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COMPARATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOME BALKAN COUNTRIES RURAL REGIONS

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Summary

Defining rural area is the first step in shaping efficient development policy. There is no single universal definition, nor a typology of the rural areas. Moreover, in most Balkan countries, serious institutional efforts have not been made to classify populated areas as rural or urban, nor identify different types of rural areas. This paper makes a comparative analysis of various factors that are important for determination of the degree of rurality and main features of regional and rural development of some Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia). One notices that in a relatively similar natural-geographic and to some degree historic and developmental setting, similar socio-demographic processes are occurring in parallel. Difference in features and dynamics of these processes is resulting from different institutional approach.*

Key words: rural development, regions, typology, socio-demographic processes.

Methodological frameworks

The way we understand rural regions has evolved through time as the meaning of the term broadened. Originally, a rural region was viewed as a residual area of an urban centre. Simple understanding of rurality defined according to territory was refuted when it was accepted that rural region represents territorial entity with coherent economic and social structure of diversified activities. Nowadays, predominant view is that a rural region represents a territorial unit, with one or more small/medium-sized towns surrounded by vast open space, with a relatively low population density and regional economic structure which reflects the state of affairs at a specific labour market.

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Contemporary positioning of rural development policy implies its emergence on the basis of a balanced regional development policy while relying on a unique set of agricultural policy measures, structural policies, industrial policy, tertiary sector development policy, health care policy, infrastructure policy and environmental policy in a specific area.

Territorial-administrative organisation of a country and the availability of statistical data considerably affect how the issue is approached. Important indicators are usually observed only at the national and regional level, while, the same indicators for lower territorial units often lack reliability, even for those sectors that are almost synonymous with rural areas (agriculture, forestry).

According to OECD typology, rural regions are classified into three groups, depending on what percentage of the population lives in rural communities: with more than 50% of the population - predominantly rural regions, with 15 to 50% of the population – significantly rural or intermediate regions, with less than 15% of the population - predominantly urban regions.

Regionalization in the European Union has been performed according to so-called NUTS classification (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics), a geocode standard for referencing the administrative division of countries for statistical purposes in Europe⁴. However, regardless of the Eurostat definition, there are significant differences between EU countries. The definition of rurality used by the EU, initially based solely on population density, was improved by the introduction of more complex elements relating to the functional links between rural and urban areas. Accordingly, for example, LEADER project defines rural areas as groups of local communities with 5,000 to 100,000 inhabitants.

Eurostat approach to defining rural regions is made according to the degree of urbanization: densely populated zones - groups of municipalities, each with a population density greater than 500 inhabitants/km², and a total population of at least 50 000 inhabitants; intermediate zones - groups of municipalities, each with a population density greater than 100 stanovnika/km² (not belonging to a densely populated zone), sparsely populated zones - groups of municipalities that are not classified as either densely populated zones or intermediate.

In the outlined context, this paper comparatively analyses elements determining the level of rurality and the main features of regional and rural development of some Balkan countries - Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia.

4 Eurostat has defined three levels of NUTS (Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques/Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics): NUTS 1 – comprises regions with over 3 million inhabitants, NUTS 2 – for regions between 800 000 and 3 million inhabitants, NUTS 3 – for regions with less than 800 000 inhabitants. Since 2003, NUTS level 4 and NUTS level 5 have been renamed LAU levels 1 and 2 respectively (local administrative units - LAUs).

Regions and rural areas in Montenegro

Regional development of agriculture represents significant feature of the overall regional development. As is the case with regional development in general, in contemporary theory and practice, it is defined as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Indeed, there is a complex correlation between interdependence and change, both between and within its individual dimensions.

Although spatial regionalization of Montenegro was not officially established by a legal act, in terms of statistical-economic or administrative aspects, nor in terms of determining specific names of regions and /or specific policies of regional development, in the spatial planning documents the country is usually divided into three major regions: (1) Northern or Mountainous region (municipalities: Andrijevica, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Plav, Plužine, Pljevlja, Rožaje, Žabljak and Šavnik), (2) Middle or Central region (includes: Cetinje, Danilovgrad, Nikšić and Podgorica) and (3) Southern or Coastal region (which includes the municipalities of Bar, Budva, Herceg Novi, Kotor, Tivat and Ulcinj).

If the specified regionalization of Montenegro (the division into three regions) is to be taken as the basis for the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistical Purposes, then the territory of the Republic of Montenegro, just hypothetically, could be organised as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. NUTS – Hypothetical regional-rural organisation of Montenegro

EU standard	Montenegro	Methodological limitations
NUTS 1	Montenegro	Macroeconomic indicators in line with international standards are available only for the Republic as a whole. Statistical series are not compatible within longer time period.
NUTS 2	Regions: (1) Northern (2) Central (3) Southern	The statistic data represents only a sum of data collected for municipalities. There are no elected representatives or authorities at this level that could carry out the policy of development.
NUTS 3	Municipalities	Some municipalities were established after the 2003 Census, and for them there are no compatible data for all indicators.
NUTS 4	Settlements Villages	The total number of settlements is 1256. Out of which only about 40 settlements are of urban type, and the rest are villages (2003Census). Available statistics at this level refers only to demographic indicators.

Generally viewed, according to all relevant criteria and indicators for determining the degree of rurality (OECD, EU), given that the average population density amounts

to only 45 inhabitants/km² (Census 2003) and despite the fact that this indicator nearly doubled in the course of the past fifty years (27 inhabitants/km², Census 1948), the whole territory of Montenegro could be considered as a **rural area**, or sparsely populated area. On the other hand, population living in municipal centers that could be considered as centers of urban settlements, has reached 56% (2003), which indicates that about 44% of the population lives in rural areas. According to the OECD typology, it means that the whole Republic of Montenegro can be classified as **significantly rural** or intermediate region.

However, if we look at population density and the share of agricultural population in the total population of municipalities, an extremely strong differentiation into significantly rural and predominantly urban areas is observed. Several municipalities in the North region (Kolašin, Žabljak, Šavnik, Plužine) are **extremely sparsely populated**, only 50-10 people per km². These are also municipalities with the largest share of agricultural population in the total population (12% in Kolašin, up to 32% in Šavnik) and according to the typology of the EU, these areas could even be classified as **distant (remote) rural areas**, heavily dependent on agriculture, isolated due to geographical characteristics, where only essential services are provided. On the other end of a scale are a few municipalities of the Southern region (with the exception of the capital city) which could be, according to population density (more than 100 inhabitants per km²), classified as **medium-populated**, such as: Herceg-Novi (141), Tivat (296) and Budva (130) and Podgorica (117). At the same time, all municipalities (except Podgorica) have less than 1% of agricultural population.

The regionalization of agriculture in Montenegro, regardless of its relatively small size, due to its pronounced differences in relief, altitude, geological materials, diversity of climate, soil, biodiversity, has received attention of a number of authors and was the subject of different studies. By mid-seventies, the first attempts of agricultural regionalization have been made in a study on technical and technological bases of agricultural development /Lit.10. 1975/, and the regionalization of Montenegro was made so that the total territory was divided into 5 regions: I Coastal region (Herceg Novi, Kotor, Tivat, Budva, Bar and Ulcinj); II Zeta-Bjelopavlići region (Titograd and Danilovgrad); III Karst region (Cetinje and Nikšić) IV Polimlje-Ibar region (Plav, Ivangrad, Bijelo Polje and Rožaje); V Northern-Mountainous region (Kolašin, Mojkovac, Plužine, Šavnik, Pljevlja and Žabljak).

In the early eighties, one of more ambitious and successful regional development projects was the agricultural development project in Montenegro / Lit.5, 1983 /. The project paper was made in an effort to introduce the regionalisation of Montenegro from the aspect of production and market development, and the country was divided into five areas-regions: Coastal, Zeta-Bjelopavlići, Karst zone, Mountainous and Polimlje zone (the Lim river valley).

At the end of the eighties, in a study / Lit.12, 1989 /, the regionalization of Montenegro was carried out in accordance with two aspects: (a) first, from the standpoint of agro-ecological conditions (taking into account the characteristics of soil, water resources and climate conditions), the territory was divided into **five agro-**

ecological regions, regardless of their administrative municipal boundaries: Coastal, Zeta-Bjelopavlići; Valley region; Karst region and Mountainous area. (B) second, in addition to agro-ecological conditions, three additional criteria were taken into account (altitude, the structure of agricultural land and population number changes in the period 1971-81). Thus, the division in six "**socio-economic regions**" was made: Plains region, Coastal region, Highlands, Highlands-Mountains region and Karst region.

Finally, agroecological regionalisation of agricultural areas of Montenegro, regardless of administrative divisions and municipal boundaries, was one of the most important analytical basis for the adoption of "Green Strategy of Montenegro" as an important planning and development document / Lit.14, 1992 /, which formulated the policy of agricultural development of Montenegro in accordance with new market fundamentals.

Application of more exact methods in the regionalisation of agriculture and regional development was not widely practiced in the territory of former Yugoslavia, although a few such projects were conducted in Serbia / Lit.6, 1990 / and in Bosnia and Herzegovina / Lit.9, 1986 /. There have been attempts to prepare regionalization of the territory of Montenegro, according to conditions for agricultural production, by using measurable criteria, indicators and mathematical and statistical methods / Lit.3, 1990 /. Finally, we come to a conclusion that the territory of Montenegro includes several areas, regions and subregions: I **Mediterranean area**, covers two quite homogeneous region: 1 Coastal municipalities, 2 Zeta-Bjelopavlići region (Podgorica and Danilovgrad). II **Karst area**, due to specific agroecologic and especially pedologic features, is considered separately from the hilly-mountainous areas, and includes the municipality of Cetinje and the municipality of Nikšić. III **Hilly-Mountainous area**, that covers two major regions: 1 Central Mountain region (Mojkovac, Kolašin, Šavnik, Žabljak and Plužine), 2 North-East region, where we observe two homogenous subregions: a) Polimlje (Ivangrad, Bijelo Polje and Plav), b) Pljevlja-Ibar sub-region (Pljevlja and Rožaje).

This type of division into regions and subregions can not be regarded as definitive agricultural regionalisation, as it is largely determined by the existence of administrative boundaries. However, regardless of numerous restrictions, it could and can be observed as a framework for regional streamlining of agricultural production in Montenegro.

Regions and rural areas in Serbia

In the Republic of Serbia, in 1990s, there were several attempts to improve territorial and spatial organisation, namely through the Spatial Plan for the Period until 2010 and the Law on Underdeveloped Areas for the period until 2005. Main strategic goal of the Spatial Plan was to achieve higher level of total functional integration of the area of the Republic of Serbia and provide for the conditions necessary to achieve better transport and economic connections with neighbouring countries. It required alleviation/decrease of regional disproportions, i.e. qualitative changes in spatial, economic and social structure.

The Spatial Plan also included the development of rural settlements as multi-

functional productive, social and cultural areas. The classification of areas moves from the principle of homogeneity as regards the level of economic development. The parameters used were the national income, employment level, turnover in the retail sector and the development of the PE of PTT Communications “Serbia“ post company network. Further criteria that were taken into consideration were the altitude of the settlement, distance from the state border, type of the settlement (rural or urban), and its inclusion in special development programmes.

However, it should be emphasised that the term “region” herein is in line with the definition of the regions laid down in the Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2007-2012 as “units of a local self-government in the area of administrative districts” (defined in the Law on State Administration), but it is not in compliance with the definition used in the European Union where the “region” refers to a statistic (economic) region. New (European) definition of the term “region” was used for the first time in Serbia in the Law on Regional Development adopted in July 2009. In line with NUTS regionalisation models, there are 24 districts, plus the territory of Belgrade, in Serbia (Kosovo and Metohija excluded), which would be classified as NUTS 3 level. For rural development, it is necessary that at this level there are neither elected authorities nor executives which would implement rural development policy. The territory is further divided into 165 municipalities (some of them got the status of a municipality after the 2002 Census). Total number of settlements in Serbia (K&M excluded) amounts to 4.718, out of which 181 settlements have the status of towns. The statistics available at this level refer only to demographic indicators.

Most comprehensive data on rural areas originate from the Census of population, households and housing and from the Census of Agriculture. This means that main indicators of rural areas refer only to the time period of ten years, and the classification unit is a municipality.

Table 2. Main features of rural and urban areas in Serbia

	Urban		Rural	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>% (Serbia=100)</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% (Serbia=100)</i>
OECD definition (<150 inhabitants /km ²)				
Population density	299.80		64.59	
Total territory	11072	14.29	66402	85.71
Population 2002	3291310	43.90	4206691	56.10
Agricultural land	771520	15.90	4341787	84.91
Forest land	171965	9.13	1711781	90.87

Source: Lit.1, 2007.

According to these criteria, over four fifths (85%) of the territory of the Republic of Serbia could be considered rural, since over 56% of the total population of the Republic of Serbia (2002) is living on the territory. The analysis of the above listed results indicates that OECD criteria that measures rurality based on population density reflect the image of rural Serbia to a satisfactory extent. These criteria could be complemented with new criteria and scales referring to the size of settlements, due to the fact that without this limitation rural areas would include municipalities with great differences in the number of inhabitants and the size of the territory they comprise.

Rural Development policy in Serbia should be based on well-known features of the rural territory and the population inhabiting it. Area classification in this regard forms the basis for rural area typology, and consequently, Rural Development policy. / Lit.13, 2005/.

Regions and rural areas in Croatia

Difference between rural and urban areas in Croatia is made in accordance with the territorial division by which smaller administrative units – municipalities, are considered rural, whereas towns are considered urban areas. According to this administrative criterion, out of the total population of 4.437.460 (Census 2001), around 44,4% (1.971.005) of the population is regarded as rural, and 55,6% (2.466.455) as urban population /Lit.11, 2008/. At local level, (municipalities, towns)⁵, areas are classified as rural or urban based on the threshold of 150 inhabitants/ km². At regional level (NUTS 3 – counties), OECD defines three groups of areas depending on the share of the population in the region living in local rural areas: mostly rural regions (over 50%); significantly rural (15-50%) and mostly urban regions (less than 15% of the region's population live in local rural areas).

5 “In Croatia there are two levels of political-territorial organisation: municipalities as units of local self-government and counties as units of regional self-government. According to the provisions of the Law on Territories of Counties, Towns and Municipalities from 1992, territory of the Republic of Croatia was divided into twenty counties and the City of Zagreb. According to the abovementioned Law from 1997, the number of municipalities was reduced from 424 to 416, and the number of towns/cities increased from 75 to 122. In compliance with the Law, certain municipalities disappeared, and others were founded, and 47 municipalities gained the status of towns. Now, there are 123 towns/cities registered and 564 municipalities “ /Lit.15, 2004/.

Table 3. Rural and urban areas in Croatia

Classification	OECD Criterion, 150 inhabitants/ km ²					
	Surface km ²	%	Number of settlements	%	Number of inhabitants	%
Rural areas	51.872	91,6	6.001	88,7	2.110.988	47,6
Urban areas	4.731	8,4	763	11,3	2.326.472	52,4
Total	56.603	100	6.751	100	4.437.460	100

Source: Lit.11, 2008.

As the Table 3 indicates, according to the OECD criteria, the following can be concluded: (a) 91,6% of the total territory of Croatia are classified as rural areas, and 8,4 % as urban areas; (b) 88,7% settlements are located in rural, and 11,3% in urban areas, with 35% of the population living in 14 towns with over 30.000 inhabitants; (c) 47,6% of the total population live in rural, and 52,4% in urban areas.

Strong negative growth rate of the population living in rural areas is the result of a relative and/or absolute aggravation of life conditions of young families and growing trend of migration into urban centres or more perspective rural/tourist regions. Educational level of the population living in rural areas as compared to urban areas is much lower, on average. In some counties, almost every third adult person living in a rural area has only primary school education.

Main feature of Croatian rural areas is a poor access of the population to basic infrastructure. All main indicators of whether the rural population is provided with infrastructural conveniences or access to basic infrastructure (e.g. the number of phone lines, number of post offices per 1000 inhabitants, density of roads and railway tracks per 100 km², etc.) are much lower in rural than in urban areas. Also, life conditions of the rural population are in the majority of the regions much worse than those in urban areas, e.g. urban households are to a higher extent equipped with bathrooms, electricity, water, sewage system, etc. than the rural ones. /Lit.11, 2008/.

Conclusions

Features that characterise regional rurality in the countries concerned, besides the fact that they indicate extreme differences on such a small area, also reveal their significant resemblances. In Montenegro, according to average population density (45 inhabitants/km²), the whole territory could be considered as a rural area, i.e. rarely inhabited zone; several municipalities in the North of the country are extremely rarely inhabited (5-10 inhabitants/km²), but with large share of rural population in the total population (up to 32%); in the South, municipalities have less than 1% of the rural population in the total population number. In Serbia, basic features of rural and

urban areas, according to the OECD criteria, indicate that over four fifths (85%) of the territory of the Republic of Serbia could be considered rural, with over 56% of the total population living in it (2002). In Croatia, according to the same criteria, around 92% of the total territory is classified as rural areas, with 88% of settlements located in them, and 48% of the total population living in rural areas.

In comparative analysis of rural areas development, region-specific features should be taken into consideration, based on improvement of an appropriate harmonised methodology. More detailed mapping of the region could provide for a clear insight into possible forms of support to rural economy diversification and promotion of a sustainable regional development. Thus, Rural Development Programmes could not only be developed, but also updated and improved, through reciprocal cross-border regional experiences, through various economic activities related to multifunctional farms and diversification of a wide range of "post-industrial" socio-economic out farm activities.

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