

CHANGES IN MOBILITY PATTERNS AND SERVICES USE OF RURAL POPULATION

Aija Zobena Dr.sc.soc./ professor *,
Faculty of Social sciences, University of Latvia

Abstract. Mobility patterns of rural population in Latvia are changing. Commuting to nearby towns is a widespread practice of rural population, providing access to services and different opportunities. The distance from Riga is becoming more important than regional differences in the regional development context. The main focus of this paper is on the changes of mobility and services-use patterns of rural population. The empirical evidence of this study is based on the survey conducted for the research project "Elaboration of Innovative Diagnostic Instruments for Regional Development". The first results of empirical research show that the same services are not equally accessible between residents in the places with a limited structure of opportunities and everyday mobility resources and residents of more prosperous places. The concept of service provision in rural areas has changed – an offer of various services in rural areas should be replaced by accessibility of services in nearby towns. Developed public transport and road infrastructure as well as development of communication (particularly the Internet) are becoming more important.

Key words: regional development, rural development, mobility patterns, public services policy.

JEL code: R58

Introduction

In Latvia, a rapidly growing number of municipalities with a small number of inhabitants highlights the issue of depopulation of large areas of the country and the administrative costs per inhabitant. The Administrative Territory and Settlement Law (LR Saeima, 2008) states that the minimum number of residents in *novads* (English: county) should be at least 4,000, for it to be possible to maintain a minimal infrastructure, including administration. Currently, in 30 counties (almost 1/3 of the total), the population is below 4,000 and the population continues declining in all these counties.

* Aija Zobena. Tel.: + 371 67140040.
E-mail address: aija.zobena@lu.lv.

The main focus of this paper is on the changes of mobility and services-use patterns of rural population. The empirical evidence of this study is based on the survey conducted for the research project "Elaboration of Innovative Diagnostic Instruments for Regional Development".

Functional relationships between people and places

Describing place attachment and the sense of belonging to a place researchers acknowledge that they are formed both by the emotional bonds, linked directly to the experience of environment and community, as the sense of home, the sense of belonging to a local community, identification with a place, and also by satisfaction with a structure of opportunities in a place (Low & Altman, 1992; Stedman, 2002).

The structure of opportunities in a place is connected with the territorial capital – the development opportunities created by resources and their combinations (van der Ploeg & Marsden, 2008). The structure of opportunities in a place is the capacity of a territory to satisfy the demands of people for the quality of life.

The use of the term quality of life implies a multi-dimensional character embracing social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Many researchers (Stiglitz et al., 2008) argue that conventional, market-based measures of income, wealth and consumption are insufficient to assess human well-being. They need to be complemented by non-monetary indicators of the quality of life. The places that are able to survive in the changing circumstances and maintain attractiveness as places of settlement are sustainable. Resilience of the place and community, the ability to survive crises, adapt, flexibly transform in changing circumstances are important indicators of sustainable development.

Not only the place is a factor for the life activity of a person, but a person is a factor in the development of a place (Zobena & Mezs, 2013). The social and human capital of a place, nature capital, and economic capital form a unified capital of a place, where the capacity to act of social agents, their capacity to use the opportunities offered by a place, is decisive.

Relatively recently, people (particularly in the countryside) to a large extent depended on the opportunities offered by the place. Nowadays, the places where one lives, works, receives services, and enjoys one's leisure mostly do not coincide because people are becoming more mobile. The increase in everyday mobility is a relatively new phenomenon that changes the relationship between people and places. Limited possibilities of commuting makes people consider leaving the rural areas as the place of residence if there are no reasonable opportunities for work, education, shopping, bank services and other opportunities and services within a reachable distance.

Research data sources and methodology

This article analyses the data from the survey conducted for the research project "Elaboration of Innovative Diagnostic Instruments for Regional Development". This study covered different aspects of measurement of sustainable regional development.

A stratified random sample, calculated on the basis of the Population Register data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia about the population of Latvia, was used in the survey. In total 1004 permanent residents of Latvia, aged 18-74, were surveyed. The composition of the respondents reflects the composition of adult population of Latvia by gender, age, nationality, and place of residence.

The marketing and public opinion research centre SKDS carried out a survey in September-October, 2014, where 120 survey points were selected randomly from the list of all populated areas of Latvia.

The survey included a question: "Where have you usually been using different services in the past 12 months?" about the following services and opportunities: shopping, bank services, health care, education and further education, possibility to attend culture, leisure and sports events, everyday services (café, hairdresser etc.) – frequently used daily and necessary services or opportunities. The importance of those services is confirmed by other surveys that pay attention to objective quality of life indicators (Tisenkopfs & Bela-Krumina, 2006). In this paper only part of the data is analysed due to its limited size.

Respondents were also asked questions about the means of transport used to reach different important destinations (work-place, municipality office, family doctor) and access to private cars and use of public transportation.

Use of different services by rural population

Where do the rural inhabitants get their everyday services? Some services are used in towns and other territorial units in the municipality or in other place in Latvia. Geographical dispersion of the use of services and opportunities is a part of people's everyday activity. As it was a survey of permanent residents of Latvia, all respondents were offered answers "in the place of residence" and "in Riga" among other options, but residents of Riga were offered only an option "in Riga", as it is their place of residence. In calculations these answers were used with meaning "in the place of residence".

The data of the survey show that some services have been used in the place of residence by rural population more rarely, but some services have been used in the place of residence as often as by other categories of respondents.

Differences in the use of bank services are the most evident. Bank services in the place of residence were used by 32.9 % of rural inhabitants (47.7 % use these services in another town or territorial unit in the municipality). Residents of Riga and other towns have used bank services at their places of residence more often (accordingly 90.5 % and 91.8%). The share of respondents who have not used bank services in the past 12 months is rather high among

rural population, namely, 13.3 % to compare with 3.1 % of inhabitants of Riga and 5.1 % of inhabitants of other towns. Qualitative surveys show that some rural inhabitants do not have regular monetary incomes. Barter and food sharing are still popular forms of exchange in rural communities.

Inhabitants of other towns more often than rural inhabitants have used bank services in Riga – 25.2% and 19.1 %, accordingly. One of reasons could be that cash machines and local branches of the banks are less available outside Riga and other cities (Table 1).

Table 1

Where have you usually been using bank services in the past 12 months? (%)

Place of residence	Use services in Riga	Use services in the place of residence	Use services in other towns, territorial units in the municipality	Use services in other places in Latvia	Use services abroad	Have not used services	Difficult to say
Riga	90.5	90.5	0.6	23.3	12.3	3.1	5.9
Other town	25.2	91.8	12.6	13.1	10.6	5.1	1.3
Rural area	19.1	47.7	32.9	16.8	3.9	13.3	0.9

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004. Respondents could choose several answers, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100%

Shopping is among services which have been used in the place of residence almost equally often by all categories of respondents (Table 2). Data show that 93.8% of inhabitants of Riga, 97.2% of inhabitants of other towns, and 89.9% of inhabitants of rural areas have been shopping in the place of residence. Rural inhabitants more often have been shopping in other towns and territorial units in the municipality (51.5%) to compare with inhabitants of towns (25.7%). Inhabitants of Riga have been shopping abroad more often (21%) than other categories of respondents. Only 9% of rural inhabitants and 13.4 % of inhabitants of other towns have been shopping abroad.

Shopping malls and large retail chains are concentrated in Riga and some other cities where flows of customers are more intensive. People with low incomes usually buy food in small local food stores with limited offer of goods and they buy clothes in the second-hand shops.

Further, more detailed analysis should be done to evaluate the impact of level of income, employment and other variables on the shopping habits of rural population (Table 2).

Table 2

Where have you usually been shopping in the past 12 months? (%)

Place of residence	Use services in Riga	Use services in the place of residence	Use services in other towns, territorial units in the municipality	Use services in other places in Latvia	Use services abroad	Have not used services	Difficult to say
Riga	93.8	93.8	0.6	32.0	21.0		5.3
Other town	42.0	97.2	24.7	24.6	13.4	0.6	
Rural area	31.0	89.8	51.5	24.4	9.0	0.9	

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004. Respondents could choose several answers, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100%

The data of survey show that such everyday services as café, hairdresser etc. have been used by rural population more rarely (Table 3).

Table 3

Where have you usually been using everyday services (cafe, hairdresser etc.) in the past 12 months? (%)

Place of residence	Use services in Riga	Use services in the place of residence	Use services in other towns, territorial units of municipality	Use services in other places in Latvia	Use services abroad	Have not used services	Difficult to say
Riga	85.9	85.9	0.3	19.40	12.8	8.1	4.7
Other town	23.9	86.6	10.1	9.9	6.8	8.0	0.6
Rural area	18.0	40.0	33.9	14.8	3.1	20.2	0.6

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004. Respondents could choose several answers, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100%

One fifth (20.2%) of rural inhabitants have not used these services in the past 12 month. It is more than twice to compare with other categories of respondents. Rural inhabitants have used the services the place of residence more rarely in (only 40%) to compare with 85.9% of inhabitants of Riga and 86.6% of inhabitants of other towns. Rural

inhabitants use these services in another town or a territorial unit of municipality more often (33.9%) than inhabitants of other towns – 10.1%.

These services are provided by private businesses and usually they are available in the places with high population density.

Further, more detailed analysis should be done to evaluate the impact of the level of income, employment and other variables on the use of these everyday services of rural population.

The data show that rural inhabitants have visited a doctor, used medical services (Table 4) in the place of residence not so often (61.1%) as other categories of respondents (inhabitants of Riga – 83.2% and inhabitants of other towns - 80.3%). Rural inhabitants have used medical services in another town or territorial unit in the municipality more often (31.8%) than inhabitants of other towns – 6.9%.

Table 4

**Where have you usually visited doctor, used medical services in the past 12 months?
(%)**

Place of residence	Use services in Riga	Use services in the place of residence	Use services in other towns or territorial units in the municipality	Use services in other places in Latvia	Use services abroad	Have not used services	Difficult to say
Riga	83.2	83.2	0.3	2.9	1.2	10.6	5.5
Other town	14.2	80.3	6.9	3.4	0.3	12.7	1.6
Rural area	13.1	61.1	31.8	12.0	0.9	15.8	2.5

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004. Respondents could choose several answers, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100%

The preliminary analysis of geographical dispersion of the services use shows that rural inhabitants use services in other town or territorial unit in the municipality more often, inhabitants of Riga and another towns have access to a wide range of services in their places of residence. Rural inhabitants have used some services during the last 12 months more rarely than other categories of respondents. Further studies are needed to evaluate accessibility of several services (e.g. medical services) and the demand for them among rural inhabitants. An influence of employment, education and age of respondents should be taken into account in more detailed analysis.

Mobility of rural population

Everyday mobility is a substantial resource that provides access to different opportunities. Several resources are needed for everyday mobility, e.g., access to transport infrastructure, personal means of transport or public transport, as well as an ability and motivation to go somewhere. Everyday mobility in rural areas (related to a job, use of services, maintenance of social contacts etc.) is closely connected to the distance from the urban centres, available transport infrastructure and other resources people have – personal car, bicycle, driving skills.

Possibilities of mobility are an important aspect of quality of life and life-satisfaction. In places with limited possibilities of commuting people consider leaving the rural areas as place of residence more often if there are no reasonable opportunities of work, no access to different services and other opportunities within a reachable distance. The people from rural areas who have the opportunities and resources for mobility, for example, people with higher income, who own or use the means of transport and commute daily in order to get to work are in a better position than those who do not have the resources, they have no personal car or have a difficult access to the public transport.

Respondents answered a question about the use of any public transportation services during the past month. The data show that inhabitants of Riga use public transportation services more often than inhabitants of smaller towns and rural population (Table 5).

Table 5

Have you used public transportation (tram, trolleybus, bus, microbus, train) services during the past month? (%)

Place of residence	Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total %
Riga	86.8	12.6	0.6	100.00
Other towns	65.8	33.4	0.8	100.00
Rural area	64.8	34.1	1.1	100.00
All respondents	72.3	26.9	0.8	100.00

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004.

Regarding the access to the personal car in case of necessity, the data show that there is no significant difference between inhabitants of Riga, other towns and rural areas. Personal cars are likely less accessible to residents of other towns than to other categories of respondents. Data in Table 6 show that rural people have even slightly better access to the personal car than the residents of Riga.

Do you have access to the personal car (you own it, you could borrow it or somebody could drive you) in case of necessity? (%)

Place of residence	Yes	No	Difficult to say	Total %
Riga	72.3	23.6	4.1	100.00
Other towns	68.9	29.0	2.1	100.00
Rural area	73.0	23.2	3.8	100.00
All respondents	71.3	25.4	3.3	100.00

Source: Survey of the Latvian population, September-October, 2014, n=1004.

To analyse the use of different means of transport, respondents were asked to answer questions about the means of transport usually used to get to everyday destinations. All categories of respondents use private transport (car, bicycle) to get to work-place with almost equal frequency - 22.6 % of residents of Riga, 25 % of residents of other towns and 26.9 % of rural people. Residents of Riga more often use public transport – 35.4% to compare with 11.5 % of residents of other towns and 6.6% of rural people. Rural people do not need to use any mean of transport to get to their work-place more often (39.2 %) to compare with 29.8 % of residents of Riga and 32.2 % of residents of other towns. Some of them perhaps work at their family farms, but part of them could be unemployed. People outside Riga more often reach their work-places just walking – 20.1% of rural people and 25% of residents of other towns. Only 9.7% of residents of Riga walk to their work-places.

Discussion

Functional relationships between people and places are changing rapidly. The statement that countryside, as a location with fewer opportunities, will stay practically empty in the near future is controversial. More and more people live in rural areas but work in towns. Commuting to the nearby town for work is a widespread practice, providing access to the most vital services and opportunities (Zobena, Lace & Benga, 2012). In the regional development context the distance from Riga, the capital, is becoming more important than regional differences.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

The first results of the empirical research show that geographical dispersion of the consumption of services and the use of opportunities is a part of rural people's everyday activity. The same services are not equally accessible for people in the places with a limited structure of opportunities and everyday mobility resources and for inhabitants of more prosperous places.

The concept of service provision in rural areas has to be changed – a wide offer of services in rural areas should be replaced by accessibility of services in nearby towns. Developed public transport and road infrastructure as well as the development of communication (particularly the Internet) are becoming even more important.

The further analysis is needed to understand patterns of mobility and use of services by different groups of rural population taking into account their age, education, employment and level of income, the structure of opportunities of different places.

Acknowledgments

The study was funded by the European Social Fund project “Elaboration of Innovative Diagnostic Instruments for Regional Development” (No2013/0057/1DP/1.1.1.2.0/13/APIA/VIAA/065).

Bibliography

1. Low, S., Altman, I. (1992). *Place Attachment*. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 279-304
2. LR Saeima. (2008). Administratīvo teritoriju un apdzīvoto vietu likums (Law on Administrative Territories and Settlements). (Adopted: 18.12.2008.), *Latvijas Vestnesis*, 202 (3986), 30.12.2008., *Zinotajs*, 3, 12.02.2009.
3. Stedman, R.C. (2002). Toward a Social Psychology of Place: Predicting Behavior from Place-Based Cognitions, Attitude, and Identity. *Environment and Behavior*: Volume 34, pp. 561-581.
4. Stiglitz, J., et al., (2009): Report of the Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress. Retrieved: http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf. Access: 05.01.2015.
5. Tisenkopfs, T., Bela-Krumina B. (red.). (2006). *Dzīves kvalitāte Latvija*. Rīga: Zinatne.
6. van der Ploeg, J.D. and Long, A., eds. (1994). *Born from within: Practice and Perspectives of Endogenous Rural Development*. Van Gorcum – Assen, pp. 195-203.
7. van der Ploeg, J. D., Marsden, T. (eds.) (2008). *Unfolding Webs: The Dynamics of Regional Rural Development*. Assen: Van Gorcum, pp. VII-IX.
8. Zobena A., Lace I., Benga E. Service Provision and Social Cohesion in Rural Areas: Interaction Between Commuting, Mobility and the Residential Preferences in Latvia Retrieved: <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/handle/126119>, 2012 Access: 05.01.2015.
9. Zobena A., Mezs I. Sustainability of territories: the individual perspective. *Latvia. Human Development Report, 2012/2013 Sustainable Nation*. B.Bela (ed) Rīga: Advanced Social and Political Research Institute of the University of Latvia, 2014, pp.81-92