



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

A VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

MAP Position Paper



LONG-TERM VISION FOR RURAL AREAS: CONTRIBUTION FROM 20 SCIENCE- SOCIETY-POLICY PLATFORMS

MAP POSITION PAPER

BULGARIA

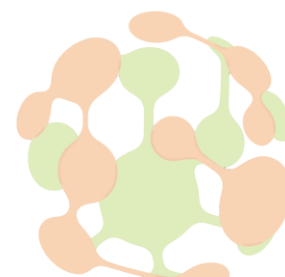
Version 22.01.2021

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1. Headline message

The demographic problem in rural areas, in contrast to cities, is mainly based on the strong lag in many economic relations. It cannot be said unequivocally that the lag in socio-economic indicators is the reason for the demographics, but it is certainly the reason for the difficult integration and prosperity of the communities in them. The negative trend in demographic terms is a problem no less than poverty, unemployment and low income. It originated as a problem in early socialism, when the strong industrialisation of national economies concentrated a large part of the rural population in cities.

The unfavourable economic conditions in the villages and rural municipalities are due to their inability to compete with the non-rural areas, which in turn leads to the demographic problem. Rural areas also have many advantages that need to be supported. This, in turn, can be positively used as a tool to reduce the negative trend with demographics, as well as increase vitality in rural areas.

It would be useful to think more towards decentralisation and involvement in the local government process, thus increasing efficiency in dealing with problems at the local level.

Keywords: rural demography, population structure, socio-economic lag, endogenous advantages

2. Key scientific evidence

In many scientific journals, demography is mentioned as one of the main problems facing rural areas. The four key areas in which we see a significant difference in the indicators of rural and non-rural areas are: demography, unemployment, economy and social infrastructure. On the other hand, in areas such as human resources, health infrastructure, agriculture and educational infrastructure, the differences in the last 10-15 years are not so significant. Data analysis show that even in times of technological progress, unfavourable trends in all indicators are exacerbated. Which in turn shows us that the problems that cause them are still relevant in most rural areas.

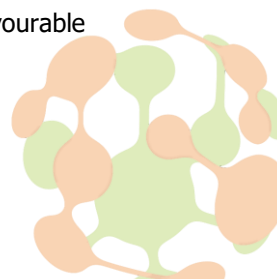
The starting point for improving the demographic situation in rural areas is the future look-out. As perspectives and expectations change, people and communities will consider sustainable horizons for rural development. Studies show that the materialisation of these ideas requires the strengthening of synergies between endogenous factors and public funds to support rural areas. In addition, the activity of local entrepreneurs in the field of agriculture and services plays a determinant role in sustainable growth, especially by developing local markets and connecting the local economy with the national one.

3. Summary of the outcomes of the Delphi

The Delphi approach is an expert-bound process, which is quite useful and effective but in time of shutdown and restrictive measures for social interaction due to COVID-19 crisis is a challenge to implement. Looking and finding consensus among involved experts is sound evidence that formulated notions and theses are relevant. The experts recognised in general that demographic situation in rural areas is adverse and in order to cope with it is necessary improve socio-economic outlook and prospects of those areas, which can be achieved by exogenous public support capitalising on strengths of rural areas.

3.1. Challenges and opportunities in the next 20 years

Research by experts and those familiar with the issue of demography show that in the next 20 years the challenges facing rural areas will be serious. Some of the most affected communities are those in the mountainous and disadvantaged parts of the country, along with rural communities located in less developed and economically disadvantaged regions. In fact, they are also those with the worst demographics and more. An unfavourable prerequisite for the lag in these areas are the unfavourable



geography and environmental factors (climate, soil, land cover). They are also much more vulnerable and prone to negative opportunities to improve existing indicators. Thus, a strong correlation is observed between the endogenous characteristics of the environment and the current situation in the socio-economic and demographic development in rural areas.

Meanwhile, the current situation leads to an abundance of territories, reduced opportunities for their survival due to the lack of critical potential for generating recovery and mitigation processes. Without people and without the necessary conditions to preserve the community, these territories become inhuman areas. This in turn will lead to the loss of the identity of the regions as well as the loss of cultural and historical heritage. That is why it is strategically important to work towards rural regeneration.

In the near future, there are more and more opportunities for these areas to become more and more attractive and to become popular again. New technologies, communication systems and digitalisation in general are considered to close the gap in opportunities in urban regions compared to small settlements. The economic and market advantages of megacities will not be as attractive in the future. At the same time, the interest in small settlements and in ecologically clean areas is growing. This, of course, is a matter of time. However, the challenge is to work methodically and systematise in order to make this transition smoother. Which is a prerequisite to happen earlier.

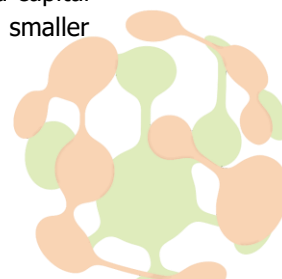
3.2. Desirable future for 2040

The desired future for rural development undoubtedly passes through a better and more sustainable demographic situation. It is in itself a prerequisite for improving the socio-economic situation. The perspective of demography is related to the population as well as its structure, quality and educational qualifications. It should also be considered as an indicator that depends on many factors that do not allow adequate change in rural areas. Focusing on endogenous strengths, backed by a sound, systematic and comprehensive policy, would provide a very different perspective for rural areas. With the improvement of national demographic indicators, stabilisation of the demographic structure in rural areas can be sought. The sustainability of their development and demographic trends passes not only by stopping the population decline, but also by improving age dependencies, as the share of people under 50 and especially those under 30 living in rural areas is growing by contrast. of the population ratio of retirees.

The population of retirement age compared to the population of working age in 2019 represents 38% in rural areas, while in rural areas it is 31% and this level is a good prospect that should be directed to 2040 in order to take into account sustainability. With increasing life expectancy, the mortality rate measured in 2019 in rural municipalities is 18,7 ‰ and in rural areas it is 13,6 ‰, which can be defined as a long-term, realistic goal for rural areas. In addition, in order to position a stable demographic situation, natural population growth in rural areas must significantly reduce its negative values from -10 ‰ to -3-4 ‰, while at the same time consistently improving the mechanical population growth, as more people go back and settle down to live in these areas than leave. This will lead to a gradual increase in population by 1-2 ‰ per year. Achieving these quantitative indicators by 2040 will provide sustainable demographic prospects and will testify to the overall improvement of the socio-economic factors explaining the demographic situation. This will promote the quality of life that exists in rural areas, where people will reap the benefits of rural areas without affecting their economic well-being.

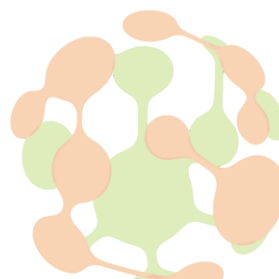
3.3. Enablers to achieve the vision

Opportunities for the next 20 years depend to a large extent on the introduction of new technologies, digitalisation, innovation, which will reduce the need to achieve competitiveness and economic efficiency based on population concentration. Consumption and demand of people will play a leading role in the economy due to the accumulated significant capital resources in the world economy and increased capital productivity. The even distribution of income in societies will probably allow people to turn to smaller



settlements, which in turn will improve their quality of life, but will also preserve their opportunities for professional realisation. This process must also be stimulated and encouraged by public funds, which will provide the necessary catalysts for public services and incentives to do so more quickly and smoothly. The basic premise of positive change when rural areas become an attractive place for social life is needed to ensure a proper understanding of what rural areas are and what their needs and characteristics are. They should look primarily for the quality of life they offer, taking into account the conditions and opportunities they provide for the professional and career realisation of the people. Economic factors, competitiveness, economic efficiency and economies of scale work in most cases against the prosperous and dynamic development of rural areas. A consistent and targeted public support policy is therefore needed to support the potential endogenous comparative advantages and strengths of rural areas. This intervention is needed to stimulate and generate real and sustainable change and improvement in rural areas. This improvement must be sought in socio-economic factors and whether they are successful and to what extent they meet these criteria can be judged by the results of demographic indicators.

Rural areas that lag behind in development compared to non-rural areas must be supported in order to maintain the balance between the two types and to overcome the "draining resources" from a stronger economic side. Special attention should be paid to villages in rural areas, where the problems are most acute. They should play a more important role in the structure of local self-government and the bottom-up approach. This is important in the implementation of all public policy decisions. Leadership and institutions are the most important tools for achieving the desired situation and changing negative trends. Leadership brings the right and credible ideas and vision, driven by a strong will, can build territorial development institutions that give a promising future to rural areas. The future of these areas in the coming digital age and the development of information technology is also on the side of rural, sparsely populated, environmentally friendly areas. These are the strengths of rural areas as providers of better living conditions that will work for their development in the future, which must be used to ensure continuity between rural areas today and those of the future.



Annex 1. Methodology used in the MAP

The Delphi approach is an interactive expert process, which specific tool is to gather experts relevant to the topic and to create conditions for their discussion and mutual concluding, which is used to build up the position paper. Due to unusual situation and pandemic with COVID-19 in persons round discussions were not deemed as safe as necessary, which poses finding a modified and justified way to deal with exclusive situation. Instead of interactive approach and in persons discussions, the involved experts participated in the process remotely, reacting by e-mails and by phones individually through sending their comments and suggestions and accepting the final draft of the position paper. The entire Delphi process was composed of 7 steps, described herein below. The moot and reflections on the previous drafted Discussion Paper were organised in three consecutive rounds, where the goal was to come up to recognising a text of Position Paper by all experts. The aim was to clarify and formulate the main notions and messages and combine all opinions and statements alleged by experts as at the end achieve consensus.

Step 1: Organisational work - Facilitator and Monitor

The facilitator and monitor were in charge of organising the whole process. They were involved in preparing the Discussion Paper. The moderator and facilitator were in touch with MAP members and handle the communication process with all involved experts. The invitations to join the discussions and Position Paper drafting were sent to all MAP members along with 2 scholars with experience in rural development. As a result of paneling the experts' group of 7 members of MAP and external specialists actively participated in the discussion process and in working out the content of the Position Paper.

Step 2: Identification and invitation of experts

The Delphi technique relies on a panel of experts. The experts' panel involve 5 members of Bulgarian MAP and 2 external specialists and scholars in rural development. All involved experts possess relevant knowledge and experience in rural development. Other 5 members of Bulgarian MAP do not respond to the invitation to join the discussion process. Therefore, external specialists, not member of the MAP were invited in the process. All these experts belong and are stakeholders from civil society and scientific field, as involved 2 representatives from public authority area were not able to take position due to needs to coordinate any statement and proposal with principals.

Step 3: Define the purpose of the discussion process and Discussion Paper handover

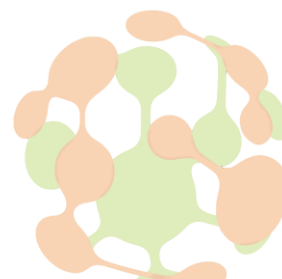
All experts were acquainted with the purpose of the discussion purpose. The experts have received the Discussion Paper dedicated to demographic issue in rural areas, where they were also contacted for filling up questionnaire and in reviewing and consenting the text. The Discussion Paper was the starting point to set up the Position Paper. In this relation, all experts were invited to formulate their opinions, proposals and statements following the structure of Position Paper.

Step 4: Round One – opinions, proposals and statements collection

All experts were invited to posit their opinions, comments and statements based on the Discussion Paper, as the purpose was to obtain their view separately each other. The role of facilitator and monitor were to collate and summarise the responses, raising to experts any unconsentaneous proposals and looking for common viewpoints.

Step 5: Round Two – compiling and sending the Position Paper Draft for reviewing

Based on all received comments, proposals and statements, the draft document was provided to experts by e-mail for reviewing. They were invited to review the Position draft going deeper into the topic to clarify specific issues. All experts were able to know comments and proposals from other experts in the panel. Again, collate and summarise the results were done as the stress was posed on the controversial and singular opinions and proposals expressed by experts. The purpose was to seek and build consensus, as those statements and proposals that were not consented were redacted or removed.



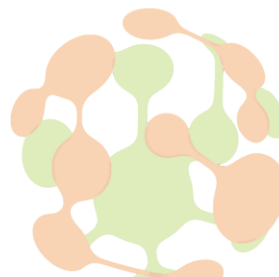
Step 6: Round Three – sum up of reviewed draft

The responses from all experts were collected and started collation of the text and statements consented by all and taking aside those unaccepted or doubted by experts. The intention of this step is to unite all text and formulation agreed by experts.

Step 7: Creation of final draft of Position paper

After summing up and structuring the paper draft based on the experts' reactions and proposals, the SHERPA team set up to synthesize findings, text and conclusions and to create the final draft of Position Paper. The team checked for missing points and to be sure the document is delineating the vision and ideas for future of demography of rural areas rather than pointing out specific measures to be done.

Conclusions and sending to SHERPA leaders



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