

## RURALITY OF LITHUANIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

In this study authors compare the demographic, socio-economic and agriculture activity indicators in the municipalities of different degrees of rurality, highlight the causes of uneven distribution of social and economic indicators and show trends of change for 2009–2012. Authors proposed new indicators and justify the using of these indicators as background characteristics in analysing the rurality of municipalities.

KEY WORDS: *degree of rurality, integrated evaluation, spatial distribution.*

JEL CODES: Q150, Q180, R120, R230.

### Introduction

It is recognised that there is no conception of rural at present. Precise definition of what is meant by the term rural has proved to be an elusive goal (Pacione, 1989: 1). The term rural has remained an elusive one to define in academic research (Hall, Page, 1999: 179). Rural areas are identifiable as non-urban space (Hoggart, Buller, Black, 1995: 21).

By the 1970s the need to replace subjective expressions of rurality with a more objective statistically based view had been widely recognized. P. Cloke in 1977 derived an index of rurality by applying principal components analysis to 16 variables measuring population, housing, occupation and migration characteristics as well distance from urban centers for rural districts in England and Wales. Finally four categories of rural areas were identified (Pacione, 1989). Later the most important world-famous OECD methodology recognized at present in EU has been suggested. The OECD initiated its Rural development programme, of which the rural indicators project is an important part. The main seeking of this work is to understand territorial diversity and dynamics and to draw policy relevant lessons. Classifications and typologies of areas were created which allowed analyses of similarities and differences among the various territorial units. One important analytical and policy relevant dimension for structuring territory is rural-urban gradient, describing different settlement pattern (Meyer, 1997; Cunningham, Bollmann, 1997; OECD regional typology, 2010).

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Advantage of territorial analysis according the degree of rurality is following:

- differentiates the territory according to the share of population living in rural communities, in per cent;
- provides theoretical background for analysis of other phenomenon according to specificity of a territory.

Rurality of Lithuania according OECD method has been presented by Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics (Vidickienė, Melnikienė, Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Ribašauskienė, 2012). Two types of regions were recognized (county level in Lithuania): predominantly rural and significantly rural. Integrated evaluation of rurality in municipality level was performed on the basis of 3 criteria: remoteness of the municipality, density of population and number of residents in the center of the municipality (Vidickienė, Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2011). Five regions (groups of municipalities) were recognized: strong rurality, intermediate rurality, weak rurality, semi urban and urban. The authors are predicating that this typology is stable for a long time and help to highlight the specifics of the region that is unable to be changed quickly (Melnikienė, Vidickienė, Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Ribašauskienė, 2011).

Social exclusion is increasing among the towns and villages (Smulkauskas ir vidutinio (...), 2004). The standard of living and quality of life in rural areas is lower than in urban areas (Verkulevičiūtė, 2010). Poverty has become a problem for larger shares of the (especially rural) population, not only in Lithuania, but in Central and Eastern Europe (Baum, Weingarten, 2004: 10). In the future, Lithuania will have to go to the new rural development policy, which will be focused on the harmonious development of all rural region (Vidickienė, Melnikienė, Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Ribašauskienė, 2012: 8).

Table 1. Comparison of indicators of investigation in 2008–2010 and 2009–2012 (municipality level)

| 2008–2010<br>Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics 2012 | 2009–2012<br>Author's investigation  |
|--|--|
| Percentage of the employed population, %                     | Percentage of the employed population, %                                     |
| Investment in tangible fixed assets per 1 inhabitant, Lt     | Investment in tangible fixed assets per 1 inhabitant, Lt*                    |
| Percentage of social benefit recipients, %                   | Percentage of social benefit recipients, %                                   |
| Unemployment rate, %   | The proportion of the unemployed and the working-age population, %           |
| Business vitality index                                      | The number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population |
| Index of ageing  | Index of ageing  |
| Agricultural land, %   | Utilized agricultural land, share from agricultural land in municipality, %  |
|  | Farm size 3–10 ha , share from total farm in municipality, %                 |
| Share of forests, %  |  |
| Density of roads with improved pavement km/km <sup>2</sup>   | Density of local roads with improved pavement km/km <sup>2</sup> *           |
|  | Infant deaths per 1000 live births*  |

\* 2011

Source: Vidickienė, Melnikienė, Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Ribašauskienė, 2012: 64;  
Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2012

The purpose of this study is: to assess whether the typology of integrated evaluation of rurality is suitable as a theoretical basis for the analysis of demographic, social-economic and agriculture activity indicators 2009–2012 period.

Tasks of the study are:

- To analyze the interaction between indicators' spatial distribution tendencies and degree of rurality.
- To investigate the interaction between less favored areas and degree of rurality.

Methods. Researchers of Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics proposed the following indicators to evaluate the degree of rurality in 2008–2010 periods: percentage of employed population, investment in tangible fixed assets per 1 habitant, percentage of social benefit recipients, unemployment rate (%), business vitality index, index of ageing, agricultural land (%), share of forests (%), and density of roads with improved pavement km/km<sup>2</sup>. During the study, we have chosen new indicators which characterize the social economic situation and agricultural activity, and which were not used by the researchers of Institute of Agrarian Economics in their study. These indicators are: the number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population, the proportion of the unemployed and the working-age population (%), infant deaths per 1000 live births, utilized agricultural land, share from agricultural land (%) and farm size 3–10 ha, share from total farms (%). All indicators were compared during the period 2008–2010 and 2009–2012 (Table 1).

In this study we also used the following methods: statistical analysis, comparative analysis, cartographic analysis.

**Results: territorial analysis of demographic, socio-economic and agriculture activity indicators in municipalities with varying degree of rurality in 2009–2012**

In this study we compare the socio-economic indicators in the municipalities of different degrees of rurality, highlight the cause of uneven distribution of social and economic indicators and show trends of change for 2009–2012.

Business viability index (growth rate of number of entities), which is applied by the Agrarian Economics Institute researchers, shows a change in the number of companies. During the economic crisis in Lithuania many enterprises have been closed, but the data of recent year statistics show that new enterprises are being established. In 2009–2012 the number of economic entities in operation increased mostly in rural municipalities (12 of such municipalities), while in the group of semi urban municipalities the number of economic entities in operation has not increased, and in the urban group businesses increased only in Vilnius. In some years, the number of economic entities in operation varies slightly, therefore, those changes should not be considered essential. For this reason, we propose another indicator which, the authors believe, reflects the employment opportunities – that is number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population. Distribution of economic entities in operation in various groups of rurality varies smoothly – the lowest proportion of economic entities in operation has municipalities of strong rurality, and the highest proportion – municipalities of weak rurality (Table 2). Very low number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population is in Švenčionys district, Šalčininkai district, Kalvarija and Pagėgiai municipalities (less than 20), which shows relatively smaller employment opportunities for local population. It was an unexpected fact that the average number of economic entities in operation is smaller in semi urban municipalities than in municipalities of weak rurality. Due to weak significance of Elektrėnai municipality the total value of a semi-urban group decreases, since the proximity of major cities of the republic implies that a large part of the population of Elektrėnai municipality is going to work in Vilnius or Kaunas. Meanwhile, in the group of municipalities of weak rurality, the overall picture is distorted by Neringa municipality, where the number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population is very high (85.8). Assignment of Neringa municipality to weak rurality group is questionable due to other exceptional values too.

Of course, the investment in tangible fixed assets goes not only to new construction, but also to the renewal of existing businesses, therefore, the investment in tangible fixed assets rate is adequate to demonstrate the viability of enterprises, and it can be used in the methodology of rurality research. Comparing the change in the size of investment in tangible fixed assets for 2008–2010 and 2009–2011 periods, it can be seen that the amount of investment in tangible fixed assets per 1 habitant increased slightly only in the group of semi urban municipalities.

However, a more detailed analysis shows that the amount of investment in tangible fixed assets in some municipalities has increased more than twice in 2009–2011. Such are municipalities of Marijampolė County, as well as municipalities of Kelmė, Plungė, Švenčionys, Ignalina, Alytus districts. Most of them are

municipalities of intermediate and strong rurality. More than half of the investment in tangible fixed assets fell in Visaginas municipality. From one-third to one-fifth investment in tangible fixed assets lost municipalities of Trakai, Molėtai Akmenė, Pasvalys, Jonava districts and Alytus town. Thus, the consequences of the economic crisis involved both the urban and rural municipalities.

Table 2. Average of socio-economic indicators of Lithuanian municipalities in 2009–2012

| Indicators   | Strong rurality municipalities | Intermediate rurality municipalities | Weak rurality municipalities | Semi-urban municipalities | Urban municipalities |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Infant deaths per 1000 live births*  | 7.1                            | 5.2                                  | 4.6                          | 5.1                       | 3.4                  |
| The number of economic entities in operation per 1000 working age population | 23.1                           | 26.3                                 | 32                           | 30.3                      | 55                   |
| Percentage of the employed population, %                                     | 56.8                           | 60.9                                 | 60.3                         | 60.4                      | 71.3                 |
| Investment in tangible fixed assets per 1 inhabitant, Lt*                    | 2298                           | 2656                                 | 3904                         | 5701                      | 5219                 |
| Percentage of social benefit recipients, %                                   | 8.8                            | 7.6                                  | 6.7                          | 6.6                       | 4.2                  |
| The proportion of the unemployed and the working-age population, %           | 14.2                           | 13.5                                 | 12.3                         | 12.2                      | 11.8                 |
| Index of ageing  | 191                            | 156                                  | 160                          | 133                       | 152                  |
| Density of local roads with improved pavement km/km <sup>2</sup> *           | 0.08                           | 0.11                                 | 0.24                         | 0.19                      | 3.03                 |
| Utilized agricultural land, share from agricultural land, %                  | 53.60                          | 60.91                                | 59.42                        | 68.83                     | 0.03                 |
| Farm size 3–10 ha, share from total farms, %                                 | 35.80                          | 35.93                                | 30.97                        | 34.31                     | 0.00                 |
| Number of municipalities   | 7                              | 20                                   | 18                           | 8                         | 6                    |

\* 2011

Source: Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2012

Population employment provides income and livelihood. In order to determine the employment, the ratio of the number of employed persons and the working-age population is calculated. This indicator is one of the most important in determining the degree of rurality.

Previous authors have found that in municipalities of strong rurality the share of employed population is the lowest. This trend has continued in 2009–2012, but the employment rate further decreased in almost all municipal groups due to the impact of the economic crisis. However, the employment rate extremely fell in municipalities of strong rurality. Very low population employment is in the municipalities of Ignalina, Pakruojis, Plungė and Varėna districts, where the employed population is below 50 %.

Unemployment is a major social problem in rural areas. Low qualification does not guarantee employment and higher income for rural residents. Low income limits access to education and training (Adamonienė, 2004: 83). Since the Lithuanian Department of Statistics currently calculates the relative size of registered unemployed and the working-age population, there can be seen differences between this index and the unemployment rate results. However, the general trend remains – the highest ratio of registered unemployed

and the working-age population is observed in municipalities of strong rurality, this rate is decreasing as the degree of rurality is decreasing. The difference between groups of municipalities is not great – it ranges between 0.1 % to 0.7 %. However, differences between separate municipalities are very big – the ratio of registered unemployed and the working-age population varies from 5.05 % (Neringa municipality) to 17.75 % (municipality of Ignalina district) (Fig. 1).

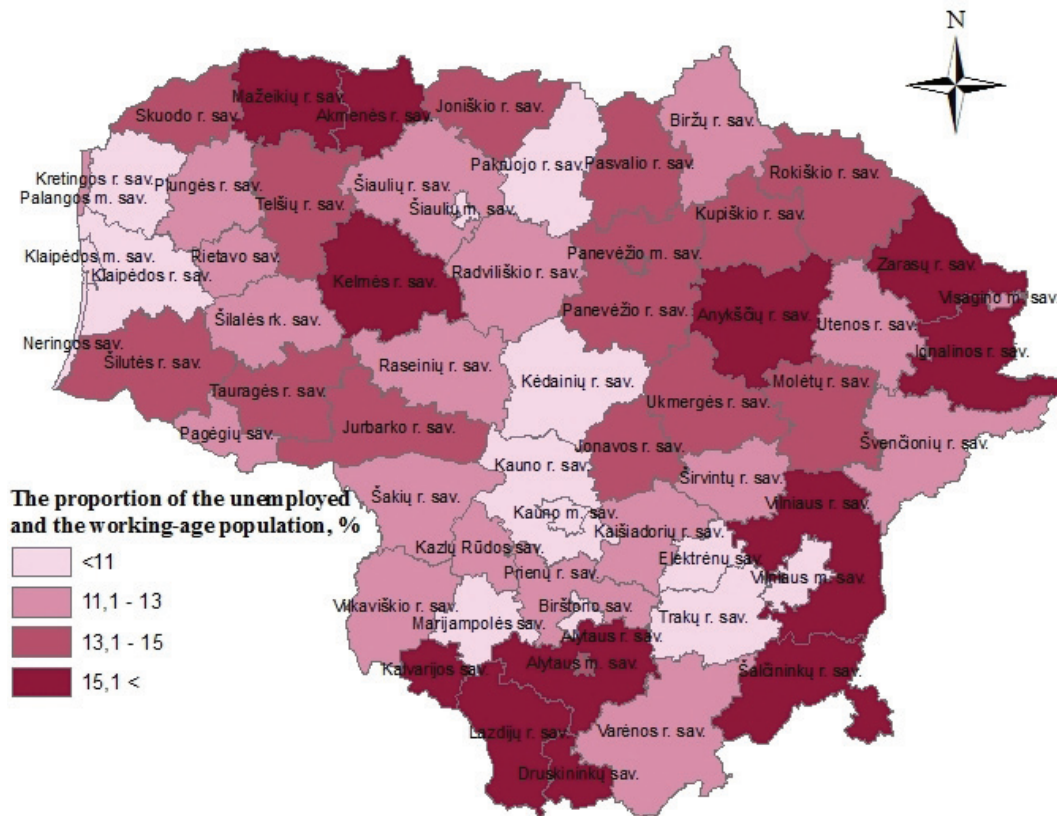


Figure 1. The proportion of the unemployed and the working-age population in municipalities of Lithuania in 2009–2012, %

Source: Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2012

Residents who do not receive labor income or their income is insufficient, receive social benefits from municipal budgets. Recipients of social benefit as percentage of the total population of the municipality describe the phenomenon. Unfortunately, the social benefits do not motivate to work (Vitunskienė, 2003). Previous research has already shown that the portion of recipients of social benefit directly depends on the unemployment rate (Verkulevičiūtė, 2009; Vidickienė et al., 2012). Other socio-economic factors also have an impact – it is a specific economic activity of municipalities, population structure, and so on. As the degree of rurality increases, the portion of recipients of social benefit also grows. And this trend has continued during the economic crisis but became more severe – proportion of recipients of social benefit in all groups of municipalities has increased. Share of social benefit recipients in 2009–2012 exceeded 10 % in municipalities of Kelmė, Zarasai, Lazdijai, Akmenė districts and Kalvarija. These municipalities, except Akmenė district, fall into the group of intermediate and strong rurality.

The demographic spread of the rural population is very important in evaluating and forecasting the further development of the rural areas (Stanaitis, 2010: 20). Even though the whole of Lithuania is characterized by rapid ageing of the population, because of negative natural decline and young people's departure, index of ageing in many rural municipalities exceeded the national average, and in the municipalities of Anykščiai, Ignalina, Varėna, Zarasai districts the index of ageing exceeded 200. This reflects not only the growing



number of elderly people but also the dwindling human resources and in the future – serious socio-economic problems in the municipalities in which the ageing phenomenon is extremely high. The compared data for 2008–2010 and 2009–2012 years reveals that the trend remains similar, but the index of ageing has grown even more.

Social problems of municipalities, living conditions, public health and accessibility of various social infrastructures are highly dependent on the residence. But the geographical remoteness of central government leads to lack of information about the public's needs and problems (Mačiulytė, Ragauskas, 2007: 15). Infant health and life depend on the distance to hospitals and medical staff availability. Health care services for the rural population is becoming more difficult to access, some medical institutions have been closed (Lietuvos kaimo (...), 2005: 77). Many health indicators in the world distinguish infant mortality, which is dependent on those factors. It is obvious, that it is rural residents to whom it is more difficult to achieve timely treatment facilities and to ensure the survival of the baby. As a result, we offer to include infant mortality rate (the number of infant deaths, per 1000 live birth) as one of the indicators of rurality. Statistical data confirms that as the degree of rurality increases, infant mortality rate is also rising (Table 2). The infant mortality rate in semi urban municipalities is higher than in municipalities of weak rurality (this figure has increased significantly in Kėdainiai district municipality). However, it should be noted that the infant mortality rate varies in different years, so it might just be a short-term increase in the infant mortality score.

Development of the roads with an improved pavement provides population with faster access to the center of the municipality or the city. Therefore, the density of roads with an improved pavement is a reasonable choice in determining the degree of rurality. This figure varies a little – in 2009–2011 the density of local roads with improved pavement in Lithuania remained the same as in 2008–2010. However, in municipalities of intermediate rurality, weak rurality and semi urban the density has increased by one-hundredth part, and in the cities it rose by 0,6 km/km<sup>2</sup>. Only in municipalities of strong rurality the density of local roads with improved pavement has not changed.

We have chosen two new indicators to compare the distribution of utilized agricultural land in municipalities of different levels of rurality. Lowest utilized agricultural land, share from agricultural land (less than 60 %) is located at East Lithuania municipalities. Municipalities of Ignalina, Lazdijai, Švenčionys, Varėna districts belong to regions of strong rurality, among which Švenčionys district municipality (41.2 %) has the smallest portion of utilized agricultural land, while in municipalities of strong rurality the average utilized agricultural land is 53.60 %. Municipalities of Alytus, Molėtai, Pakruojis, Panevėžys, Šalčininkai, Širvintos, Vilnius district and Rietavas belong to intermediate rurality regions, of which a minimum share of utilized agricultural land we found in the municipality of Vilnius district – 27.4 % (while in municipalities of intermediate rurality the average is 60.91 %). Municipalities of Akmenė, Klaipėda, Utena districts and Druskininkai are the regions of weak rurality, among which the smallest share of utilized agricultural land is in Druskininkai municipality (32.8 %), while the average share of utilized agricultural land in municipalities of weak rurality is 59.42 %. Jonava district municipality belongs to semi urban region, and there the share of utilized agricultural land is 53.2 %, while the average share of utilized agricultural land in all semi-urban municipalities is higher – 68.83 %.

The largest share of utilized agricultural land (more than 70 %) is located in Central and Western Lithuanian municipalities. According to the degree of rurality these municipalities belong to the group of weak and intermediate rurality, among which we can distinguish Šilalė district municipality (82.2 %) and Vilkaviškis district municipality (84.5 %) (Fig. 2).

In general, we can conclude that in the municipalities of strong rurality the share of utilized agricultural land is smaller than in the group of municipalities of intermediate and weak rurality, while in the semi urban municipalities the share of utilized agricultural land is the largest among all regional groups. Many municipalities of weak and intermediate rurality of Eastern Lithuania have less favorable conditions, which partly determine the relatively low share of agricultural land use.

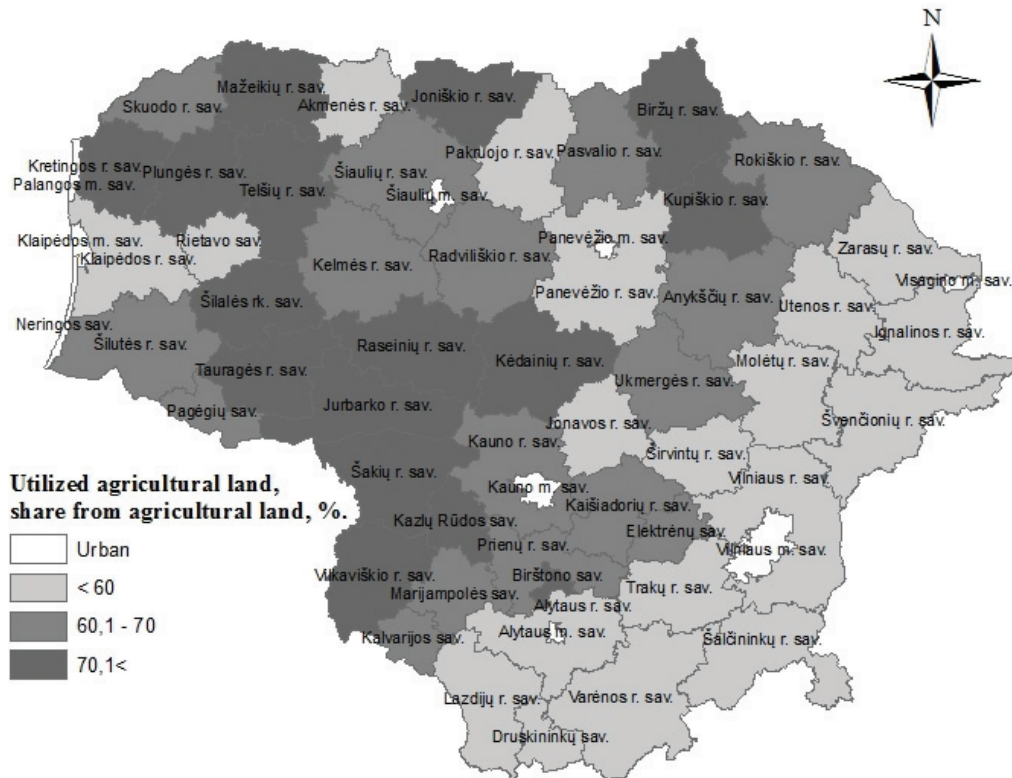


Figure 2. Utilized agricultural land, share from agricultural land, %

Sources: Lietuvos Respublikos žemės fondas, 2012: 10; Lietuvos Respublikos žemės fondas, 2012: 140–142

After the evaluation of distribution of farms with 3–10 ha, it has been found that in the municipalities of both intermediate and strong rurality the share of farms is very similar (respectively 35.9 % and 35.8 %). A similar ratio was found in semi urban municipalities (34.31 %). Only in municipalities of weak rurality the share farmers' farms with 3–10 ha is relatively lower (30.97 %). Of course, in each group there are municipalities with values above the group average: municipalities of Lazdijai and Varėna districts (strong rurality region) – respectively 46.44 % and 40.59 %, Kaišiadorys district municipality (intermediate rurality region) – 45.01%, Utena district municipality (weak rurality region) – 45.74 %. Thus, farmers with small land (3–10 ha) farms represent over 30 % of all farms in different regions of the degree of rurality.

It was revealed that structure of municipalities in less favoured areas according rurality is following: strong rurality – 32, intermediate rurality – 32, weak rurality – 21 and semi urban – 15 %. However extreme unfavourable areas are municipalities of strong rurality (4 municipalities from 6) and intermediate rurality (2 municipalities from 6).

## Conclusions

From demographic and socio-economic point of view, the typology of an integrated assessment of rurality is generally adequate. Comparing socio-economic indicators of 2009–2012 to indicators of 2008–2010, it is noticed that the trends remain similar: in the municipalities of strong rurality the employment of the population, the size of investment in tangible fixed assets, the density of roads with improved pavement are lower and the rate of ageing and the share of social benefit recipients are higher than in municipalities of intermediate and week rurality. The economic crisis has only exacerbated the social problems in all groups, regardless of the degree of rurality. New suggested indicators: the number of entities per 1000 working-age population, infant mortality rate and the portion of the unemployed and the working-age population also

confirm these trends; therefore, they can be used as background characteristics in analysing the rurality of municipalities.

From agrarian point of view, the typology of integrated evaluation of rurality helps to explain the spatial diffusion of utilized agricultural land. The lowest land use is in the municipalities of strong rurality in southern and eastern Lithuania.

Typology of integrated evaluation of rurality allows understanding spatial variability of demographical and social environment in less favored areas (municipality level). Structure of municipalities in less favored areas according to rurality is following: strong rurality – 32, intermediate rurality – 32, weak rurality – 21 and semi urban – 15 %. However extreme unfavourable areas are municipalities of strong rurality (4 municipalities from 6) and intermediate rurality (2 municipalities from 6).

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## LIETUVOS KAIMIŠKUMAS: TARPDALYKINIS POŽIŪRIS

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### Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – ištirti, ar integruoto kaimiškumo vertinimo tipologija tinka kaip teorinis pagrindas rodiklių analizei 2009–2012 m. Šiame tyrime lyginamos socialinių-ekonominių ir ekonominės veiklos rodiklių reikšmės 2009–2012 metais įvairaus kaimiškumo lygio savivaldybėse, išryškinamos jų netolygaus pasiskirstymo priežastys, atskleidžiamos demografinių, socialinių-ekonominių rodiklių kaitos tendencijos. Šio straipsnio autorės analizuoja ne tik Agrarinės ekonomikos instituto mokslininkų tyrimų metodikoje taikytus rodiklius, bet ir siūlo naujų.

Demografiniu ir socialiniu-ekonominiu požiūriu integruoto kaimiškumo vertinimo tipologija iš esmės tinkama. 2009–2012 m. socialinius-ekonominius rodiklius palyginus su 2008–2010 m. rodikliais, pastebėta, kad tendencijos išlieka panašios: kuo aukštesnis kaimiškumo lygis, tuo mažesnis gyventojų užimtumas, materialinių investicijų dydis, kelių su patobulinta danga tankis, kartu didesnis senėjimo koeficientas, daugiau socialinės pašalpos gavėjų. Ekonominė krizė tik paaštrino socialines problemas visose savivaldybių grupėse, nepaisant kaimiškumo lygio.

Pasiūlyti nauji rodikliai: ūkio subjektų skaičius, tenkantis 1000-iui darbingo amžiaus gyventojų, kūdikių mirtingumas ir registruotų bedarbių bei darbingo amžiaus gyventojų santykis taip pat patvirtina šias tendencijas, todėl gali būti taikomi kaip pagalbiniai rodikliai analizuojant savivaldybių kaimiškumą.

Nors registruotų bedarbių ir darbingo amžiaus gyventojų santykinio dydžio reikšmės tarp įvairaus kaimiškumo grupių savivaldybių nėra didelės (svyruoja tarp 0,1–0,7 %), tačiau tarp atskirų savivaldybių šie dydžiai labai skiriasi: nuo 5,05 % (Neringos savivaldybėje) iki 17,75 % (Ignalinos r. savivaldybėje).

Nuo gydymo įstaigų atstumo, medicinos personalo pasiekiamumo labai priklauso ne tik kūdikių sveikata, bet dažnai ir gyvybė. Daugelyje pasaulio sveikatos ir gyvenimo kokybės rodiklių išskiriamas kūdikių mirtingumas, kuris ir priklauso nuo minėtų veiksnių. Kaimo gyventojams sudėtingiau laiku pasiekti gydymo įstaigas ir užtikrinti kūdikių išgyvenimą. Dėl to kaip vieną iš kaimiškumo rodiklių siūloma įtraukti kūdikių mirtingumo rodiklį (mirusių kūdikių skaičių, tenkantį 1000-iui gimusių gyvų kūdikių).

Darbe taip pat nustatyta, kad ūkininkų ūkių mažiausia naudojamos žemės ūkio naudmenų dalis (mažiau nei 60 %) yra Rytų bei Pietų Lietuvoje išsidėsčiusiose savivaldybėse. Didžiausia ūkininkų naudojamos žemės ūkio naudmenų dalis (daugiau nei 70 %) yra Vidurio ir Vakarų Lietuvos savivaldybėse. Pagal kaimiškumo lygį tai silpno ir vidutinio kaimiškumo regionų savivaldybės, tarp kurių išryškėja Šilalės rajono savivaldybė (82,2 %) ir Vilkaviškio rajono savivaldybė (84,5 %).

Įvertinus ūkininkų, turinčių 3–10 ha žemės plotą, tyrimų rezultatus, nustatyta, kad tiek vidutinio, tiek ir stipraus kaimiškumo savivaldybėse ūkininkų dalis labai panaši (atitinkamai 35,9 % ir 35,8 %). Artimas rodiklis ir pusiau miestų savivaldybėse (34,31 %). Tik silpno kaimiškumo savivaldybėse ūkininkų, turinčių 3–10 ha žemės plotą, ūkių dalis santykinai žemesnė (30,97 %).

Agrariniu požiūriu integruoto kaimiškumo vertinimo tipologija leidžia paaiškinti ūkininkų ūkių naudojamos žemės erdvinę sklaidą. Stipraus kaimiškumo savivaldybėse naudojamos žemės dalis mažiausia.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *kaimiškumas, integruotas vertinimas, erdvinis pasiskirstymas.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: Q150, Q180, R120, R230.