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RURAL AREAS TYPOLOGY IN BULGARIA

In this study typology of rural areas is examined, on the base of the official definition applied in Bulgaria and the definition most often used in EU countries – the OECD definition. The latter definition delimits two levels – local and regional. The local includes LAU 1/2, which for Bulgaria is municipality or settlement (in this research municipality is used), and the regional level is NUTS 3 and corresponds to a district. Recommendations are made on the base of the established conclusions about the use of the concept “rural areas” and the necessity of change of the concept “municipality” is justified.

JEL: N50; R11; R14

With the constant and considerable EU enlargement the problems in rural areas become more large-scale and important. After EU-25 enlargement, 56% of the population in the Community lives in rural areas, according to the Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) definition for rural areas, which cover 92% of its territory.¹ Furthermore, 19% of the population lives in “predominantly rural areas” and 37% - in “significantly rural areas”. These areas generate 45% of the Gross Value Added (GVA) of EU-25 and provide 53% of the employment, but at the same time tend to lag as regards a number of social-economic and infrastructural indicators, compared to non-areas. In rural areas, income per inhabitant is around a third less. In the New Member States three times as many people work in agriculture (12) compared to the Old Member States (4). In Bulgaria and Romania agricultural employment levels are considerably higher. In this aspect, rural areas development is an important area of the agricultural policy. Agriculture has a first-rate importance for the land-use and the management of natural resources in rural areas. CAP application in rural areas imposes the correct definition of concept “rural area”.

The aim of this study is assess the official definition for rural areas in Bulgaria at present and of the OECD definition, widely used in EU countries.

Assessment of the Rural Areas' Definition by Ordinance № 14 in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, rural areas are defined by Ordinance № 14 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of the Regional Development and Public Works, from 1 April 2003.² All definitions for rural areas are based on the administrative division of the country. In Bulgaria, the administrative unit used is the municipality. According to the Ordinance № 14, as rural are defined all municipalities, on which territory there is no town with population over than 30 000

¹ Council of the European Union. Annex to the Proposal for a Council Decision on Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development, Brussels, Belgium, 2005.

² Ordinance N 14, Official Journal, 1.04.2003, N 35.

inhabitants and the population density is under 150 inhabitants per square kilometer.

The analysis of the Ordinance № 14 indicates that the total number of municipalities that do not meet the criteria are 5, 1 of them does not meet the criterion for the lack of a town over 30 000 inhabitants and 4 towns have density over 150 inhabitants per km² (Beloslav, Krichim, Peshtera and Stamboliiski) (Table 1). In the region of Plovdiv, both municipalities are with density over 150 inhabitants per km², Petrich municipality does not meet the first criterion, and two municipalities in Pazardjik and Varna region – the second criterion. These 5 municipalities have population 221 346 inhabitants and include 45 761 hectares of agricultural land. If they are excluded from the rural areas, their scope will be reduced by 3.5% (measured by the agricultural fund) and by 1.5% (measured by the population).

Table 1

Rural municipalities do not meet the criteria of Ordinance № 14

№	Districts	Municipalities	Population – number	Population density - inhabitants/ km ²
<i>I. Which do not meet the first criterion – number of population – 2003</i>				
1	Blagoevgrad	Petrich	57553	88.5
<i>II. Which do not meet the second criterion – density of population</i>				
1	Varna	Beloslav	111 138	185.4
2	Pazardjik	Peshtera	21 935	162.0
3	Plovdiv	Krichim	8544	155.6
4	Plovdiv	Stamboliisky	22 176	361.9
<i>Total sum on the second criterion</i>			163 793	
<i>Sum on both criteria</i>			221 346	

Note. Calculations are made on the base of the “Population and demographic processes”, National Statistics Institute, 2003.

The conclusion is that the Ordinance № 14 does not give exact account of realities. However, at this stage it is the official document defining rural areas. From 1.01.2007 Bulgaria is member of the EU. The main part of the financial support from the EU funds is allocated to the rural areas and SAPARD Program is replaced by Rural Areas Development Program. This imposes the necessity of objective and actual definition of the concept “rural areas”.

Assessment of the Rural Areas' Definition by OECD

This definition delimits two levels – local and regional. The local level includes LAU 1/2, which for Bulgaria is municipality or settlement (in the present research is used municipality). The regional level is NUTS 3 and corresponds to a district. At a local level, all municipalities having density under

150 inhabitants per km² are defined as a rural. According the OECD definition there is no requirement concerning towns over 30 000 inhabitants, so big district towns having smaller density, can classified as rural areas. The data in Table 2 shows that according to this definition, 14 district towns (50% from all in Bulgaria) are rural areas. But we have to take in consideration that although with small density, the district centers are characterized with small social and economic problems. Usually, they have more developed infrastructure, communications, basic services – transport, public utilities, administrative services, education, health services etc.; they have bigger opportunities for population employment; the social isolation existing in the smaller municipalities in district towns, is absent or exists in small degree; the part of the ageing population is lower and the part of young people is higher etc.

Table 2

Density of districts less 150 inhabitants/km²

№	Districts	Density of population
1	Blagoevgrad	126.3
2	Veliko Tarnovo	102.1
3	Vratsa	124.7
4	Gabrovo	133.8
5	Kardjaly	121.5
6	Kjustendil	73.0
7	Lovech	64.9
8	Montana	93.6
9	Razgrad	97.9
10	Silistra	118.8
11	Sliven	99.3
12	Smoljan	54.8
13	Targovishte	94.0
14	Haskovo	133.8

Note. Calculations are made on the base of the “Population and demographic processes”. National Statistics Institute, 2003.

Twenty municipalities in total have population density over 150 inhabitants per km² and do not meet the criterion for rural areas by this definition. Six of them are not district centers (Table 3). According to OECD definition, by the density criterion under 150 inhabitants per km², 245 of 264 municipalities do meet this criterion. They cover from 58% of the country's population and 92% from agricultural land.

Table 3

Municipalities with density over 150 Inhabitants/km², not districts

№	Districts	Municipalities	Density of Population (inhabitants/km ²)
1	Varna	Beloslav	185.4
2	Veliko Tarnovo	Gorna Orjahovitsa	173.9
3	Kjustendil	Dupnitsa	155.5
4	Pazardjik	Peshtera	162.0
5	Plovdiv	Krichim	155.6
6	Plovdiv	Stamboliisky	361.9

Note. Calculations are made on the base of the "Population and demographic processes". National Statistics Institute, 2003.

On a regional level NUTS 3, which is for Bulgaria the district, according to the OECD definition, three sub-levels are proposed:

- Predominantly rural areas: over 50% of the population living in rural communities – first group;
- Significantly rural areas: from 15% to 50% of the population living in rural communities – second group;
- Predominantly urban regions, in which less than 15% of the population live in rural communities – third group.

According to the criteria mentioned, in Bulgaria the first group is the most numerous, including 20 districts, the second – 7 districts. On level NUTS 3, only the capital city has density over 150 inhabitants per km². Only Sofia has not being defined as a rural. The first group includes 77% of the territory and 59% of the population of the country; the second – 22% and 26% respectively.

Rural Areas Characteristic and Scope, According to the Different Definitions

The characteristics of rural areas, according to the two definitions could be made by different indicators.

In Table 4 we can see that from 264 municipalities in Bulgaria, 231 are defined as rural by Ordinance № 14 or 88% from all municipalities and by the OECD definition - 245 or 93%. The biggest number of rural municipalities, according to the Ordinance, is the South-Central region (according to the Ordinance – 59; to OECD – 62), the smallest – in the South-East region – 19 and 20 respectively. Through the scope of the rural areas, by municipalities, we could not make an assessment about their extent, because of the fact that the concept "municipality" in Bulgaria is very large. There are municipalities with only one settlement and others – with much more – until 134 (see Table 5 and Table 6). Big differentiation is observed between municipalities regarding all characterizing indicators. The territory of one municipality varies from 1 350 km² to 44 km², the agricultural land – from 82 956 ha to 1819 ha. There are significant differences in the number of inhabitants and the population density per square kilometer.

Table 4

Rural municipalities and less-favoured areas in rural areas

Macro-regions and Districts	Municipalities - number				Agricultural land in less favoured areas (%)
	Number - total	from them:		in less favoured areas	
		in rural areas			
		by Ordinance № 14	by OECD		
<i>North-Western region</i>	32	29	31	10	27.6
Vidin	11	10	10	3	23.1
Vratsa	10	9	10	3	34.2
Montana	11	10	11	4	24.0
<i>Central-Northern region</i>	41	34	38	13	25.8
Veliko Tarnovo	10	7	9	4	32.6
Gabrovo	4	3	4	4	100.0
Lovech	8	7	8	5	51.3
Pleven	11	10	10	0	0
Ruse	8	7	7	0	0
<i>North-Eastern region</i>	49	43	45	6	8.6
Varna	12	11	10	1	7.8
Dobrich	8	7	7	0	0
Razgrad	7	6	7	0	0
Silistra	7	6	7	0	0
Targovishte	5	4	5	2	29.3
Shumen	10	9	9	3	22.8
<i>South-Eastern region</i>	22	19	20	14	48.3
Burgas	13	12	12	9	49.5
Sliven	4	3	4	3	61.0
Yambol	5	4	4	2	37.6
<i>Central-Southern region</i>	68	59	62	50	59.8
Kardjaly	7	6	7	7	100.0
Pazardjik	11	10	9	10	71.0
Plovdiv	18	16	15	10	51.7
Smoljan	10	9	10	10	100.0
Stara Zagora	11	9	10	5	25.8
Haskovo	11	9	11	8	66.9
<i>South-Western region</i>	52	47	49	52	100.0
Blagoevgrad	14	13	14	14	100.0
Kjustendil	9	7	8	9	100.0
Pernik	6	5	5	6	100.0
Sofia – capital	1	0	0	1	100.0
Sofia – district	22	22	22	22	100.0
<i>Bulgaria</i>	264	231	245	145	42.8

Note. Calculations for rural areas are made on the base of "Uniform classifier of administrative-territorial and territorial units in Bulgaria", 2001, National Statistics Institute, Sofia.

Source: Янакиева, И. и др. Методически подход за определяне на необлагодетелстваните райони и райони с екологични ограничения (Yanakiyeva, I. et al. Methodological Approach for Definition of Less Favoured Areas and Areas with Environmental Restrictions). Sofia: ИАИ, НЦАН, 2005.

Table 5

Characteristic of municipalities with smallest number of settlements

№	Districts	Municipalities	Number of settlements	Territory (ha)	Agricultural land (ha)	Population, number	Only rural	Density, inhabitants/km ²
1	Dobrich	Dobrich	1	109018	75538	99249	0	910.5
2	Plovdiv	Plovdiv	1	101981	41031	340122	0	3335.2
3	Plovdiv	Krichim	1	54895	19192	8544	0	155.6
4	Plovdiv	Peroushtitsa	1	48719	28126	5385	0	110.5
5	Sofia - capital	Sofia - capital	1	1350237	829561	1178579	54274	873.7
6	Sofia-district	Anton	1	76098	52511	1799	1799	23.6
7	Sofia-district	Dolna banya	1	66854	29508	4746	0	71.0
8	Sofia-district	Koprivshitsa	1	139165	55892	2643	0	19.0
9	Sofia-district	Chavdar	1	70797	20345	1403	1403	19.8
10	Sofia-district	Chelopech	1	44390	18189	1719	1719	38.7
11	Yambol	Yambol	1	90724	55741	82364	0	907.9
12	Sofia-district	Pirdop	2	152435	52704	9301	929	61.0
13	Pazardjik	Batak	3	677310	64670	7124	3035	10.5
14	Varna	Devnya	3	121052	62957	9589	941	79.2
15	Pazardjik	Peshtera	3	135428	51359	21935	2594	162.0
16	Pazardjik	Rakitovo	3	246438	44416	15811	7369	64.2
17	Varna	Beloslav	4	60079	27775	11138	3067	185.4
18	Sofia-district	Zlatitsa	4	541775	52293	19186	5571	35.4
19	Pleven	Iskar	4	243899	219673	8976	4925	36.8
20	Pleven	Kneja	4	317812	294212	16813	4155	52.9
21	Lovech	Letnitsa	4	177719	139689	5512	1655	31.0
22	Stara Zagora	Nicolaevo	4	96524	44220	4863	1943	50.4
23	Burgas	Primorsko	4	272027	55211	4979	2502	18.3
24	Montana	Yakimovo	4	220977	200821	5697	5697	25.8

Sources: Единен класификатор на административно-териториалните и териториалните единици в Република България (Uniform classifier of administrative-territorial and territorial units in Bulgaria). Sofia, НСИ, 2001; Статистически годишник (Statistical year book). Sofia, НСИ, 2001; Население и демографски процеси (Population and demographic processes). Sofia, НСИ, 2003.

Table 6

Municipalities with over 70 settlements

№	Districts	Name	Settlements, number	Territory (km ²)	Agricultural land (ha)	Population, total number	Only rural	Population density
1	Gabrovo	Gabrovo	134	555579	246495	74357	7745	133.8
2	V. Tarnovo	Elena	124	671389	282164	11276	4864	16.8
3	Kardjaly	Kardjaly	118	574742	225434	69845	24113	121.5
4	Gabrovo	Tryavna	106	254909	106266	14210	847	55.7
5	V. Tarnovo	V. Tarnovo	89	885345	565667	90381	16323	102.1
6	Smolyan	Smolyan	86	853997	238532	46794	13865	54.8
7	Kardjaly	Krumovgrad	79	843319	402538	19792	14553	23.5
8	Kardjaly	Kirkovo	73	537871	201639	24005	24005	44.6
9	Kjustendil	Kjustendil	72	959429	485224	70010	20171	73.0

Sources: Единен класификатор на административно-териториалните и териториалните единици в Република България (Uniform classifier of administrative-territorial and territorial units in Bulgaria). Sofia, НСИ, 2001; Статистически годишник (Statistical year book). Sofia, НСИ, 2001; Население и демографски процеси (Population and demographic processes). Sofia, НСИ, 2003.

The first indicator varies from 1 178 579 inhabitants in Sofia-city to 1403 in Chavdar, Sofia district; the second – from 3335.2 inhabitants to 10.5. In this respect, the necessity of specifying the concept of “municipality” arises.

The share of the agricultural land in rural areas varies in narrow limits, concerning the six Regions of planning (NUTS-2) and also on municipality level. The differentiation between the six macro-regions by less-favoured areas (LFA), is significant. These areas have been defined on the base of criteria of Regulation (EC) 1274/2006 for financial support of rural areas and on the individual conditions for every Country Member of EU. As a result of the higher costs and the foregone incomes of agricultural producers, which are objects of natural limitations for the agricultural land-use, compensatory payments are allowed. There is no officially approved Ordinance for the scope of the LFA yet. In the study the variant of the cited research has been used, where the scope is defined on municipality level. A variant on settlement level has not been achieved yet. From 264 municipalities in Bulgaria as LFA defined 145 or 55%.

In North Bulgaria, where the plate terrain predominates and the soil-climatic conditions are more favourable, the part of the LFA is considerably lower (9% in the North-East, 26% in the North-Central and 28% in the North-West). The situation is opposite in South Bulgaria where the relief is predominantly mountain and frequently very indented, and the soil-climatic conditions limit the agricultural development and raise the cost of production. South-West region is included in LFA with its all territory; South-Central – with 60% (2 municipalities are with 100%) and South-East – with 48%. If we compare the number of rural municipalities for the 6 macro-regions (NUTS-2) with the number of LFA, in the South-East region only one less-favoured municipality is not rural, according to the Ordinance and two according to OECD, from the all 145 less-

favoured. These municipalities, defined as rural, bearing all unfavourable consequences for the agriculture development, are unfavourable also for the agriculture development, in their predominant part (97% according to the Ordinance and 99% according to OECD). Taking into consideration that in many rural municipalities, the agriculture is main occupation and the conditions for its development are not favourable, this is a precondition for aggravation of all economic and social problems, especially unemployment.

A better idea of the structure and the character of rural municipalities is given by the grouping of the municipalities in which there are no towns or there are towns only (Table 7).

Table 7

Municipalities with villages only

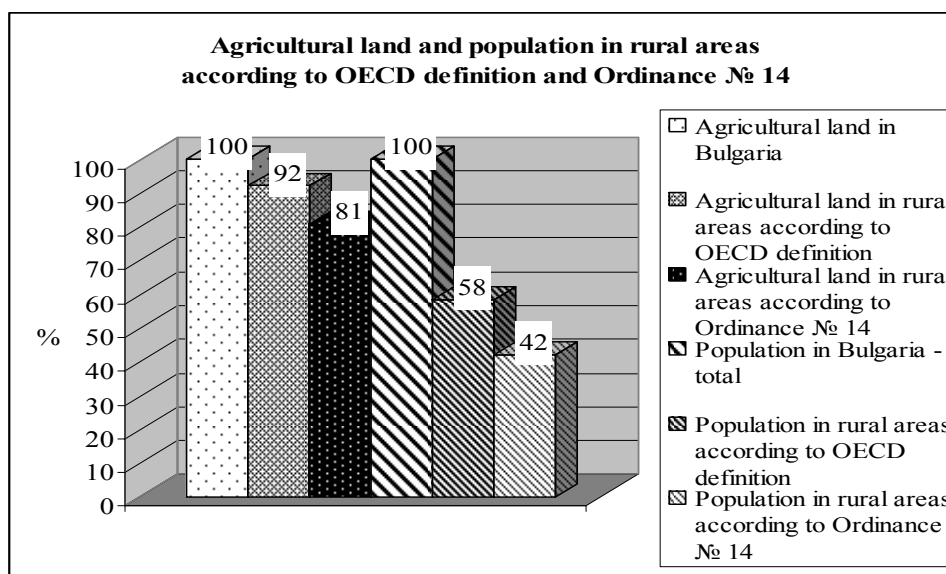
№	Districts	Municipalities	№	Districts	Municipalities
1	Blagoevgrad	Garmen	26	Plovdiv	Kaloyanovo
2	Blagoevgrad	Satovcha	27	Plovdiv	Maritsa
3	Blagoevgrad	Strumyani	28	Plovdiv	Kuklen
4	Burgas	Ruen	29	Plovdiv	Rodopy
5	Varna	Avren	30	Razgrad	Samuil
6	Varna	Aksakovo	31	Ruse	Ivanovo
7	Varna	Vetrino	32	Ruse	Tsenovo
8	Vidin	Boinitza	33	Ruse	Slivo pole
9	Vidin	Macresh	34	Silistra	Kainardja
10	Vidin	Novo selo	35	Silistra	Sitovo
11	Vidin	Rujintsi	36	Smolyan	Borino
12	Vidin	Chuprene	37	Smolyan	Banite
13	Vratsa	Borovan	38	Sofia district	Anton
14	Vratsa	Hairedin	39	Sofia - district	G. Malina
15	Dobrich	Kroushary	40	Sofia - district	Mircovo
16	Dobrich	Dobrich-rural	41	Sofia - district	Chavdar
17	Kjustendil	Nevestino	42	Sofia - district	Chelopech
18	Kjustendil	Trecljano	43	Stara Zagora	Bratya Dascalovi
19	Kardjaly	Kircovo	44	Stara Zagora	Opan
20	Kardjaly	Chernoochene	45	Hascovo	Mineralny Bany
21	Montana	G. Damyanovo	46	Hascovo	Stambolovo
22	Montana	Medcovets	47	Shumen	Nicola Cozlevo
23	Montana	Yakimovo	48	Shumen	Hitrino
24	Pazardjik	Lesychovo	49	Yambol	Tundja
25	Pernik	Kovachevtsy			

Source. Единен класификатор на административно-териториалните и териториалните единици в Република България (Uniform classifier of administrative-territorial and territorial units in Bulgaria). Sofia, НСИ, 2001.

Data from Table 7 show that in Bulgaria 49 municipalities are composed by villages only – there is not towns on their territory. At the same time, 4 municipalities, defined as rural area not have villages, but only towns – Krichim, Peroushtitza, Dolna Banya and Koprivshtitza.

Other indicators for delimitation of the scope of rural municipalities, according to different definitions, are the territory and the population (Figure 1). The Chart indicates that the predominant part of the agricultural fund of Bulgaria is in rural areas, according both definitions and on municipality level, the scope is bigger according the OECD definition.

Figure1



The situation is very different if the scope is determined by the population living in rural areas. The predominant size of rural areas is retained through the OECD definition, but as a whole, it is considerably smaller than the scope determined by the agricultural land. This can be explained by the fact, that rural areas have low density and trend of decrease in inhabitants. In considerable part of these areas, the unemployment is very high, so the population looks for jobs through migration to the big towns or emigration abroad.

The smaller scope of rural areas, through the Ordinance № 14, in comparison to the OECD definition is due to the fact that through the first 231 municipalities are defined as rural (or 33 are urban), through the second – more – 245 (or 19 are urban) (Table 8).

Table 8

Municipalities are composed of towns only

According to Ordinance № 14					According to OECD definition				
№	Districts	Municipalities	Population, number	Population density/km ²	№	Districts	Municipalities	Population, number	Population density/km ²
1	Blagoevgrad	Blagoevgrad	78343	126.3	1	Burgas	Burgas	209727	409.4
2	Burgas	Burgas	209727	409.4	2	V. Tarnovo	G. Oryahovitsa	53059	173.9
3	Varna	Varna	321009	1351.7	3	Varna	Beloslav	11138	185.4
4	V. Tarnovo	V. Tarnovo	90381	102.1	4	Varna	Varna	321009	1351.7
5	V. Tarnovo	G. Oryahovitsa	53059	173.9	5	Vidin	Vidin	77167	153.9
6	V. Tarnovo	Swishtov	47415	75.8	6	Dobrich	Dobrich – town	99249	910.5
7	Vidin	Vidin	77167	153.9	7	Kjustendil	Dupnitsa	51161	155.5
8	Vratsa	Vratsa	84702	124.7	8	Pazardjik	Pazardjik	127287	199.9
9	Gabrovo	Gabrovo	74357	133.8	9	Pazardjik	Peshtera	21935	162.0
10	Dobrich	Dobrich	99249	910.5	10	Pernik	Pernik	103870	214.5
11	Kardjaly	Kardjaly	69845	121.5	11	Pleven	Pleven	148325	183.2
12	Kjustendil	Dupnitsa	51161	155.5	12	Plovdiv	Krichim	8544	155.6
13	Kjustendil	Kjustendil	70010	73.0	13	Plovdiv	Plovdiv	340122	3335.2
14	Lovech	Lovech	61419	64.9	14	Plovdiv	Stamboliisky	22176	361.9
15	Montana	Montana	61104	93.6	15	Ruse	Ruse	180344	384.4
16	Pazardjik	Pazardjik	127287	199.9	16	Sofia-capital	Sofia-capital	1178579	873.7
17	Pernik	Pernik	103870	214.5	17	Stara Zagora	Stara Zagora	167877	164.7
18	Pleven	Pleven	148325	183.2	18	Shumen	Shumen	104002	159.4
19	Plovdiv	Asenovgrad	67164	102.8	19	Yambol	Yambol	82364	907.9
20	Plovdiv	Plovdiv	340122	3335.2		<i>Total</i>		3307935	
21	Razgrad	Razgrad	58584	97.9					
22	Ruse	Ruse	180344	384.4					
23	Silistra	Silistra	61294	118.8					
24	Sliven	Sliven	135701	99.3					
25	Smolyan	Smolyan	46794	54.8					
26	Sofia-capital	Sofia-capital	1178579	873.7					
27	Stara Zagora	Kazaniak	81179	127.9					
28	Stara Zagora	Stara Zagora	167877	164.7					
29	Targovishte	Targovishte	64762	94.0					
30	Hascovo	Dimitrovgrad	64275	113.2					
31	Hascovo	Hascovo	98970	133.8					
32	Shumen	Shumen	104002	159.4					
33	Yambol	Yambol	82364	907.9					
	<i>Total</i>		4560441						

Source. Население и демографски процеси (Population and demographic processes). НСИ, 2003.

Rural areas, by Ordinance include 81% of the Bulgaria territory, 81% of the agricultural land and 85% of the forest, and by OECD definition is bigger – 93%, 92% and 96% respectively. The bigger scope through the OECD definition is because there is not a restriction for a town with more than 30 000 inhabitants. Only in the districts of Varna and Pazardjik, the scope of rural areas is smaller – determined by the agricultural land and also by the population. In all the others, it is bigger. From Table 9 we can see that in result of this, according to the OECD definition, 13 of the districts are defined as rural, and through the Ordinance № 14 – only one – Sofia district.

According to the two definitions, there is no big differentiation of the share of the agricultural land in rural areas in the 6 Macro-regions of planning (NUTS 2) (Table 9).

Table 9

Agricultural land and population in rural areas according to OECD definition and Ordinance № 14 (percentage)

Regions and Districts	Agricultural land		Population	
	Ordinance № 14	OECD definition	Ordinance № 14	OECD definition
<i>Bulgaria</i>	80.6	92.1	42.2	58.1
<i>North-Western region</i>	78.8	91.2	58.0	85.5
Vidin	81.8	81.8	39.7	39.7
Vratsa	83.0	100.0	62.1	100.0
Montana	81.1	100.0	66.0	100.0
<i>Central-Northern region</i>	76.4	92.5	45.1	68.0
V. Tarnovo	59.0	92.8	34.4	81.8
Gabrovo	77.5	100.0	47.9	100.0
Lovech	71.7	100.0	63.4	100.0
Pleven	83.2	83.2	54.4	54.4
Ruse	84.3	84.3	32.4	32.4
<i>North-Eastern region</i>	86.2	95.2	45.7	59.0
Varna	95.7	94.5	30.4	28.0
Dobrich	98.0	98.0	53.5	53.5
Razgrad	77.2	100.0	59.5	100.0
Silistra	80.7	100.0	56.5	100.0
Targovishte	72.6	100.0	54.0	100.0
Shumen	78.6	78.6	48.9	48.9
<i>South-Eastern region</i>	87.3	95.5	46.1	63.2
Burgas	92.1	92.1	50.4	50.4
Sliven	60.8	100.0	37.5	100.0
Yambol	97.8	97.8	46.6	46.6
<i>Central-Southern region</i>	77.2	90.9	46.0	65.1
Kardjaly	83.1	100.0	57.2	100.0
Pazardjik	71.2	68.0	58.8	51.7
Plovdiv	90.2	97.0	43.0	48.1
Smolyan	73.1	100.0	66.3	100.0
Stara Zagora	69.0	78.6	32.5	54.5
Hascovo	72.7	100.0	40.7	100.0
<i>South-Western region</i>	77.9	86.4	29.4	36.4
Blagoevgrad	87.9	100.0	76.9	100.0
Kjustendil	55.3	86.4	24.6	68.2
Pernik	81.2	81.2	29.9	29.9
Sofia - capital				
Sofia – district	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Statistical year book, 2001; Population and demographic processes. National Statistics Institute 2003.

There are small fluctuations only per districts, around the average level for the country. Analyzing the absolute size of the agricultural land, per Micro-regions, we observe considerably higher polarization (Figure 2 and 3).

Figure 2

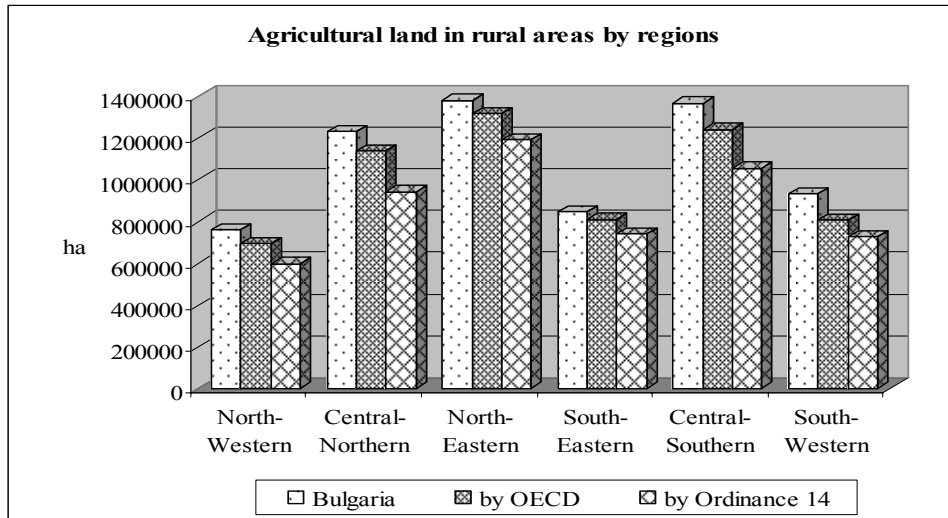
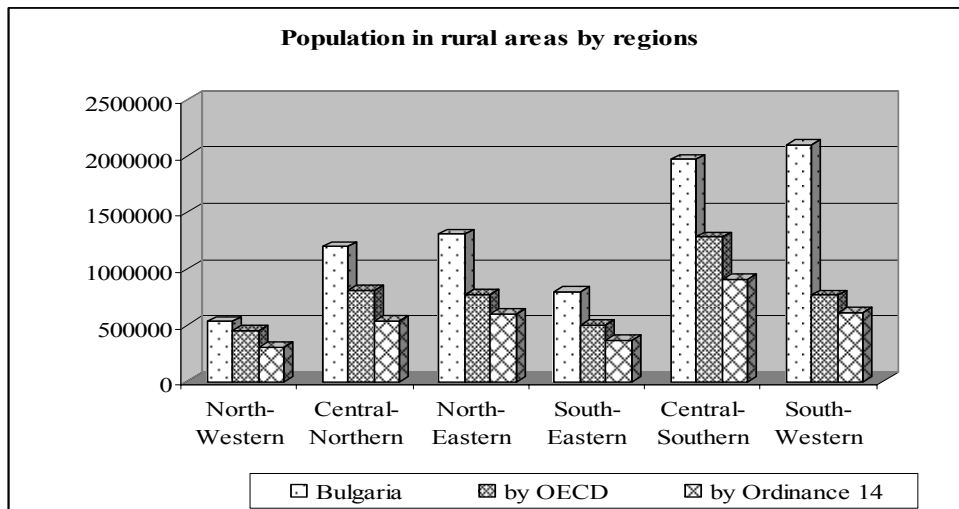


Figure 3



We can separate two groups of regions, on the base of this indicator. The first group includes North-Central, North-East and South-Central regions, which

possess the larger share of agricultural land – 61% of the country agricultural land, 57% by OECD and 49% by Ordinance is in rural areas of the these three Macro-regions. The North-East region has the largest quantity of agricultural land in rural areas – respectively 20% and 18%. The second group includes smaller size of agricultural land for the country – 39%, and in the rural areas – 35% and 32%. If we compare the rural areas' scope, according the two definitions by Macro regions, we notice differences, more significant in South-Central, North-Central and North-West regions. Differences in rural areas' scope are deepening, when they are measured through the population.

In rural areas live 42% of Bulgarian population, according the Ordinance and 58% according to the OECD definition, because of the mentioned reasons. The analysis of this indicator in the six Planning Regions, indicates considerably bigger differentiation between them, in comparison to the rural areas' scope, measured by the agricultural land (Figure 2 and 3). The polarization of the part of the population, living in rural areas is considerable, according both definitions. It remains also when this indicator is presented as a relative value, in difference to the agricultural land, where it is inessential, by the 100% scale (Table 9). According to the Ordinance, the share of the population, living in rural areas, related to the total population, varies from 29% in South-West region to 58% in the North-West; according to the OECD definition from 36% to 86 % respectively. These differences are more considerable, when expressed in their absolute values. They are strongly expressed in regions with most numerous population – South-West and South-Central and they form the first group. For these areas (especially for the first) it is characteristic that differences between all the population in Macro-regions and the population living in rural areas are biggest. This results from the fact that in the South-West region the capital-city situated is and in the South-Central region – Plovdiv, which population is not included in rural areas, but participates in the total population number for the region as a whole. In the second group are the North-East and the North-Central regions, where are located Varna and Ruse respectively, the rest of 4 big towns in Bulgaria with numerous population. In the Chart, we can see that differences between the three groups of population are less expressed (total, rural by Ordinance № 14 and by the OECD definition) in absolute quantity in the South-East and particularly in North-West regions, where there are no such big cities. The last two regions are characterized by a small total population, so – a smaller part of population lives in rural areas. The biggest part of the population, living in rural areas, is in the South-central region, although the total population in the South-West region is more because of the capital city. Differences in the rural areas scope are most considerable according the two definitions, measured through the population in absolute numbers, but the difference is mostly expressed in the North-West region (58% through the Ordinance and 86% through OECD, respectively). It is characterized by the highest share of rural population,

through both definitions, but this cannot be seen in the Figure because of the smallest number population in this region.

According to the criteria mentioned for rural areas division on a district level (NUTS 3), by OECD definition, in Bulgaria two groups have been formed – predominantly rural areas and significantly rural areas. Rural areas defined in such a way, forming the two groups, are applied analogically to the Ordinance № 14. Different are the scopes, defined by OECD at a local level for Bulgaria – a municipality and on level NUTS 3 – a district (Figure 4 and 5). According to the criterion, as rural are defined all municipalities having density under 150 inhabitants per square km, and on district level two groups have been formed – predominantly rural and significantly rural areas. In the first group the share of population living in rural areas, through the definition, is over than 50%, and in the second is from 15% to 50%. On a *municipality* level, as rural areas are classified only these which do meet the criteria for density; on *district* level can be included also municipalities that do not meet this criterion, but satisfy the following criterion: the share of the population living in rural municipalities to be above the second group lower limit – 15%. As a result, in rural areas, by OECD definition, on a municipality level 92% of agricultural land is included, on a district level – 99%. The bigger scope on the district level is conditioned by the fact that as rural are defined all districts, except Sofia city (20 districts in first group and 7 districts in second), while on the municipality level – only municipalities which density is under 150 inhabitants per square km (see Figure 4 and 5)

Figure 4

Agricultural Land in Rural Areas - by Groups of Districts

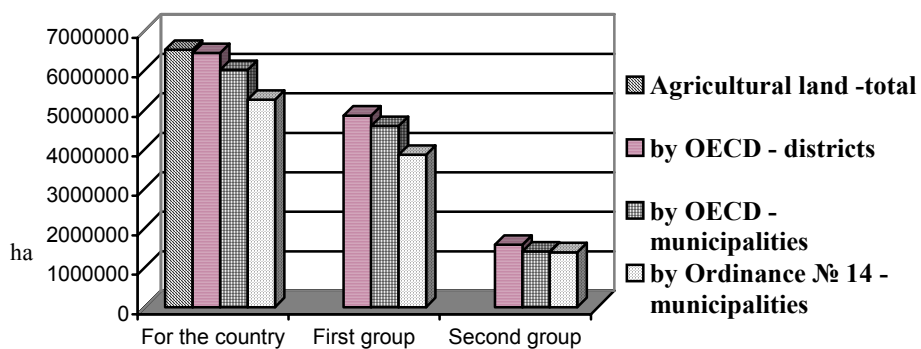
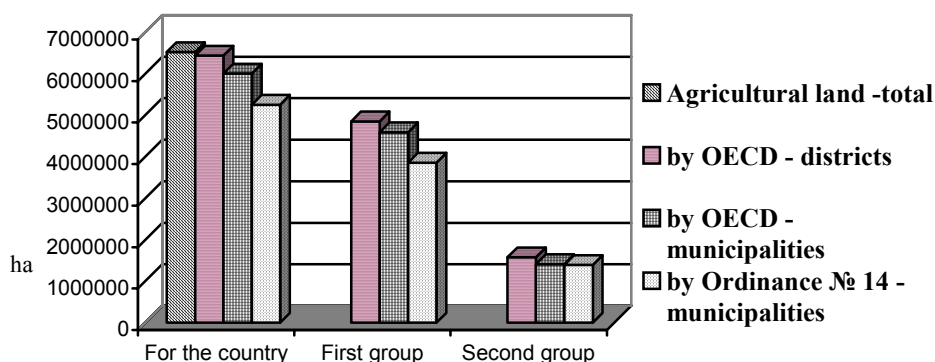


Figure 5

Population in Rural Areas - by Groups of Districts



Differences between the rural areas scope, according OECD definition, on the level of municipality and on the level of district are going deeper, when the scope is measured by the population. In rural areas there are 58% of the population on the municipality level and 85% on the district level.

In Figure 4 and 5, we can see that the predominant share of the country territory, land and population, living in rural areas, are concentrated in the first group of districts. In this group is 70% of the agricultural land and 48% of the population by OECD and by the Ordinance –59% and 32% respectively. The share of the second group is considerably lower and almost the same according to both definitions –22% and 10% by OECD and 21% and 10% by the Ordinance respectively. This is due to the fact that this group is formed by districts, which population living in rural areas has a lower share in comparison to the first group, because of the presence of the biggest towns, according to both definitions. The situation is different for the first group, because of the criteria difference – according the Ordinance, there are not towns with over 30 000 inhabitants, according the OECD they remain. This is the reason for the significant differences in the rural areas' scope in the group, on the base of both definitions.

Nevertheless, we can hardly accept for advisable to classify as rural areas all municipalities and only one – Sofia – capital to be classified as urban, as in the OECD definition on a district level.

Finally, we can make the following *conclusions and recommendations*.

- The Ordinance № 14 does not take into account of the realities. As rural are defined five municipalities, which do not meet the criteria. However, at this

stage this document is the only one that regulates rural municipalities in Bulgaria. Apart from this, the part of these municipalities is small;

- According to the OECD definition, on a *municipality* level as rural are defined municipalities including 14 district towns and 1 municipality having town with more than 30 000 inhabitants. This fact questions the expedience of this approach;

- The concept “municipality” in Bulgaria is very wide, which necessitates specification and clarification. Eleven rural municipalities are composed by one settlement, at the same time four have over than 100 settlements, and Gabrovo has 134;

- Big differentiation is observed between municipalities in relation to all indicators of characterization – municipalities’ number, less-favoured rural municipalities, territory, agricultural land, population, population density etc. Forty-eight rural municipalities are composed by villages only and four municipalities - of towns only;

- The rural areas scope in Bulgaria, according to the OECD definition on a municipality level, is bigger than according to Ordinance No 14. This is because of the dropping out the criterion for the presence of towns with population more than 30 000 inhabitants. The second criterion remains – the population must not exceed 150 inhabitants per square kilometer:

The scope, measured according to the *municipalities’ number*, by the Ordinance definition, 33 municipalities do not meet the criteria for rural municipalities, by OECD – 19;

The scope, measured by the *district’ number*, included as rural with their whole territory, agricultural fund and population: by first definition - 13 and second - none;

The scope, measured by the *agricultural land*: by the first definition is 92% and by the second-81%;

The scope, measured by the *population*, living in rural areas: according to the first definition is 58%, according to the second – 42%.

- Big is the differentiation between the six Macro-regions regarding the number of the rural municipalities and less-favoured municipalities in rural areas. In the South of Bulgaria, it varies from 48% to 100%;

- In the six Macro-regions of planning, there is no big differentiation between the share of the agricultural land in rural areas, on a municipality level, according the two definitions;

- Differences in the rural areas’ scope by Macro-regions become deeper, when it is measured by the population, both in absolute and relative numbers;

- On a *district level*, according to OECD definition, two groups of rural areas have been formed in Bulgaria. In the first group there are 20 districts, in the second – 7;

- Agricultural land in rural areas on a *district level* according OECD definition occupies 99% of the total for the country, on a *municipality level* – 92% and the population living there – 85% and 58% respectively;

- The rural areas scope, according the two definitions, on all levels (municipality, district, six Macro-regions), measured by the agricultural land, compared to the population, is bigger. It is more significant, when measured by the population number.

Recommendations:

1. On the base analysis and assessment of the “rural areas” definition, the question is which of them to recommend. At this stage, the Ordinance is the only official legal document, defining rural areas in Bulgaria, nevertheless it does not respond to the realities. In 2006 a EU project started in the framework of Eurostat for unified definition of the “rural areas” in the EU Members states, because now every country uses its own definition and this is the reason for a different scope. Until then, Bulgaria faces the following choice:

- To use the Ordinance № 14:
 - a. in the same way;
 - b. to eliminate municipalities, witch do non meet criteria;
 - c. to change criteria.
- To implement the OECD definition:
 - a. on municipality level (LAU 1);
 - b. on district level (NUTS 3).

We propose three variants:

a) To use Ordinance No 14 in the same way. Firstly, because the adoption of a common definition of rural areas in the EU framework and, at secondly, the share of municipalities not meeting criteria is small;

b) To change the criteria- to eliminate municipalities which are district towns and national resorts. Arguments for this proposal are based on the fact that despite the low density of some, they are characterized with less economic and social problems. Usually they have well developed infrastructure, communications, services – transport, administrative and public utilities, education, health etc.; they have bigger opportunities for employment; the social isolation of the smaller municipalities does not exist or it is insignificant; the share of the young people is higher etc.;

c) To adopt the OECD definition on *municipality* level, because it is predominant for the EU Member States. In our opinion, this definition on *district* level is not suitable for Bulgaria, because it defines as rural area all the country, except Sofia-city. This makes the concept “rural areas” meaningless.

2. To re-assess the definition of the concept “municipality”, making it more exact and clear. At this stage, this concept is very wide and insufficiently justified.

1.VI.2006