



Original Contribution

IDENTIFICATION OF THE RURAL AREAS OF BULGARIA

Kr. Toneva*

Doctoral Applicant, Department Regional Development,
Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The term, 'rural area' finds disparate definitions within Member States of the European Union. Similarly, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) determines two hierarchical levels: local = municipality- LAU2 and regional = district – NUTS3. This ratio has been applied to define the following 3 regions: predominantly rural, rural to a considerable degree and predominantly urban. The second definition by Eurostat is based on the degree of urbanization on the territory. Under this condition the following 3 (three) areas have been defined: densely populated territories, intermediate group and thinly populated territories. In compliance with the national definition for rural area there are two distinguishing criteria: population density and number of the population in the biggest town of the municipality (the municipal centre). As of 31.12.2007 the population of the district of Stara Zagora was 355, 625 on an area of 5, 148 km². It encompasses 11 municipalities with two village headquarters whilst others are towns. The OECD classifies all municipalities, except Stara Zagora Municipality, in the rural category. Eurostat defines Stara Zagora district as thinly populated. The National definition places the municipalities of Stara Zagora and Kazanlak as being related to the rural municipalities while the rest of them – to the urban ones.

Key words: rural area, predominantly rural regions, rural to a considerable degree regions, predominantly urban regions, densely populated territories, intermediate group, thinly populated territories.

With Bulgaria's accession to the European Union the development of the rural areas has been a particularly significant course in the policy of each government of this country (1)

No common definition of the term rural area has so far been accepted within the European Union in the former European legislation and practice. Each Member State employs its own national definition of division of these areas.

The most widely used definition in the countries of the European Union is the definition of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which determines two hierarchical levels: local = municipality - LAU2 and regional = district – NUTS3.

On a local level the municipalities with population density below 150 people/km² are defined as rural. On a regional level bigger administrative units are distinguished on the basis of the percentage of the population

inhabiting each of the areas. This ratio has been applied to define the following 3 regions:

- Predominantly rural - > 50% of the population lives in the rural municipalities.
- Rural to a considerable degree - 15-50% of the population lives in the rural municipalities
- Predominantly urban - < 15% of the population lives in the rural municipalities.

On the basis of this definition in the Project of the strategic directions of the European Union for the development of the rural areas, 90% of the territory and 70% of the population of Bulgaria have been defined as predominantly rural.

The second definition – this of the Eurostat, is based on the degree of urbanization on the territory. Under this condition the following 3 (three) areas have been defined:

* **Correspondence to:** *Krasimira Toneva, Tel.: +359 42 619 427, Mobile: +359 898 218630; E-mail: k_toneva@abv.bg*

- Densely populated territories – a group of adjacent local territories, in each of which the density of the population is > 500 people/km² and where the total number of the population of each of these adjacent territories runs to at least 50 000 inhabitants.
- Intermediate group – a group of adjacent local territories, in each of which the density of the population is > 100 people/km² and/ or the total number of the population for each territory runs to at least 50 000 inhabitants, or they are adjacent to densely populated territories.
- Thinly populated territories – a group of local territories which do not belong to the densely populated or intermediate territories.

In most cases the term “local” territory corresponds to the smallest administrative – territorial unit – the municipality.
 In compliance with the national definition for rural area there are two distinguishing criteria. They are:

- Population density;
- Number of the population in the biggest town of the municipality (the municipal centre).

According to the National Plan of development of agriculture and rural areas in Bulgaria a rural region is a municipality in which the population in the biggest town does not exceed 30 000 people and its density is smaller than 150 people/km².

In the year 2007 the National Statistical Institute (NSI) participated in an International Project of regional statistics within Eurostat framework. One of its purposes was to give a common definition of the term “rural area” for the Member States of the European Union.

According to the data indicated in the Project and in compliance with the identification of the areas (According to OECD), 79,24% of the territory and 59,13% of the population of this country is in rural municipalities; 19,6% of the territory and 24,75% of the population is in considerable degree rural and only 1,16% of the territory and 16,12% of the population is in predominantly urban municipalities (**Figures 1 and 2**).

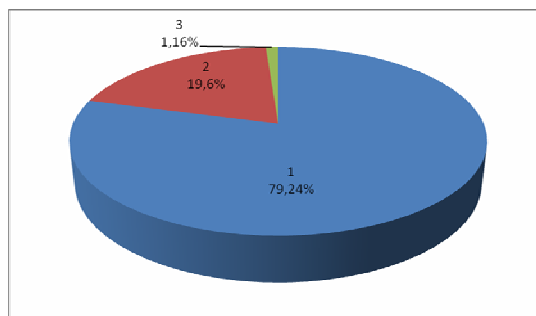


Figure 1. Distribution of the territory (according to OECD)

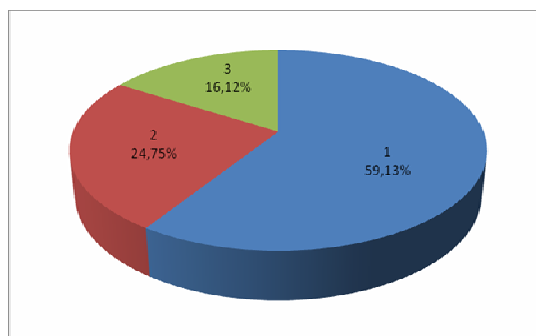


Figure 2. Distribution of the population (according to OECD)

The identification requirements of Eurostat indicate that 86.1% of the territory and 46% of the population of this country is in thinly populated territories; 12.3 of the territory and 26.72% of the population – in intermediate and 1,6% of the territory and 27.01% of the population is in densely populated territories (**Figures 3 and 4**).

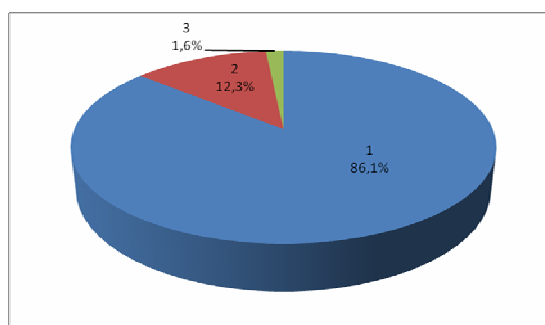


Figure 3. Distribution of the territory (according to Eurostat)

According to the National definition, 81.09% of the territory and 41.17% of the population are in the rural areas and 18.91% of the territory and 58.83% of the population - in urbanized or urban areas (**Figures 5 and 6**).

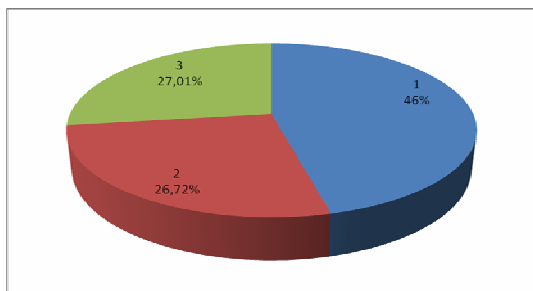


Figure 4. Distribution of the population (according to Eurostat)

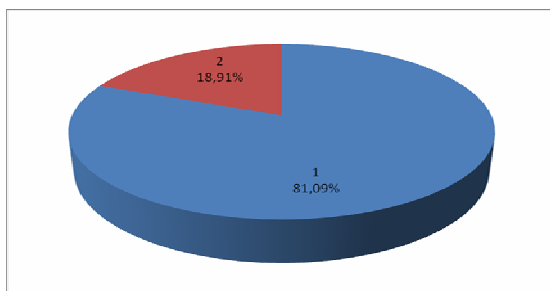


Figure 5. Distribution of the territory (national definition)

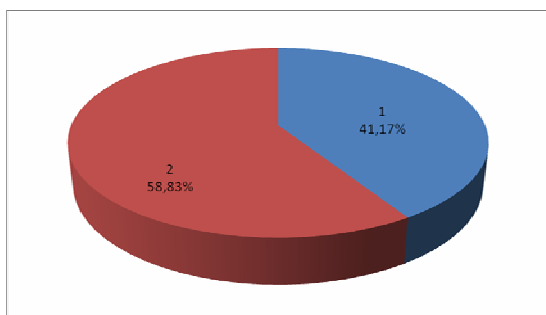


Figure 6. Distribution of the population (national definition)

Table 1. According to OECD identification

Region	Population as of 31.12.07	Territory (dka)	Territory (km ²)	Density of population per km ²	Type of municipality
Stara Zagora	355626	5 148 048	5 148,05	69	53,8%
Bratya Daskalovi	10 289	482 308	482,31	21	rural
Galabovo	14 648	347 995	348,00	42	rural
Kazanlak	77 777	633 418	633,42	123	rural
Maglizh	12 508	388 856	388,86	32	rural
Opan	3 665	257 475	257,47	14	rural
Pavel Banya	14 888	518 601	518,60	29	rural
Radnevo	22 601	544 420	544,42	42	rural
Stara Zagora	164 970	1 063 237	1 063,24	155	urban
Chirpan	24 111	522 953	522,95	46	rural
Gurkovo	5 312	292 266	292,27	18	rural
Nikolaev	4 857	96 519	96,52	50	rural

The data from **Table 1** indicate that all municipalities, except the Municipality of Stara Zagora, are in the category rural, as the density of their population falls below the requirement for 150 people/km².

Where is the place of the county of Stara Zagora?

The administrative district of Stara Zagora is in the central part of the Republic of Bulgaria and is the fifth largest town with its territory and population.

The purpose of this research is to find out the characteristics of this area and the municipalities belonging to it by using the three main definitions.

In order to achieve these purposes the latest demographic data has been used provided by the official source of information – The National Statistical Institute.

Notice should be taken that including real data for identification according to the three definitions leads to an accurate identification of the area. The achieved results could promote for determining the further policy and making management decisions concerning the development of the district of Stara Zagora as a whole, and of each of the municipalities in it.

As of 31.12.2007 the population of the district (according to the latest demographic data) runs to 355 625 people on an area of 5 148 km². It encompasses 11 (eleven) municipalities and the centres of (2) two of them are villages while the rest of the centres – towns.

As a whole, the district is in a predominantly rural area – 53,8% of the population lives in a rural area on a local level.

According to Eurostat definition where the main indicator is the density of the population, the district of Stara Zagora is in thinly populated territories. The calculations

indicate that the Municipality of Kazanlak where the density of the population is 123 people/km², and the Municipality of Stara

Zagora with 155 people/km², fall in the intermediate group (**Table 2**).

Table 2. According to Eurostat identification

Region	Population as of 31.12.07	Territory (dka)	Territory (km ²)	Density of population per km ²	Type of municipality
Stara Zagora	355626	5 148 048	5 148,05	69	
Bratya Daskalovi	10 289	482 308	482,31	21	thinly populated area
Galabovo	14 648	347 995	348,00	42	thinly populated area
Kazanlak	77 777	633 418	633,42	123	intermediate area
Maglizh	12 508	388 856	388,86	32	thinly populated area
Opan	3 665	257 475	257,47	14	thinly populated area
Pavel Banya	14 888	518 601	518,60	29	thinly populated area
Radnevo	22 601	544 420	544,42	42	thinly populated area
Stara Zagora	164 970	1 063 237	1 063,24	155	intermediate area
Chirpan	24 111	522 953	522,95	46	thinly populated area
Gurkovo	5 312	292 266	292,27	18	thinly populated area
Nikolaevo	4 857	96 519	96,52	50	thinly populated area

The main indicators according to the National definition are the density and number of the population in the biggest town of the municipality. According to them the municipalities of Stara Zagora and Kazanlak are related to the rural municipalities while the rest of them – to the urban ones (**Table 3**). With its favourable geostrategic position and provision with valuable and quantitative territorial and human resources, its multi-industrial and intensely economic reconstruction, the district of Stara Zagora has

become one of the most significant areas in the Republic of Bulgaria.

With this report an identification of the entire area is made and of each of the municipalities it encompasses on the basis of the main definitions. The research could serve as a basis for developing a conception for the further stable development of the area as regards the economic balance and the increase of the standard of living, achieved through the sensible use of the available resources and the development of the human potential.

Table 3. Identification according to the National Definition

Region	Population as of 31.12.07	Territory (dka)	Territory (km ²)	Density of population per km ²	Type of municipality
Stara Zagora	355626	5 148 048	5 148,05	69	
Bratya Daskalovi	10 289	482 308	482,31	21	rural
Galabovo	14 648	347 995	348,00	42	rural
Kazanlak	77 777	633 418	633,42	123	urban
Maglizh	12 508	388 856	388,86	32	rural
Opan	3 665	257 475	257,47	14	rural
Pavel Banya	14 888	518 601	518,60	29	rural
Radnevo	22 601	544 420	544,42	42	rural
Stara Zagora	164 970	1 063 237	1 063,24	155	urban
Chirpan	24 111	522 953	522,95	46	rural
Gurkovo	5 312	292 266	292,27	18	rural
Nikolaevo	4 857	96 519	96,52	50	rural

REFERENCES

1. Marinov, A. and collective, "Social and Economic Problems in The Sustainable Development of The Agricultural Sector in Bulgaria", III Symposium of Livestock Production with International Participation, proceedings, Ohrid, Macedonia, September 12-14, 2007.
2. National Strategic Plan for the development of the rural regions (2007-2013).
3. National Statistical Institute, Demography, 2008.
4. NSI, Improving the quality of life in Rural Areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity, PHARE 2005 Date Collection Projects.
5. Yanakieva Iv. Typology of rural areas in Bulgaria, Economic Thought, 1/2007.