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NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL CENSUSES IN POLAND FROM 1921–2010: EVOLUTION, THEMATIC SCOPE AND RELEVANCE FOR THE STUDY OF RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL HISTORY

Abstract: Population censuses have been organised sporadically since antiquity, but in the 19th century they acquired a universal character. These censuses are a good source of information on the rural population, but it was not until the introduction of systematic national agricultural censuses that a broader picture of the countryside and agriculture was obtained. In the censuses conducted after 1918 in Poland, there was a fixed catalogue of questions on the characteristics of farms, but each time new questions were also introduced to reflect the specificity of agriculture in a given historical period. The censuses were conducted on a fairly regular basis and, therefore, they provide valuable information for comparative analyses. Due to their universality and thematic scope, they also collect data on demography and socio-professional and economic relations that are not available in other sources.

Keywords: national agricultural census, agriculture, demography, 20th century Polish history

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INTRODUCTION

Possessing information on the number and state of the population has always been important for state governance. The first censuses of the population for tax and military purposes were organised as early as in the ancient states (e.g. Egypt, Babylonia, Palestine, Rome), but they took place sporadically. Conducting such a complex operation as a census required a well-organised state apparatus capable of encompassing, if not all the

inhabitants of a state, then at least most of them. It was equally important to have the right personnel capable of applying the correct survey methodology and designing the data collection. The first censuses similar in form to the contemporary ones were conducted in the 18th century in the Scandinavian countries (e.g. Sweden in 1749) and in the USA (1790). Nationwide population censuses, organized since the 19th century and referred to as national censuses, are characterized by their universality (they include all inhabitants), simultaneity (they are conducted throughout the national territory on the same date), personal nature (each person is recorded by name) and directness (answers are given by the person recorded or by one of the household members). They are also conducted at fairly regular intervals – usually every 10 years (Krywult-Albańska, 2012: 90).

In the Polish lands, censuses were organised, for quite a long time, only in selected towns or church or private estates. It was not until 1789 that a census of the population and houses of the entire country was carried out, pursuant to an Act of the Polish Sejm (Parliament); The number of people was estimated – six people were admitted per household. Its results were to be used to determine the amount of tax for the upkeep of the army. However, it did not include the two privileged population groups, the clergy and the nobility, and therefore cannot be considered a census. Nevertheless, it was the first such extensive survey of the population of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and it provided information, which became the basis for estimates of the population and socio-professional structure of the Kingdom at the end of the 18th century, immediately before the loss of independence (Kuklo, 2017: 59). The census was carried out under the responsibility of the landowners, who listed the general number of inhabitants in the census sheets for each village, so the results should be treated with great criticism.

Censuses were carried out twice in the Duchy of Warsaw (1808 and 1810). In the Kingdom of Poland on the other hand, as in the entire Russian Empire, for almost throughout the 19th century, population censuses were conducted on the initiative of local authorities, irregularly and only in selected governorates or in certain towns. The census of population and houses conducted between 1824 and 1826, the results of which were published as *Tabella miast, wsi i osad Królestwa Polskiego* (The Table of Towns, Villages and Settlements of the Kingdom of Poland), stands out against this background (Pociecha, 2017: 10). For each locality, even the smallest one, the numbers of inhabitants and houses were given, their geographical location, administrative and ecclesiastical affiliation were also

characterised. The first and only census in the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland did not take place until 1897 (Rzepkowski and Janczak, 1994: 48–57).

In Austria, the tradition of censuses dates back to the mid-18th century. As early as 1772, a census was conducted in the area of lands separated from Poland (Kumor, 1972: 69–81), but the ones carried out as late as the second half of the 19th century are recognised as national censuses. Starting in 1857, censuses were held quite regularly (1869, 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910) (Pociecha, 2017: 11–13).

The earliest and most systematic census was of the inhabitants of Prussia. From 1816 until 1867, censuses took place at three-yearly intervals, and from 1871 at five-yearly intervals. The census of 1852 is considered to be the first national population census. It is worth mentioning that from the same year data on farm buildings and livestock also started to be collected (Guldon and Wajda, 1970: 89–92).

The results of the censuses conducted in the Polish lands in the 19th century by the central statistical offices of Russia, Austria and Prussia, provide abundant and valuable information on the rural population in Poland, but due to different methodology and subject matter, as well as ambiguous terminology, the data obtained from them are often incomparable. Following the restoration of independence, one of the most urgent needs was to collect the most complete information on the state of the country's population and economic resources. This was to be achieved by the establishment of the Central Statistical Office (1918), which has since then systematically conducted censuses, compiled and published their results.

From as early as the end of the 18th century, separate census forms were used in the censuses taking place in the Polish lands for the urban and rural populations. The list of questions addressed to inhabitants of rural areas was gradually extended to include more and more categories concerning the occupational structure of the population, farms and their economic activities. The censuses that had taken place in Poland until 1970 applied the principle that the agricultural census was an integral part of the national population census. It was only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries that agricultural topics began to be excluded by organising national agricultural censuses independently of national population censuses (1996, 2010, 2020). The main objective of the agricultural censuses is to collect information on the agricultural population and on the farm as a whole and the agricultural production carried out therein. The data col-

lected, especially when correlated with data from population censuses, allow us to grasp the links between the economic and social phenomena studied. Polish censuses have already produced a vast literature, which, however, focuses, mainly, on demographic issues. This article aims to draw attention to the agricultural themes present in the censuses and to signal the possibility of using their results in describing the social and economic phenomena occurring in the Polish countryside in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century.

The starting point of this article needs no further justification. In 1921, the first national population census in Poland combined with a census of agricultural farms was carried out. The choice of the closing point was more difficult. Usually, when describing political processes taking place in the 20th century, the year 1989 is indicated as the end of the period. However, in relation to social and economic processes taking place in the Polish countryside, it does not constitute a fundamental breakthrough. A much more important point, however, seems to be the year 2004, which ends the period of social and economic transformation in the countryside and opens a new stage of agricultural development. The first agricultural census after Poland's accession to the EU took place in 2010, hence the choice of this final date. It is also important for the considerations presented in this paper that it was the first agricultural census based on an electronic form and conducted according to the same methodology as in other EU member-states. The article consists of four parts. The first three parts discuss the subject of agricultural censuses in the Second Polish Republic, in the communist period and after 1989 respectively. The last part is devoted to the importance of agricultural census as a source of information about the countryside and agriculture.

NATIONAL CENSUSES IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

After the restoration of independence, the first national population census was conducted on 30 September 1921. The territory of the state had not yet been finally formed, so the census did not include the Vilnius region and part of Upper Silesia. The results were also influenced by the migration flows underway at the time and by the boycott by some national minorities who refused to recognise the Polish authorities. A significant part of the rural population also evaded the census for fear of tax consequences.

However, despite the unfavourable circumstances, a swift census of population resources was necessary. For international opinion, the completion of the difficult census operation was proof that Poland was functioning efficiently as a state. The rapid collection of data on demographic and economic resources was also crucial for the proper management of the state (Janiszewski, 2002: 121).

In spite of reservations regarding the conduct of the census (Krzywicki, 2002), the correctness of the census takers' work or the reliability of the answers – its results, became the basis for determining the nationality structure (the census form contained questions on nationality, mother tongue and religion) and the occupational structure of the society of the Polish Republic. The questions concerned the determination of the farmer and the owner of the farm and whether farm work was the main or side occupation. The census form contained detailed questions on the area of farms (owned, leased and company farms) and the stock of domestic animals (horses and mules, horned cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, poultry and bee hives). Questions were also asked about the farm's agricultural machinery and equipment (engines, windmills, treadmills), as well as the use of breeding seeds and fertilisers (*Tematyka i organizacja...*, 1981: 8; Nadobnik, 2002: 129). The extensive catalogue of questions was intended to provide as up-to-date a picture of the agricultural economy as possible. In practice, however, it may have caused difficulties in obtaining accurate answers.

The second national population census was conducted in 1931 and covered the entire national territory – in this respect it was much more accurate than the first one. Many inhabitants of the eastern provinces refused to participate in the census. This is one of the reasons why the reliability of the data to the nationality statistics in the eastern regions is questioned by the researchers (Szturm de Sztrem, 2002). However, the results obtained are assessed as lacking in reliability, especially with regard to nationality issues. Compared to the previous census, the survey was extended to include the occupational characteristics of the population and the number of people employed in the various sectors of the economy. A full agricultural census was abandoned at that time for cost-saving reasons. Nevertheless, the data obtained provide an important source of information on population relations in the countryside.

The census topics included the number of people working in agriculture, with the census broken down by farm owners, family members working on the farm and total family members per farm (separately for men and women). Also linked to this topic was a question on hired workers

employed on the farm – in this category a breakdown was used between white-collar workers and agricultural labourers. An additional criterion taken into account in the census was that agricultural labourers lived in servants' quarters (farm servants), in the dwellings of the employer (labourers employed by small farmers) or lived in their own houses. With regard to farms that did not employ external hired workers, males aged 18–60 were enumerated. The intention of this question was to investigate whether there was an excess of labour power in the owner's family (a specific phenomenon of rural unemployment, the category of expendable people; Baranowicz and Landau, 2002: 234). The census also gave an insight into the housing conditions of the population.

AGRICULTURAL TOPICS IN NATIONAL CENSUSES IN THE PERIOD OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

After the Second World War, five national population censuses and one summary census (1946) were conducted¹. Three of them were combined with agricultural censuses (1950, 1960, 1970). In 1978 and 1988 population censuses were held, and in 1976 and 1986 only agricultural censuses were conducted. Complementary to agricultural statistics in this period were the annual June agricultural censuses covering individual farms. However, these censuses were of a different nature to the national censuses, as they were based on one common form for the whole village. The annual June censuses served current statistical needs and were carried out by the administration and village heads. They included all farms and landless livestock keepers, but individual farmers were enumerated in separate lines on a common form for the whole village. Thus there was not, as in the national censuses, a separate form for each farm (Czerniewski, 1959: 34). For a relatively short period in 1962–1967 and 1976–1981, December censuses of headage of livestock were additionally conducted. The June censuses were carried out up until 1988.

The first post-war national census was conducted in 1950. Due to the extent of the information collected and its propaganda significance, the authorities gave it the rank of a universal nationwide census. The period

¹ In addition to this list, a population census was carried out in 1946, the purpose of which was to obtain summary information on the state and structure of the population by sex and age. This made it possible, inter alia, to estimate wartime population losses.

preceding it was full of political and socio-economic changes. Of particular importance for the countryside was the agrarian reform and the liquidation of large-scale private land ownership, as well as mass migrations, especially from the countryside to cities and towns. From the end of 1948, the forcible collectivisation of agriculture, which was to lead to a reconstruction of property relations in the countryside, was also underway.

The thematic scope of the census was very broad (Łazowska, 2017: 271). Information was collected on the socio-professional structure of the rural population, and the part on agricultural topics included questions on the area of the farm and the number of people working on it, the location of the land (in the local commune, in another commune), the area of land by ownership title and by type of use, and the number and species of livestock. Farm animals were also enumerated in the case of land users with less than 0.1 ha and landless farmers. The mechanisation section of the form was very extensive – the number and type of agricultural machinery and implements were asked about in detail (65 items).

Separate forms were prepared for production cooperatives. Depending on the type, cooperatives were asked about the number of their members and the area of land of the members, jointly cultivated, or about the number of associated farms and households. Further questions were asked about the area of other land of the cooperatives by type of use, the livestock as well as agricultural machinery and tools. Small private farms of members of production cooperatives were also surveyed.

Farms in use by the state, public institutions and social organisations were also included in the census. In addition to basic data on the operating institution or the owner, questions were asked about the nature of agricultural production on the farm and the features also surveyed in relation to individual farms (including employment, land location, land use, livestock and agricultural machinery and equipment; M.P. 1950 No 92 item 1140).

In December 1960, the fourth national population census combined with an agricultural census was conducted. After a decade had passed since the previous census, it was necessary to update information on the demographic and socio-occupational structure, and housing conditions of the population (Łazowska, 2017: 279). In the agriculture section, the census topics were very detailed. For an individual farm, the enumerator had to fill in 80 items (area of land, ownership title, location of the land in the district where the farmer lived, land use; Padowicz, 2002: 357). There were no longer any questions on production cooperatives, most of which had

disintegrated after 1956, but the issue of the so-called land patchwork, i.e. the number of parts (pieces) of land comprising the total area, was included, and the arable area of each farm. This was the first study of this problem on such a scale².

In the section on agricultural machinery and equipment, the catalogue of questions was shortened in relation to the 1950 census and limited to the categories most relevant, from the point of view of their impact on agricultural production and human labour savings, as well as the categories most common on farms (24 items). However, machinery and equipment which, due to their low numbers, were not yet present in the previous census, e.g. tractors, trailers, tractor ploughs (about 30 items), were included. As in the previous census, a criterion was applied to divide machinery and implements into those owned solely by the farm user and those owned jointly by two or more users³. An account was also taken of the increasing number of agricultural associations in the countryside created with a view to increasing the level of mechanisation there (the question is whether in 1960 farmers used machinery and tools belonging to an agricultural association; *Tematyka i organizacja...*, 1981: 75).

In 1970, another National Census was carried out, combined with an agricultural census (Dz.U. 1970 No 17 item 147). The range of issues was quite extensive, therefore, the census was held on two dates. The census of farm buildings took place in June together with the annual agricultural census, while the census of population, dwellings and houses and individual farms took place in December (Łazowska, 2017: 294). In the population section, the topics included a full population survey, i.e. establishing the number of people actually resident, the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population (primary place of work and occupation and place of secondary work). In relation to persons with more than one source of livelihood, the main source of livelihood was also established, which is important for establishing the number of the agricultural population. A peculiarity of this census was to undertake surveys of the number of children born per woman (carried out using the representative method in 5% of the census districts; *Tematyka i organizacja...*, 1981: 84, 86).

² It turned out that only 38.8% of farms had their land in one piece. Two pieces accounted for 26.1%, 3 pieces accounted for 14.5% and 4–5 pieces accounted for 11.3% (*Spis Powszechny...*, 1965: XXIV).

³ Co-ownership of machinery and tools was so rare that this category was no longer included in the compilation of the census results (*Spis Powszechny...*, 1965: XVII).

An important part of the census was issues related to the housing resources of the population. In both urban and rural areas, the form on inhabited buildings included categories such as type of inhabited building, form of ownership (national councils, housing cooperatives, etc., wall and roofing material, period and year of construction, number of floors, provision of electricity, number of dwellings and living rooms, area of dwellings, number of inhabitants). However, in rural areas only, the method of water supply (waterworks, well) was, additionally, examined.

In the section on farms, the census covered the total area of the farm, taking into account the title of land use (owned, rented from the state or from private individuals) and method of land use, livestock and agricultural machinery and equipment (13 types in total). In addition, a sample method was used to survey pigs and cattle by age group, and number of hens. The survey covered 10 per cent of individual farms and animal owners without farms (M.P. 1970 No 25 item 214).

Agricultural censuses were also conducted on a limited basis in 1976 and 1986 (in June or July) In 1976, the census covered the use of land, the sown area and the number of livestock. In 1986, the census concerned the number of the agricultural population, the sown area and the number of livestock. In addition to the topics traditionally surveyed in all agricultural censuses, there were also topics surveyed sporadically. E.g. in 1976, individual farms of users born in 1920 and earlier, as well as ecologically neglected individual farms, were surveyed. In 1986, additional topics included whether the farm had water supply facilities, three-phase electricity and two-axle tractors, as well as the value of production sold to state-owned entities (Dz.U. 1985 No 45 item 220: Annex).

CHANGES IN THE THEME OF AGRICULTURAL CENSUSES AFTER 1989

The process of transforming a centrally controlled economy into a market economy that began in 1989 meant rapid and profound changes in the structure of rural property relations, employment, infrastructure and farm incomes. The results of the annual representative surveys conducted by the Central Statistical Office on a drawn sample (usually 5 per cent of the total number of individual farms and agricultural plots) were insufficient in relation to the information needs of the state, especially with regard to

individual communes. Answers to a number of questions about changes in the countryside were to be provided by another agricultural census. This took place in 1996 and was a national census, but was not combined with a population census. Poland's aspirations to join the EU were also an important impetus for this census. This involved the need to collect statistical data according to Western standards. In 1990, the Central Statistical Office signed an agreement on cooperation with Eurostat (the Statistical Office of the European Community), and in 1994 – on the adaptation of its systems of official statistics to EU requirements. The aim was full integration into the European Statistical System (Pociecha, 2017: 20).

The themes of this census reflected the main problems facing the countryside and agriculture in the first half of the 1990s. The census covered farm owners and users, who were asked about their sources of livelihood, their contribution to the farm, their non-farm economic activities, and their search for off-farm employment. In addition to questions about the area of the farm and land use, they were also asked about buildings, infrastructure and technical facilities (e.g. means of sewage and rubbish disposal, gas supply and telephone facilities). Questions on farm indebtedness and non-agricultural economic activities were a novelty resulting from the economic situation of agriculture at that time. Also, questions on major expenses incurred and planned for the purchase of land, construction or modernisation of buildings, enlargement of the herd, purchase of tractors, agricultural machinery were important for the estimation of the prospects for agricultural development. In addition, questions were asked about planned changes in the functioning of the farm by 2002 (Dz.U. 1996 No 34 item 147). It is worth mentioning that the thematic scope of the census was in line with the latest FAO recommendations on agricultural censuses.

The next agricultural census in 2002 was again conducted in conjunction with the national population census. Although only six years had passed since the previous agricultural census, the population census was, however, taking place after 14 years. The last one was held in 1988, and in 1995 a Population and Housing Census was carried out using the sample method. After over a dozen years of social and economic transformation, with profound changes still taking place in the countryside, there was a need to update the information base on agricultural holdings. The aim of the census was to collect the data necessary for the implementation of national and regional policy as well as local agricultural policy and social policy in the countryside. Detailed knowledge on demography and agri-

cultural resources was also necessary to finalise association processes with the EU and to fulfil Poland's obligations to provide information for international organisations, mainly FAO and OECD.

In the section on farms, the form of questions on the income structure, the economic activities carried out by the user and the infrastructure of the farm was expanded, e.g. questions on sources of water supply, methods of sewage and waste disposal, provision of electricity and telephone and types of drainage facilities. The use of fertilisers and pesticides on the farm was also included. As in the 1996 census, selected expenditure on the farm was also examined, including that incurred on the purchase of land, the construction or modernisation of buildings, the expansion of the livestock herd or the purchase of farm tractors and other means of transport and agricultural machinery.

The first National Agricultural Census after Poland's accession to the EU took place in 2010. For the first time, it was held on the same date as in other EU countries and contained the same thematic scope – this was due to Poland's obligations to provide specific information to international organisations (EUROSTAT, FAO, OECD, etc.). The aim of the census, apart from the obvious updating of data, was to obtain data illustrating the state of Polish agriculture before and after accession to the EU and necessary to compare Polish agriculture with that of other member-states. The latter objective was closely linked to the need to build a Common Agricultural Policy (Domaszewicz and Łaczyński, 2011: 11). The results of the census were also important for determining the directions of agricultural and social policy in rural areas at national, regional and local levels. In terms of the demographic situation, the information collected in the 2010 census was linked to the data obtained in the National Census conducted a year later, in 2011.

The 2010 agricultural census included, for the first time, questions on the ageing of the rural population, the problem of lack of successors, agricultural employment and the impact of agriculture on the environment, as well as the farm's use of subsidies for arable land and rural development support programmes. Also new was a question on the impact of agriculture on the environment, especially on soil cultivation methods, soil protection against nutrient leaching, and livestock housing systems. The survey on agricultural production methods was conducted using the sample method for natural persons and the full method for legal persons and unincorporated organisational units (Dz.U. 1996 No 34 item 147: Annex no 1).

Table 1. Summary of selected characteristics of individual farms surveyed in the agricultural censuses

ISSUES	1921	1931	1950	1960	1970	1996	2002	2010
Employment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
User's main source of livelihood	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X
Area of the agricultural holding	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ownership structure of agricultural land (own, lease, other)	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mode of land use	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Livestock	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Agricultural machinery and equipment	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Farm infrastructure and technical equipment	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X
Use of fertilisers	X	-	-	-	-	-	X	X
Farm debt	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X
Economic activities (agricultural and non-agricultural)	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X
Major investment expenditure	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X
Use of agricultural support programmes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X
Agricultural production methods (environmental impact of agriculture)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X

Source: own work

Thus, the census of 2002 marked the end of the period of traditional agricultural censuses conducted using the face-to-face method by census takers who personally reached each farmer. From 2010, paper forms were replaced by electronic forms (Januszewska, Kurkowski and Piskorz,

2002: 34). According to the new survey methodology, farm users, subject to the census, could provide information by means of online self-enumeration, a telephone interview conducted by an interviewer or during a face-to-face interview conducted by a census agent, but with the use of an electronic form. For the first time, information from non-statistical sources such as the registers of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) or PESEL (Polish Citizen Identification Number) system were also used to compile the final results.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL CENSUSES AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRYSIDE AND AGRICULTURE

National agricultural censuses provide a range of information that can be analysed and collated in many configurations. The data obtained in this way allow comparisons to be made and changes to be tracked in territorial and temporal terms (the analytical material is particularly abundant when agricultural censuses take place together with population censuses or in close temporal proximity).

Making comparative analyses is facilitated by the thematic elementary nature typical of censuses. On the one hand, it stems from pragmatism (the longer the census sheet, the greater the fatigue of the enumerated person and the greater the risk of error), but on the other hand, the limitation of the number of issues studied allows the dynamics of change between successive censuses to be captured. With regard to rural areas and agriculture, these are, mainly, demographic data, as well as data on the socio-economic structure (including the main source of livelihood of the farm user) allowing us to determine the agricultural population and some of its characteristics (e.g. the phenomenon of aging of the agricultural population). They also document the occupational structure of the rural population, which is less and less linked to agriculture (Gorlach, Drağ and Nowak, 2004). The analyses of changes in the agrarian structure are made possible by the data collected in each census on the number and area of farms. Changes in the directions of agricultural activity can be evaluated on the basis of data on the area of arable land and sown crops, as well as the size and types of livestock (Zegar, 2002: 101–102).

Based on the results of the censuses, the processes of modernisation of the countryside and agriculture can be traced. Information on the technical equipment of agriculture (agricultural machinery and equipment) and the entire infrastructure related to agricultural production and the chemicalization of agriculture, and, more recently, also changes related to the perception of agriculture in the context of environmental impact, can be useful for this purpose.

However, each census was an opportunity to address new topics, mainly, concerning modernisation processes in the countryside (e.g. water supply, mechanisation of agricultural production, chemicalization). They reflected the peculiarities of a given historical period, allow a better look at civilisation and its changes in the countryside, yet making it difficult to make comparisons for longer time periods (Holzer, 2002: 46).

Nevertheless, such difficulties in the comparability of data obtained by the census method can also relate to issues that systematically arise in successive agricultural censuses. This is due to changing methodologies and differences in the terminology used. For example, the 2010 census excluded the majority of farms with area of less than 1 ha, which significantly reduced the number of entities surveyed – 1.8 million compared to approximately 3 million farms in the 1996 and 2002 censuses⁴. Another example can be found in the results of the 1996 National Agricultural Census, in which the fact of living in a household with an individual farm user was used as a criterion for inclusion in the agricultural population. The consequence was that 29.9% of the country's population was considered to be agricultural. This result was criticised by some economists, who pointed out that a significant part of this population does not work on a farm or farm work is not their main source of income, so they cannot be recognised as an agricultural population. On the other hand, the agricultural population did not include the population connected with agriculture through work in the agricultural enterprise sector and in other agricultural units (Zegar, 1999: 48). In subsequent censuses, the criteria for the very concept of the individual farm as an organisational and production unit also changed. Sometimes the changes in terminology are due to the need to adapt the census questions to the legislation in force, e.g. in 2004 the concept of good agricultural conditions was in-

⁴ Agricultural holdings with an area of less than 1 ha were included in the sample survey.

roduced (Dz.U. 2004 No 65 item 600), which made the different types of agricultural land not fully comparable with the results of the 2002 census. The 2010 census, on the other hand, uses new or changed categories of agricultural land adapted to Eurostat requirements – e.g. fallow land, permanent crops.

The assessment of the reliability of census data is also debatable. In this context, the most serious allegations are made against the censuses conducted between the First and the Second World War, although they mainly concerned nationality issues. In relation to later censuses, such allegations no longer arise, instead it is not uncommon to always find a certain group of people who do not fulfil their census duty. Another issue is the truthfulness of the enumerated persons. The fear of using census data for tax purposes was, particularly, evident in the countryside between the wars and after the Second World War. Although the authorities, during the information campaigns preceding the censuses, repeatedly assured the populace that their intention was only to collect statistical data necessary for the proper running of the state⁵ or for scientific purposes⁶, distrust remained. The defensive reaction of the enumerated farmers was usually to underestimate the quantitative data on their animal populations⁷. Errors in understanding the questions on the sheets may also have been a cause of inaccuracies in the census information. This was the case for both people enumerated and for the enumerators working with increasingly elaborate census sheets. It seems, however, that the resulting errors had little effect on the overall results, although, in micro terms, relating to communes or districts they may have had statistical significance.

Access to census results was often monopolised by the state. Gradually, however, the practice of publishing them became widespread, making

⁵ A thorough display by means of the census of the various deficiencies of the economic and social life of our country will make it possible to continue the effective struggle for the improvement of the conditions of our existence (*Obwieszczenie...*, 1931).

⁶ Answer with confidence! Statements made during the census will only be used for statistical purposes. They may not be given to public authorities or to private persons for any other purpose, and in particular they may not be used as a basis for levying taxes, conducting requisitions or launching judicial and administrative investigations (*Odezwa...*, 1921).

⁷ The atmosphere leading up to the census made farmers fear that the census was linked to the formation of production cooperatives. These sentiments were exploited by all sorts of speculators who bought pigs and poultry at half price (Jedruchowski, 1950; 'Dziś wszyscy...', 1950).

them accessible to contemporary and future researchers of demographic and economic processes occurring in the countryside. These results are published in the form of comprehensive, sometimes very detailed, studies, such that their interpretation sometimes poses serious difficulties. It is necessary not only to know the methodology for compiling census data, but also to be able to refer to data from previous censuses. It is also sometimes necessary to verify data against other statistical surveys or non-statistical data (Jarosz, 2004: 11).

The detailed topics of the individual censuses, largely, reflect the changes taking place in the countryside and emanate from the current information needs of the state (Strzelecki, 2009). Censuses can, therefore, be a valuable resource for the study of social and economic processes in the countryside, especially in territorial terms. This is because they make it possible to collect data on agricultural economy even for the lowest administrative level in a state, i.e. for the commune. Such information is, particularly, important for assessing the development of the economy in an area, evaluating rural infrastructure, as well as changes in the structure and number of farms. In earlier censuses, the range of questions on farms and agricultural economy was not as detailed as it is today. For a historian dealing with the issue of demographic changes in the countryside and rural economy, such detailed information is of great importance, as it makes possible the reconstruction of processes taking place on a regional scale and over an extended period of time.

CONCLUSION

The national agricultural census is a unique demographic and statistical survey covering the entire agricultural population at the same time and throughout the national territory. Despite advances in data collection by various administrative bodies, a complete picture of agriculture can still only be obtained by means of a national census, the themes of which cover a variety of issues allowing the study of the links between various demographic, social and economic phenomena. Censuses make it possible to capture many characteristics (e.g. the number of people in a household, the education of farmers or equipping them with technical means) that usually escape recording by the various levels of state administration. They also make it possible to establish the factual state, which often differs from the legal state.

Contemporary agricultural statistics also rely on many other sources of information, but at the earlier stages, census data are often the only ones available, especially for smaller administrative units. Their importance for research into rural and agricultural history, especially conducted by historical demographers as well as social and economic historians, can hardly be overestimated.

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