

Regional topics: mobility in the Latvian countryside

Depopulation in rural parts of the country is a concern in many countries. It has been argued that out migration serve as an important land use change factor (Roose et al., 2013). In the wider perspective changes in land use have impact also on biological and visual diversity of the landscape. Previous studies in densely populated countries greatly concentrate on in migration processes and changes of the society and land usage structure. However countries with sparsely populated regions experience population decline which is result of young people out migration mainly due to lack of employment and life experience opportunities. The research on rural out migration and issues on land use marginalisation is based on the combination of the on-going survey and interview data and available register data. It serves to identify characteristics of people habiting particular areas, expressing the desire to move out from rural areas as well as this information considering other household members in the context of current and planned land use and as well as planned changes in the land use.

Depopulation and threat of rural area marginalisation and abandonment in both current economic and social conditions has lately gathered much of attention. An established body of literature exist on relation of social, economic, political and environmental factor combination and influence to marginalisation processes in rural areas. On the other hand remote rural regions with high density of natural amenities confront significant constraints to land availability for development (Chi, Marcouiller 2013).

The collapse of communist economy and Soviet agro-industrial system resulted in extremely rapid employment decline and out-migration from rural areas.

In the 1990s, there was a short period of ruralisation, which was expressed in dominating out-migration from major cities to rural areas. The reasons why urban residents left the cities were associated with land reform, property restitution and desire of people to move back to their ancestral homes in rural areas. Later trends of internal migration showed that these were only temporary flows and motivations.

The following research questions can be developed in relation to migration behaviour, compositional differences of population in rural Latvia.

1. To what extent rural resident composition and migration behaviour differ in several areas of rural periphery?
2. How do migration motivations explain migration patterns in remote countryside?
3. What role do resident characteristics play in the dynamics rural transformation?

We used a face-to-face survey of local residents from randomly selected households that was conducted within 8 rural municipalities in 2013 and 2014. Total number of respondents is 800 representing one member of the randomly selected household in each case. Characteristic feature in sparsely populated rural areas - around 30% of all respondents are over 65 years of age and most commonly have moved to these areas more than 20 years ago.

1. table. Characteristics of respondents in the regions of Northern and Eastern Latvia

| Characteristics of respondents | Northern Latvia | Eastern Latvia |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| over 65 years of age | 30 % | 39% |
| Retired persons | 28% | 48% |
| Employed | 50% | 21% |
| Experience working abroad | 9% | 1% |
| Relatives working abroad | 33% | 22% |

The main migration motives for those who have moved are family related and property purchase, during soviet period work related as well.

We found that migration pattern had an aging effect on the population in rural areas. Household size decreases, while older age cohorts became overrepresented within the rural population.

Farmsteads become more attractive as second homes. Second home owners represent increasing group of temporary residents.

Despite the renewed interest in rural living which has been reported in other studies, remote rural areas are less attractive to migrants than peri-urban locations in Latvia.

The findings point towards migration flow linkage to broader processes of rural transformation which are producing an increasingly differentiated countryside. Unfavourable socio-economic conditions, including a high level of unemployment and a lack of jobs, led to a different migration flow, with people once again flowing away from the peripheral districts of the country.

References

Chi, G., Marcouiller, W.D. (2013). In-migration to remote rural regions: The relative impacts of natural amenities and land developability. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 117, 22 – 31.

Roose, A., Raagmaa, G., Kliimask, J. (2013). The status and trends of human and territorial assets in the peripheral rural areas of Estonia [https://wiki.uef.fi/download/attachments/33659666/JBS_Nqmmik%20SV_Rural%20development_Roose%20et%20al.docx?version=1&modificationDate=1399193370000&api=v2]

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