

Rural area in Poland:  
new social quality or the absorber of  
changes in the 21st century?

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# Rural area – what does it mean nowadays?

- In most developed countries both rural area and agriculture underwent fundamental metamorphosis quite a long time ago.
- Agriculture turned into farming, and peasants became farmers subjected to the market rules of modern society.
- Until recently they constituted quite a big part of rural world, and in a modern rethoric, this world itself was located somewhere in the past (as something about to disappear, dependent, civilizationally backward, as a ballast of development).
- Rurality associated with agriculture and peasantry is now becoming a history, but the assumption that „rural area is turning into desert” seems groundless. It is just different one.
- It is different because of its new context → globalization processes and postmodern society.

# The new context in Poland

- In early transformation period one of the more outstanding Polish sociologists wrote: *the fact that peasants still exist proves the country's backwardness* (E. Mokrzycki, 1993)
- In this context peasants (and farming) were thought to be a holdover and developmental ballast.
- They really didn't be ready to go into rules of free market and - being their victims - they became the opponents of transformation processes.
- Our accession to the EU has definitely changed the condition of farmers and rural area in Poland:
  - Today they are the biggest beneficiaries of public money from the EU (30,5 bln EURO through 2007-2013) ...
  - and the sensitive subject of the inner transformation processes

# Rural areas in Poland - main tendencies:

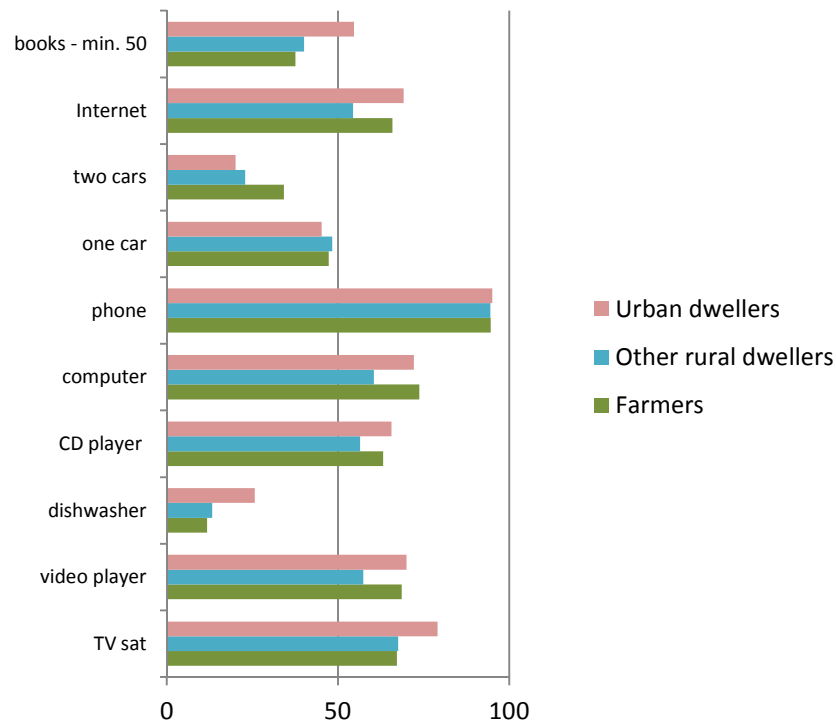
1. Polish society is rural in a sense, but ... increasingly fewer Poles work in agriculture
  - in the communist period this sector gave employment to 27,8% of the population, now it is 12,8%
2. Rural area is becoming increasingly less agricultural
  - in the early 1990s over 60% of rural families earned their income on agriculture, in 2011 – circa 30%
  - since the year 2000 we have had a positive balance of migration to rural area (representatives of new vocational categories have arrived to there), so ...
  - the social structure in rural area has become more heterogeneous one (with representatives of 'new' social classes: clerks, entrepreneurs, residents)
3. Farmers are becoming increasingly less agricultural
  - for hardly 17% of farmers families a farm is the only or main source of income,
  - but the number of rural dwellers who earn their living beyond agriculture or live on non-earning resources has grown twice.

# The changes are of ambivalent nature

- Agriculture is not as decisive as it could be expected and this seems to result from:
  - unfriendly labour market (which makes an agricultural farm the guarantor of social safety)
  - legal regulations connected with socially oriented agricultural policy (which allow to establish new small farms )
- At the same time social reforms in Poland and the EU support programs improve living conditions in rural area:
  - the average income of rural family is 2/3 of the average income of urban family (but still 1/3 of rural dwellers are pensioners)
  - educational aspirations of rural youth and the educational structure in rural area are noticeably better (it is over 10% people with higher education among rural dwellers – 3 times more then in the 80., and 15% among big farmers)

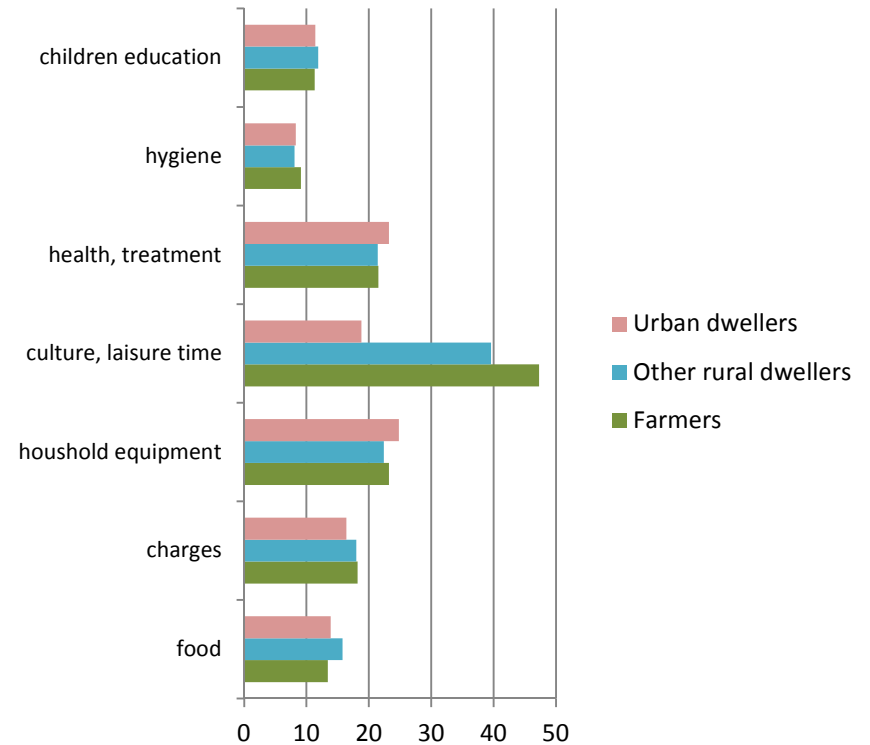
# The economic status of rural and farmers households

## 1a. Durable goods in households



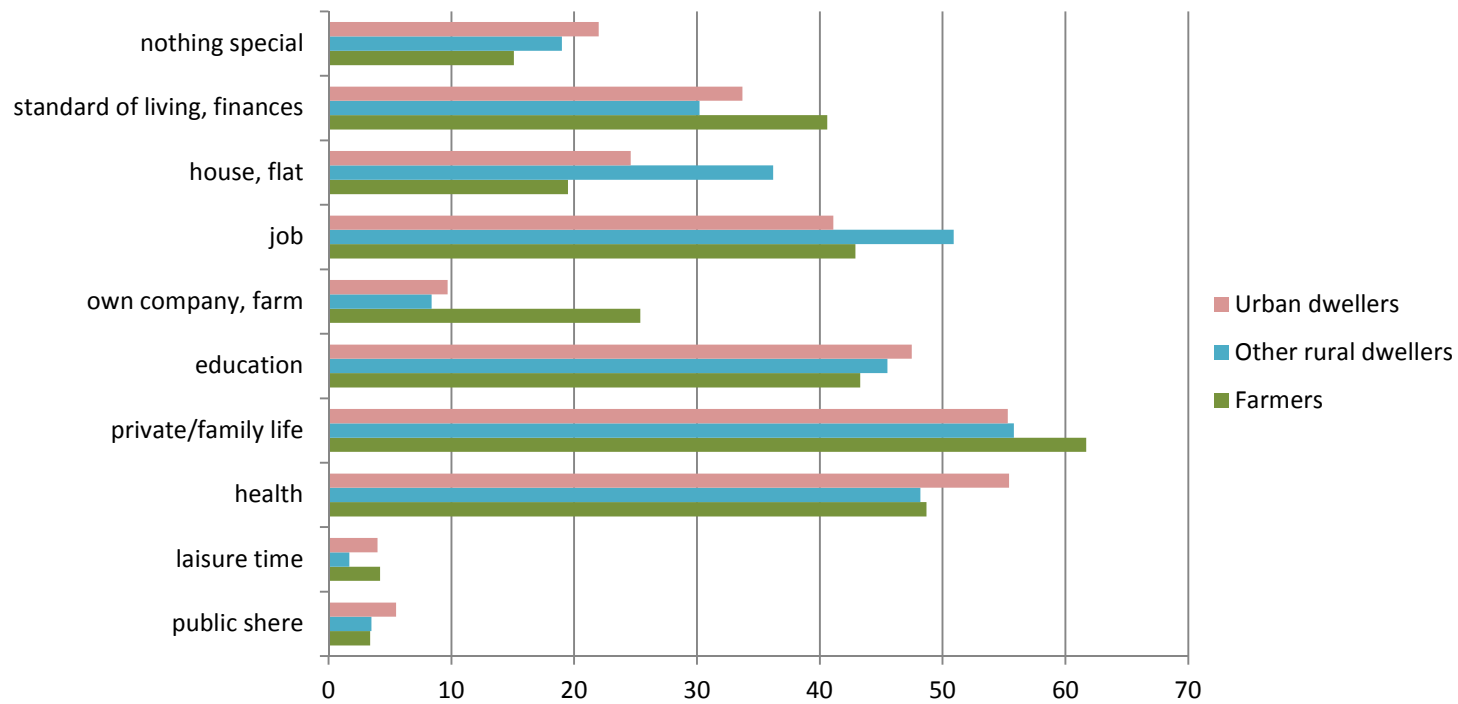
Source: the representative survey "Poles 2011";  
N = 1202

## 1b. The scale/meaning of deprivation



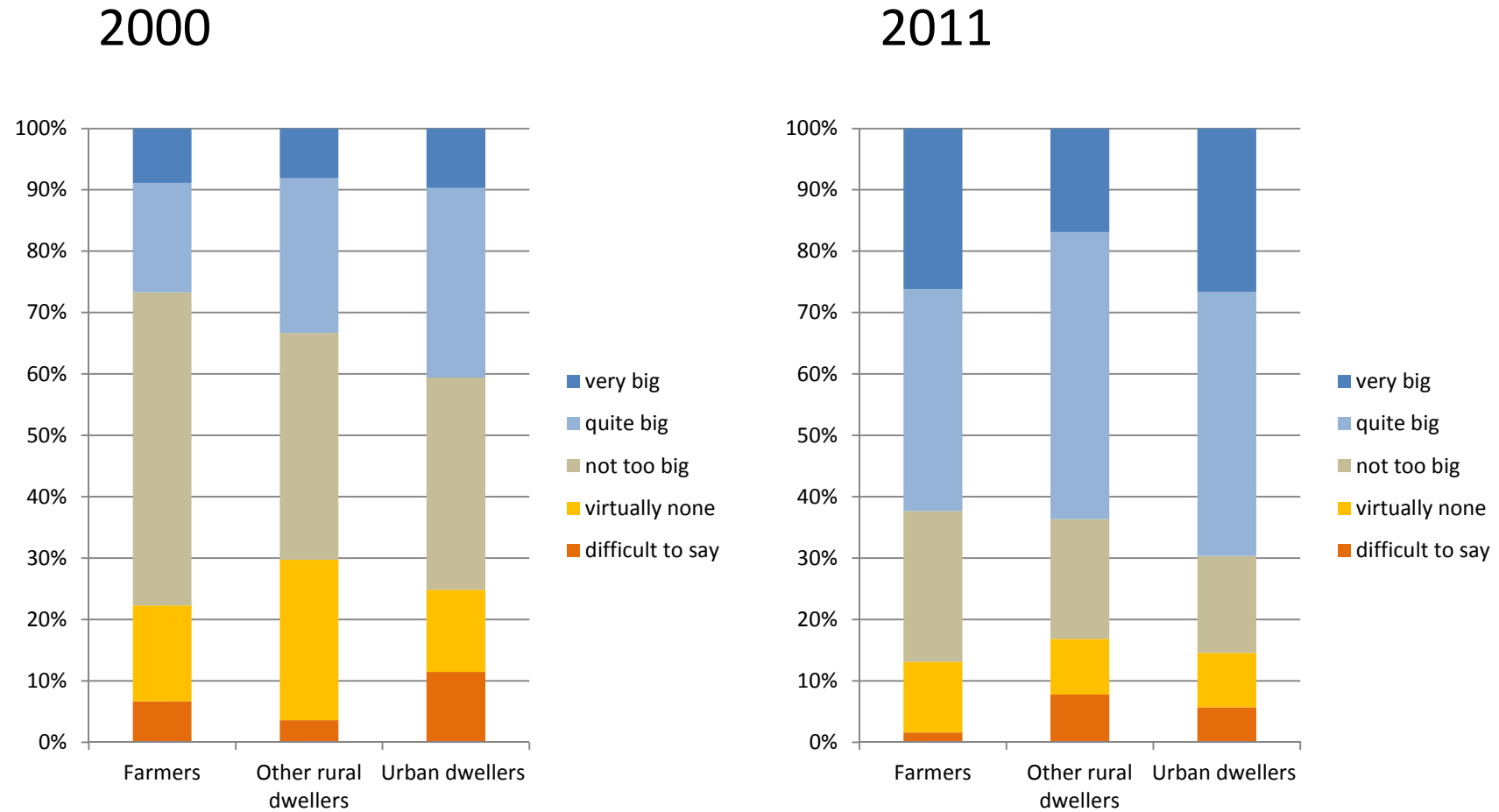
"missing always , very often and often" taken together

# What is the most important thing to you now?



Source: survey "Poles 2011"; N = 1202

# "What is the possibility that the eldest child will complete higher education"?



Source: survey "Poles 2000", N = 1696 & "Poles 2011", N = 1202



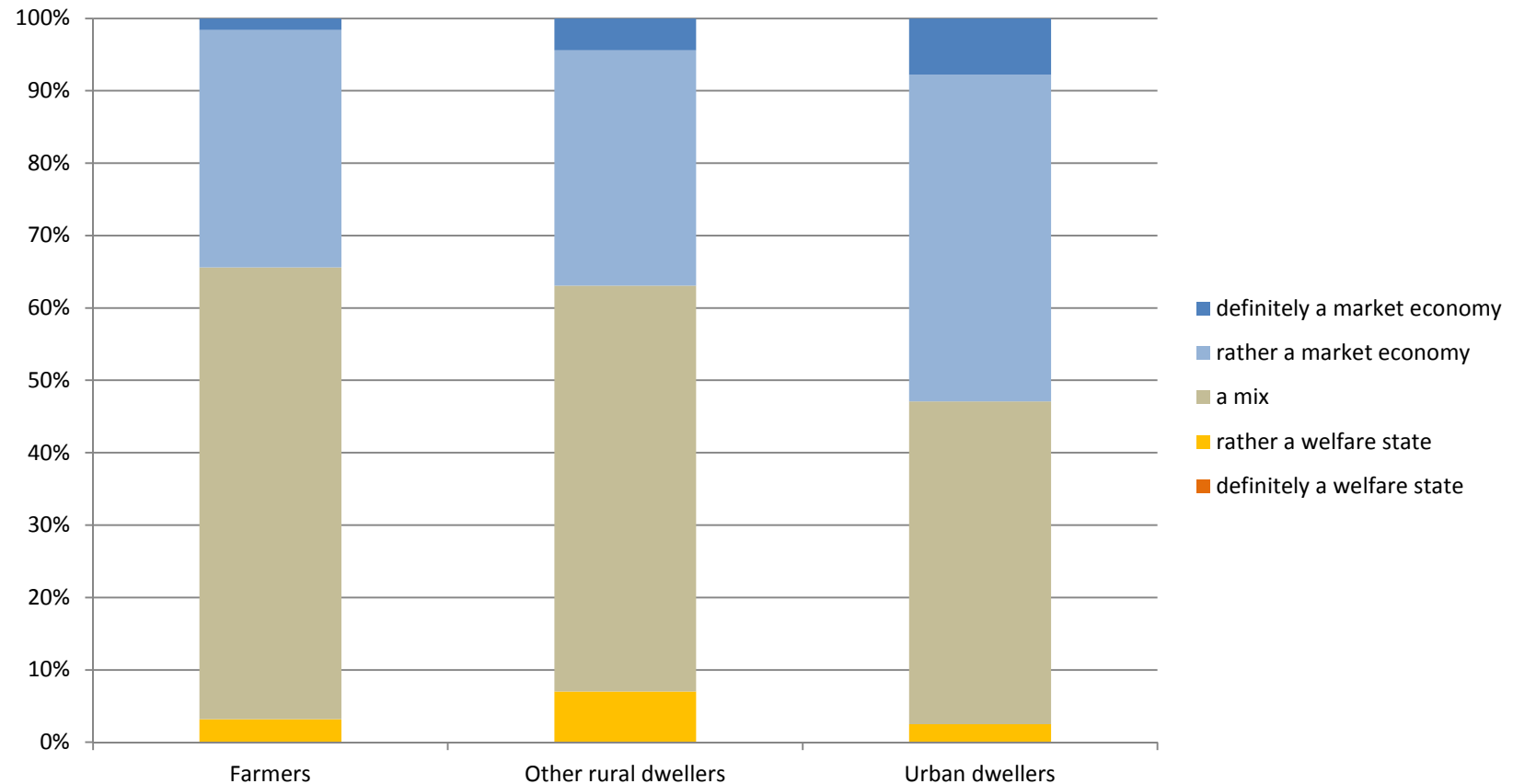
1/ What economic system?

2/ What political system?

3/ What collective identity, and what type of national community?

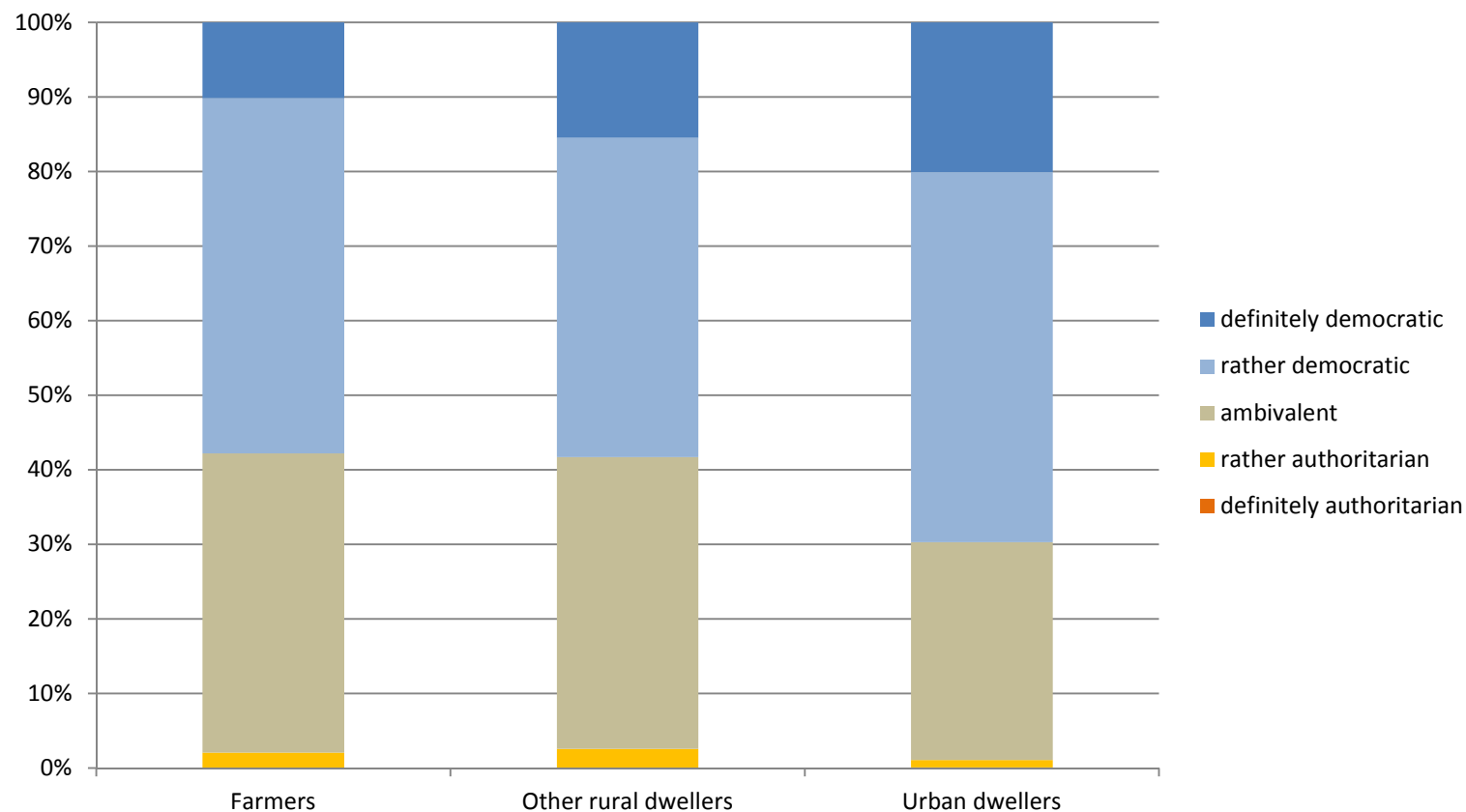
## **ATTITUDES TO THE SYSTEM' CHANGES**

# (1) Preferences concerning the economic system



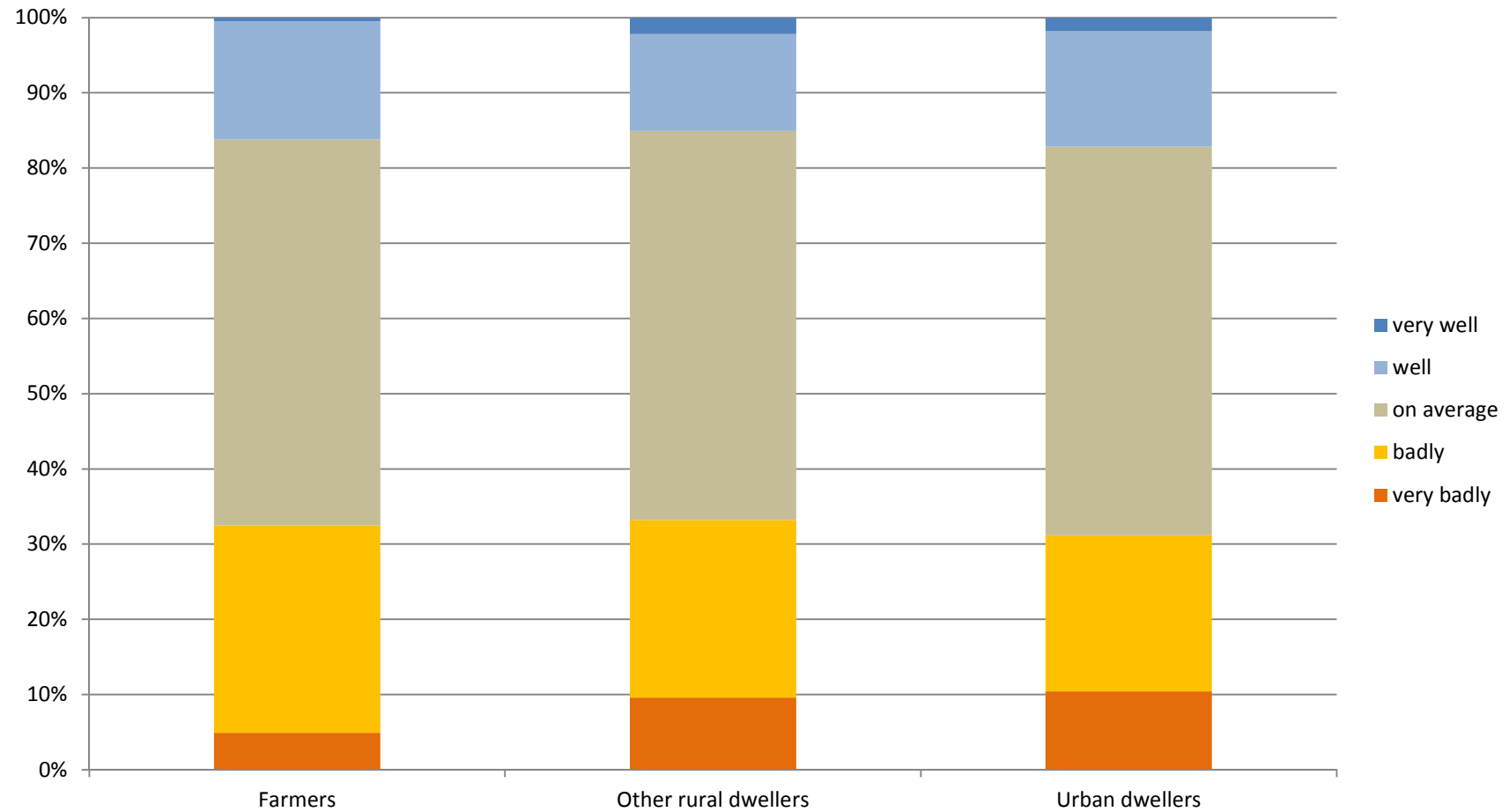
"Poles 2011" - index of 20 items: general opinions about socialism & capitalism (4); egalitarianism vs meritocracy (5); economic and social obligations of the state (6); assessment of privatization (5)

## (2) Preferences concerning the political system



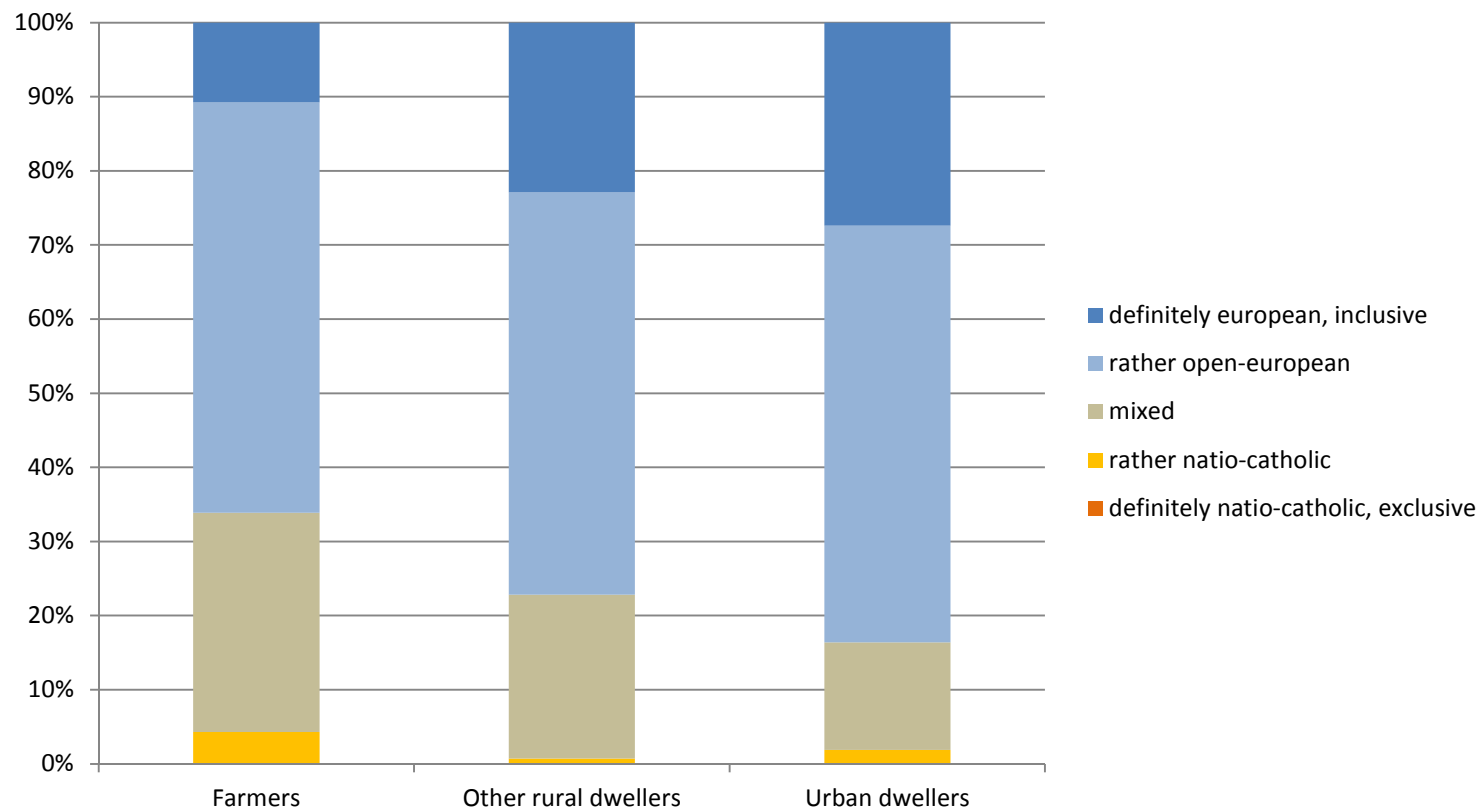
"Poles 2011" - index of 5 items: role of political opposition, type of leadership, of censorship, model of massmedia, attitudes towards minorities

# How democracy works in Poland?



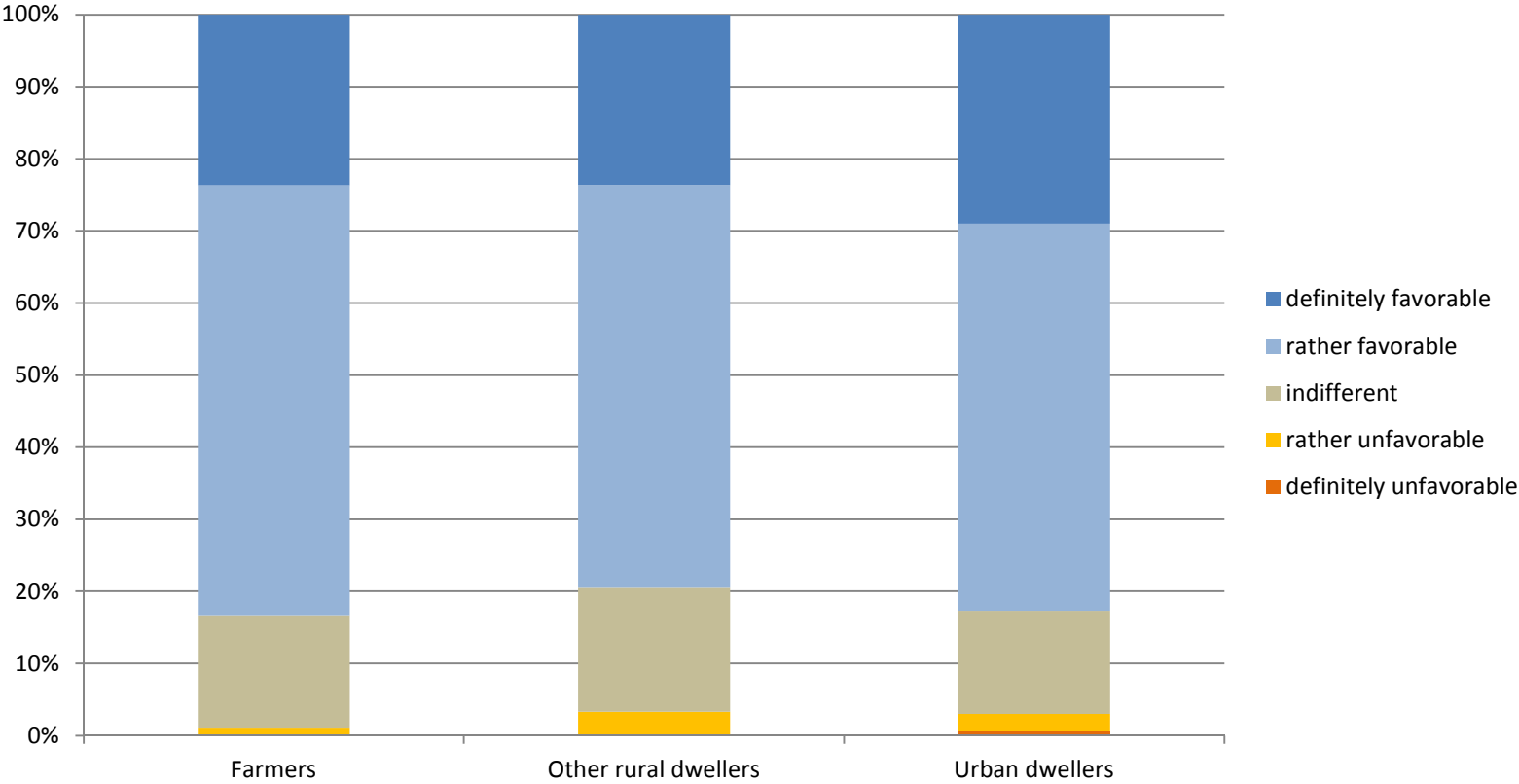
Source: "Poles 2011", N = 1202

### (3) What type of national community and identity?



"Poles 2011" - index of 9 items: scale of openness for foreign influences vs xenophobia (7); the role of Catholic church in public sphere (1); church separate from the state or not (1)

# Is our membership in the UE favorable for Poland?



Source: "Poles 2011", N = 1202; index of 7 items

## Conclusions (1):

- In the first decade of Polish transformation (1990s) the gap between rural and urban areas was still deep. However, today this gap has remarkably narrowed.
- Both internal system' changes and the new agricultural policy practiced within the CAP EU have contributed to this phenomenon.
- They triggered people's activity that changed not only their lives but also the broader social space.

## Conclusions (2)

- Within rural area itself there can be observed the proceeding process of social and mental differentiation.
- Its poles delimit not that much the areas of wealth and poverty but rather:
  1. economically prosperous, dynamicly developing farms , which owners are interested in transforming the socio-political system
  2. economically ineffective farms, which owners are often afraid of changes led to market economy, but don't afraid so much of political and cultural changes.
- There are the representatives of new social classes between them :
  1. administration staff, entrepreneurs, residents (mentally close to the owners of prosperous farms)
  2. blue-collar workers, pensioners, the unemployed (mentally close to the ownres of small ineffective farms)



## Conclusions (3)

- The rural population not necessarily will encumber the processes of transformation (because of economic, social and mental reasons described above).
- The direction of further changes of rural area in Poland will depend on the policy practiced by the EU and the state, which may be:
  - more agrarian or more rural one
  - more egalitarian or more effectively-oriented
  - more focused on existing local sources or more active in creating new regional policy
- Finding the optimal solution is very difficult nowadays, but not impossible.
- It needs: good politicians, good experts and good social capital.
- Do we have them?



**Thank you very much for your attention ...**

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