



**Rural Development
and Land Use**

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A Rural Country in Transition

Alternatives for Lithuania

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CASE STUDY Lithuania

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20th Century Rural History

Developing Rural Society in the Early 1900s

In the beginning of the 20th century ‘rural areas’ in Lithuania were perceived as isolated and stagnant areas, only used for primitive agriculture. Lack of infrastructure and means of communication and transportation confirmed this opinion, in spite of the fact that most of the population lived and worked in the rural areas. Later, in the Independent Lithuania (1918-1940), the rural economy became more appreciated as being of significant value for the existence of the whole state. The better-off farmers became the backbone of the emerging middle class, and education was improved in rural areas. Woodworkers, carvers, stonemasons, stove-makers, metal-beaters, potters, rope-makers, etc. were also part of the rural village society. In the villages there were also weavers, knitters, tailors and shoemakers, and their products could often be very interesting and valuable folk art. In 1940, 75% of the people in Lithuania still lived in the rural areas, most of them being farmers and farm workers (Aleksa, 1999).

In the beginning of the Second World War, Lithuania was occupied first by the Soviet Union, then by Germans. Lithuanian soldiers took part in the war on the German side. The German influence and occupation led to great

human losses to Lithuanian society, not least the extinction of the more than 300,000 Lithuanian Jews who were killed or sent to a certain death in concentration camps.

The Soviet Union again occupied Lithuania from 1944 onwards and more people were resettled, killed or sent to work camps in the Soviet Union (gulags). The numbers actually imprisoned in the gulags are still debated by historians from different countries. However, they were many. During and after the war, there were also many Lithuanians who went into exile in countries in the West.

The Soviet Period

The outcome of the war was that independent Lithuania was made part of the Soviet Union. The impact on rural areas of these traumatic events was that a great number, especially men in their most active age, were not present. This affected rural activities such as farming, handicraft and small businesses, but people with intellectual skills such as teachers were also lacking. The enforced collectivisation of agricultural land destroyed farmers as a social class, and the civil activity of rural inhabitants was devaluated. Rural people’s impact on state development diminished. Old farmsteads were abandoned and a new society in the rural areas, consisting of blockhouse villages to house farm workers on the big state farms and



Figure 19.1. The Plokštine missile base is located near lake Plateliai, in Žemaitija National Park. It was built in 1962 and armed with R-12U intermediate range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. After the collapse of the USSR the base was turned over to the national park administration who have turned it into an 'Exposition of Militarism' and with guided tours. Photo: Andrius Vangas.

collective farms, was formed. Most private businesses, professions and craftsmen were replaced by industry. In addition, farming experts, military personnel, engineers and other experts settled in Lithuania from other parts of the Soviet Union, as a part of the common strategy of the Soviet Union leadership to unify the different parts of the federation.

Lithuania's urbanisation was very intensive after the war, agricultural production was intensified and industrialisation was rapid. The number of people directly involved in primary agricultural activity decreased very rapidly, as the mechanisation of agriculture released labour to jobs in new industries in urban areas. This in turn made a great impact on education, professional structure, residence and even on everyday life. Lithuanian farm workers were 50% more productive than the Soviet average and 50% of the country's farm products were exported to other Soviet states. A positive development for rural areas during Soviet times was that quite large parts of valuable natural landscapes were saved as protected areas.

Post-Soviet Rural Lithuania

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1989-1991, factories, rural schools and even collective farms closed

down. Many reforms were made and quick decisions were taken which were positive for some but negative for most common people. During only a few years most of the agricultural land was privatised, but at the same time (1989-1994) agricultural production decreased by 50% (Iwaskiw, 1995). It was a turbulent time. Unemployment increased rapidly, and health care and other social welfare structures were neglected (since these were usually connected with state industrial companies, or state or collective farm organisations). This of course caused great disappointment and difficulties, especially for common rural people.

After the first difficult years of negative trends, living standards rose rapidly during the first decade of 2000. In 2001-2008 (until the financial crisis hit the world in 2008), Lithuania had one of the fastest growing economies in Europe.

The globalisation trends have had more impact on the rural economy and rural inhabitants since EU membership. During 2002-2007, scientific studies showed that the professional structure of the rural population again changed dramatically. Rural residents in the non-agricultural sector increased from 35 to 45% and rural business people increased from 2 to 4%. Retired and disabled

people made up about 30% and unemployed people on welfare schemes about 10%. Many people also emigrated from rural Lithuania to other countries during these years (Jasaitis, 2005; Jasaitis, 2006a; Jasaitis, 2006b; Jasaitis, 2006c; Jasaitis & Surkuvienė, 2006).

Rural Lithuania in the European Union

Joining EU

When Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, agricultural workers constituted 13% of the total employable population (Statistikos..., 2007). Now even greater changes were introduced for the rural population. The agricultural sector was affected by EU policies and subsidies and an increasing number of rural citizens could have training for jobs outside the agricultural sector.

In 2008-2009 Lithuania was struck particularly hard by the financial crisis. In 2009, real GDP decreased by 18.5%. This caused high unemployment, cuts in public spending, great difficulties for private businesses, etc (Grant, 1997).

Negative Impacts on Rural Society

In spite of modernisation the rural part of the country still has a negative image among urban people, and this prevails even among decision-makers. The popular belief is that the main task of rural areas is the agricultural sector. Decisions affecting rural citizens are made without their participation, and this divides the country. The prolonged, but unfinished, land reform and many other policies discourage people from living in rural areas.

The landscape is sometimes destroyed by vandals and the activities of businesses seeking a fast profit. For instance, deforestation is a common problem, causing loss of biodiversity and increased erosion. Rural local roads are damaged by heavy vehicles and heavy agricultural machinery but the roads are left without maintenance. Agricultural land is left untilled, and ruins of useless Soviet-era buildings and wrecks of damaged machinery make the landscape ugly. Outskirts of local forests have become a dump, with no one responsible for cleaning this up. Not even the municipal police seem to care.

Urban Life

On the other hand, life is not satisfactory for common people in urban areas either: for instance very little attention has been given to enhancing the environment. Air, water and soil pollution is increasing, waste handling is poor, the traffic situation is very problematic, drinking water supply is of low quality, etc. Fuel and electricity prices are increasing. There is no space for children's games, sports activities or neighbourhood collaboration. There are no flowers around residential blocks and their interior is deteriorating. Added to this is the recent rise in unemployment.

Fortunately some new positive trends can also be noted. New forms of traditional and non-traditional farming are being developed, new commercial products and other activities are being created in the countryside, and new concepts of residence in suburban or rural areas are being realised.

Aspirations of Rural People in Lithuania

Attitudes of Countryside Populations

Social science research has recently been carried out to investigate people's ideas on future sustainable development in rural Lithuania. Questions were asked on what kind of society they would like to create, what social stratification they would welcome and what they think about respecting private property (of the employer, the neighbour or the state). This research revealed that people with the most experience of 'collective property' had trouble understanding how to value the concept of private property. They also had trouble perceiving their own responsibility for the state and society, and e.g. for taking part in self-governing. For those convinced that the state has to care for everybody, it is hard to image a vision of personal prosperity which each individual is expected to create their own long-term strategy of personal activity.

The results show that people actually cannot articulate their wishes because they do not know the meaning of the concepts used by the researchers. The respondents were clearly not able to identify objects in nature and describe their availability. They were unable to recognise many of the objects of wildlife (plants, trees, birds, etc.) in a natu-



Figure 19.2. View of the small village Medingenai, in western Lithuania in 2005. Photo: Patrick Wilken.

ral environment or to understand the interactions between ecosystems (Jasaitis, 2006c). They did not understand the importance of agriculture and ecology. Most of them were unable to understand why it is important not to dump litter and did not know how to behave in the forest, in the meadow, by the lake or at the river. Their knowledge of nature was not based on personal experience.

Seeking New Ways

An analysis of migration processes also showed changes in the structure of rural and urban population: 1) People looking for jobs are moving to cities; 2) more prosperous social groups are trying to obtain private households in suburban areas.

These tendencies are strongly related to changes in business development: more and more jobs can be created by small flexible business firms in residential houses, and modern industrial factories can be established in suburban areas, where good infrastructure (highways) and fast internet networks have been installed.

Another area investigated through interview surveys was people's ideas about spiritual communication and communication between generations. Possibilities for

meeting places or household communities where people with similar professional or business interests could meet were also perceived as activities suitable for rural areas.

In conclusion, alternatives for sustainable rural development were the following, according to the respondents' views: 1) well planned housing areas (including infrastructure and public services); 2) multi-structural diversified economics; 3) functions for recreation, rehabilitation and tourism; 4) educational and experience-enhancing activities; 5) preservation of ethnic and cultural heritage; 6) preservation and management of natural landscape.

The local rural communities have the best possibility to determine the kind of services needed. Research information from settlements and townships can become the basis for planning training and adult education for people looking for new careers. Training in business management, small business methodology and the basics of cooperation is also needed. Legislation, economic incentives, better planning and increased cooperation between different political levels in society are other suggestions. However, the main question is who should pay for all the necessary changes and which areas should be prioritised.

Development Opportunities

Alternatives for Future Rural Development

A radical rethink is needed of concepts such as *villagers*, *rural economics* and *rural functions*. The main task for policymakers now should be to balance traditional and modern functions of rural areas to the benefit of the citizens and the society as a whole. The question here is how to include long-term, careful treatment of natural resources in the definition of sustainable development, and whether alternative sources of energy can be developed for rural use and a healthy rural life style promoted (Treinys, 2005; Treinys, 2006). Several projects have been proposed for an alternative rural development (Lietuvos..., 1997; A Typology of..., 1999).

There is an increasing interest in the former life style and old buildings in the countryside. Many buildings and facilities have been restored as weekend cottages or long-term holiday homes in the Lithuanian villages. The activity of organisations such as 'Tribe houses' (*Giminės namai*), which promote a healthy lifestyle, organic food, creation of family leisure time areas and everyday communication with nature, is becoming increasingly popular.

Rural areas may also develop as suburban fringes to large cities. New suburban areas are planned, which have appropriate planning of infrastructure, and fit the surrounding environment, have parks, recreational areas, shopping malls, schools, and cultural centres.

Land Reform and Restructuring of Agriculture and Forestry

A very bureaucratic and legislative procedure of privatisation of rural land has been carried out recently. When Lithuania became an independent state, small parcels (down to 2 ha) were given to rural people who had no land. The problem was that the vast majority of these owners did not have any suitable farm buildings or agricultural machinery (Jasaitis, 2005). In addition, the new land owners were not familiar with the economic complexity of small-scale farming. Only in very rare cases were these owners able to develop a business activity such as growing herbs, seedlings and saplings, agricultural tourism, out-of-school teaching of children, etc. The majority of the owners of these small farms today are retired people, working their land with very old-fashioned

methods. For them this land reform was positive, since they can generate some income as a supplement to their pension. The younger private land owners more often use the land for building large, well-equipped houses.

The question is what should be done for the future with these land reform plots and what should be done with remaining large state farms and collective farms.

Large- and Small-scale Tourism

The main tourist attraction in Lithuania is the beaches, but they are often overcrowded and alternatives are needed for rural tourism (Rural development, 2005). In nearby EU states, rural areas have a diversity of tourism alternatives, such as: private health services, sport centres, recreation areas, rehabilitation centres for disabled people, amusement parks, adventure parks, outdoor museums, restaurants, pubs, coffee places, youth camps, museums at historical or religious heritage buildings, shops for traditional handicrafts, etc. These alternatives do not always need large investments – some of them could be set up on a very limited scale. However, apart from better infrastructure and public services, in relation to tourism there is also need for improving legislation and marketing of such activities. Payment of fees for different activities also needs to be discussed.

Restore Identity and National Pride

National heritage need to be maintained and issues such as identity, local history, language and ethics need to be taken up to ensure that people are proud of the region where they were born (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). Possible options in achieving this are school textbooks, museums, research policies and research funding.

There are several important issues for the creation of a common identity. Collection of narrative folklore, folk songs, adages and other samples of national verbal creativity; development of regional studies and using such material in the context of formal and non-formal education; practical training in ethnic crafts and traditional rural folk creativity; creation of special tourist routes, devoted to ethnographic or historical studies; analysis of national ethnic heritage in different regions (lifestyle, means of communication, folk traditions, etc.) in collaboration with cultural centres, sport or religious organisations, youth clubs and so on.

A good example of the activities suggested is The Local Action Group (LAG) of Siauliai district, which took part in the EU LEADER+ programme. They appealed to the local rural communities and asked for help in recording and evaluating the resources of local heritage objects. The results of this campaign exceeded all expectations. Hundreds of historical, architectural, literary and nature objects were documented: imposing buildings (churches, manors), old cemeteries, monuments, memorial homesteads, memorial barrows, etc.; but also landscape objects: mineral springs, lakes, rivers, multi-bole trees, hills, valleys, etc. (www.zum.lt/min/failail/partnerystes_organizavimas.pdf)

The Aesthetic Dimension – Cleaning up

It is necessary to revive the work of the Society for Beautifying Lithuania, which was created by writer Juozas Tumas-Vaizgantas, Prof. Povilas Matulionis and others. This needs to be made part of people's attitude again, so that e.g. they avoid littering the landscape. There is therefore a need to inform and educate, perhaps have practical campaigns with schools, or fund this function using tax revenue.

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Chapter 20

Chapter 19

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