THE RURAL SPACE. 
TYPOLOGY AND CLASSIFICATION.

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Abstract:
The rural space – this is the expression of man’s prolonged effort to put into service the physical-geographical components of space, of nature. It is a space that man has molded as time has passed, according to his needs, that he has created through his own work and has filled with his creations of an anthropic nature, being therefore, a genuine “rustic masterpiece” of man.

Rural typology can be founded on various attributes, as the rural areas may be described in a variety of ways: according to the dimensions of the settlement, the landscape type, the economic activity, the administrative area, the social characteristics, or a complex blend of indicators. Nevertheless, none of these, taken in isolation, have the potential to provide the perfect definition that best describes the type of area (space).

The typology of the rural space is a complex issue. When attempting to venture into a classification of rural areas (spaces), the various aspects of rurality give rise to two issues: Analyzing what the rural is or what it entails; Analyzing the way in which to settle boundaries to a rural region (area).

Key words: Rural, rural space, typology of the rural space, classification of the rural space

INTRODUCTION

The rural space – this is the expression of man’s prolonged effort to put into service the physical-geographical components of space, of nature. It is a space that man has molded as time has passed, according to his needs, that he has created
through his own work and has filled with his creations of an anthropic nature, being therefore, a genuine “rustic masterpiece” of man.

The rural has the capacity to preserve and rebuild the natural setting, as a result of lower anthropic pressure, associated to the type of economic exploitation and the general level of development of the production forces. The extended farmed fields, the absence of the main means of communication, the insular presence of the small built frame and that of the herds of animals, these undoubtedly betray the presence of the rural.

**TYPOLOGY OF THE RURAL SPACE**

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The typology of the rural space is a complex issue. When attempting to venture into a classification of rural areas (spaces), the various aspects of rurality give rise to two issues:

- Analyzing what the rural is or what it entails;
- Analyzing the way in which to settle boundaries to a rural region (area).

**Defining rural areas (regions)**

The requirements that can be linked to a territorial unit named “rural area” should contain the following elements:

Homogeneity of an area – the homogeneity requirement only refers to single type territories. For instance, in the case of mountainous territory, it is expected that the entire area be made up of mountains or high land, without significant low areas. Similarly, a “coast and island” maritime territory is only expected to contain an insignificant proportion of dry land. The homogeneity requirement is comfortable and it allows for a uniform approach of the entire area;

Availability of statistical data – the statistical data is vital in diagnosing the status of a certain area and in evaluating the results of a treatment, in the event that such has been applied. These data should allow for the analysis of the distribution in space of social-economic variables selected in defining the area, as well as of the factors influencing these variables. The data should identify those regions which the selected variable values indicate as having social-economic problems and they should allow for the definition of the regional development policy that contributes to the solving of the identified problems.

Local authorities and organizational structures – In order to prevent the junction of multiple authorities’ efforts, the entire area should be governed by a
center having appropriate organizational structures and adequate financial channels.

Unfortunately, on the one hand, homogenous territorial units oftentimes make up parts of certain neighboring administrative territorial units, and on the other hand, administrative territorial units were not formed by respecting the homogeneity requirement. As a result, all the above mentioned attributes are not always found in the existing territorial administrative units. As a rule, administrative territorial units are governed from the “center” and there usually are clues to these units not being homogenous. However, territorial-administrative units are usually chosen for their pragmatic advantages as organizational structures and the availability of statistical data.

**Classification of rural regions**

**A) The NUTS typology**

Over the past 20 years, there has been in Europe a general regionalization trend, more visible in certain European Union member states than in others, which did not have a common perception of the “region” from a political, legal, or even sociologic point of view. The term “region” used to describe political or administrative entities comprises a varied range of concepts. The constitutions of EU member states refer to Länder (Germany and Austria), regions or communities (Belgium), comunidades autónomas (autonomous communities) (Spain), regions and departments (France), committee councils (Great Britain and Sweden), special statute regions, regular statute regions and autonomous provinces (Italy), provinces (Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Italy, Holland).

The heterogeneity of every country is inventoried by the European classification named “The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics” (the so-called NUTS). The specific character of the NUTS regions lies in the fact that they are based to a large extent on institutional divisions (namely on administrative units). NUTS is founded on statistical reasons for collecting information, practically the access to data being organized on five spatial levels, from the largest units to the smallest ones.

This nomenclature was elaborated by the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat) for the purpose of creating a coherent structure of the territorial distribution at the level of the entire European Union. It started being utilized ever since 1988 and it uses five categories of territorial units. The five categories used are the following:

The NUTS level 0 of this classification defines the member states of the European Union (27 units);

The NUTS level 1 comprises 77 regions of the type „Regions” in Belgium or „Länder” in Germany, „Continente”, „Regiao dos Açores” and „Regiao da

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Madeira” in Portugal; „Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland” and „Government Office Regions of England” in the United Kingdom.

The NUTS level 2 comprises 206 equivalent regions with, for instance, „Provincies/Provinces” in Belgium; „Regierungsbezirke” in Germany; „Periferies” in Greece; „Comunidades y ciudades autónomas” in Spain; „Régions” in France; „Regions” in Ireland; „Regioni” in Italy; „Provincies” in Holland; „Länder” in Austria.

The NUTS level 3 comprises a total of 1031 regions: “arrondissements” in Belgium; „Amtskommuner” in Denmark; „Kreise/kreisfreie Städte” in Germany; „nomoi” in Greece; „provincias” in Spain; „départements” in France; „regional authority regions” in Ireland; „province” in Italy; „länn” in Sweden; “maakunnat/landskapen” in Finland.

The NUTS level 5 comprises municipalities or communes.

The NUTS levels 1, 2 and 3 are differentiated based on the following demographic thresholds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Minimum(persons)</th>
<th>Maximum(persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NUTS 1</td>
<td>3 million</td>
<td>7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUTS 2</td>
<td>800 000</td>
<td>3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUTS 3</td>
<td>150 000</td>
<td>800 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mention should be made regarding this classification, namely that the categorized regions do not entirely represent only rural regions. This classification includes the entire territory of a country, which comprises both the rural and the urban, irrespective of the level (NUTS 0-5).

**B) The OCDE typology**

OCDE (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) elaborated a simple definition of rural areas, with the purpose of making comparisons on the international level regarding rural conditions and tendencies. The definition distinguished between two hierarchic levels of territorial units: local and regional.

As shown in the above paragraph, at the level of the local community (NUTS 5), OCDE identifies the rural areas as communities with a population density of less than 150 inhabitants/ square kilometer.
At the regional level (NUTS 3), OCDE distinguishes, according to their degree of rurality, larger functional and administrative units, which depend on the percentage of the population living in rural communities. In order to facilitate the analysis, the regions were grouped, as we have seen, into predominantly rural, significantly rural, and predominantly urban.

This classification does not, unfortunately, reflect in any way the social or economic characteristics of the categorized regions. For instance, the rural areas found in the vicinity of urban centers with a regular public traffic, advanced infrastructure of communications and prosperous secondary and tertiary services sectors, may contain 50% or even more of the population from the rural communities. However, it cannot be said that this population made up of commuters working in the urban environment at a comfortable commuting distance, represent the region with a predominantly rural population. On the other hand, a relatively distant rural area, with serious economic issues and with a high unemployment rate, falls into the category of the significantly rural regions, or even that of the predominantly rural regions.

C) The Eurostat typology

The Eurostat4 typology relies on the degree of urbanism. The classification of every European region is achieved based on one of the three areas presented below:

- Densely populated areas – these are groups of neighboring localities, each with a population density greater than 500 inhabitants/square kilometer and a total of the population in the area of at least 50.000 inhabitants;
- Intermediary areas – these are groups of localities, each with a density greater than 100 inhabitants/square kilometer and which do not belong to a densely populated area;
- Slightly populated areas – these are groups of localities which are not categorized as being either densely populated, or intermediary.
- A locality or a continuous group of localities that do not reach the required level of density, but which is completely comprised in an intermediary area, is considered to be a part of that area. If the locality or the group of localities is located between a densely populated area and an intermediary area, it is considered to be intermediary. In order for this phrase to be applicable, it is necessary for the group of localities to have a surface smaller than 100 sqkm.

4 http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/
D) Typology of the rural areas based on the specific character of the activities

Bernard Kayser, based on the social-professional structure and the demographic dynamics, outlined the following types of rural:

- **The deep rural**, comprising communities with 70% rural population witnessing a great demographic decline. This type of rural is either “losing speed”, or “keeper of an active agriculture”;
- **The semi-agricultural rural** witnesses a demographic decline, but the communities have large agricultural exploitations and a profitable agriculture, alongside a poor agriculture. The communities of the semi-agricultural rural are also situated in industrial areas, providing little qualified work force;
- **The mutating rural** is a type of rural with a vigorous agricultural population. The communities belonging to this type of rural are residencies for qualified industrial wage earners; some are situated at the periphery of the traditional industrial areas or at the periphery of recent industrial areas. Some of them are populated “with a large proportion of independent and tourist professions”; 
- **The stagnating rural**. In these communities as well, the agricultural population is vigorous. It is characterized by the passage from agriculture to industry, by rural poles of attraction, by great agriculture, with employees. Certain communities of the stagnating rural are found in “declining” industrial areas;
- **The intermediary rural**, the one having a still important agricultural population. Communities have a “large ratio of inactive and retired people, some are agricultural district centers, with artisans and traders.”

The central issue of Bernard Kayser’s synthesis is that of rural rebirth. It is actually the analysis of a phenomenon of demographic growth in the rural space, of change in the direction of migration, from migration with a rural-urban sense, into migration with an urban-rural sense. The phenomenon was noticed at the French census of 1982 and it was also named rurbanization or counter-urbanization. Kayser explains rural rebirth by means of the following determining elements: municipal policy, receptivity, land usage, use of neighbors, agricultural development, tourist sites, secondary residences, available houses, unending options.

A report of the European Commission named “European Cooperation for Territorial Development”, trying to describe the changes and tendencies taking

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7 Europe 2000; Co-operation for European Teritorial Development,1994

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place in the European rural space, based on the principles of economic activities, made a classification of the rural spaces based on these activities.

From this point of view, the rural space can be structured as follows:

1. **Rural space in the vicinity of large urban centers – characterized by:**
   - A surplus of industrial and recreational residential areas;
   - A growth in the number of inhabitants;
   - Intensive agriculture;
   - Intensive commerce;
   - Development of transport (raise of traffic)

2. **Rural space used for tourism – characterized by:**
   - Mountain and coastal areas, prepared (equipped) for mass tourism (tourist circuit);
   - Reduction of agricultural areas;
   - Population growth;
   - Fragmentation of habitats.

3. **Rural space with diverse activities – characterized by:**
   - High degree of dependence on agriculture;
   - Development of complementary activities.

4. **Predominantly agricultural rural space – characterized by:**
   - Very efficient and productive agriculture;
   - Low degree of traditionalism.

5. **Rural space in difficulty – characterized by:**
   - Mountainous areas, forests, islands;
   - High migration of population;
   - Areas inhabited by senior citizens.

This structuring furnishes information on the specific character of rural areas, but it does not at the same time provide the information necessary for the analysis of economic, social, and environmental characteristics of these areas.
E) Geographic classification

Another typology of rural areas is geographically oriented and it uses the following classes:

a) coastal areas and islands;
b) mountainous areas;
c) rural areas in the vicinity of large cities;
d) low density population areas or little populated areas;
e) the remainder of the rural areas.

Upon a closer look at this classification, we can notice that the first two classes are truly of geographic nature, whereas the class provisioned by point c) corresponds to the classification of the urban-rural continuum, and that of point d) belongs to the type of classification according to population density. Point e) comprises all the types of rural areas left uncategorized above and with no special specification.

Such a system of classification, with no additional priorities can only be used partially successfully.

A first objection to this classification is the fact that this system is not reciprocally exclusive, thus it allows for a rural area to be classified within several categories. For instance, certain coastal and island areas, as well as certain mountainous areas, can, at the same time, have small population density, or they can even be little populated areas. Therefore, it is not clear which category those individual areas fall into.

F) Qualitative classification of rural areas

In addition to regional classifications based on demographic indicators, it is useful to also consider qualitative classification systems. Within this classification there is however a tendency to generalize the rural areas. The European Union admits to three standard areas with issues:

- Areas suffering on account of the pressures of modern life (modern agriculture and new residential areas);
- Areas suffering from rural decline (migration of the population etc.);
- Very distant areas (reduced population, periphery).

Depending on their degree of integration into the national economy, rural areas can be categorized into integrated rural areas, intermediary rural areas and distant rural areas.

Integrated rural areas – these areas are characterized by a growth of population, of the workplaces in the secondary and tertiary sectors, the main occupation remaining land farming.

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8 www.ccss.cz/rw/identif.pdf, p18
Integrated rural areas, oftentimes found in the vicinity of large cities, usually have the greatest population density, with certain identifiable components.

The first component is the rural population living and working in the region. In certain parts, this component is employed in the agricultural, forestry or piscicultural sector, the remainder of this component being employed in subsidiaries of firms belonging to the cities or in the local industry and in the secondary and tertiary sector.

The second component is represented by commuters who, although living in the area, are employed in the neighboring city.

The last component is made up of older persons moving to the rural environment after retiring (the so-called rurbanizers), but also a part of the wealthy persons who move to the rural area in order to build houses in a healthier environment, their work places being however in the urban environment. The latter can be called counter-urbanizers.

The high density of population as well as the dimensions of the population, together with the high income per head of the population, creates good development conditions in the tertiary sector. From the point of view of land usage, its dimension for agricultural production is decreasing. Real estate companies use attractive places of the unintegrated rural areas in order to build residential towns. A considerable proportion of the land is used for industrial production and the service sector.

The infrastructure is well developed, in the integrated areas, as well as medical and social services.

In these conditions, the environment is considerably better than the neighboring city.

In order to detail this typology even more, considering the functionality of the integrated areas, they can be zoned into:

- Regions close to large cities;
- Regions under the influence of tourism;
- Industrialized rural regions.

Intermediate rural areas – they are at a certain relative distance from the urban centers, with a variety of primary and secondary sectors, land farming being performed at a larger scale.

The density of the population and the general dimensions of the population are more reduced than in the case of integrated rural areas. Migration from the exterior is smaller and it is not compensated by counter-urbanizing.

The income per head of population is smaller towards moderate. The reduced density and dimension of the population, the small proportion of the middle class, the lack of migration towards the interior of the intermediary areas, these restrain the activities in the tertiary sector. The population of intermediary rural areas suffer due to the relative distance towards urban centers, suffering materialized into:
The transfer of the companies’ subsidiaries from urban to rural is rare;
The transfer of the companies’ subsidiaries from urban to rural is rare;
The access to a larger sphere of customers is reduced;
The access to business providers and financing sources;
The rural labor markets are relatively limited;
The no variations of the population are recorded (its stagnation).

The intermediate areas represent the agrarian area of the rural space, with agricultural exploitations of the type of private-family farms, associative or societal (in the countries with transitioning economy), based on the agricultural production and the profitability of exploitations. A large proportion of the land is used for primary rural production, namely: agriculture, silviculture, fishing. The usage of the land for recreational and tourism activities has lately been growing in these areas as well.

Large portions of the land have a natural surface. The large scale adoption of the modern management methods in agriculture can reduce land pollution and the pollution of surface waters.

The problematic of rural development in the future in the intermediate rural space is among the more complex issues, both for EU countries, and for associated countries (transitioning). According to the new community agrarian policies, in the EU countries the agrarian-productive area must take on two massive reorganizations, namely:

Sustainability of agriculture in order to bring back agricultural performances within the biologic limits of the species, varieties, hybrids, and races, in order to avoid major ecologic imbalances and ecologic diseases;

Reduction of subventions of any type, within parameters that cannot produce uncontrolled social reactions, but which allow for equal access to competiteness and the market. In these conditions, the European consumer will be forced to pay more for his general comfort.

Distant rural areas – usually have the lowest population densities, oftentimes the smallest income per head of the population and an aged population, relying heavily on the primary economic activities, such as agriculture, silviculture, fishing, hunting. The migration flow to these areas is almost inexistent. Migration towards the exterior is usually high especially among the young persons. The number of population is usually declining, and the senior population is growing. Some of these areas are populated with native inhabitants, who might require special attention due to their specific culture.

Most of the distant rural area territories are represented by mountains, distant coast areas, islands, and, typically, they are uninhabited (wild). The agricultural usage of land in these areas is irregular. The main activities are usually silviculture and forest exploitation, animal farming, fishing, hunting. Other activities supported in these areas are individual tourism, mountain climbing, hiking, yachting, and other sports and recreational activities.
From the point of view of the infrastructure, an isolation of these areas is noticed, isolation caused by their long distance to the transportation and communication networks.

**New concepts regarding rural typology**

Due to the need of reflecting rural identity within the rural policy elaboration framework, Marsden identifies four typologies of the rural area, defined on the basis of persons or groups which exert predominant power over what takes place in these rural areas.

These are:
- The preserved rural area (maintained) – characterized by preservative attitudes and decisions strongly against development. Groups of the strongly rooted middle class can inflict their points of view everywhere in the planning system or on the potential development agents. In the name of preserving aesthetic values of the natural and architectural environment, they oppose industrial development projects which can threaten these areas;
- The contested rural area – is the one in which agriculture workers and local entrepreneurs influence the political stage and regard the rural space only as a set of economic resources to exploit;
- The client rural area – situated in the distant rural areas, where agriculture and its associated political institutions are still powerful, but a great portion of the remainder of the rural economy can only be supported by means of state subventions;
- The paternal rural area – areas where still dominant are large private properties and large farms, and the development process is decisively outlined by the existing owners or by great farmers.

Satsangi and collab. (2001), identify the inequality of the pressures exerted on different rural areas. They suggest that there are seven great types of rural areas:
- Lively areas – where the population, the economic activities, and the pressure of housing are all growing, while supply is weakly developed;
- Areas under pressure – where the population and the pressure of housing are growing, some of them having indigenous economic growth.

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• Fragile areas – with small or inexistent economic growth. In these areas there is a migration of young families from the outside, but the pressure on the offer of housing is great, in particular on the ones to be rented;
• Regeneration areas – areas with smaller pressure, but with large incidence of layoffs, including areas with abandoned land;
• Intermediate areas – presenting layoff or pressure areas;
• Areas that are mainly active, but fragile from an economic point of view – they comprise locally active economies, distinct from the point of view of space;
• Transitioning areas – recovering after the loss of traditional economic activities.
• These types identified by Satsangi illustrate the range of pressures exerted in different rural areas, affecting the existing land reserve and reflecting the varied approaches of the policy required in different areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the undertaken analysis, we can state that up until the present time there is no unitary concept as far as the definition of the rural is concerned.

In present civilization, profoundly urbanized or about to be urbanized, the rural is sometimes identified with “the image of nature”.

The rural space is not only an object resulted from the exploitation of natural resources, which is why we must accept a different reality, namely that it collected in time certain human attitudes towards the nature that we need so much. It is a vast laboratory for understanding man’s relation with nature, but at the same time a “sumum” of resources for future development.

The rural space is a common asset, and getting to know it is a necessity if we want the largest part of the populated territory to take active part in the sustainable development.

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