

The goal of the project is to study rural social movements (RSM) as actors in social and political processes after transformation in Poland. Civil society played a key role in the transformation processes, especially in its early stages. While the role of labour (trade unions, employees organizations, organized workers as a social group) has been very well researched, the role of rural (peasant) movements was hardly ever an object of systematic study, in spite the intensity of its activity, the size of the rural population and the uniqueness of challenges faced by this group. In recent years, the focus of political sociologists was on urban movements, and rural movements are largely the forgotten actor. The project should fill the gap. It will provide a longitudinal study of the formation, institutionalization and possible demise of rural movements in the post-1989 era. The study will cover Samoobrona, splinter groups created after its collapse and Agrounia, as well as local groups without national recognition.

Research questions are related to the origins, impact and decomposition of rural movements. The first question is about the conditions for formation: what structural factors produce them? What is the catalyst motivating the participants to self-organize? We will start with the analysis of socio-economic and political conditions under which spontaneous protest activities start. We will look for a link between economic policies and contention, treating political representation as a mediating factor. Hypothetically, RSM emerge when the introduction of economic policies adversely affecting rural communities occurs in institutional vacuum (lack of adequate channels of interest articulation) related to party capture or lack of organizational capacity.

The second question is related to the phase of institutionalization. As a movement develops structures and routines, it becomes an organization. RSM relatively early adopt political goals and start to act as a political party. We want to know: what were / are the political goals? How effective were rural movements in articulating them? We will look at parliamentary representation of RSM and RSM activists in central and local government. We will try to trace the link between the political side (acting within institutions) and social activism (acting as civil society organizations).

The third area is related to movement decomposition. The question is about the demise: why did rural movements decline? Was it: a) because they completed their mission, i.e. were successful in achieving their goals, b) because of quality of leadership; c) due to structural changes in society? Hypothetically, a combination of all three factors played a role. In the post-EU accession period, Samoobrona ceased to become a viable player due to gradual improvement in rural living conditions (structural factor) and due to the quality of leadership. We will compare that process with the current developments within Agrounia, the contemporary RSM.