

## Rural geography in Russia, Ukraine and in Belarus – a literature review<sup>1</sup>

DÁVID KARÁCSONYI<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The article is an overview of the literature on rural geography published in the Commonwealth of Independent States during the two decades that passed since the break-up of the Soviet Union. First, a brief review of the Soviet period is presented. A description of the current methodological approach and of the main sources follows. Finally, the studies devoted to rural areas of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are introduced. The sources of the analysis mainly include works in English, German, Russian and Ukrainian. The literature review covers rural geography of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, and in the case of Russia it is focused on its European section.

**Keywords:** rural areas, rural geography, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, CIS.

### Introduction

This article is an attempt to provide a review of the rural geography literature published in the countries of the CIS. Our review is far from comprehensive as our goal has been to summarize the English-language sources in the first place and only to some extent sources in Russian and Ukrainian. The most abundant literature in western languages is available on Russia's rural areas.

Only a small portion of the reviewed writings is considered rural geographical by their authors, but some topics were chosen deliberately for their association with rural spaces. The novelty of our efforts for the international audience boils down to systematization of various sources and to introducing them to the Hungarian experts. During the 1990s Hungarian geography, with

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<sup>2</sup> Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. H-1112 Budapest, Budaörsi út 45. E-mail: karacsonyidavid@gmail.com

few exceptions, stood away from the realities of the CIS. Consequently, this review purports to fill this gap.

### Soviet geography and rural areas

East European (i.e. *Soviet-Russian*) *geography* developed along a pathway different from the Western as well as from the Hungarian trends (PROBÁLD, F. 1999 p. 251). Though clearly manifested in academic theories, this difference stemmed from the divergent social processes. . In the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural areas in Eastern Europe experienced a stormy and tragic history with far-reaching consequences. The elimination of their backwardness remained merely an ideological slogan. What had really been accomplished proved to be a step backwards relative to the previous periods and caused a serious break in economic development of rural places and in social consciousness of rural people. One example of a cataclysm the Soviet countryside experienced – a cataclysm with a death toll of 6–8 million people – was the great famine (Holodomor) in the early 1930s.

The Soviet *dualist approach to geography*, different from the western treatment of the subject, sharply distinguished between physical and human (i.e. economic) geography (BULLA, B. 1953 p. 49; PROBÁLD, F. 1995 p. 38, 1999 p. 252). However, human geography was effectively reduced, in the Soviet Union, to economic geography (industrial geography, analysis of location factors and production forces). Such genuine subjects of human geography as population and settlement were studied mostly as important factors of production (PROBÁLD, F. 1999 p. 253). According to MÉSZÁROS, R. (1979 p. 401), population geography and geography of settlements were the youngest spheres within Soviet economic geography.

All the three factors, i.e. a specific path of social and academic development, a definitive dualist stance, and a preponderance of economic geography (within human geography's scope) provided that in contrast to Western geography a concept of rurality did not emerge as a synthesizing concept. According to PROBÁLD, F. (1995 p. 38): "at any rate, dichotomy of nature and society hindered the development of regional geography of a synthesizing trend". A specific approach to rural spaces or their neglect in Soviet geography in comparison with the western (including Hungarian) counterparts is captured in *Table 1*.

In spite of the above limitations the Soviet economic geography yielded considerable results in the sphere of *agricultural regionalization* (e.g. MUKOMEL, I.F. 1954; RAKITNIKOV, A.N. 1961, 1973), based on diversity of natural landscape. According to BERNÁT, T. (1967 p. 152), the evaluation of natural components has played an eminent role in geographical approach to Soviet agriculture.

Table 1. Concepts of and studies on the rural spaces in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West, in the East and in Hungary

Years	Western Europe	Hungary	Soviet Union (and successor states)
1920–1950	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tönnies (Gemeinschaft) urban-rural dichotomy</li> <li>- Rural areas preserve the past (conservatism, the genuine nation: England), urban settlements are depositories of modernity, of the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sociographies, studies on the backwardness of rural Hungary, feudal residues within the rural society</li> <li>- Repartition of land as the fundamental issue of land reform</li> <li>- Repartition of land carried out in 1945 and its consequences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From the 1920s: laying foundations for the Soviet concept of geography, Batanskiy's activities</li> <li>- 1930s years: „Stalinist“ transformation, social “shock” (the three great demographic disasters, Civil War+Holodomor+Great Patriotic War)</li> <li>- In these circumstances (grain expropriation, collectivization, <i>obeskulachivanie</i>, deportations) no investigations of rural areas might be carried out (in a lack of data and conditions)</li> </ul>
1950–1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pahl modernization, urban-rural continuum,</li> <li>- Penetration of capitalism into agriculture</li> <li>- Smallholders' holdings are changed by family farms, peasant farms are taken over by agricultural workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early 1960s: collectivization – sectoral and regional studies on the economic background of agriculture in the support of development and planning</li> <li>- Expansion of quantitative methods, options for a complex investigation of rural areas</li> <li>- From the 1970s a turn towards the society: research of rural transformation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demand on the research of rapid industrialization</li> <li>- Development of the consolidated extensive Soviet economy starting with the second half of 1950s: studies on the agricultural rayons for the purposes of economic progress (the Khrushchev era): virgin land, cotton, maize programmes</li> <li>- Recognition of population and settlement as the factors of economic production, initiation of investigations into rural areas in the frame of economic geography</li> </ul>
1980–1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Postmodern agriculture: rural areas “after” farming</li> <li>- searching for new research trends</li> <li>- social problems, social geographic groups</li> <li>- rural is the area residents of which declare themselves rural (behavioural geography)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1990s years: decline of the agricultural sector: studies on the related socio-economic problems and on the new spatial structure of farming</li> <li>- A complex approach to rurality (after the western pattern)</li> <li>- A growth of the significance of farming (with the decay of subsidiaries as part of structural reorganization)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survival of the concept: rural=agricultural</li> <li>- Research of depressive (rural) regions, of those with heavy population loss</li> <li>- Looking back upon the rural conditions during the period of “classical” capitalism (Vitte and Stolypin, late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century; NEP era; Ukraine: independence between 1917 and 1922)</li> <li>- Connection of agricultural issues to demographic ones (Ioffe's works), outset of the complex rural geography</li> </ul>

ENYEDI, GY. (BERNÁT, T. and ENYEDI, GY. 1977 p. 16) called attention to Soviet agroecological regionalization schemes which he tended to label as natural landscape assessments from the viewpoint of farming. A similarly large-scale work on regionalization was devoted to the delimitation of agrarian zones in Ukraine (MUKOMEL, I.F. 1954).

Some outstanding achievements of *rural geography* were aptly summarized by MÉSZÁROS, R. (1979). In the 1960s, scholars from the Institute of Geography Academy of Sciences of the USSR (IGAN) carried out extensive agricultural regionalization of the Lower Volga (Astrakhan oblast') as reported by LASZISZ, J.B. (1959) and RAKITNIKOV, A.N. (1961).

In Hungary, the *geographical literature of the Soviet period* was thoroughly studied by WALLNER, E. (1953); BELUSZKY, P. (1965); BERNÁT, T. and ENYEDI, GY. (1977); MÉSZÁROS, R. (1979); by RADÓ, S. (1957, 1960: with a strong Marxist-Leninist ideological approach by the latter author). Besides, periodicals such as *Földrajzi Értesítő/Geographical Bulletin* (e.g. POMUSZ, M.I. 1952) and *Földrajzi Közlemények/Geographical Review* (e.g. ANUCSIN, V.A. 1966) published materials of scientific discussions and theses in Hungarian translation, and some articles from the journal *Voprosy Geografii* were printed as well. For the most part these reviews covered publications authored by scholars from Moscow State University/MGU and at IGAN. Relatively little attention was paid to the works produced at the universities of the Soviet republics other than Russia (e.g. Ukraine). The latter, however, were of lower quality compared to research conducted in the academic centres in Moscow.

### **Current approach to rural areas of the CIS and the principal literary sources**

In many respects, "rural spaces" in the East European literature are synonymous with the agricultural sector. In Soviet books and articles published at the end of the 1980s, the adjective "rural" was applied to depressive regions afflicted with massive population decline. The objective of researchers was to reveal the reasons for this decline and other problems of these areas (KHOMRA, A.U. 1989; ZAYONČKOVSKAYA, Z.A. 1986; DOLENINA, O.E. 2005).

In the early 1990s, privatization of agriculture and its political and economic background was the focus of the studies primarily pursued by economists. Besides, several contemporary publications compared the rural spaces prior to the Russian revolution (1917) with the processes during the 1990s (e.g. IOFFE, G., NEFEDOVA, T. 1997a; NEFEDOVA, T. *et al.* 2001). A *radical transformation* of the peasant society and *rural regions* were the topics for the historians (SUBTELNY, O. 2000; HELLER, M. 2000; HELLER, M. and NYEKRICS, A. 2003), and for the experts on economic policy (VAN ZON, H., BATAKO, A. and KLESLAVSKA, A. 1998; VAN ZON, H. 2001).

The third important case at issue was investigations into a nexus of the above mentioned problems that constitute rural geography in a broader sense. There are only few specialists involved in the study of rural regions in Eastern Europe because the attention of geographers is rather focused on urban centres as the engines of socio-economic transformation (WEGREN, K.S. 2000 p. 237). A "discovery" of rural spaces was accomplished by the late 1990s when privatization was basically over, and its consequences, as well as the unsolved problems gained importance. Rural geography as a complex approach appeared on the scene, relating farming production to demographic depression. That was the focus of the works of IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. However, only a narrow circle of contemporary researchers from Eastern Europe deals with the rural issues. At present NAHIRNA, V.P. in Ukraine, and ANTIPOVA, E.A. in Belarus are the leading personalities in rural geography.

Out of geographical periodicals in the West, the most valuable source of information about East European countryside is *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (the successor to *Soviet Geography*). Founded by Theodore SHABAD (HARRIS, C.D. 1998), author of the first monograph on the economic geography of the Soviet Union (SHABAD, T. 1951), this periodical has since 1960 dealt with geography of countries of the Eastern Bloc. Publishing the writings by several Soviet economic geographers, it provided a deeper insight into studies going on in the eastern part of Europe. With the time passing, the appearance and contents of the journal changed several times, and it has become predominantly economic in profile. In the early 1990s, it was renamed *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, its current title was obtained at a later date. This change in the title was necessary, because the study area extended spatially. Since the early 1990s, the growing number of articles was devoted to China, so instead of the former Soviet space the emphasis was put upon human geography of post-socialist countries.

Another important source available in the English-speaking world is *Europe-Asia Studies* published by the University of Glasgow. The title suggests a less geographic and more general (area studies) orientation of the contents. Besides the regional studies, micro-level sociological surveys and articles on economics prevail, the latter with the emphasis on economic and social policy.

There are some research institutes specializing on East Europe (Osteuropa Institut, Berlin, Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa Institut, Vienna, Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig, Institut für Agrarentwicklung Mittel und Osteuropas, Halle), and their areas of inquiry are divided between the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe (European countries of CIS). Of the periodicals in German, *Osteuropa* rather publishes multidisciplinary essays ranging from economics and history to literature and political science. Its kindred journal is *Osteuropa Wirtschaft* which focuses on the economy. Of

the geographic periodicals, the most important is *Europa Regional*. Its study areas are the Balkans, Central Europe, and CIS countries. There are journals (*Geographische Rundschau*, *Geoforum*, *GeoJournal*, *Annals AAG* etc.) that deal with the East European region either only occasionally or in thematic issues; they offer a scope to publications by both native and western experts.

A critical comment about Western publications on Russia is contained in IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. (2001a p. 398). Specifically, they point out that the approach of western authors to contemporary Russia is marked by a “breaking news” mentality, i.e., it centers on elections, Kremlin leadership, oligarchs or the drastic decline of the economy but barely takes the long-term processes into account.

### Rural geography in Russia

This area of inquiry has developed mainly in Russia during the past two decades indicating a high scholarly level reached by the academic institutions and far-reaching international links. Since the emergence of the CIS, the attention of the international academic audience has increasingly focused on the Russian Federation. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, political and economic power and therefore importance of Russia in the eyes of social scientists outweighs those of the rest of the successor states of the USSR considerably, thus the experts keep a close eye on that country. Secondly, in Soviet times Moscow dominated international relations whereas the universities of the other (than Russia) republics almost exclusively maintained professional ties with the academic establishments within the Soviet Union. After the breakup of the union, Moscow inherited the international connections of the Soviets; therefore, Russian researchers have a better chance to publish in western periodicals than specialists from the Near Abroad. Thirdly, after the collapse of the USSR, part of the leading scholars (mainly from Moscow) with command of foreign languages emigrated to the West where they were welcomed. These researchers established further contacts and created publishing opportunities for the geographers from the homeland.

There are two kinds of articles about rural Russia. The first group deals with the relatively densely populated core area, i.e., with rural regions of the black-earth and of the non-black-earth areas of *European Russia*. The other group is devoted to *geography of the peripheral regions*, that is, sparsely populated areas and ethnic republics. Besides Siberia, the European North belongs in this group as well as ethnically diverse Caucasus.

In most of the articles on European Russia, no regional aspects are tackled at all; rather, they deal in general with processes of shorter duration that have taken place in rural Russia and in agriculture, especially privatiza-



tion or with a historical perspective on the society and economy. Some of these writings are economic treatises considering Russia as a homogeneous entity, describing the privatization process and the rural areas affected by it in a spatially undifferentiated manner. Other articles are micro-level sociological analyses which view general trends from the perspective of local experiences learned through in-depth interviews. Yet one more group of articles are writings emphasizing regional specifications of general trends and applying methodologies from economics and sociology to a continuum of spatial scales from regions down to settlements and individuals.

In sights into the historical geography of the processes that took place in rural Russia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were thus *historical antecedents* of the agricultural privatization of the 1990s is mainly associated with the work of IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. (especially IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. 1997a). The authors provide an overview of the developments in rural areas, that is, of the forerunners of the present-day transformation,. These developments range from overpopulation of the rural regions to their fragmentation and from the decay of *obschina* to the vanishing of the collective sector. The major thread of the work in question is the comparative analysis of the transformations of Russia's rural spaces after the emancipation of serfs (1861) – the transformations preceding and following the STOLYPIN land reform (that undercut *obschina*) and of the post-Soviet transition. DOLENINA, V.P. (2005) presented an overview of demographic processes in rural spaces in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Devoted to the investigations of historical dimensions, is an outstanding book by NEFEDOVA, T., POLIAN, P. and TREIVISH, A. (2001) entitled *Town and village in European Russia – Changes of one hundred years*. This is one of the most detailed analyses of European Russia. Its antecedent was the eponymous 1910 book by P.P. SEMENOV TIAN-SHANSKIY. It was the first detailed description of European Russia, including its rural areas. Fundamental structures of East European collective agriculture – *obschina* under the czars and the collective farm under the Soviets – were the subject of writings by several authors (SKYNER, L. 2003; LINDNER, P. and NIKULIN, A. 2004).

Most articles on *agricultural privatization* were published in the first half of 1990s; predominantly in the context of politics and economics and of the ongoing transformation. Along with the economist LERMAN, Z. it was VAN ATTA, D. and WEGREN, K.S. who studied these issues thoroughly. Below only those authors will be mentioned who have been steadily publishing on the subject. The first contributions by WEGREN, K.S. (1994a, 1997) were devoted to agricultural privatization, putting the political background and land reform in the focus. BARNES, A. (1998) highlighted the differences between the methods of privatization in industry and farming.

In the early 1990s, the majority of the authors dealt with private (*farmer*) holdings at that time considered potentially viable, but by the

mid-1990s they had shrunk and the dominance of large-scale collective sector and the subsistent household plots became evident. Later, large-scale production units had come to the fore and due to difficulties in data acquisition for several million dwarf holdings (IOFFE, G. 2005) the subsistence or household farms were involved in the analyses only after the turn of the millennium. SKYNER, L. (2003) inquired into the issue of collective and private land ownership. BROOKS, K. and LERMAN, Z. (1994), WEGREN, S.K. (1994c), RODIONOVA, G. and OVČINCEVA, L. (2000), LINDNER, P. (2003) analysed a model reorganization of production units in *Nizhny Novgorod oblast'* and its outcomes. This, in fact, was a model suggested by the World Bank and first introduced in five territorial units; subsequently the methods spread from here to the entire country. Accordingly, land shares were distributed among collective farm members. The contingents of the individual members were determined on the basis of time they worked on the farm. Real estates and other non-land property and agricultural machines were auctioned. Members were encouraged to join into groups in order to form new farms and to participate in tenders, bidding for machinery, buildings, and animals. From one collective farm 5–15 new farms with different specialization used to emerge.

In his two latest articles, LINDNER, P. (2003, 2007) sought for reasons for the disintegration of Russian agriculture at the farm level. He emphasized that due to the weakness of the central state power in the course of the transformation of collective farms – a multitude of subjective human factors proved to have played a critical part in the destiny of the newly emerged farms and their economic success or failure. This led to rapid differentiation of the farms. Moreover, Soviet collective farms used to assume functions beyond just farming, as they provide infrastructure, services for the settlements, economic background and support for the household farms so bidding farewell to collective farms was not an easy case. Consequently, reorganization of collective farms was often nominal and it has not brought about new structures.

WEGREN has lately provided an assessment of the agricultural policy of the Putin era (WEGREN, K.S. 2004, 2005) coupled with the description of *socio-economic outcomes of reform* (WEGREN, K.S. 2000; WEGREN, K.S. *et al.* 2003), such as rural unemployment and the lack of agrarian elite. A similar sociological treatise published by SHUBIN, S. (2007) on rural poverty is based on network analysis.

Besides macro processes, several authors studied their *regional specifications* that showed up during agrarian reform. The first writings of this kind appeared in 1994, with the termination of the initial step of transition when collective and state farms acquired new organizational forms pattern (even if only formally) and most agricultural land was withheld from state property. CRAUMER, P.R. (1994) carried out an analysis of the spatial consequences of the transformation of farming at the oblast level for the entire country, in-



cluding the socio-economic circumstances and natural conditions. CRAUMER, P.R. applied many variables of a broad spectrum (qualification, employment, population, ethnic relations, productivity and profitability in agriculture, urban–rural interrelationships, private farms, political relations, incomes and land use). He made an attempt to process variables by multi-various methods (correlation and cluster analyses) but due to a multitude of variables and the unknown pattern of their interrelationships no statistically significant results were arrived at, and so the treatise revealed nothing much by way of description. CRAUMER, P.R. also provided a long list of references from the first half of 1990s. Typologies relating to rural Russia on the oblast level and based on agriculture and consumption were produced by KUHN, A. and WEHRHEIM, P. (1999) for European Russia, South Siberia and Far East.

Using comparative analyses of different regions WEGREN, K.S. (1992 1994b,) established spatial effects of agricultural reform and for the first time among the foreign experts he examined these processes at the rayon level in the Kostroma and Rostov oblasts. These studies focused on the transformation of agricultural enterprises and on appearance of peasant holdings and emphasized the relevance of the cultural-ethnic dimension to the collectivise tradition.

IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. (2001a) presented an overview of the entire agro-food system (food production and processing) and its regional distribution. In another article (IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. 2001b) they closely examined the processes of transformation using the example of Moscow and Ryazan oblasts, with a special reference to the spatial aspects. The study uses local examples for the description of territorial links between agriculture and food processing. The authors' conclusion was that there would be five factors instrumental in the regional position of food economy: a core–periphery relation, productivity of the agricultural sector, human capital, economic situation of food processing, and spatial polarization with land abandonment in the periphery. Another article by IOFFE, G. (2005) treated the critical issues of agriculture such as its unimportance from the viewpoint of the investors and human resources whereas a work by NEFEDOVA, T.G. (2009) was an attempt to provide a summary report about the period since 1990 and a prediction of the long-term retreat of the sector due to extreme rural population decline up to 2050.

There were studies focusing on *household plots* and private farms. The forerunner of these studies was an article in the special issue of *Geographische Rundschau* which dealt with the USSR (GIESE, E. 1983) and attached importance to household plots operating along with collective and state farms not merely as subsidiaries. Even though the dwarf household plots provided a significant part of produce they barely appeared as research topics. This is primarily because the reliable statistical data had been merger about this type of farming

operations which could only be investigated through painstaking field work. This topic surfaced in several works that for the most part explored the changing legal and economic background (PROSTERMAN, R.L. *et al.* 1997; WEGREN, S.K. 2004). The latter article identified the differences between the household plots and registered private farms, especially from a legal perspective. An article by AMELINA, M. (2000) sought an answer to the question, why the peasantry prefers to remain within the collective sector, why it is more attractive and where the household plots are positioned in the contemporary structures. The empirical investigations carried out in the Leningrad and Saratov oblasts included survey of nearly two hundred households associated with the collective sector and an analysis of the local agricultural policy allegedly responsible for the divergent options, such as self-organization on the market (household plots) versus dependency on the collective sector. The East European collective agriculture (obshchina of the tsarist regime or the collective farm of the Soviet period) as a basic structure of the rural spaces appeared in LINDNER, P. and NIKULIN, A. (2004). The study by IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. (1997b) is similar in its content.

A significant breakthrough was the investigation by NEFEDOVA, T. and PALLOT, J. (2003, 2006) reported in a volume published by the Oxford University Press and entitled *Russia's Unknown Agriculture: Household Production in Post-Soviet Russia*. The book pursues a spatial approach to household plots i.e. it is a purely rural geographical volume. This is an extended version of an article published by the same authors in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* and based on surveys in contrasting regions of Russia: Stavropol' krai, Volga and Ural regions, and Arkhangel'sk and Moscow oblasts. Factors differentiating among household plots (accessibility of markets, physical environment, competitiveness of the different produce) have a close relationship with the ethnic dimension.

One of the latest contributions of WEGREN, K.S. *et al.* (2008) was an attempt to apply linear regression to outcomes of a sociological survey and reveal implications of geographical location. In that survey over 1,000 households were analysed on the basis of their distance from the rayon centre in more than 30 villages from 9 regions. Correlation was found between location and economic performance both on rayon and settlement (micro) levels.

A complex spatial perspective on rural space, *Russian rural geography* has grown out of studies on geography of agriculture and those on rural demographic processes (as the labour force background of the sector). The outstanding works belonging to this trend: IOFFE, G. 1991; IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. 2004; IOFFE, G., NEFEDOVA, T. and ZASLAVSKY, I. 2004; IOFFE, G. 2005; NEFEDOVA, T. 2008a,b. The first crucial point in the case was made by an article by IOFFE, G. V. (1991) showing linkage of demographic processes taking place in the rural areas to the situation in agriculture, based on the state of affairs in the Soviet

era. The reforms of the 1990s produced a mess in the spatial distribution, but rural structures that had crystallized by the end of the decade by and large remained the same as before; the reforms even intensified the spatial contrasts. Beginning from the second half of the 1990s, the authors tried to display the historical continuity of the new structures. The first fundamental work on this subject, entitled *Continuity and Change in Rural Russia* (IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. 1997a), was written in the midst of the transformation. This volume dealt chiefly with the changes prior to the 1990s, taking into account the Soviet period as a whole, but it extended into the years after the change of the political regime. The book was pioneering in a sense that it was fully dedicated to the Russian countryside and the concepts of rural geography were applied to inter-urban spaces. The authors revealed the factors instrumental in the structure of the agriculture prior to 1990, including the change of population distribution and socio-economic impacts of transformation. They were the first to write about spatial polarization and fragmentation of rural activities. Some regions, e.g. Belgorod oblast' within the black earth zone and Yaroslavl oblast' within non-black-earth zone were studied in more detail. In a monograph published at the turn of the millennium (NEFEDOVA, T. *et al.* 2001), special attention was paid to rural typology and changes in European Russia.

A prominent volume by NEFEDOVA, T. (2003), entitled *Rural Russia at the Crossroads* dealt with rural circumstances that emerged following the transformation of agriculture. A particular attention was paid to urban-rural relationships, including the impact of the *dacha*, a typically Russian phenomenon of weekend cottages combining urban and rural functions (in a sense that urbanities settled in the countryside and thus affected its demographic and socio-economic processes). Many people who own *dachas* engage in subsistence farming activities. The author also subjected the transformation of Russia's agriculture to an international comparison focusing on the mode of food production (e.g. collective sector, household plots, and registered private farms). The measures of agriculture's success are influenced by the farm's location especially under extreme environmental and accessibility conditions. The book ends up with a 10 unit regional typology that combines two aspects – accessibility and natural conditions.

A publication by IOFFE, G., NEFEDOVA, T. and ZASLAVSKY, I. (2004) represents the most concise and thorough account of the fragmentation of Russian rural spaces. A more detailed version of this account was later released as a book, "*The End of Peasantry?*" by IOFFE, G., NEFEDOVA, T. and ZASLAVSKY, I. (2006). The same issues were raised by IOFFE, G. and NEFEDOVA, T. (2004) in their article in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* seeking for the drivers of spatial differentiation, such as physical environment and accessibility, in European Russia. This volume has a lot in common with the one of 1997 but presents a picture that emerged after the market reform induced transforma-

tion. The book focuses on spatial disintegration of rural Russia applying a key idea: *Geography is Destiny*. The once continuous social space of rural Russia has been converging into an archipelago consisting of multiple oases of farming immersed in a socio-demographic desert. Internet inspired the idea of the “death of distance” but it is not valid in each case as electronic communication is not available everywhere and for everyone. In the book the proponents of environmental determinism (Andrey PARSHEV, Fiona HILL, Clifford GADDY) are set against scholars who studied relations of cause and effect between Russian environment and socio-economic development (geographers Piotr SEMYONOV TIAN-SHANSKIY, Piotr SAVITSKIY and historians Sergey SOLOVYOV and Vasilii KLYUCHEVSKIY).

The book enlarged upon specific Russian features such as the dichotomy of Westerners and Slavophiles, Russian collectivism (*sobornost'*), peasant community (*obshchina*), collectivization, delayed capitalist development and urbanization. The general dimensions fundamental for the situation of farming were described: west–east sociocultural gradient in Europe, distance from urban centres (i.e., a core-periphery relation), frontier character of the conquest of rural space, expansion typical of the previous times, marginal location due to considerable distances and environmental extremes. The volume provided an overview of rural population, situation in farming, and regionalization of European Russia. Some specific regions were characterized in more detail, such as Novgorod and Moscow oblasts, Stavropol' krai, and Chuvash Republic. The book may be considered a comprehensive summary of the authors' previous investigations.

In the course of their quantitative studies G. IOFFE, and T. NEFEDOVA have come to the conclusion that whereas the differentiation of rural spaces during the czarist regime depended on natural conditions, it became predominantly the function of urban impact by the end of the Soviet era. As NEFEDOVA, T. (2006) put it, the urban centres had become the main drivers (organizing forces) of the spatial structures of rural Russia.

In an article written in Russian NEFEDOVA, T. G. (2007) discussed theoretical foundations and roots of rural studies (in fact human geography approach to agriculture) in Russian geography, while KRYUCHKOV, V.G. (2002) wrote about agrarian geographical investigations carried out at Moscow State University. In Russian literature several regional reports appeared such as the Ugory project conducted and published jointly by sociologists and geographers (NEFJODOVA, T.G. 2008c; NEFEDOVA, T.G. 2010). Ugory village council (*sel'skiy soviet*) is located in Manturovo rayon of Kostroma oblast', ca 600 km north-east of Moscow. This is a typical segment of an internal periphery where a low population density, dwarf villages, ageing and outmigration have become a serious problem. It is virtually a process of degradation of a frontier area.

Leafing through the periodical *Regionalnie Issledovaniya*, one can get an insight into the situation of rural geography in Russia. Another inner peripheral rayon in Kostroma oblast' was the subject of an article by BABURIN, V. L. (2007). In effect it is an exploration and description of complex socio-economic problems within a smaller region. Typologies of simpler (one-dimensional) kind are represented by KAZMIN, M.A. and ČERNISHEVA, E.A. (2007) who dealt with the settlement network of rural areas in European Russia. European oblasts were classed into 11 types of rural settlement network by the size of villages (small, medium and large) and the temporal change of the oblasts' position (1979, 1989 and 2002) was traced as well. LEVČENKOV, A.V. (2007) described the historical transformation of a rural settlement pattern of Kaliningrad oblast' since the pre-Soviet period.

### Research of rural areas in Ukraine and in Belarus

The geographical literature associated with rural areas of Ukraine, especially the one based on empirical studies, is much scantier than its counterpart about Russia and it is hardly represented internationally. One of the most curious papers was published by KHOMRA, A.U. (1989) who analyzed population decline in rural regions of the Ukrainian S.S.R. in the 1970s and 80s. Its greatest merit among the foreign language publications on Ukraine is high spatial resolution of research (conducted at the rayon level).

Most of geographical studies about rural Ukraine in foreign languages have dealt with agricultural endowments. The issue of a contradiction between a high *agrarian potential* and a disastrous performance of the farming sector and the issue of *privatization in agriculture* were examined predominantly by the economists.<sup>3</sup> Several studies were published under the aegis of the World Bank (1994a, 1994b), such as the treatises by CsÁKI, Cs. and LERMAN, Z. (1997, 2000). The World Bank and OECD issued several works about the Ukrainian agricultural sector (OECD 2003, 2004). The latter (OECD 2004) is a detailed analysis focused on the agricultural potential of the country (agrarian policy, privatization, living conditions in rural areas).

CLEMENT, H. (1994) examined Ukrainian agriculture in the mirror of agriculture and heavy industry as the major sectors of the economy. The notion of "*Kornkammer*"<sup>4</sup> (granary or breadbasket) referring to Ukraine occurs in the articles repeatedly. BALABANOV, G.V. and FRIEDLEIN, G. (1995) reveal the significance of "*Kornkammer*" in relation to environmental and economic con-

<sup>3</sup> E.g. GUDOWSKI, J. 1997; LISSITSA, A. and ODENING, M. 2001; ONEGINA, V.M. 2001; NIJNIK, M. 2001; LISSITSA, A. 2002; KRAVCHUK, R.S. 2002; ZORYA, S.I. 2003; JOHNSON, T.G. *et al.* 2005.

<sup>4</sup> In Diercke Weltatlas (2000 p. 153) published in Germany the concept of "*Kornraum*" was used.

ditions. A similar approach is deployed also by BREBUDA, J. (1971), PENKAITIS, N. (1994), POSPELOWA, G. (1995) and SCHUBERT, W. (1997). In the 1940s and 50s, agroecological studies appeared in the Anglo-Saxon literature comparing the North American prairie and the Ukrainian steppe (e.g. NUTTONSON, M.Y. 1947).

The issue of *household microfarms* is discussed in the paper of NEDOBOROVSKYY, A. (2004) reporting on the case study conducted in three rayons of Zhitomir oblast'. Transformation of the Ukrainian rural areas was tackled by ALLINA-PISANO, J. (2007).

On agriculture and its transformation many studies of non-geographic character were published relating to *regions that once used to be part of Central Europe* such as Sub-Carpathia (ALMÁSY, S. 2004; ALMÁSY, S. and KÁLI, T. 2004; RÉTI, L. and MOLNÁR, J. 1999; VLAKH, M. 1997); Galicia (BOSCH, B. and ENDLICHER, W. 2001) or Kaliningrad oblast' (KORNEJEWZ, W.S. and KNAPPE, E. 1996). Rural areas of the Carpathian Euroregion figured in the writing of SÜLI-ZAKAR, I. (2000) with a detailed description of such regions in Sub-Carpathia and Galicia. The study presents the results of a survey devoted to subsistent farms within agriculture.

An overview of contemporary literary sources published in Ukrainian has led to more findings in empirical and quantitative analyses, but not in spatial typologies. Apparently the main hindrance on the way to a typology was a lack of uniform data about small territorial units. As a result, spatial analysis is performed at the oblast level, which is conducive to only a generalized picture of the emerging spatial patterns.

In Ukraine, one of the most prominent sources is the periodical issued by a research institute for regional studies under the aegis of the University of Lviv, *Regionalna Ekonomika* and *Ekonomika Ukraina*. From the reviewed literature it became clear that a strong regional economic approach and a GIS-based environmental-ecological analysis are the key aspects of research published by that periodical.

This is a fundamental and rapidly evolving trend within Ukrainian geography. A widely accepted and practised method to measure spatial disparities is to sum up various socio-economic indicators and to establish a ranking order of oblasts. Cluster and factor analyses are also frequently applied. However, when relatively few spatial units (the oblasts of the country or the rayons of an oblast') are described by numerous indicators, a statistical significance of the results appears to be questionable.

A textbook for higher education published in Lviv and dealing with human geography of Ukraine (SHABLIJ, O.I. 1994) contains only a brief description of rural issues (e.g.: settlement patterns pp. 210–213). The population as a source of workforce for agriculture captures some attention in the introduction to a discussion of the agri-food production complex (285 p). After a brief



analysis of sectoral complexes the spatial structure of agricultural production is displayed (pp. 307–310).

In relation to transformation processes in the rural areas and to the agricultural sector, several surveys were conducted at the oblast' level by NAHIRNA, V.P. (1998, 2003, 2006) resulting in types of rural spaces within the individual oblasts. The associates of the Institute of Geography in Kyiv (BALABANOV, G.V. *et al.* 2003) published a work on the spatial aspects of transformation of several sectors, including the agri-food production complex at the level of oblasts.

Besides, this work presents a complex description of the nine regional economies in the country. The drawback of the analysis is that it sticks to vast administrative units, i.e., oblasts or to large economic regions so the picture derived is too generalized. The research of rural areas in this sense means the study of depressive (agrarian) regions (ZASTAVNIY, F. 2005; BARANOVSKIY, M.O. 2007).

The first lengthy *monograph that might be considered rural geographic* was published by BARANOVSKIY, M.O. in 2009. The work is centered on a typology of depressive areas at the rayon level supported methodologically with a factor analysis encompassing 19 indicators. The book has a lot to offer and contains proposals for the regional policy especially in relation to Chernikhiv region based on a detailed case study.

As far as rural geography of Belarus is concerned, the work of ANTIPOVA, E.A. (*et al.* 2007, 2008) has to be mentioned. She has been involved in the investigations of demographic issues and rural settlement network of Belarus. In her first lengthy coauthored volume published under the auspices of the United Nations, the demographic situation and labour market potential were measured. In her later writing, she used the concept of rural geography (*sel'skaya geografiya*). Describing the demography of rural areas, ANTIPOVA compiled a rayon-level typology. Dwarf villages present the most acute problem throughout the country; therefore in the frame of regional development policy a network of agrarian towns was planned as central places of the lowest level.

The author examined the demographic trends of these central settlements. A rayon-level cluster analysis of Belarus's demographic situation and its settlement network, resulted in a typology of the rural areas in Belarus. Similarly to BARANOVSKIY, ANTIPOVA tackled the related problems of regional policy and made recommendations.

In the international literature on geography, the agriculture of Belarus was dealt with by KNAPPE, E. *et al.* (2002, 2004). Putting emphasis on the postponement of structural reforms in agriculture and on change of the level and standards of production in farming, she also touched upon the problems of the rural settlement network.

## Conclusion

The emergence of rural geography in all the three CIS countries can be attributed to a few of researchers. Consequently, rurality as a complex notion has not been accepted and appears only marginally in the literature. Russian rural geography has developed in the wake of research activities and publications of NEFEDOVA and IOFFE, its Ukrainian counterpart emerged with the works by NAHIRNA and BARANOVSKIY, while in Belarus ANTIPOVA was the explorer of the subject. All of them should be deemed pioneers of rural geography in the respective countries.

Rural geography has grown out of the interrelationship between the issues of demography and agriculture and of the studies on rural areas as depressive regions in these countries. Studies of rural areas, however, are still lagging behind the studies of urban spaces as the key engines of the economy. International and foreign language literature mainly deals with rural Russia and to a considerably smaller degree with Ukraine, whereas Belarus is largely neglected. Rural Russia attracts the attention of foreign scholars because of its enormity and of the role it plays in society as well as because of a general interest in privatization. As for Ukraine, the apparent contradiction between its large agrarian potential and low productivity of agriculture has engaged attention of the scholars.

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