

INTRODUCTION

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It is observed in contemporary geographical studies that the advancing liberalisation of world trade in food products and raw food materials creates both opportunities for, but also threats to, the development of farming in individual European states. Their agriculture is unable to meet competition on an open agricultural market, hence the need for supporting measures to keep up its permanent development. The present volume of *Quaestiones Geographicae* contains ten articles dealing with the place and role of agriculture in the development of European regions, with a focus on its spatial aspects. The problems discussed differ in the subject matter tackled and the spatial range of the research (local, regional and national). Special attention is given to agricultural production and its modernisation, because only farms implementing the multi-functional model of agriculture and able to compete on the common EU farming market can be an important factor in the development of rural areas.

The first group of articles deals with regional differences in agriculture in countries that are recent members of the European Union. It opens with an article by Jana Némethová and Marek Cíváň, “Regional differences in agriculture in Slovakia after its accession to the European Union”, analysing spatial and structural changes in the agriculture of Slovakia following this step. On the basis of their research, the authors state that Slovakia’s accession to the EU has caused a decline in agricultural production and in the number of farm animals, which is connected with a drop in employment in farming by more than 50% in 2010 as compared with the 2002 figure.

The next article is by Aleksandra Jezierska-Thöle, Marta Gwiaździńska-Goraj and Łukasz

Wiśniewski, “Current status and prospects for organic agriculture in Poland”. The authors seek to assess the state of Polish ecological agriculture and prospects for its development, especially in terms of the Common Agricultural Policy. The absorption of Community funds has greatly contributed to an increase in the number of ecological farms and in the area of ecological crops. In the authors’ opinion, a chance for the development of Polish ecological agriculture rests in small family holdings that give farmers an opportunity to increase their earnings by the sale of ecological food and applying for a subsidy under the 2014–2020 Rural Development Programme.

In her article “Fragmented agrarian space: building blocks and modernisation trajectories. The case of Slovenia”, Irma Potočnik Slavič characterises this country’s agrarian structure and presents modernisation trajectories for 70 thous. farms. In her opinion, there is no single modernisation trajectory, but its three forms: autarky, pluri-activity, and innovativeness. The last is implemented in Slovenia via measures financed under the 2014–2020 Rural Development Programme.

The second group of articles deals with selected elements of the structure of agricultural production. Polish agriculture enters a new stage in development where the production of energy crops will be as important and that of food. An assessment of spatial differences in such crops in Poland is made by Anna Kołodziejczak and Roman Rudnicki in their article “Spatial differences in energy crops in Polish agriculture: A study of plantation concentration based on local indicators of spatial association (LISA)”. Using Moran’s local I_i statistics, they determined the

concentration of energy crops. They found that subsidies for those crops had caused a decrease in the land lying fallow, thus preventing many areas in Poland from losing their agricultural character.

Olive groves in Andalusia are the matter taken up by José Domingo Sánchez Martínez and Antonio Garrido Almonacid in their article "Productivism and post-productivism in the olive groves of southern Spain". They found there to be a change in the approach to the cultivation of those groves, from monofunctional, or focused on the intensity of production organisation, to multi-functional, where the agricultural function is connected with environmental ones, like the preservation of the landscape and environmental protection via the use of ecological methods, and social functions, like the creation of a new tourist product termed 'oleotourism'. This product embraces thematic routes covering olive-grove landscapes, visits in oil mills, participation in the picking of olives, and the tasting of olive products. This change has been caused by the delocation of olive crops in the world that threatens the future of Spanish producers of olive oil, hence the financial support by regional administration in eliminating less productive trees and reducing production costs, and support granted under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme.

In their article "Changes in the spatial organisation of fruit growing at the beginning of the 21st century: The case of Grójec powiat (Mazovia voivodeship, Poland)", Marcin Wójcik and Anna Traczyk discuss changes in the organisation of fruit production in the early 21st century. What caused them was Poland's accession to the EU, which intensified the processes of specialisation and concentration in agriculture, and resulted in an increase in fruit production and in the area occupied by orchards. Today Poland is one of the largest fruit producers in Europe, and Grójec powiat is the largest producer in Poland.

The part of QG devoted to agricultural production closes with the article by Fulvio Rizzo, "Investigating dairy farmers' resilience within a revised policy and a market regime: The case of North Karelia, Finland", in which he presents the adaptation of milk holdings in North Karelia to structural changes in the milk-producing sector introduced by the Common Agricultural Policy.

The last group of articles concerns land use and the agricultural landscape in suburban zones. The article by Barbara Maćkiewicz and Cecylia Karalus-Wiatr, "Agricultural land on built-up housing lots and the incomes of communes: An example of Rokietnica commune in the Poznań agglomeration", offers an analysis of the relation between the cost of designating farmland for non-agricultural purposes and the difference between the rates of the agricultural tax and the real-estate tax resulting from changing the designation of only the part of the lot on which a building is erected, the rest still being farmland. This happens in areas undergoing rapid suburbanisation processes.

Agnieszka Wilkaniec and Magdalena Szczepańska deal with "Manor and grange complexes as a cultural heritage of the agricultural landscape in the process of commune space management: A case study of Tarnowo Podgórne, Wielkopolska". Today those elements of the cultural heritage undergo destruction. The authors try to establish if those complexes are taken into consideration in the development strategies of communes and their revitalisation programmes. The problem is of a local nature, but the conclusions can be applicable to other regions in Poland.

In the last article, "Differences in the rural structure of Slovakia in the context of socio-spatial polarisation", Lucia Máliková and Michal Klobučník discuss those differences in terms of the location of an area, and distinguish mountain areas, the borderland, and the area at the intersection of those two structures. The ANOVA analysis employed allowed them to state that those areas differ significantly, being often confronted with the phenomenon of marginality. Those differences result mainly from the lack of integration of some areas and their exclusion from chief economic, social and cultural processes.

The articles in this volume do not exhaust the complex and multi-aspect field of the contemporary development of agriculture in Europe. They present the results of studies by geographers and people dealing with spatial management, and are a contribution to further discussion and research.

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Volume editor