

It is well known that the rural population in Poland is ageing, in line with broader demographic trends affecting the entire society. In this context, the lack of up-to-date, in-depth research that would deepen our understanding of the nature and consequences of this process, as well as provide both valuable scientific insights and guidance for public policy, is striking. Therefore, the primary objective of the proposed project is to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder ageing in place in rural contexts in Poland. Ageing in place is commonly understood as the ability to remain in one's home or local community as long as possible, without the need to relocate to a care facility. In this project, we adopt its broader understanding, focusing on social relationships, informal support mechanisms, and place attachment. These elements are particularly significant in rural areas, where residents often face limited access to infrastructure and services. This approach aligns with most recent perspectives defining ageing in place as a "journey" to maintain an older adult's independence and active engagement in the community. It also recognizes ageing in place as a dynamic process, in which the agency of older adults plays a central role.

In this project, we address several research questions. First, we want to explore which main trends and challenges related to ageing in place in rural Poland are currently recognized, discussed, and analyzed. To achieve this, we will review public documents, research reports, scientific publications and statistics. We will also interview key experts in the field including representatives of ministries, local government organizations (e.g., Union of Rural Communes of the Republic of Poland, village representatives' associations), non-governmental organizations, as well as scientists studying the Polish countryside or demographic changes in Poland. Second, we want to identify the factors that support or hinder ageing in place within specific, selected local contexts. Third, we are also interested in how older adults' socio-demographic characteristics may affect their ageing in place experiences. Fourth, we want to explore, whether and to what extent older adults co-create environments supporting ageing in place in a rural context. In existing research, the significance of help and support provided by older adults to their peers is often overlooked. In order to obtain answers to these research questions, we will conduct fieldwork in 5 selected rural and urban-rural communes across Poland. We will select these communes on the basis of their aged populations and distance from larger cities. Apart from that, we will also take into account the broadly documented diversity of rural areas in Poland regarding their social, cultural, economic and demographic dimensions. In these communes, we will interview older residents aged 65 and over, local stakeholders (e.g., representatives of local authorities, organizations and institutions), as well as family caregivers for older adults. We will conduct 100 interviews in total, assuming 20 per commune. In order to provide a more complete and comprehensive answer for our research questions, in the last step we will validate our findings through a quantitative study. It will be conducted on a nationwide representative sample of rural residents aged 65 and over, which will allow, among others, for comparisons between women and men, as well as between people in various age groups, e.g., those "younger old" and those of advanced age.

We believe that results obtained within the project will provide a systematic and thorough knowledge about rural ageing challenges and how these are perceived and experienced, as well as about various dimensions of ageing in place in rural environments in Poland. This knowledge will be useful both for scientists and practitioners working in the fields of public policy and rural area development. We also hope that we will boost interest in rural ageing in Polish academia and society, as well as contribute to further development of the ageing in place conceptual framework.