

## **TRANSITION IN SLOVENIAN RURAL AREAS**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Transition in Slovenian rural areas**

This paper discusses the changes in Slovenian rural areas after socio-economic changes in the post-socialist European states in the 1990s. It illustrates regional and national factors having effect on transition in Slovenian rural areas. Special emphasis is put on the analysis of structural indicators of socio-economic changes in the Slovenian rural areas in comparison to the neighbouring countries.

Slovenian population is strongly attached to their traditional rural way of life. When ranging people's life values, care for maintaining the rural landscape, assuring the quality of life in relation to nature and production of healthy food come out among their highest priorities. The mentioned fact implies an elaborate analysis of interdependence between the economic impacts of trade economy and realisation of common European agricultural policy in relation to maintaining traditions of living and farm management in Slovenian rural areas. Thus, evaluation of national agricultural policy and development of rural area through indicators showing land use categories, individual farm sizes and their ownership structure, the share and mobility of rural population and individual farms' production orientation, are a good indicator of transition in Slovenian rural area.

#### **Key words**

rural development, agriculture, common European policy, development indicators, regional disparities

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## **1. Introduction**

Diversity and indigenous development are typical of the European agricultural areas. In the EU-27, rural areas (predominantly rural and intermediate regions) represented 90% of the territory and 54% of the population in 2005. The corresponding shares for predominantly rural areas were 53% of the territory and 17% of the population. Rural areas are therefore particularly important in terms of territory. These are, in terms of economics, nature and culture, complex areas which are all different from one another and have experienced different levels of adaptation to the socio-economic structural changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the 90s.

Structural changes can be ascribed not only to the natural and geographical facts, but increasingly to the external factors such as the quality of the natural and social heritage. High level of development in some agricultural areas in Europe shows that a rural-based activity in itself is not necessarily a burden to dynamic economic development and jobs growth. Even if economic activity tends to be concentrated in more urban areas, rural areas generate 42% of the Gross Value Added (GVA) in EU-27 and provide 53% of the employment, these shares being larger in the new Member States (74% and 83% respectively), (Eurostat 2009).

Not that long ago, agricultural areas were treated as being homogenous and experiencing equal barriers and developmental opportunities. This way of thinking no longer suits the real situation in the European region. Nowadays, the common characteristics of agricultural areas are low population density and high percentage of agricultural land-use of space. However, due to the diversity in rural development in different regions, specific regional and local conditions should be considered. Among the Member States, the importance of rural areas varies from the more "urban" ones (BE, NL, MT) to the more "rural" ones (IE, FI, SI) along a continuum where Intermediate Regions can play a major role (CY, LU, CZ, EE, SK, BG, UK, LT), (Eurostat 2009).

The experience from the past has shown that multilateral projects are of rising importance for regional development and territorial cohesion in the programme area comprising Austrian, Hungarian, Slovenian, Italian and Croatian border regions. Therefore the programme partners consider it important for the programme design and implementation to widen the scope of the cross-border programmes and to take care of the needs and opportunities of multilateral projects. The law on balanced regional development that Slovenia introduced in 2005 gives foundation to the establishment of development regions and cohesion regions.

Through the extension of the eligible territories, added value and higher level of cross-border cooperation will be achieved with the activities, which will have a broader impact on the development of the overall territory. It will be easier to fulfil the objectives related to the Lisbon strategy (research institutions, universities, etc., additional regional resources and competences). Development programmes are focused on developing economic areas, regional municipal and traffic networks and protecting sensitive areas in terms of ecology (Lorber 2008-a).

Slovenia borders with the countries which had developed in different social-economic conditions. Italy and Austria were developmentally connected with the European market of the EU-15. Hungary was a member of the Eastern-European

political and economic system until 1989 and Croatia, which, together with Slovenia, developed within the socialist planned economic system of the SFRY until 1991.

Transitional processes as a result of socio-economic changes in the Eastern-European countries affected the standard patterns of regional European development. The European integration process is a multi-layered one and tends to have different effects in different European areas. Many rural areas have undergone a successful process of structural change and independent development.

However, regional disparities are significant, and not only among the countries that developed under different socio-economic conditions, but also within individual countries, where considerable regional disparities can be observed, in particular between the urban and the rural areas.

Tab. 1: Regional disparities, NUTS 2 level, 2006.

	2006	2006 GVA in %		
	GDP in EUR/person	Agriculture	Industry	Service
Slovenia	15504	2,0	34,5	63,5
Western Slovenia	18350	1,4	28,1	70,5
Eastern Slovenia	12680	3,6	42,1	54,2



Fig.1: Regional disparities, NUTS 2 level, 2006.

There is no doubt that revitalisation of agricultural areas and assuring sustainable rural development poses a major challenge for the post-socialist countries, particularly in their border regions (Lorber 2008-b).

## 2. Socio-economic situation in rural areas

In most rural areas, a first characteristic is the low level of concentration of the population: at EU-27 level, population density varies from 36 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in predominantly rural areas to 548 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in predominantly urban areas. In most Member States, population density did not evolve significantly in rural areas between 1995 and 2005. In Slovenia, population density varies from 81 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in Predominantly Rural region (PR) to 141 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in Intermediate region (IR), (Eurostat 2009).

At EU-27 level, the income per habitant is by 28% to 32% lower in rural areas and generally increases with a higher urban character. In the new Member States where the general level of income is about half of the EU-27 average, (Slovenia is an exception – 10% below the EU-27 average) the gap between predominantly rural areas and predominantly urban areas is accentuated. In Slovenia, it is 32% lower in rural areas (71% EU-27) than in intermediate areas (102% EU-27).

Tab. 2: Employment by main sectors, 2006.

	Agriculture	Industry	Service
EU-27	6,3	25,1	68,6
Slovenia	10,0	35,1	54,9
Austria	5,5	27,5	66,9
Hungary	4,9	32,4	62,7
Croatia	17,3	28,7	54,0
Italia	4,2	28,8	67,0

Source: SURS, EUROSTAT

The primary sector still represents 18 % of the employment and 5 % of the value added in rural areas of EU-27. This situation is more marked in the new Member States, with the corresponding shares standing at 29 % and 9 % respectively (Slovenia – PR 14.1 % and 3.9 % ; IR 5.2% and 1.2 %). In general, even in rural areas, the majority of the economic activity depends more and more on the service sector. This trend should increase in the coming years as, between 2000 and 2005, the relative importance of the primary sector in the economy of the rural areas in EU-27 decreased by 6.3 percentage points in terms of employment and by 1.2 percentage points in terms of value added, (Eurostat 2009).

With around 13.44 mio persons employed in 2005 in EU-27, the primary sector (agriculture, hunting and forestry) represented an important part of the EU economy in terms of employment: 6.2% for EU-27, ranging from 1% in United-Kingdom,... Slovenia 10 % (14.1 % in PR and 5.2 in IR)... to 33% in Romania.

Tab. 3: GDP and Share of Sectoral GVA in %, 2007.

	2007	Gross value added in %, 2007		
		GDP/person	Agriculture	Industry
EU-27	24800	1,9	26,5	71,6
Slovenia	16600	2,0	34,5	63,5
Austria	32800	1,9	31,1	66,9
Hungary	10000	4,2	29,5	66,3
Croatia	8443	6,8	30,2	63,0
Italia	25900	2,0	27,0	70,9

Source: SURS, EUROSTAT.

In terms of value-added, the EU-27 primary sector reached around 182 bio Euros in 2005 and accounted for 1.8% of GDP, ranging from 0.4% in Luxemburg...2.4 % (3.9 % in PR and 1.2 % in IR) in Slovenia to 9.5% in Romania.

The importance of primary sector in EU-27 is declining. Between 2000 and 2005, its share diminished by 1.8 percentage points in terms of employment (Slovenia 2.8 %) and by 0.5 percentage points (Slovenia 0.6% ; 0.9 % PR and 0.2 % in IR) in terms of value-added , (Eurostat 2009).

### 3. Transition in agriculture sector

In 2005, agriculture utilised 172 mio hectares in EU-27 (Slovenia 0.488 mio hectares) of which 60% were dedicated to arable crops, 32% to permanent pastures and 6% to permanent crops (Slovenia 35.9 %, 58.1 % and 5.7 %). As the distribution depends mainly on natural conditions, there are major variations between (and generally within) Member States. Typical examples are the importance of permanent crops (vineyards, olive trees) in dry areas of Mediterranean countries (e.g. EL, CY, IT, PT, ES) or the major share of permanent pastures in mountain or rainy areas (e.g. IE, UK, SI, AT, LU, NL) , (Eurostat 2009).

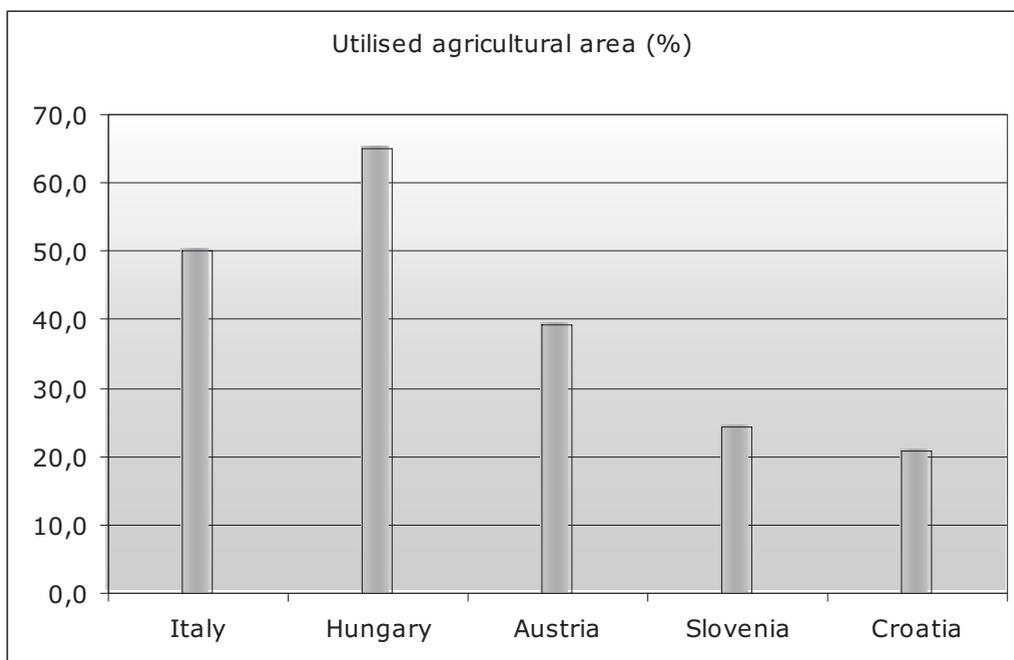


Fig. 2: Utilised agricultural area UAA.

Natural conditions are one of the deciding factors in development of agriculture. A very lively relief is typical of Slovenia and the share of UAA in Less Favoured Areas (LFA) is one of the highest in the EU-27. Merely 7.6 % of UAA can be found in the non-LFA (EU 27 46%, EU 15 41.5% and EU 12 44.2%). The largest share of UAA can be found in the mountain LFA, namely 69.5%, which is the highest in the EU-27. Therefore, the above-average level of permanent pastures and well developed livestock farming do not come as a surprise.

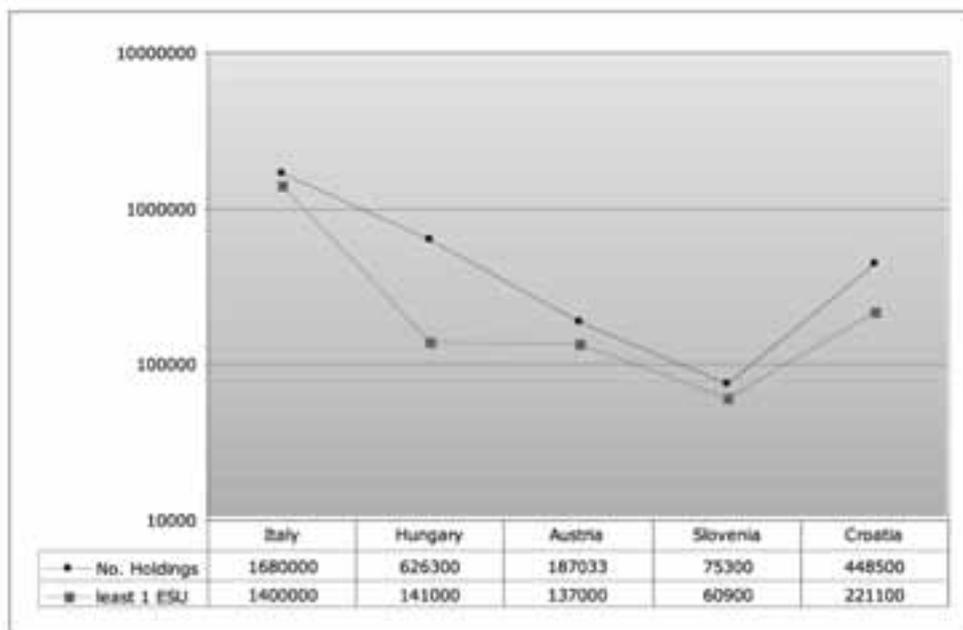
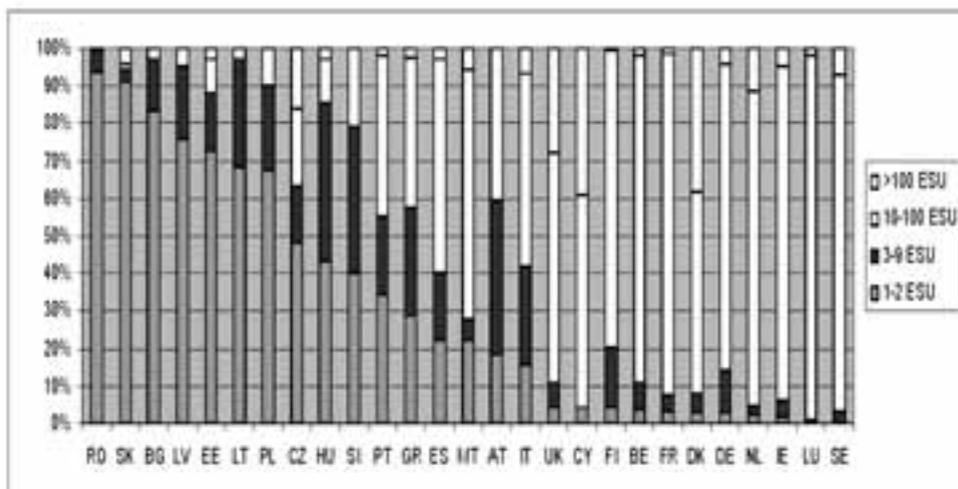


Fig. 3: Farm Structure Survey, 2006.

There were 14.5 mio farms in EU-27 in 2005 (Slovenia 71,500 in 2007), with an average size of 12 hectares, varying from 1 hectare in Malta...6,5 hectare in Slovenia... to 84 hectares in Czech Republic. In general, farm sizes are higher than the average in EU-15 (with the exception of EL, IT and PT) and lower in the new Member States (with the exception of CZ, EE and SK). Variations in structure among regions of the same Member State are in general much lower in new Member States (with the exception of CZ and HU) than in the old ones. In Slovenia, the lowest average size is 5.5 hectares in Spodnje-Posavska Region and 7.7 hectares in Notranjsko-Kraška Region, (Lorber 2008-c).

Variations between Member States and regions are even greater when measuring the ESU on average, the economic size of farms in the new Member States is ten times lower than in EU-15 (the Czech Republic is the only new Member State above the EU-27 average economic size that stands at 10.5 European Size Units; Slovenia 4.6).

Differences in economic farm size distribution in percentage of farms in different size classes are particularly noticeable. The proportion of farms < 2 ESU in EU-27 is 61.5%, EU-15 29.4%, EU-12 - 83.2%, and Slovenia 48.3%. In the range between 2 and 100 ESU, the distribution for EU-27 is 38.5%, EU-15 70.6%, EU-12 - 16.8 %, and Slovenia 51.5%. The proportions of farms larger than 100 ESU are the following: EU-27 - 2.0%, EU-15 - 4.7%, EU-12 - 0.2% and for Slovenia - less than 0.1% , (Eurostat, 2009).



Source: EUROSTAT - FSS 2005 and DG AGRI

Fig. 4: Number of holdings per economic size of farms (ESU).

Due to historical reasons, high fragmentation of property in the time before transition is typical of the new Member States. Only in the recent years, the number of farms has been decreasing in comparison to the average size of farms which has been increasing.

The total labour force in agriculture represents around 12.7 mio annual work units for EU-27 (Slovenia 95,000). The basic feature of agriculture in the EU is family farming with 1 to 1.5 full-time jobs, though there are significant variations between Member States. In southern countries of EU-15 and in most New Member States, there are many holdings with less than 1 full-time job. On the other extreme, in some regions, agriculture production is based on very large agricultural holdings organised in legal entities and mainly based on non-family labour force.

Very small farms that could be considered as based on semi-subsistence activities are very important in some Member States, particularly in the New Member States. In 2005, there were around 6.4 mio holdings (44% of EU-27, Slovenia 54 %) in which more than 50% of the production was self-consumed. These farms covered 12 mio hectares (23% of EU-27) and used 3.8 mio annual work units (52% of EU-27), (Eurostat, 2009).

Changes in labour productivity in agriculture between 2000 and 2005 are particularly reflected in the new EU-12 Member States with annual growth of 8.8% (Slovenia 7.9%). Such rapid growth is a result of structural changes in the economy and agricultural policy on the EU and national levels.

Gross Fixed Capital Formation in the EU-27 reached 49 bio Euros in 2005, of which 93% took place in the EU-15. The rate of investment, measured by the ratio between the Gross Fixed Capital Formation and the Gross Value Added, was around 33% for the EU-27 but was half in the new Member States than in EU-15 (19% and 35% respectively). In EU-15, it varied between 14% in Spain and 91% in

Luxembourg. Among the New Member States, high rates (at least 40%) are observed in the Baltic States, in Czech Republic and in Slovenia, (Eurostat, 2009).

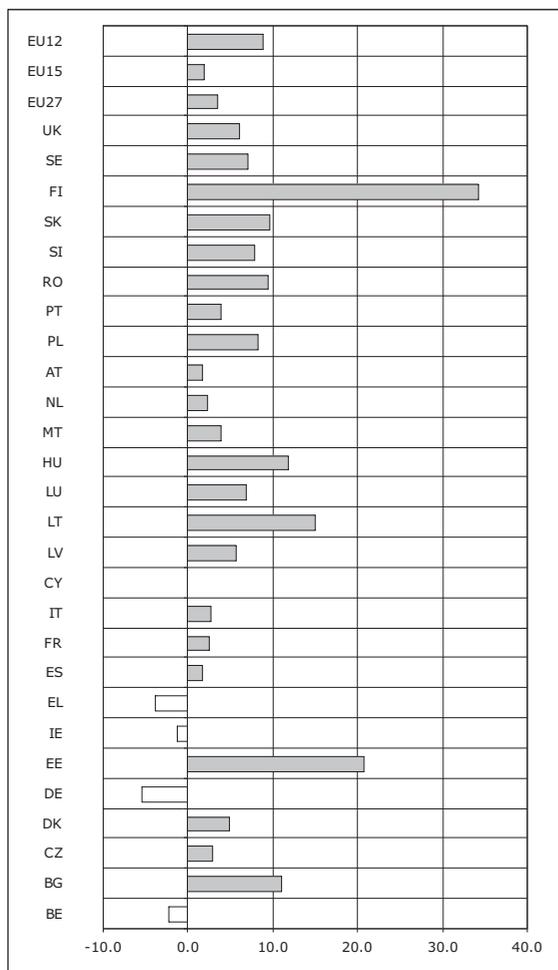


Fig.5: Average Annual Growth Rate of Labour Productivity in Agriculture, 2000 to 2005.

#### 4. Diversification and quality of life in rural areas

Rural development in Europe comprises a number of different spatial trends, systems and factors. Many rural areas have undergone a successful process of structural change and independent development, while many of them are still facing them. Structural weaknesses can be deteriorated by natural factors such as peripheral location, relief configuration, unfavourable climate changes, lack of water, etc. Agriculture as a source of income is still very important in these areas, however, its competitiveness is still relatively low.

According to definitions, a family farm manager is considered as pluriactive if he carries out any activity other than farm work for remuneration, be it on the holding

itself (farm diversification), on another holding, or as employee in a non-agricultural enterprise. Farm diversification is understood as the creation of any gainful activities that do not comprise any farm work but are directly related to the holding i.e. use its resources or products, and have an economic impact on the holding.

In the recent years, supplementary activities (pluriactivity) among the farmers and diversification of economic activities on farms have expanded a great deal. The most important activities comprise processing of farmer's own products (EU-27, 55.8%; Malta, 93.8%; Cyprus, 92.5%; Portugal, 86.2%; Italy, 84.0%; Romania, 73.4%; Hungary, 62.7%, etc.), different tourism activities (EU-27, 7.1%, United Kingdom, 56.8%; Austria, 35%; Slovenia, 20.0%; Ireland, 19.6%), and contractual seasonal works activities (EU-27, 11.3%, Bulgaria, 72.8%; Finland, 55.9%), (Eurostat 2009).

Slovenia possesses ideal conditions for farm tourism which can successfully contribute to the development of rural areas by favourable environmental conditions and attractive landscape, favourable locations in relation to urban centres and appropriate infrastructure.

There are many factors affecting the development of supplementary activities (other gainful activities). Farmers, considering the size of their farm, choose one option or another. Supplementary activities (pluriactivity) are the domain of smaller farmers, while diversification is chosen at larger farms. The proportion of supplementary activities in small farmers (0-2 ha) amounts to 41%, while the farms > 100 ha this proportion amounts to only 15%. Inversely, the proportion of small farmers in diversification of farms amounts to 10%, and the large ones to 23%.

The type of farming is another important factor in making decisions on taking up supplementary activities. Some of the activities demand far more presence and work than the other. The share of pluriactive family farms tends to be the highest at farms involved in intensive cattle farming (38%), while being the lowest at farms specialised in milk production and horticulture (15%).

Like the farm size, the type of farming may also influence the kind of diversification activity set up: contractual work is more frequent on farms specialised in field crops, processing of farm products on farms specialised in permanent crops. As for tourism, its - so far modest - development is mainly linked to farms specialised in grazing livestock.

Human capital is a very important factor for pluriactivity and diversification of farms. In addition to the age structure, good educational structure is important here. Therefore, the assistance policy for rural areas is based on improvement of the age structure of the owners of family farms and on promotion of education and entrepreneurial mind-set (Kolnik 2009).

Unfortunately, we are also faced with the process of marginalisation where agriculture is no longer profitable. It is then when changes in land use practices occur which could undermine the foundations of regional economies. Lately, intensive forestation of agricultural areas and depopulation of have been noticed in Slovenia.

Structural changes in rural development bring about more opportunities than risks. Diversification enhances opportunities for investment and additional income as well

as promotes nature and landscape protection. The most daring predictions say that new information and communication technologies can quicken decentralised development in rural areas and enable establishment of small and middle-sized enterprises.

## **5. Common Agricultural Policy**

Common Agricultural Policy was designed to facilitate productivity in agriculture. After the reform in 1992, financial support was given mainly as a reimbursement for the abandonment of land use. Between 1993 and 1994, an area of approximately 6 million hectares of agricultural land was abandoned. This initiative increased agricultural income particularly in the EU areas where agriculture was intensive even before, and the farmers were getting paid sums equal to their real former income. In terms of development, the areas where agriculture had been less intensive were in a worse position this way, which brought even larger dichotomy between different agricultural regions.

Studies on spatial impact of common agricultural policy on income, labour market, the infrastructural and natural resources revealed a close connection between agriculture and rural areas. This induced proceedings toward accelerated development of rural areas. The results tend to vary and depend on the individual region, specific geographic-, environmental-, cultural- and socio-economic conditions, and partly of the type of production and regulation of the market.

Intensification, concentration and specialisation in agricultural production had negative impact on spatial development: monotonous landscape; abandoning traditional methods of cultivation; use of expansive wetland areas, marshes and natural pastures; polluting ground water due to the increasing use of pesticides and fertilizers, which affected the decrease in biodiversity.

Nowadays, we understand the significance of agricultural policy in a wider economic and social context of agricultural areas. Agricultural development is connected to assurance of sustainable agricultural production, use of environment protection measures and greater diversification in use of agricultural land. Taking into account the given natural resources and the structure of Slovenian agricultural holdings, rural area tourism is an opportunity for an additional income source at agricultural holdings. In the context of offer and demand for healthy food, tourism gives new market perspectives for development of organically grown food and for sustainable rural development. Local communities are increasingly paying attention to investment programmes for the environment which opens new perspectives and possibilities.

## **6. Conclusion**

The future in sustainable development of rural areas lies in development of autonomous development perspectives and discovering domestic potential as well as in integrating with other regions according to the bottom up principle of cooperation. The necessity of integral consideration of cities and countryside as one whole functional region is of special importance here. Small and middle-sized cities are the generators of regional economic development in a polycentric system of cities. These cities represent centres of employment which, with their infrastructure, enable development of service activities in the region and provide access to larger

labour markets. Cities in scarcely populated rural areas bear special significance in maintaining the settlement structure and cultural landscape.

In the open-market system, rural areas with unfavourable production structures are faced with international competition. They can improve their competitiveness by producing high quality agricultural crops and products, using adequate marketing strategies and by rediscovering the multifunctionality of agriculture – ecologic- and organic food production. Sustainable rural development is enabled by returning to old, environment-friendly production- and processing technologies.

Obtaining these goals requires support to regional education centres. Further education and promotion of entrepreneurial mind-set will help increase the proportion of pluriactivity and diversification of family farms. Further reduction in number of farms and increase in average farm size will, along with higher productivity, are a basis for subsequent rural development.

The future of Slovenian rural areas depends on implementation of measures provided in the national agriculture development programme, harmonized with the European Directives. The local environment itself will decide whether the opportunities given will be turned to advantage, their advantages recognised and their development potentials focused, in accordance with the bottom up principle, in the right direction towards the intended goal of sustainable landscape development.

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### **Summary**

Slovenian population is strongly attached to their traditional rural way of life. Rural areas are therefore particularly important in terms of territory. These are, in terms of economics, nature and culture, complex areas which are all different from one another and have experienced different levels of adaptation to the socio-economic structural changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the 90s.

Structural changes can be ascribed not only to the natural and geographical facts, but increasingly to the external factors such as the quality of the natural and social heritage. Nowadays, the common characteristics of agricultural areas are low population density and high percentage of agricultural use of space. Slovenian space borders with the space of the countries which had developed in different social-economic conditions. Italy and Austria were developmentally connected with the European market of the EU-15. Hungary was a member of the Eastern-European political and economic system until 1989 and Croatia, which, together with Slovenia, developed within the socialist planned economic system of the SFRY until 1991.

Transitional processes as a result of socio-economic changes in the Eastern-European countries affected the standard patterns of regional European development. Many rural areas have undergone a successful process of structural change and independent development.

However, regional disparities are significant, and not only among the countries that developed under different socio-economic conditions, but also within individual countries, where considerable regional disparities can be observed, in particular between the urban and the rural areas. There is no doubt that revitalisation of agricultural areas and assuring sustainable rural development poses a major challenge for the post-socialist countries.

There were 71,500 farms in 2007, with an average size of 6,5 hectares, the lowest average size is 5.5 hectares in Spodnje-Posavska Region and 7.7 hectares in Notranjsko-Kraška Region. Due to historical reasons, high fragmentation of property in the time before transition is typical. The basic feature of agriculture is family farming with 1 to 1.5 full-time jobs., agriculture production is based on family labour force.

Many rural areas have undergone a successful process of structural change and independent development, while many of them are still facing them. Structural weaknesses can be deteriorated by natural factors such as peripheral location, relief configuration, unfavourable climate changes, lack of water, etc. Natural conditions are one of the deciding factors in development of agriculture. A very lively relief is typical of Slovenia and the share of UAA in Less Favoured Areas is one of the highest in the EU 27. Agriculture as a source of income is still very important in these areas, however, its competitiveness is still relatively low. Slovenia possesses ideal conditions for farm tourism which can successfully contribute to the development of rural areas by favourable environmental conditions and attractive landscape, favourable locations in relation to urban centres and appropriate infrastructure.

Human capital is a very important factor for pluriactivity and diversification of farms. In addition to the age structure, good educational structure is important here. Therefore, the assistance policy for rural areas is based on improvement of the age structure of the owners of family farms and on promotion of education and entrepreneurial mind-set.

Unfortunately, we are also faced with the process of marginalisation where agriculture is no longer profitable. It is then when changes in land use practices occur which could undermine the foundations of regional economies. Lately, intensive forestation of agricultural areas and depopulation of have been noticed in Slovenia.

The future in sustainable development of rural areas lies in development of autonomous development perspectives and discovering domestic potential as well as in integrating with other regions according to the bottom up principle of cooperation. The necessity of integral consideration of cities and countryside as one whole functional region is of special importance here. Small and middle-sized cities are the generators of regional economic development in a polycentric system of cities.

The future of Slovenian rural areas depends on implementation of measures provided in the national agriculture development programme, harmonized with the European Directives. The local environment itself will decide whether the opportunities given will be turned to advantage, their advantages recognised and their development potentials focused, in accordance with the bottom up principle, in the right direction towards the intended goal of sustainable landscape development.