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INFLUENCE OF CAP ON SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN GREEK AND BULGARIAN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

This paper aims to make a comparison between Greek and Bulgarian rural areas, in terms of social sustainability indicators. Social sustainability is related to social capital, social inclusion, social exclusion and social cohesion in rural economies, terms that can be measured by relevant social indicators. The paper focuses on the effects of farm household behaviour on social sustainability in regard to changes in employment, gender, migration and social capital. To this end two case study areas were selected; Macedonia and Thrace in Greece and South east Planning Region in Bulgaria. The data were collected by a survey carried out in the context of the European FP7 project entitled CAP-IRE (Assessing the multiple Impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy on Rural Economies). The survey included eleven case study areas in nine case study areas of the European Union. The paper also compares the results from the Greek and Bulgarian case study areas with the average results of the eleven European case study areas.

Key words: social sustainability indicators, rural areas

Introduction

A traditional argument connected to CAP is the issue of maintaining economically vital rural communities, particularly in disadvantaged regions where alternative income opportunities were limited. This issue is still a big driver of policy action in poorest areas by virtue of the decreasing prices of agricultural products and the difficulties of many farms. However, in the last decades, a full range of new issues has emerged. Ageing of population in rural areas, raise the issue of “greying” society in connection to liveliness of rural areas and residential use of farms. Intra and extra EU migration has led to important changes in agricultural labour market and in non-agricultural residential communities in rural areas. While particularly in southern Europe immigrant labour has brought a major contribution to economic survival of agriculture and created new opportunities for labour allocation outside farming for local families, it also has generated new social inclusion problems (Kasimis et al., 2003). This, together with the movement of population outside towns renews the issue of rural-urban interaction. The role of the household as the core of the independent farm tenants is changing with the increasing labour opportunities for the youth and this also changes the profile of gender issues in rural areas. Gender issues are a typical aspect of agriculture labour division. Though it may be argued that they have a strong social rather than biological foundation (Shortall, 2002) they are attached to both technology changes and modes of governance and social vision (Prugl, 2004). Altogether, these strong changes ask for a revision of problems connected with the management of social capital and social inclusion. On one hand, exclusion is an issue with a long story in rural areas, though the study of mechanisms and the relations with policy have been for a long time insufficient in spite of its relevance (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; Shortall, 2004). On the other, social capital, individual skills and knowledge is an increasing factor in productivity and competitiveness, particularly in an enlarged and liberalised economy. Interactions with policy are not always straightforward, but certainly important (Winter, 1997). New perspectives in rural development include consideration of local as well as EU wide issues. For example, the international cooperation between rural areas reveals an increasing connectivity within and with outside the EU space (Ray, 2001).

In the context of the research project entitled CAP-IRE (Assessing the multiple Impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy on Rural Economies), which is a European FP7 funded project; there was an attempt to assess multiple impacts of the CAP in eleven European rural areas including Greek and Bulgarian case study areas. The objective of this paper is to make a comparison between Greek and Bulgarian rural areas by measuring social sustainability indicators. The paper focuses on the effects of household behavior on social sustainability in terms of changes in employment, gender, migration and social capital. In order to study and measure these impacts we studied a number of indicators relating to economic data, but also employment, social cohesion, social inclusion and demographic changes. The necessary data were collected through a household survey, which included a questionnaire submitted to a large sample of farm households in the European Union countries. We have selected some questions of this questionnaire, which consist the social indicators on which based on to compare the two European Union rural areas.

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is “one of the three legs of the sustainability stool” (the other two are environmental and economic): each leg needs the support of the other two. There is general agreement that the different dimensions of sustainable development have not been equally prioritized by policy makers within the sustainability discourse (Drakakis Smith, 1995). There is limited literature that focuses on social sustainability to the extent that a comprehensive study of this concept is still missing. A recent study by the OECD (2001) points out that social sustainability is currently dealt with in connection with the social implication of environmental politics rather than as an equally constitutive component of sustainable development.

As a result, there have been very few attempts to define social sustainability as an independent dimension of sustainable development. Each author or policy maker derives their own definition according to specific criteria, making a generalised definition difficult to achieve. For example, from a sociological standpoint (Littig and Griesler 2005) define social sustainability as “...a quality of societies. It signifies the nature-society relationships, mediated by work, as well as relationships within the society. Social sustainability is given, if work within a society and the related institutional arrangements satisfy an extended set of human needs [and] are shaped in a way that nature and its reproductive capabilities are preserved over a long period of time and the normative claims of social justice, human dignity and participation are fulfilled”.

In recent years, social sustainability has also become an important component of the mainstream political discourse of governments, which have attempted to identify the issues involved with this concept. A report by the European Panel on Sustainable Development (EPSD, 2004) points out that the Lisbon European Council in 2000 launched for the first time the idea of a social dimension as an integral part of the sustainable development model. An entire section of the Lisbon conclusions covered four main dimensions of social sustainability. These included:

- a commitment to enhance education, especially in relation to the new skills required for the ‘knowledge-intensive’ economy
- revamping employment policy so as to create ‘more and better jobs’
- modernising social protection to accommodate the many challenges faced by welfare states, to ‘make work pay’ and to promote equality;
- and the development of a strategy to counter poverty and social exclusion by ‘promoting social inclusion’ (EPSD, 2004: 18)

Along similar lines, Omann and Spangenberg (2002) contend that social sustainability focuses on the personal assets like education, skills, experience, consumption, income and employment and comprises every citizen’s right to actively participate in his/her society as an essential element. Thus, in their analysis, access to societal resources is a key element of social sustainability.

These attempts to identify the main elements of social sustainability highlight that a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework to a fully integrated approach to sustainability is still lacking from the literature and it is unlikely that one could be developed in the near future. This is due to the multifaceted nature of the concept of sustainability that amalgamates social, environmental and economic matters into a new independent entity.

Social Sustainability Indicators

Indicators are fundamental instruments to measure the progress towards the social sustainability. Indicators linked to surveys and questionnaires are an essential part of the sustainability assessment and implementation process because they reflect people’s perceptions of rural areas where they live. Further, the choice of indicators should depend on local circumstances and the needs and priorities of local people. The use of such indicators is a clear step toward more inclusion and representativeness that acknowledge place-specific conditions and the importance of subjective values at the policy-making level. However, it can be argued that it poses methodological problems related to the aggregation and comparison of the value of the indicators.

The first major step toward the identification of sustainability indicators can be traced back to Agenda 21, a blueprint of action to be taken toward the achievement of sustainability launched at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) at Rio de Janeiro (UN, 1992). The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) developed and tested in 22 countries a set 134 indicators in the categories of society, economies, environment and institutions with methodology

sheets for each indicator (UN, 2001). This set was subsequently revised twice and finalized in 2006 and consists of a set of 50 core indicators, which are part of a larger set of 98 indicators of sustainable development.

Despite a significant emphasis is given to social sustainability in community development policies, there exists only a handful of tools for its assessment, let alone for its promotion. Indeed, several indicators have been developed for the measurement of the different components of social capital but these have only been deployed to design community surveys at the local level or used as proxies to deduct the level of social capital of countries from available national statistics. This indicates that more empirical work needs to be done on social capital tools if the promotion of this concept is to be included in social sustainability policies.

Since the initial attempt by the UNCSO, a plethora of sustainability indicators have been developed. EUROSTAT also uses many indicators in order to describe social sustainability by measuring social phenomena such as demographic changes, employment, social cohesion, social inclusion and social capital. Data constraints loom large in a regional study, and 'subject to availability' turns out to be a significant caveat. Many of the indicators we might like to track are simply not available by region. The list of the proposed social indicators shows the indicators which are in practice examined, reflecting the balance between the ideal and the constraints of data availability. EUROSTAT has data availability for many of the main social indicators in all CAP-IRE case study areas. For these reasons we propose to use social indicators defined by EUROSTAT in order to describe the social dimension.

Areas of Study and Data

A household survey carried out in order to collect empirical information about present and future trends of changes in farms and the effects of the CAP and its reform on such changes. The data for this paper came from the results of this survey for the 11 case study areas of the CAP-IRE Project (www.cap-ire.eu). The regions that we analyze and compare in this paper are Macedonia-Thrace in Greece and South-East Planning Region in Bulgaria. The rest case study areas are Emilia-Romagna in Italy, Noord-Holland in Netherlands, Podlaskie in Poland, North East Scotland in United Kingdom, Andalusia in Spain, Centre and Midi-Pyrenees in France, Lahn-Dill-District and Ostprignitz-Ruppin in Germany.

The region 'Macedonia and Thrace' is located at the north part of Greece. This region has about 2 million inhabitants, 20% of the total population of Greece. The biggest city is Thessaloniki with about 1.2 million inhabitants. The study region is divided into 3 provinces those of West Macedonia, Central Macedonia and East Macedonia and Thrace, and 16 prefectures. The west and north part of the region is covered by mountains between of which is the famous Olympus. The south part of the region is coast. Many tourists visit the region during the winter (for skiing and agritourism) and the summer (for the nice coasts) offering a good income. The region has also important industry, mainly steel, textile, chemicals and petroleum products, energy units and food industries. The agricultural area of the total region is 1,384,700 ha, 40.6% of which is irrigated. Main crops in the region are cotton, sugar beets, trees (peaches, apples and pears) corn, hard wheat and tobacco. The study region has a strong integration between agricultural and industrial system, with the creation of a relevant agri-food system. It is to some extent concentrated around big cities, where the agricultural production is specialised in specific productions.

The South-East Planning Region in Bulgaria covers an area of 14,600 sq. km, 13% of the area of Bulgaria. It consists of three administrative districts – Bourgas, Sliven and Yambol. The population is about 782,000 inhabitants, about the 10% of the population in the country. The geographical location of the South-Eastern Region with its broad outlet on the Black Sea and the long boundary with Turkey is of strategic significance. The region is one of the richest in Bulgaria in biological diversity and natural old forests, providing opportunities for development of specialized tourism and recreation in the inside of the region. The main economic sectors in the region are tourism, agriculture and industry. The main industrial sectors are food and drinks production, textiles, petrochemical products, and wood processing. The agriculture produces the 18.8% of the regional GDP and uses the 6% of the employment. The main production are grapes, fruit and corn; cattle breeding. Fishery and aquaculture are present along the coastline. Water resources are limited and unevenly distributed, which necessitates using them wisely and if not managed effectively, may turn into an obstacle for the

agricultural development. The climatic conditions, diverse landscape (including along the Black Sea coast) and the generous availability of spas and curative mud are favourable conditions for tourism development. The region has rich cultural heritage whose protection and maintenance requires more efforts than are presently made.

The survey included a questionnaire submitted to a large sample of farm households and requested information related to both farm and non-farm activities. The sample was 300 farm households from Macedonia and Thrace in Greece and 273 farm households in South-East Planning Region in Bulgaria.

Eurostat uses many indicators in order to describe social sustainability by measuring social phenomena such as demographic changes, employment, social cohesion, social inclusion and social capital. We used the main social indicators defined by Eurostat in order to estimate the social sustainability. The used social indicators are the indicators which are in practice examined, reflecting the balance between the ideal and the constraints of data availability. We have selected a number of questions of this questionnaire, which consist the social indicators on which based on the identification of trends of changes in employment, gender, migration and social capital in rural areas in Greece and Bulgaria. The selected social indicators are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Proposed Social Indicators

K1	Members of household working on the agricultural holding full time
K2	Members of household working on the agricultural holding part time
K3	Off-farm activities
K4	Lifelong learning (Education Level of the respondent)
K5	Lifelong learning (Formal Agricultural Education)
K6	Percentage of total household revenue from farming
K7	Members of a sports club, recreation or other social organization
K8	Members of the farmers union or other farming pressure group
K9	Members of a nature conservation organization or environmental organization
K10	Using Internet for buy production means
K11	Using Internet for sell products
K12	Household members younger than 18
K13	Early school leavers
K14	Household members older than 65
K15	Male members of household
K16	Female members of household
K17	Household members 18-65
K18	Full time male employees
K19	Part time male employees
K20	Full time female employees
K21	Part time female employees
K22	Employees who are citizens from other EU countries
K23	Employees who are citizens from non EU countries
K24	Long term Unemployment

Results for Social Sustainability Indicators

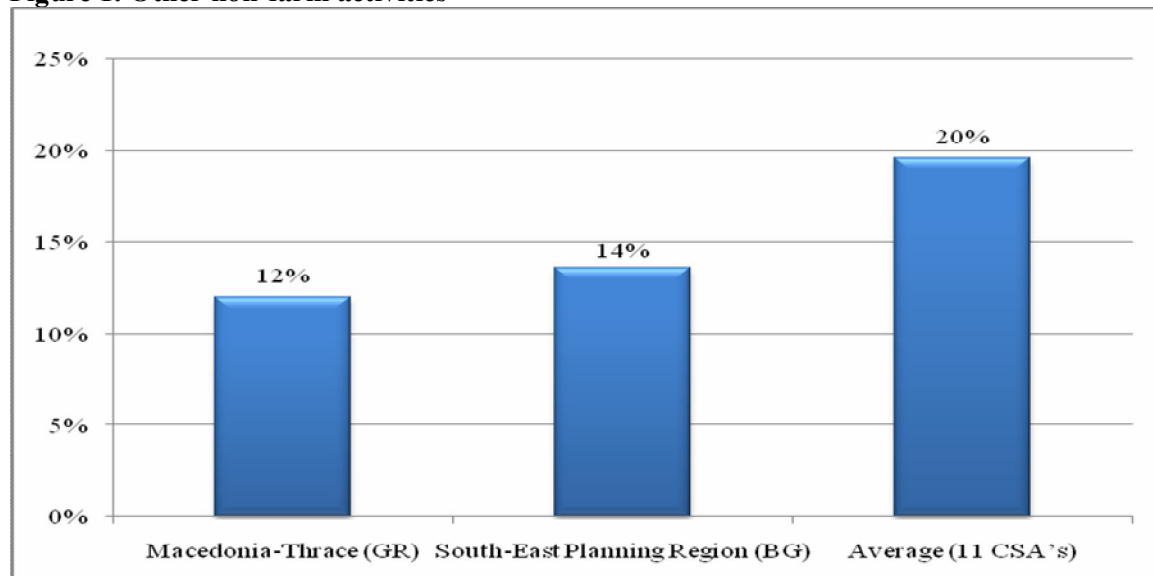
The next table (table 2) contents the results for K1 and K2 indicators, the agricultural holdings that have at least one family member working on the farm full time or part time. The differences are statistically significant ($\alpha=0.0001$). All the agricultural holdings in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) have family members working on the farm full time, and more than the half of them (58%) have family members working part time. Additionally, in South-East Planning Region (BG) most of the agricultural holdings (89%) have family members working full time and 39% have family members working part time. We can observe that both regions have higher rate than the average (83%) in family members working full time, but only Macedonia and Thrace (GR) has higher rate than the average in family members working part time.

Table 2. Family members working on the farm

	Macedonia-Thrace (GR)	South-East Planning Region (BG)	Average (11 CSA's)
Full Time	100%	89.4%	82.5%
Part Time	57.7%	39.2%	48.6%

$\alpha=0.0001$

Figure 1 contents the results for K3 indicator, the agricultural holdings doing any other activity different from crop cultivation and animal rearing. The rate of the agricultural holdings doing other gainful activities of all the case study areas is 20%. In both regions the rates are lower than the average. More specifically, in South-East Planning Region (BG) 14% and in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) 12% of the agricultural holdings do other gainful activities.

Figure 1. Other non-farm activities

In the next table (table 3) and in figure 2 we can see the results for the K4 and K13 indicators, the education level of the respondent and the rates of early school leavers. The differences are statistically significant ($\alpha=0.0001$). Regarding the high education level of the respondent, the indicator contents the respondents that have upper secondary education, post-secondary education, first stage of tertiary education or second stage of tertiary education.

Table 3. Education Level

	Macedonia-Thrace (GR)	South-East Planning Region (BG)	Average (11 CSA's)
None and primary (elementary school)	37.7%	2.9%	14.8%
Lower and Secondary (primary school)	40.7%	4.8%	18.2%
Upper secondary education (high school)	17.0%	64.7%	33.7%
Post-secondary non-tertiary education (professionalizing master)	3.0%	2.6%	20.0%
First stage of tertiary education (degree)	1.7%	25.0%	11.5%
Second stage of tertiary education (PhD)	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%

$\alpha=0.0001$

In all case study areas more than the half of the respondents (67%) has high education level, and in South-East Planning Region (BG), where the rates are much higher than the average, most of the respondents (92%) are highly educated. On the other hand, in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) only 22% of the respondents have high education level.

As regards the early school leavers, the indicator contents the respondents that have only primary or secondary education. In all case study areas less than 35% of the respondents are low educated. Moreover, in South-East Planning Region (BG) the rates are lower than the average, and more specifically, there are only 8% early school leavers. On the other hand, Macedonia and Thrace (GR) has the higher percentage in early school leavers, and much higher than the average, because 78% of the respondents have primary or secondary education.

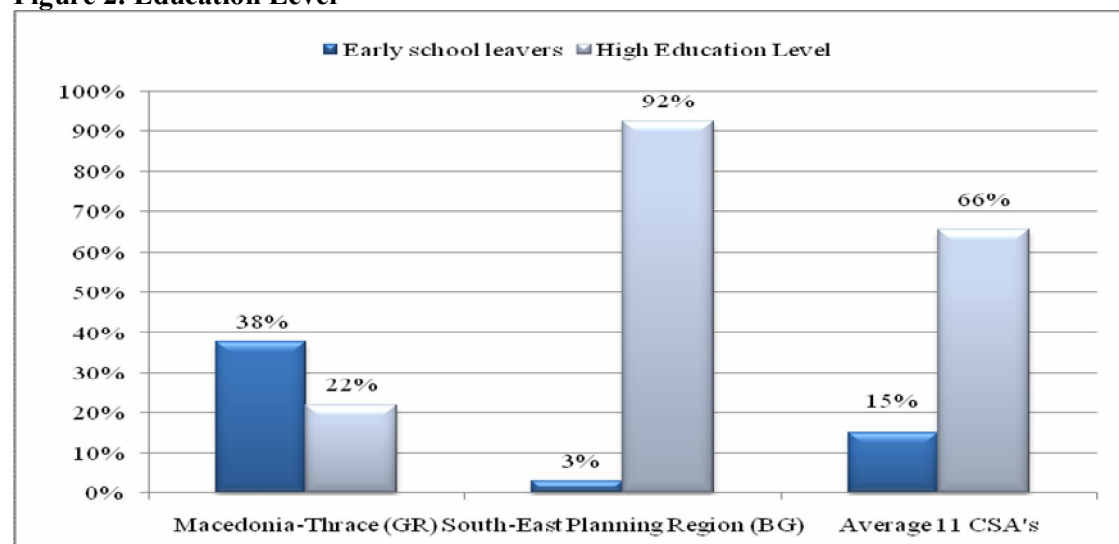
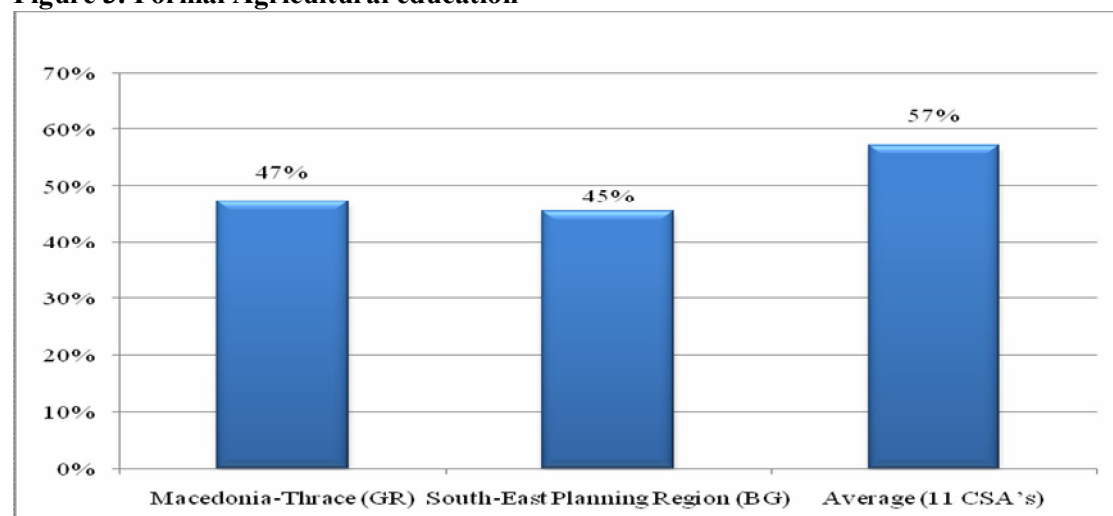
Figure 2. Education Level

Figure 3 show the agricultural holdings that have at least one member with formal agricultural education (K5 indicator). As we can observe, in all case study areas, more than the half of the agricultural holdings (57%), have at least one member with formal agricultural education. The rates for both regions are slightly lower than the average. More specifically, the 47% and 45% of the agricultural holdings have at least one member with formal

agricultural education in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) and in South-East Planning Region (BG), respectively.

Figure 3. Formal Agricultural education



The next table (table 4) contents the percentage of total household gross revenue that comes from farming (K6 indicator). The differences are statistically significant ($\alpha=0.0001$). In all case study areas in 22% of the agricultural holdings less than 30% of the total revenue comes from farming, in about 10% of the agricultural holdings 30-49% of the total household revenue is coming from farming, where in the rest of them more than 50% of the of the total revenue comes from farming.

In Macedonia and Thrace (GR) in about all the farm households more than 50% of the total household revenue is coming from farming, and more specifically in more the half of them more than 89% of the total revenue comes from farming. Moreover, in South Planning Region (BG) in only 8% of the agricultural holdings less than 30% of the total revenue comes from farming, in about 18% of the agricultural holdings 30-49% of the total household revenue is coming from farming, where in the rest of them more than 50% of the of the total revenue comes from farming.

Table 4. Percentage of total household gross revenue that comes from farming

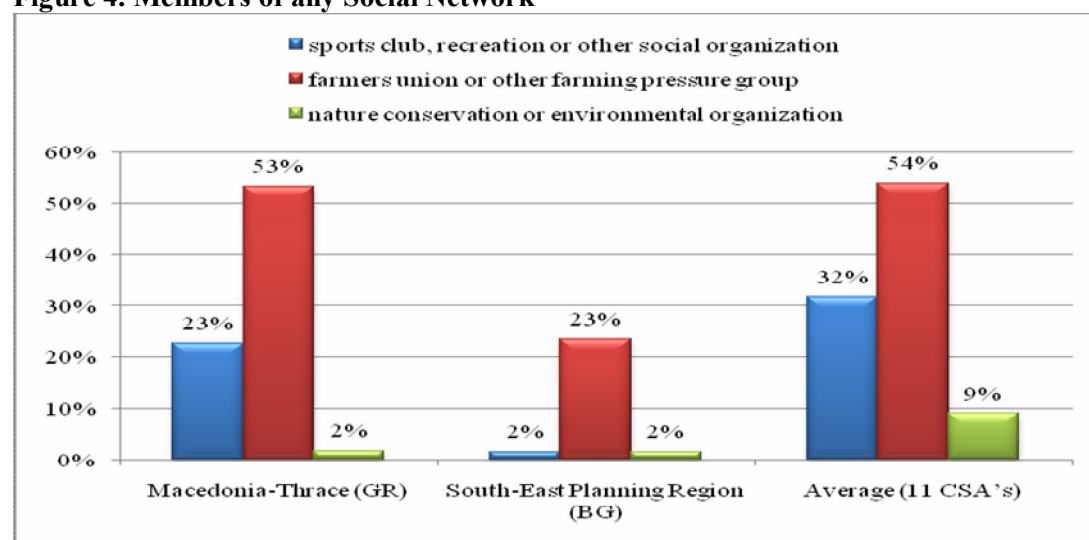
	Macedonia-Thrace (GR)	South-East Planning Region (BG)	Average (11 CSA's)
< 10%	1.0%	1.9%	11.7%
10-29%	0.3%	5.5%	9.5%
30-49%	4.0%	17.9%	11.0%
50-69%	14.7%	20.1%	15.0%
70-89%	26.7%	21.6%	14.9%
> 89%	53.3%	31.9%	35.1%

$\alpha=0.0001$

Figure 4 shows the agricultural holdings that have at least one family member who is a member of any Social Network (K7-K8-K9 indicators). More than 30% of the agricultural holdings in all case study areas are members in a sports club, recreation or other social organization, more than the half (54%) of the agricultural holdings are members in the farmers union or any other farming pressure group, but only 9% of the agricultural holdings are members in a nature conservation organization or other environmental organization.

In Macedonia and Thrace the rates are slightly lower than the average, where the 23% of the agricultural holdings are members in a sports club, recreation or other social organization, more than the half (53%) of the agricultural holdings are members in the farmers union or any other farming pressure group and only 2% of the agricultural holdings are members in a nature conservation organization or other environmental organization. In South-East Planning Region (BG) the rates are also lower than the average, where more than 20% of the agricultural holdings are members in the farmers union or any other farming pressure group, but less than 2% of the agricultural holdings are members in a sports club, recreation or other social organization, or in a nature conservation organization or other environmental organization.

Figure 4. Members of any Social Network



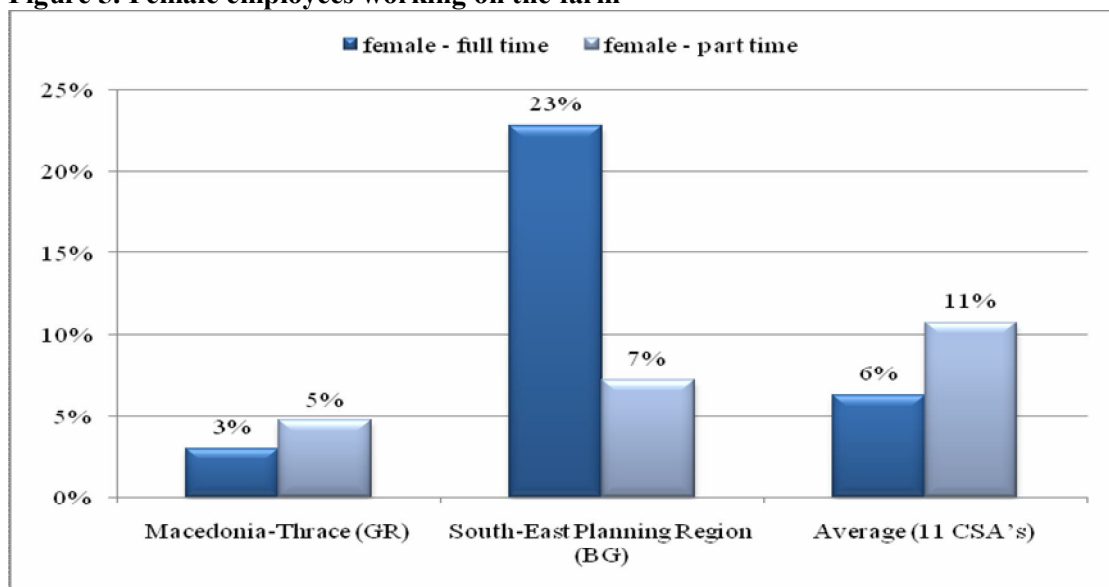
The next table and figure content the agricultural holdings that have at least one employee (male or female) working on the farm (K18, K19, K20 and K21 indicators). As we can observe, both regions have higher rates than the average in all indicators. In Macedonia and Thrace (GR) 32% of the agricultural holdings have male employees working full time, and more than the half of them (57%) have male employees working part time. Moreover, in South-East Planning Region (BG) the half of the agricultural holdings (52%), have male employees working full time and 30% of them have male employees working part time. The rates for all case study areas are lower, where less than 30% of the agricultural holdings have male employees working full or part time (Table 5). As regards female employees (Figure 5), the rates for all case study areas are lower: Only 6% of the agricultural holdings in all case study areas have female employees working full time. Also, in Macedonia and Thrace (GR), where the rates are lower than the average, 3% of the agricultural holdings have female employees working full time. Curiously, in South-East Planning Region (BG), the rate is much higher than the average, because more than 20% of the agricultural holdings have female employees working full time.

Moreover, 11% of the agricultural holdings in all case study areas have female employees working part time, 5% of the agricultural holdings in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) have female employees working full or part time, and 7% of them in South-East Planning Region (BG) have female employees working part time.

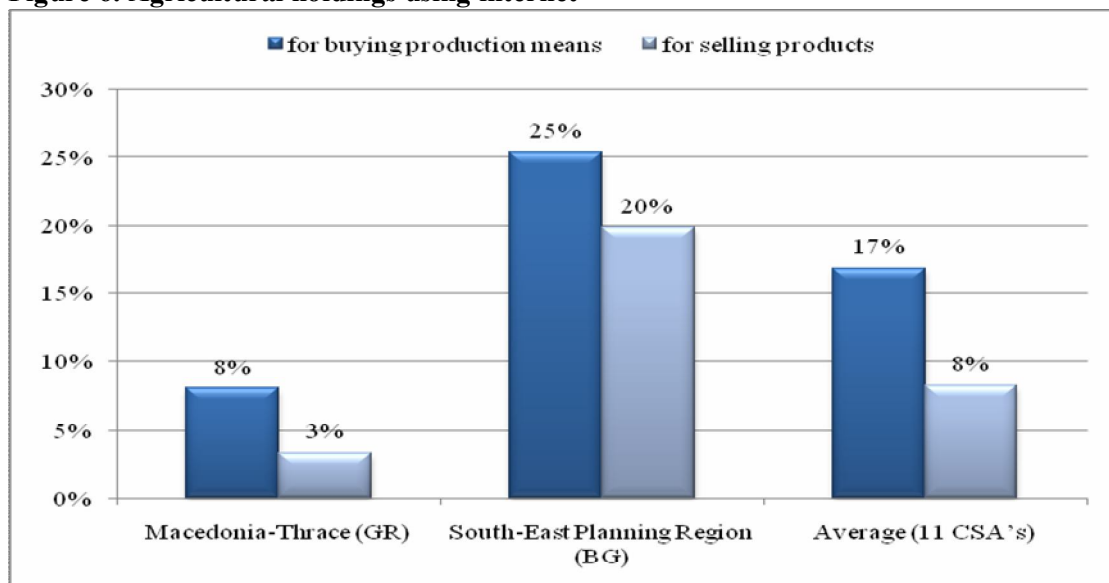
Table 5. Male employees working on the farm

	Macedonia-Thrace (GR)	South-East Planning Region (BG)	Average (11 CSA's)
male - full time	32.0%	52.4%	21.6%
male - part time	57.3%	29.5%	27.0%

$\alpha=0.0001$

Figure 5. Female employees working on the farm

In Figure 6 we can see if agricultural holdings are using internet for buying production means or for selling products. (K10-K11 indicators). The average of agricultural holdings using internet for buying production means in all case study areas is 17%. In Macedonia-Thrace (GR) the rate is lower than the average, where only 8% of the holdings using internet for buying production means. On the other hand, South-East Planning Region (BG) has higher rate than the average, because more than 25% of agricultural holdings using internet for buying production means.

Figure 6. Agricultural holdings using internet

Regarding the agricultural holdings using internet for selling products, the rates are lower for all case study areas. The average of the agricultural holdings using internet for selling products of all case study areas is only 8%, where in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) only 3% of the agricultural holdings using internet for selling products. On the contrary, South-East Planning Region (BG) has much higher rate than the average, where 20% of the agricultural holdings are using internet for selling products.

Table 6 contents some important indicators regarding household members (K12, K14, K15, K16, K17 and indicators). As regards, the ageing of population, in all case study areas 13% of the household members are older than 65. In both regions the rates are lower than the average. More specifically, in South-East Planning Region (BG) 10% of the household members are older than 65 and additionally in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) only 5% of the household members are older than 65. Furthermore, 23% of the household members are younger than 18 in all case study areas, but the rates in both regions are lower than the average. More specifically, in Macedonia and Thrace (GR) only 16% of the household members are younger than 18, and finally in South-East Planning Region (BG) only 17% of the household members are younger than 18.

Table 6. Household Members

	Macedonia-Thrace (GR)	South-East Planning Region (BG)	Average (11 CSA's)
members >18	15.8%	16.8%	22.9%
members <65	5.3%	9.7%	12.9%
members 18-65	77.9%	73.5%	64.2%
male members	50.5%	51.4%	52.5%
female members	49.5%	48.6%	47.5%

$\alpha=0.0001$

Figure 7. Long term unemployment rate

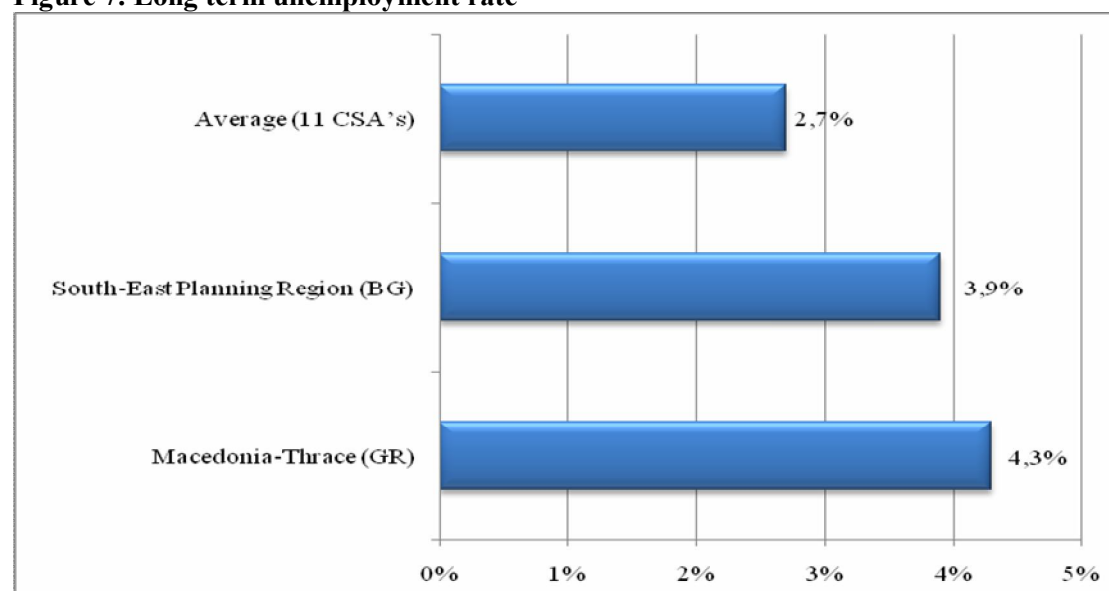
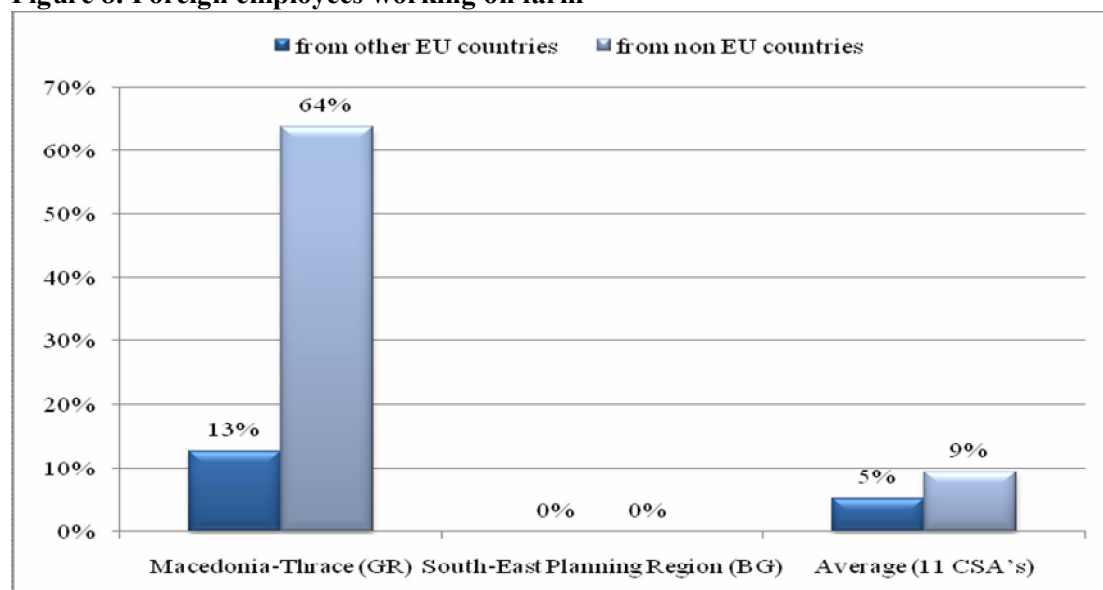


Figure 7 presents the rates of the long term unemployment in households (K24 indicator). As we can observe, both regions have higher rates than the average. More specifically, in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) the long-term unemployment rate is 4.3%. Additionally, in South-East Planning Region the long-term unemployment rate is 3.9%. On

the other hand, the average of long-term unemployed of all the case study areas is less than 3%.

The next figure (figure 8) shows the agricultural holdings that have at least one foreign employee working on the farm (K22, K23 indicators). We can see that Macedonia and Thrace (GR) has higher rates than the average, and more specifically, 13% of the agricultural holdings have foreign employees from other EU countries, but 64% have foreign employees from non EU countries. The average for all case study areas is lower, where less than 10% of the agricultural holdings have foreign employees from other EU countries or from non EU countries. On the other hand, we can observe that in South-East Planning Region (BG) none of the agricultural holdings have foreign employees from other EU countries or from non EU countries.

Figure 8. Foreign employees working on farm



Conclusions

The main idea of this paper is to make a comparison between a Greek and a Bulgarian rural area in terms of social sustainability indicators. This paper also compares the two rural areas with the average of the eleven European Union rural areas.

The data show that the problem of low educational attainments of the respondents is particularly relevant for rural areas, where also the problem of low agricultural education is common in case study areas with many early school leavers. The low educational level of most of the rural population causes a low employment rate and, consequently, may decrease the income, which in turn negatively affects the chance of receiving high quality education. Only in some case study areas the employment rate is very high. This may be partly explained by poor employment opportunities in many rural areas. The employment rate provides a different picture in the breakdown by gender, showing that in all case study areas the female employment rate is generally lower than the male one. This difference may be explained by two facts: a) the participation of women in education is lower than that of men in all the case study areas covered by the study; b) a large number of young women are still discouraged in entering the labour market.

The long-term unemployment rate is quite high in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) and South East Planning Region (BG), signaling that many people risk to be caught in “unemployment trap”. The risk of being long-term unemployed is especially high for people with low educational attainment.

As regards the implications of ageing on labour market in rural areas, people aged 65 and over represent less than 10% of population in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) and South East

Planning Region (BG). This may reveal not only an unfavorable demographic trend which may reduce local labor supply in the next few years, but can also pose a risk for the future sustainability of social protection systems.

The diffusion of internet use for buying productions means or for selling products is in general considered as a tool for stimulating economic development in rural areas and improving the functioning of economic activity and labour market. Internet usage is high in South-East Planning Region (BG), while it is still very low in Macedonia-Thrace (GR).

An important element characterizing rural areas is that of accessibility and participation to any Social Institution, especially to nature conservation organizations or other environmental organizations. The rates are quite higher concerning the participation to sports clubs, recreation or other social organizations. Moreover, in all case study areas, more than the half of the households is members in farmers unions or any other farming pressure group.

Diversified sources of income may indeed reduce the risk among farmers. The diffusion of very small or even semi-subsistence farms is a matter of serious concern, because in Macedonia-Thrace (GR) and South East Planning Region (BG), less than 15% of farmers are no longer only interested in production of raw materials for agro-business but also in other activities such as agro-tourism, environment protection, transmission of traditional knowledge (such as processing of traditional products) to new generations, openings for urban populations to participate in activities linked to eco-tourism.

With regard to immigrant employments, research has shown that the rates of migrants from outside the EU are much higher than the rates of migrants from other EU countries, in all case study areas. However, the higher rates are shown in areas where economic sectors characterized by strong seasonality and involving less qualified people are relevant. This is mainly the case of Macedonia and Thrace (GR), once traditional emigration area, which has become a destination for a large number of immigrants during the last fifteen years.

The aim of this paper is not the assessment of areas in developed, developing and underdeveloped, but a comparison made between the twenty four selected social indicators, and it does not necessarily mean that these areas follow a path of social sustainability decline. This analysis permits to point out some specific problems that characterize rural areas and determine specific problems for the rural population. This set of problems includes several difficulties linked to demography, remoteness, education, and to some special features of the labour market.

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