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New Approaches to Rural Development in Russia

Abstract: As many other countries, Russia suffers from fast depopulation of rural areas and decline of rural economy. For years, the state policy for mitigate negative consequences of these processes was considering agriculture as the main pillar of rural development and most of governmental finding was oriented to its support. Recently, the new state strategy for rural development was formulated, and in 2019 an ambitious national program approved. It assumes different options for rural territories to develop economy and achieve welfare, depending on natural and human resources availability, remoteness and other features. The paper presents a review of the current state of rural areas of the Russian Federation. It focuses on the main issues the countryside faces at the national level and also reveals regional differences in rural development. The study is based mainly on the author's analysis of national statistical data sources, including the Russian Agricultural census of 2016, and the results of conducted survey. Possible effects of the measures of the new state policy of rural development such as encouraging community-based initiatives and promotion of housing construction through preferential rural mortgage loans programs are analysed. Finally, the authors provide a brief description of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural development in Russia and attempt to forecast its further implications.

Keywords: rural areas, social and economic development, state policy, COVID-19, Russia.

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1. Introduction

In modern Russia, 27% of population live in the rural areas. The rural population poorer, rural utilities and social infrastructure are less developed and their quality of life is significantly below the average for urban areas. Consequently, the most active population of working age tend to migrate to urban areas.

The modern era has changed the character of development of the rural areas. The modern agri-food sector in Russia is one of the most successfully developed sectors of the economy. Production of such agricultural commodities such as grain, oilseeds and sugar beet has reached historic records. The country, which used to be an importer of agri-food, has become one of their main global exporters. For the last decade, Russia has achieved success in food quality and safety. The level of state support for agriculture is consistently between the European Union and the US, although the support programmes are not efficient from the point of view of targets achieved (Shik, Serova and Yanbykh 2020). Basic indicators for the sector (economic efficiency, productivity of labour etc.) and the total factor productivity as well as the proportion of producers using modern technologies is growing. But the growth of production efficiency in the Russian agrarian sector along with urbanisation has in many cases resulted in the marginalisation of significant parts of rural areas; many villages have been abandoned. Both academia and political non-agrarian establishments consider this situation to be an inevitable pattern of socio-economic development. This view is officially documented in the Russian *Strategy of the Country Spatial Development* (RG 2019b).

The depopulation of rural areas means rewilding and degradation – although not everyone leaves these areas, the state neglects them. Such a situation is neither desirable nor logical for developed countries. World experience shows that about a quarter of the population in the most developed countries prefer to live in rural areas, as long as modern living conditions are guaranteed.

Until recently, the Russian authorities were trying to solve the problems of rural areas by supporting agricultural producers. Yet agriculture is no longer the main source of income in many rural areas. Consequently, public funds allocated to the agrarian sector are at best neutral in relation to the development of a given area, at worst they divert the population from alternative approaches to increase their income and thereby hamper rural development.

On the other hand, rural underdevelopment also becomes an obstacle to progress of agricultural production. The marginalised social environment causes risks to production; businesses cannot attract qualified workers for full-time employment so they opt for rotational work. Agribusiness companies are often forced to invest in the utilities and social infrastructure in their areas, which raises production costs, reduces revenues, and lowers competitiveness.

Thus modern rural development is not only a limiting factor of further growth of the agrarian sector, but also a serious social challenge to the development of the whole nation.

2. Depopulation of rural areas

Since 2009 the decline in the rural population in Russia has averaged 100,000 annually, since 2017, it has been over 200,000 per year, and since the beginning of the 21st century, due to depopulation and migration to cities, the rural population has decreased by 1.6 million (Figure 1).

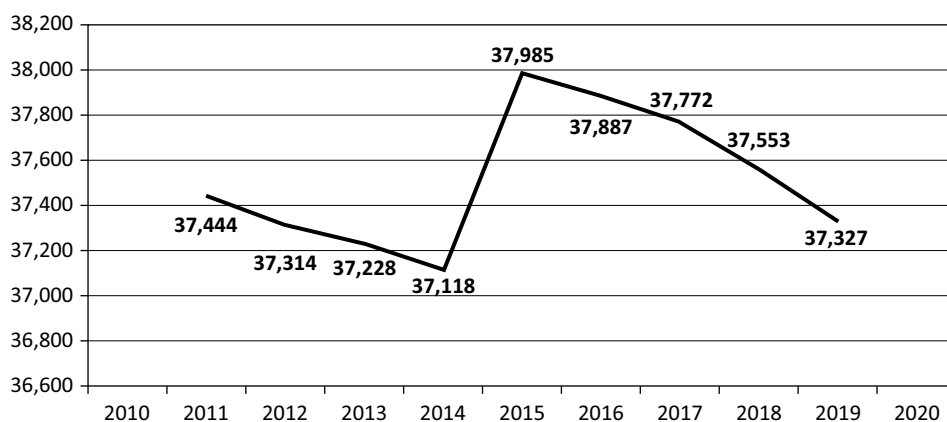


Figure 1. Russian Federation: rural population dynamics (as of January 1 of the corresponding year, in thousands)¹

Rysunek 1. Federacja Rosyjska: dynamika ludności wiejskiej (w tysiącach, według stanu na 1 stycznia, rok do roku)

Source: Serova et al. 2020.

Źródło: Serova et al. 2020.

In rural areas, the birth rate has been falling since 2014, and for the first time in the history of the country, the total birth rate in rural areas was lower than in urban ones. At the same time, the mortality rate in rural areas invariably remains higher than in the cities (13.6 against 12 deaths per 1000 inhabitants). Thus the natural decline in population in rural areas exceeds the urban level (Monitoring 2020). The consequences of the natural decline of the rural population and the balance

¹ The increase in the rural population in 2013-2015 is related to the changes in administrative division in the country.

of migration to the cities in Russia is negative, reaching over 100,000 people annually (2018). This emigration is slightly mitigated by immigration, mainly from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Numerous rural settlements have disappeared from the map, the backbone of civilisation has been drastically destroyed, historical traditions lost, and the cultural landscape shattered. Since 1959 the total number of villages – the most common type of rural settlement in Russia – has decreased by 141,000, or almost half (Rosstat 2019). According to 2016 Agricultural Census, 13% of all rural settlements in Russia did not have a permanent population, i.e. were abandoned (Rosstat 2016).

The population of rural municipalities – which include one or several rural settlements – is rapidly decreasing. At the beginning of 2019, the overall number of municipalities of this kind was under 17,500, with two thirds of them combining settlements with less than two thousand inhabitants (Monitoring 2020). A steady decline in the number of rural settlements has been observed almost all over Russia, with the exception of some regions of the southern and far eastern districts. The decrease in number of villages is especially significant in the central and north-western districts, where the rural population mostly lives in small communities. Depopulated rural settlements are losing their ability to perform administrative and other functions of local centres. The authorities usually respond simply by uniting several disappearing municipalities into the new ones. Almost everywhere in Russia, there is a polarisation of the pattern of rural settlement. In 2014–2018, total population in the smallest rural settlements (less than 500 people) increased. The total population of the largest rural settlements (more than 5,000 people) where almost 11.2 million people live – almost a third of the country's total rural population country – also increased (Monitoring 2020).

Based on the study of statistical data sources, we identify the following types of region according to the geographical features of the settlement of rural territories: 1) the Arctic zone, Far North and the mountains of south-eastern Siberia with an extremely sparse network of small rural settlements; 2) the northern European part of Russia and Siberia, where the average size of rural settlements is slightly higher; 3) central Russia, the Volga region, southern Urals and south-western Siberia with a relatively dense network of average-size settlements (up to 2.500 inhabitants); 4) the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts, with a relatively dense network of large rural settlements (only in one of these regions – in Krasnodar province² – are there 11 stanizy (Cossack settlements) each with a population of over 25,000, including the largest rural settlement in Russia – staniza Kanevskaya

² All the territorial units of Russian Federation furthermore in this paper are called 'provinces' although, in fact, there are different names used for these units, for instance 'oblast', 'kray', 'autonomous region', 'republic'. By calling them 'provinces' we attempt to simplify understanding for the reader.

(46,100 people); 5) the periphery of the largest cities, primarily capitals: Moscow, Yaroslavl, Tula, Leningrad and Sverdlovsk provinces, where the average population of rural settlements is relatively high, but their network is sparse; 6) the Astrakhan province and Primorsky province with the ribbon development of large rural settlements along the banks of Volga and in its delta and the border strip with China and on the Pacific coast. As shown on the map, most rural areas in Russia could be called a demographic desert (Figure 2).

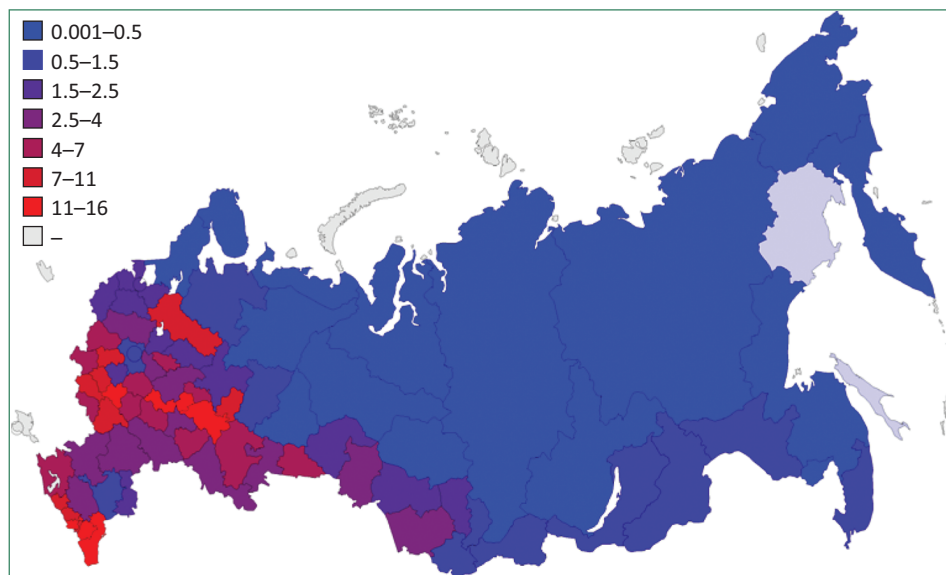


Figure 2. Russian Federation: Density of village settlements by 1 thousand km² of the Federal subjects' territory (as of January 1, 2019)

Rysunek 2. Gęstość zaludnienia w miejscowościach wiejskich w tys. na km² terytorium podmiotów federalnych (stan na 1 stycznia 2019 r.)

Source: Serova et al. 2020; map prepared by I.N. Rubanov and A.S. Naumov.

Źródło: Serova et al. 2020; mapa autorstwa I.N. Rubanowa i A.S. Naumowa.

3. Rural poverty and poorer living standards

The development of rural areas in Russia has always lagged behind urban areas. This could be explained by the ancestry of prioritised industrial development in the Soviet past, but also by the decrease in human resources (Nefedova 2012) and loss of attractiveness of agricultural employment and rural way of life (E'fendiev and Bolotina 2002). Despite the fact that in the past two decades the state has taken steps to increase the standard of living in the countryside, the problem of rural

underdevelopment remains urgent. The income level in rural areas is noticeably lower – one in five of rural residents have incomes below the subsistence level. The unemployment rate is twice as high as in urban areas (8% and 4.3%, respectively) and twice as many inhabitants have a monetary income below the subsistence minimum (20% and 11.2%) (Monitoring 2020). Rural residents' lower incomes could be explained by specific patterns of employment (they primarily work in the public sector; agricultural labour is less skilled than in industry and services etc.) and with a less developed labour market. Given the demographic features of rural areas in many regions – the predominance of older residents, especially the large proportion of retirees – the disposable incomes of the rural population in 2016 was only two thirds of that of urban residents (Figure 3).

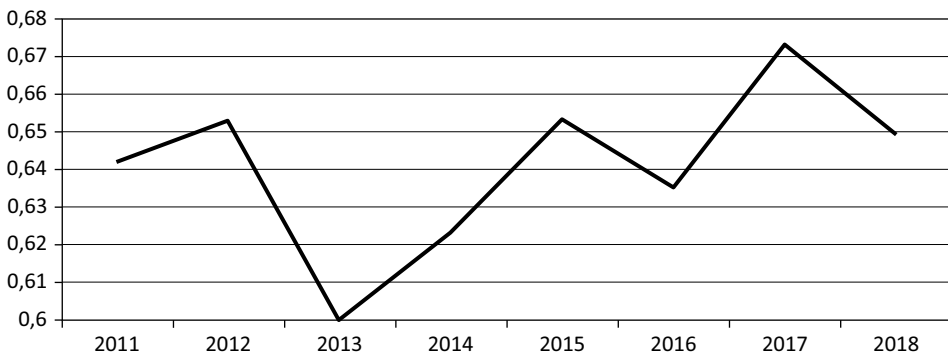


Figure 3. Russian Federation: Share of disposable income of rural population in disposable income of the urban population, in current prices

Rysunek 3. Federacja Rosyjska: udział dochodu do dyspozycji ludności wiejskiej w dochodzie do dyspozycji ludności miejskiej, w cenach bieżących

Source: Serova et al. 2020.

Źródło: Serova et al. 2020.

In recent years, certain results have been achieved in equalising the standard of living of the population in rural and urban areas in Russia. Housing construction in the villages, mainly individual houses, has increased sharply: per capita in the village there are slightly square metres of housing than in cities. However, housing amenities still significantly lag behind the cities (Figure 4). At the same time the countryside has already outrun small Russian towns in natural-gas supply; the number of sports facilities has also exceeded the urban level. The equipment of schools with computers in the villages and cities is at the same level. Other indicators of improvement of the situation in rural areas are no longer very far behind those in the cities (Monitoring 2020).

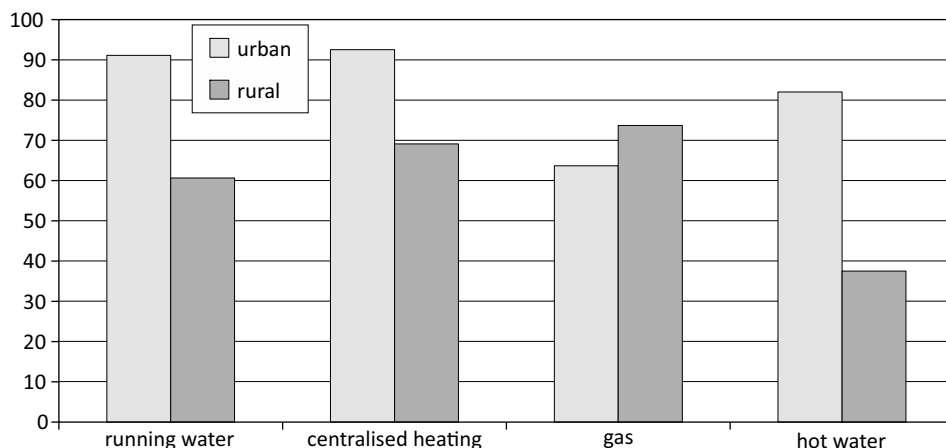


Figure 4. Russian Federation: Improvement of housing stock in rural and urban areas, 2018 (percentage of the total area of housing equipped with appropriate amenities)

Rysunek 4. Federacja Rosyjska: poprawa jakości zasobów mieszkaniowych na obszarach wiejskich i miejskich, 2018 (odsetek całkowitej powierzchni mieszkań wyposażonych w odpowiednie udogodnienia)

Source: Serova et al. 2020.

Źródło: Serova et al. 2020.

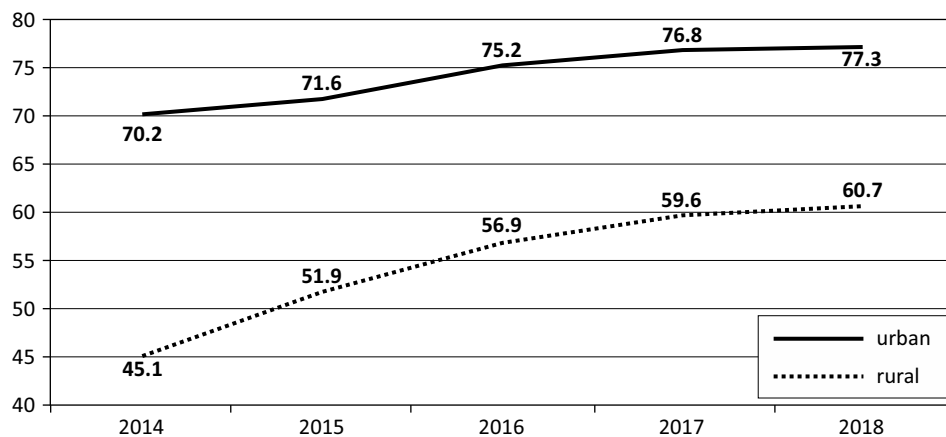


Figure 5. Russian Federation: percentage of households with broadband internet access

Rysunek 5. Federacja Rosyjska: odsetek gospodarstw domowych z dostępem do internetu szerokopasmowego

Source: Serova et al. 2020.

Źródło: Serova et al. 2020.

In modern world, access to the internet, which provides access to education, health services, trade, public services, entertainment, and social communication, is the most important indicator of welfare. In the Russian village, access to the internet has been growing more rapidly in recent years (Figure 5). Moreover, the *National Project on Digitalization of the Country*, launched in 2019, is intended to accelerate this process.

4. Role changes in sources of income and labour-force skills

Rural development has traditionally been associated with the development of agricultural production. There are stereotypes that development of the countryside can succeed only due to prosperous, strong agricultural enterprises, farms or at least subsidiary plots of the rural population. Thus until recently there was a belief that the main emphasis rural development policies should be on agriculture support.

However, global practice shows that the economically active population in developed countries is less and less engaged in agriculture. In Russia, agricultural employment has also tended to drop – from 19.1% in 1970 to 5.8% in 2018 (Rosstat 2019). This is happening despite the fact that the agricultural sector of Russian economy is one of the most intensively developing. Technological re-equipment, robotisation, digitalisation and modern chemicals are increasingly used in the industry. This modernisation does not require the mass labour of rural residents as it did before; on the contrary, it needs a much smaller number of highly skilled workers. With the modernisation of agriculture, the educational level of the employed rural population has been growing – the proportion of people with higher education employed in rural areas increased by 4.4 percentage points from 2011 to 2018. Yet there is a shortage of highly skilled workers, which is why many technologically advanced enterprises prefer shift workers, often bringing them from cities and even from abroad. The proportion of agriculture as a source of rural income is rapidly declining: in 2011, it amounted to 25.6%, in 2018, it was a little less than 20% (Monitoring 2020).

As to agricultural cooperation, which could become a pillar for community-based rural development, it is not widespread in modern Russia due to social fragmentation and the lack of legislation (Yanbykh, Saraykin and Lerman 2019).

In this regard, the development of rural areas in Russia demands the creation of activities to provide the rural population with alternative sources of income. This requires a fundamental transformation in the understanding of rural development policy, which in Russia, unlike other countries, has only recently emerged.

5. The New State Policy for Rural Development

Rural development issues have been the focus of the Russian government for many years. Until 2013, the main tool for development of rural areas was the state *Social Development of the Rural Territories until 2013*. Since 2014, there has been a federal target programme *Sustainable Development of Rural Territories for the period of 2014-2017 and until 2020*. In 2018, the federal programme *Sustainable Development of Rural Territories* was transformed into a sub-programme *Sustainable Development of Rural Territories of the State Programme on Agriculture Development and Regulation of Farm Produce, Raw Materials and Food Markets for 2013–2020*. Although these programmes achieved some results, there was no radical breakthrough in development issues. One may write this off to the lack of full-fledged funding, however, an objective assessment of the effectiveness of these programmes reveals that the main problem is the lack of an innovative approach, and the conventionalism of solutions.

In addition, the recently adopted national strategy for spatial development in Russia is based on the assumption that decline of rural areas is a natural process, and that two dozen megacities will become the unique driver of the country's socio-economic development (RG 2019b).

In contrast, we argue that Russia does not need to continue drawing the population into the largest cities, which, as the development of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, are becoming life-threatening. On the contrary, reverse colonisation of rural areas is required, which, as many worldwide cases show, is possible primarily if qualitatively different living conditions are created in the countryside.

The development of modern agricultural technologies attracts young, highly educated specialists to villages. Representatives of creative professions: IT workers, downshifters, new urban farmers, etc. are creating cottage villages around cities, which are converted to places of permanent or seasonal residence. Further from the cities, eco-settlements are arising – refuges of adherents of a healthy lifestyle disillusioned in the city. The countryside is becoming popular for rest and recreation for the urban population, as more and more attention is paid to the environment and the solution of environmental issues. New standards of habitat quality are emerging: residents require a clean environment and high quality of management in the areas where they live.

The concept of rural development management is fundamentally changing, which implies overcoming the established presumption of the central government's priori knowledge of all the local needs of the rural population. To date, all state programmes for rural development in Russia have been based on “box patterns”

(ready-made patterns) developed in federal ministries. However, in OECD countries the approach to rural development is radically different – central authorities there look for local initiatives (Mantino 2008). Villagers should first determine their priorities for the development of their settlement. They actively participate in the project development and are ready to finance it at least partially, which indicates more or less active socio-economic life in the area, and therefore can serve as a justification for state support (EP 2011). What is also very important is that this approach contributes to the development of civic activity and to overcoming paternalistic sentiments. Rural areas thus become important objects of regional policy based on internal growth, promoting the use of local resources and unleashing the potential of local initiatives. Thus a community-based approach is vital to the success of rural development.

Such an approach implies that local communities, municipal governments, non-profit organisations, NGOs and businesses offer their local social development projects at a competition on co-financing terms. The very fact of the existence of a project implies that someone from the given rural settlement or area is interested in its development, that there is life there. It is no longer the state or a ministry in Moscow that determines whether the area is promising or not. This is decided by the locals. The readiness of such initiative groups and organisations to partially finance these projects themselves indicates the seriousness of their intentions and, ultimately, serves as a guarantee that there is the demand for a project. In other words, the key direction of state rural development policy should be based on local projects submitted by residents who are involved in local rural economy and life in general.

Such local rural development initiatives are already being implemented in various Russian regions. For example, in Mordovia province there is a project to train rural residents in emergency primary care. In Perm province,³ the *Sodeystviye* (assistance) fund supporting social initiatives has been operating for more than ten years. It funds rural projects, including *Selskaya Ulochka* (rural street), *Zhivaya Voda* (living water), *Sportivnoye Selo* (sports village) and others. In Altai province, grants from the governor are issued to diversify the rural economy – to develop agritourism, local industries and crafts (*Altai Textile*); many projects have an environmental focus and imply the use of renewable energy, disposal of solid household waste, construction of water supply and sanitation systems for rural housing. In Arkhangelsk province there is a grant programme directed at rural local governments for the preservation of folk crafts, reconstruction of the museum

³ All administrative units of the Russian Federation are subsequently called provinces, regardless differences in their official Russian titles ('kray', 'oblast', etc.).

of the peasant log cabin and blacksmithing, the construction of suspension bridges, and the establishment of memorial plaques for war veterans. Often such initiatives do not require significant funds, but they play a vital role in village preservation: without rural clubs, museums and gyms, the rural areas will very soon become empty.

Rural development is possible if the area has sufficient transport, utilities and social infrastructure. While maintaining the role of centralised solutions at the federal level for the construction of expensive highways and other facilities (for example, the construction of a three-kilometre bridge over the Lena River in Yakutia worth more than 63 billion roubles, which should be completed by 2025), autonomous, smaller-scale solutions have so far received unreasonably little attention in Russia. Meanwhile, 21st-century technologies are often more effective than the mega-projects of centralised water, heat and energy networks, and education and health systems characteristic of the 1950s. Thus huge funds have been spent on creating a land-line telephone network in rural areas all over Russia, while there is still no sustainable comprehensive mobile and internet coverage (Figure 5). The quality of the medical service is traditionally measured by quantitative indicators such as the number of beds and paramedical and midwifery stations, but has anyone considered how these beds in small rural hospitals are functionally equipped, and how these small medical stations really work when a part-time paramedic on duty comes from the city only twice or three times a week? At the same time, telemedicine and distance education have been developing around the world, modern autonomous energy-supply systems are widespread. As numerous examples show, connection to the centralised natural-gas supply systems can result in a higher monthly heating costs for villagers than urban residents. At the same time, alternative energy possibilities, including the use of biogas (which simultaneously makes it possible to solve environmental problems), are barely used. There are also interesting examples of solutions to the transport problem: in some countries, such as Finland and the Czech Republic, remote villages, where regular buses are not economically profitable, are served by cheap internet taxis. This practice is also becoming common in Russia, for example, in villages in south Karelia province with mainly retired urban residents who are excluded from the regular municipal bus routes to the lack of a permanent population. In another region – Voronezh province – the local agrarian university has developed a system of distance education in rural schools. In Karelia and in Tyumen province, telemedicine systems are being created for rural areas. It is worth noting that that mobile preventive medicine teams are not new: in Australia, back in the 1920s, the Flying Doctor Service was launched for remote rural areas. Russia with its vast territory is still seeking a similar programme. In Yakutia province, the children

of reindeer herders assist “nomadic schools”, which have recently been threatened with closure for bureaucratic reasons. When asked what they need most, retirees in Karelian villages answered: high-speed internet and good mobile coverage so that they could order food and communicate with children living in the city. In one of the rural settlements in Karelia, a poor internet connection almost sabotaged the application for a presidential grant for the development of minority populations, as it had to be filled in online. There are many similar examples throughout Russia.

In 2019, InAgRes (Institute for Agrarian Studies, Higher School of Economics in Moscow) conducted a survey of two thousand students of various universities in nine Russian regions. Two thirds of respondents did not associate their future life with the countryside, but a third considered they might move to villages after graduation (not all of them are rural by place of birth). According to the respondents, the main conditions for such a move included decent wages, own housing, work in their specialty and an internet connection. (Figure 6).

Similarly, results of the survey of more than 300 experts (representatives of government agencies and municipal administration, agribusiness, analysts and media) in eight Russian regions confirm that reverse migration is possible: only 2.1% of respondents believe that migration to anywhere in the countryside is impossible under any conditions. The experts highlighted the main factors of returning city-to-village migration as decent employment, housing and access to communication.

The Russian state programme *Comprehensive Development of Rural Territories* adopted on May 31, 2019 (RG 2019a), aims precisely at such re-colonisation of rural areas. A fundamentally new approach is proposed to radically change the direction of rural development and take account of the best world practices. The main new political priority is the creation of a favourable environment for human potential, the economy and social life development of rural areas through building infrastructure – transport, communications, utilities – support for rural residents’ initiatives, small and medium-sized businesses, local government, and in this way to attract people to the countryside.

Another novelty of the programme is its approach based on local initiatives. Previous rural development programmes, unlike world practice, proceeded from the presumption that the state, represented by federal authorities and citizens’ authorities better understands rural development needs. In addition to the inventory of initiatives already under way and the dissemination of best practices, the programme is beginning to stimulate as many new local rural development initiatives as possible.

Due to lower rural incomes, the *Rural Mortgage* preferential mortgage programme is to play a crucial role in improving their housing quality. In accordance with

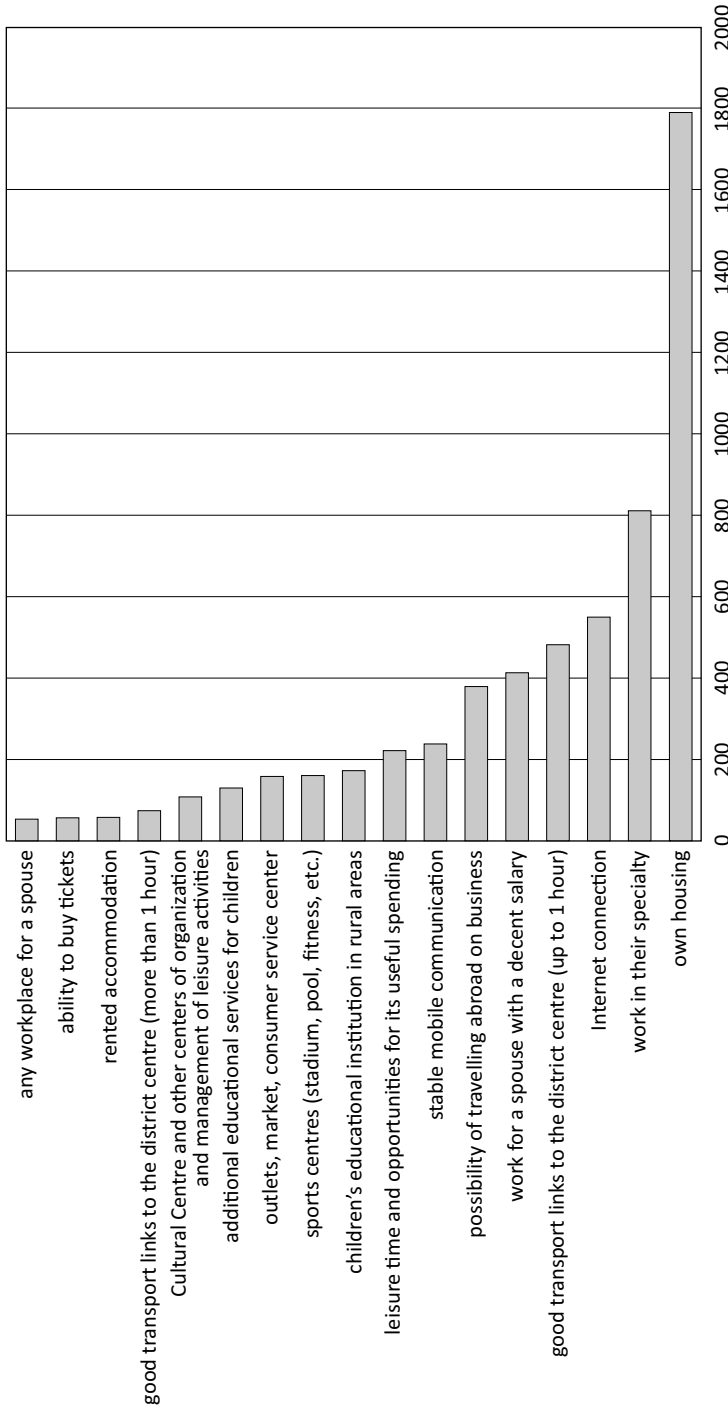


Figure 6. Russian Federation: distribution of student responses to the question about conditions for moving to the countryside, 2019 (2000 respondents in 9 regions)
Rysunek 6. Federacja Rosyjska: rozkład odpowiedzi uczniów na pytanie o warunki sprzyjające przeprowadzce na wieś, 2019 (2000 respondentów w 9 regionach)

Source: InAgRes 2019.
 Źródło: InAgRes 2019.

this programme, since the beginning of 2020 the Ministry of Agriculture has allocated preferential loans through authorised banks with a maximum of 3% per annum for house purchasing and construction in the countryside.

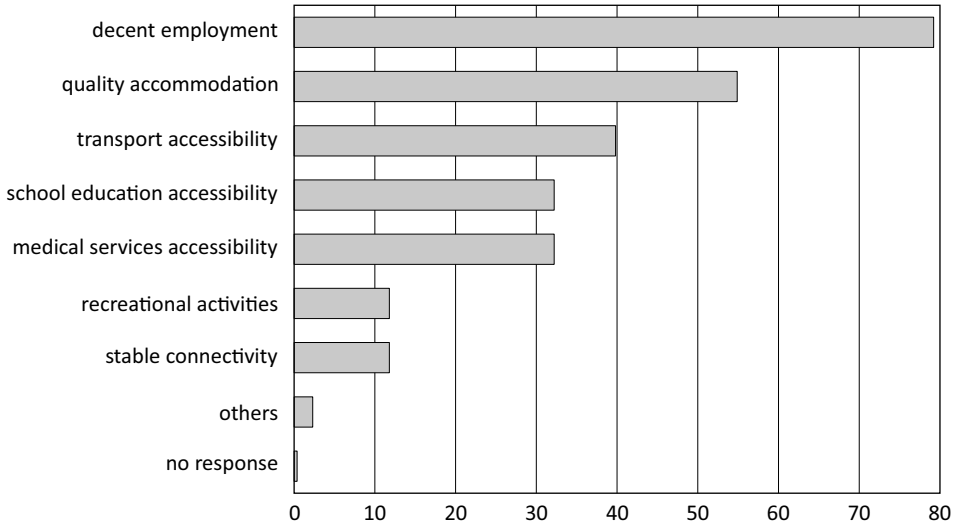


Figure 7. Russian Federation: distribution of expert responses to the question on the conditions of return migration to the countryside, 2019 (304 respondents in 8 regions), percentage of the total number of responses

Rysunek 7. Federacja Rosyjska: rozkład odpowiedzi ekspertów na pytanie o warunki sprzyjające migracji powrotnej na wieś, 2019 (304 respondentów w 8 regionach), procent ogólnej liczby odpowiedzi

Source: InAgRes 2019.

Źródło: InAgRes 2019.

This innovative Russian rural development policy may face certain risks. The first is the insufficient readiness of rural residents, local government bodies, NGOs and even business to put forward initiative projects and co-finance them. Unfortunately, civic passivity and distrust of the state. There are fears that federal and regional governments may replace local, “grassroots” initiatives with their projects or lobby for the most convenient initiatives from their point of view. In such cases, risk-mitigation measures should be provided. First, all possible participants’ awareness of the events in the state programme and training in project development methods is growing. It is necessary to find and replicate positive examples of implementation of initiative projects. Finally, it is necessary to develop methodological materials on the selection and support mechanism of initiative projects.

Since the state programme is focused on supporting local initiatives, there is a risk of strengthening the differentiation of social development between the regions: greater project activity will manifest in the most developed regions, where potential participants have far more funds. Such a risk can be reduced by introducing different minimums of the projects' co-financing levels for Russian citizens, depending on the level of their socio-economic development. For example, for a wealthy Moscow region such a minimum, could be 50%, and for the depressed Pskov region – 10% or even 5%. This would allow a relatively even redistribution of the programme's funds between the regions.

The above state programme just started in 2020, and has already faced many problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent economic crisis, and the federal budget deficit. It is not yet fully funded, as 2020 was the preparatory year only for training people in the regions and municipalities. In this regard, it is still difficult to estimate the programme's efficiency.

6. COVID-19 impact on rural development perspective

At the time of writing, the situation with the development of the pandemic in the world remains uncertain. Accordingly, while there is no accurate scientific research, it is not possible to identify any distinct trends so far. However, we make some general predictive conclusions.

The pandemic has shown that Russia's recent apparent trend towards the development of megacities, which are considered as drivers of economic growth in the state politics, the concentration of the country's population in large cities, mainly in the European part of the country, involves a number of social risks. Moscow, even within the enlarged area after 2011, is an urban territory with an extremely high population density. This inevitably leads to higher rates of the spreading of infectious diseases. The high density has other negative social and psychological consequences, which we will not touch upon in this article. However, as is already evident, rural self-isolation has less social impact than in large cities. During the quarantine, thousands of Muscovites moved to suburban cottages and even to remote villages, where it was much easier to survive restrictions. It can be assumed that after the pandemic, many urban residents who do not have second homes outside the city will start purchasing them, and many will move to the countryside permanently. The first data on the increase in the cost of real estate outside the cities have already appeared. The demand for the services of companies installing antennas for sustainable internet access in rural houses increased several times.

The self-isolation regime has shown that many types of work can be carried out remotely, without a daily presence in the office, which until recently seemed to

belong to a very distant future. Teachers give lectures and conduct classes remotely, TV journalists broadcast programmes and even government agencies increasingly provide services remotely. This means that one can live in rural areas and receive an “urban income”. Many companies that have already faced the high costs for office space in larger cities are striving to move their offices to small cities or rural areas (this is a global trend – almost all major multinational companies have offices away from capitals), the vast majority of logistics companies and call centres are withdrawing from megacities. However, the pandemic will become a lever for further strengthening this trend.

Moreover, a significant part of the leisure industry has also switched to remote working – not only concerts, theatres and cinemas, but also fitness, and other forms of leisure. This leads to understanding that life in rural areas does not necessarily involve cultural isolation.

Finally, self-isolation has shown the possibility of transferring many social infrastructure services to remote access: schools can function remotely and tele-medicine is very advanced. Online trade is booming, especially in food. Retail companies are fighting for customers, increasing coverage of the area served. In the months of quarantine, one after another Moscow food and other delivery companies began to expand their zones of operations: first in the immediate suburbs of Moscow, then beyond the beltway at a distance of about 40 km from the city, after that beyond 100 km, and finally to the regions neighbouring to Moscow province.

Of course, there still are failures, the internet and logistics are not reliable everywhere, there is a psychological barrier to switching to remote services, especially when such a transition happens suddenly, from necessity. However, what seemed fantastic yesterday has turned out to be fundamentally possible today.

Thus two groups of factors have converged in the pandemic. On the one hand, people have begun to understand that a high density in large cities is fraught with social consequences and that in this sense out-of-town life has advantages. On the other hand, remote access to income sources (work), services and leisure makes it possible to organise comfortable out-of-town life, almost like in the city.

All these factors make it possible to suggest that after the end of the pandemic a certain section of urban residents will want to move from the city to an extra-urban habitat. Some urban residents will share their life schedule between megacities and rural areas. In other words, the ratio between the urban and rural population typical of developed countries (70-75% to 25-30%) will shift slightly towards non-urban populations.

Another possible COVID-19-related trend is that the pandemic will be accompanied by a severe economic crisis and a corresponding drop in people’s income. Migration to the countryside has become commonplace for such crises. In Russian

history, this happened during the civil war and World War II, after the collapse of USSR and at the start of the 1990s market reforms. People rush to the countryside, as it is cheaper to live there and easier to feed oneself. The above trend is slightly different. Usually, poor people flee to the village to escape economic ills and then return to the city when economic conditions improve, so this trend is usually short-term. The trend that we foresee in the near future will have a medium-term perspective and will affect more wealthy people who can acquire comfortable properties. Their relocation to the countryside will be a driver of its development, as they will attract investment in infrastructure, especially communications – roads, communications and services. We have already seen this from the example of the development of Moscow suburban areas, when over the last few decades exclusive residential areas have radically transformed the countryside several tens of kilometres from the metropolis.

As mentioned above, in 2019 a new and innovative State Programme for Comprehensive Development of Rural Territories was adopted, which will further support the trend. The government's co-financing of rural development projects and the rural mortgage will become obvious accelerators of the re-colonisation of rural areas. It is important that there are no residential restrictions on lending – they can be both rural and urban residents. In 2020, the state funds allocated for rural mortgages were doubled. In addition, Russia is implementing a large-scale *National Project on Digitalisation*, which provides for sustainable internet connections throughout the country. This project will become an important factor for the development of non-urban territories.

To conclude, we assume that one of the positive results of the crisis related to COVID-19 in Russia (and, possibly, not only in Russia) may be the beginning of a rehabilitation of the out-of-town area and the rural lifestyle.

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Nowe podejścia do rozwoju wsi w Rosji

Streszczenie: Tak jak wiele innych krajów, Rosja cierpi z powodu szybkiego wyludniania się obszarów wiejskich i upadku gospodarki wiejskiej. Polityka państwa w zakresie łagodzenia negatywnych skutków tych procesów od lat traktuje rolnictwo jako główny filar rozwoju obszarów wiejskich i większość decyzji rządu ma na celu jego wsparcie. Niedawno sformułowano nową państwową strategię rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, a w 2019 r. zatwierdzono ambitny program krajowy. Zakładają one różne możliwości rozwoju gospodarczego i dobrobytu ludności wiejskiej w zależności od dostępności zasobów naturalnych i ludzkich, stopnia peryferyjności i innych cech. Artykuł przedstawia przegląd aktualnego stanu obszarów wiejskich Federacji Rosyjskiej. Koncentruje się na głównych problemach, z jakimi boryka się wieś na poziomie krajowym, a także ujawnia regionalne różnice w rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Opracowanie opiera się głównie na badaniach autorów w oparciu o analizę krajowych źródeł danych statystycznych, w tym Rosyjskiego Spisu Rolnego z 2016 r. Ukazuje

możliwe skutki działań nowej polityki państwa w zakresie rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, takie jak zachęcanie do inicjatyw opartych na społecznościach lokalnych i promocję budownictwa mieszkaniowego poprzez programy preferencyjnych kredytów hipotecznych na wsi. Na koniec autorzy przedstawiają krótki opis wpływu pandemii COVID-19 na rozwój obszarów wiejskich w Rosji i próbują przewidzieć jej dalsze konsekwencje.

Słowa kluczowe: obszary wiejskie, rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy, polityka państwa, COVID-19, Rosja.