

Territorial distribution dynamics of rural population in Lithuania in the 20th century (1897–2007)

Algirdas Stanaitis,

Saulius Stanaitis

Vilnius Pedagogical University,
Studentų 39,
LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: saulius.stanaitis@vpu.lt

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The paper presents a survey of the dynamics of the regional distribution of Lithuanian rural population in the 20th century. The survey is based on the data of population censuses and current statistics. The territorial distribution of rural population in different years of the 20th century and its regional differences are discussed. The reasons for different dynamic patterns of the distribution are indicated. The dynamics of the number and density of rural population in the nearest future is predicted.

Key words: rural population, territorial distribution, regional differences, population number and density

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was marked by significant political, economic and cultural changes. Destructive revolutions and wars, which killed millions of people and inflicted enormous material losses, accompanied the all-round progress. The mentioned events embraced various areas of the planet, yet they were most pronounced in Europe. Lithuania in the neighbourhood of the largest European countries was among the hardest hit territories. The Lithuanian people suffered all calamities and losses of the 20th century.

Huge material losses went along with losses of population through permanent emigration, deportation and wars. The patterns of the territorial distribution of Lithuania's population

were predetermined by social and economic transformations and differences of the natural increment of population. In the first half of the 20th century, the increase of the population was negligible: from 2536.0 to 2573.4 thousands (Statistics..., 2007). The pre-war (1939) population was restored in Lithuania only in about 1968. The natural population increment reduced from 14.7‰ in 1960 to 3.2‰ in 2004. It has been negative for almost two decades already (Statistics..., 2005). Depopulation due to emigration and a negative population growth in 1992–2007 amounted to 321.4 thou or 8.7% (Statistics..., 2007).

The 20th century changed the territorial distribution of the population. In the first half of the century, the absolute majority of population resided in rural settlements: in 1923 78.5% and in 1939 77.1%) (Table 1). In the second half of the

Table 1. The Lithuanian urban and rural population in the 20th century
1 lentelė. Lietuvos miesto ir kaimo gyventojai XX a.

Year <i>Metai</i>	Total, thou. <i>Iš viso, tūkst.</i>	Urban population, <i>Miesto gyventojai</i>		Rural population <i>Kaimo gyventojai</i>		Density pop. / km ² <i>Tankumas žm. / km²</i>	
		Thou. / Tūkst.	%	Thou. / Tūkst.	%	Total	Rural
1897	2536.0	341.8	13.5	2194.2	86.5	38.8	33.9
1923 ¹	2029.0	302.9	14.9	1726.1	85.1	38.1	32.7
1939	3037.1	695.5	22.9	2341.6	77.1	46.5	36.1
1950	2573.4	729.5	28.3	1843.9	71.7	39.4	28.5
1959 ²	2696.7	1025.9	38.0	1670.8	62.0	41.3	26.2
1970 ²	3118.9	1557.7	49.9	1561.2	50.1	47.8	24.5
1979 ²	3391.5	2034.9	60.0	1356.6	40.0	51.9	21.3
1989 ²	3674.8	2486.8	67.7	1188.0	32.3	56.3	18.6
1992	3706.3	2531.4	68.3	1174.9	31.7	56.8	18.4
2001 ²	3487.4	2334.2	66.9	1152.8	33.1	53.4	18.1
2007	3384.9	2260.3	68.8	1124.6	33.2	51.8	17.6

¹ Without Vilnius and Klaipėda Regions.

² Data of population census.

century, Lithuania transformed from a rural to an urban country. A rapid depopulation in the rural areas has reduced the rural population to one third of the total. In recent years, the rates of reduction of rural population have stabilised and the proportion of rural population in the total of Lithuania even has slightly increased.

The present article is devoted to the dynamics of rural population in Lithuania in general and in its regions in different years of the 20th century, regional differences in rural population dynamics and their causes, and possible changes in the future.

STATISTICAL DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

The article makes use of the data published by the Lithuanian Statistical Department. In the 20th century, the territory of Lithuania and its administrative distribution changed more

than once. For this reason, the data had to be recalculated for the present Lithuanian area. The changing area of administrative units and their changing population number cause difficulties in comparing the data. For this reason, the tables contain not only the data about the number and density of population, but also on the area of administrative units.

The territorial distribution of the Lithuanian population in the first half of the 20th century is shown in tables and of the second half of the century in graphical charts. The density of rural population is calculated excluding the city areas which differed in various years. For the sake of easier comparison, the legend of population density is uniform for all graphical charts (Fig. 1).

The paper deals with the data of population censuses in 1959, 1989 and 2001, data of 1897 and 1939 recalculated for the present territory of Lithuania, and data of current statistics published in 1950 and 2007.

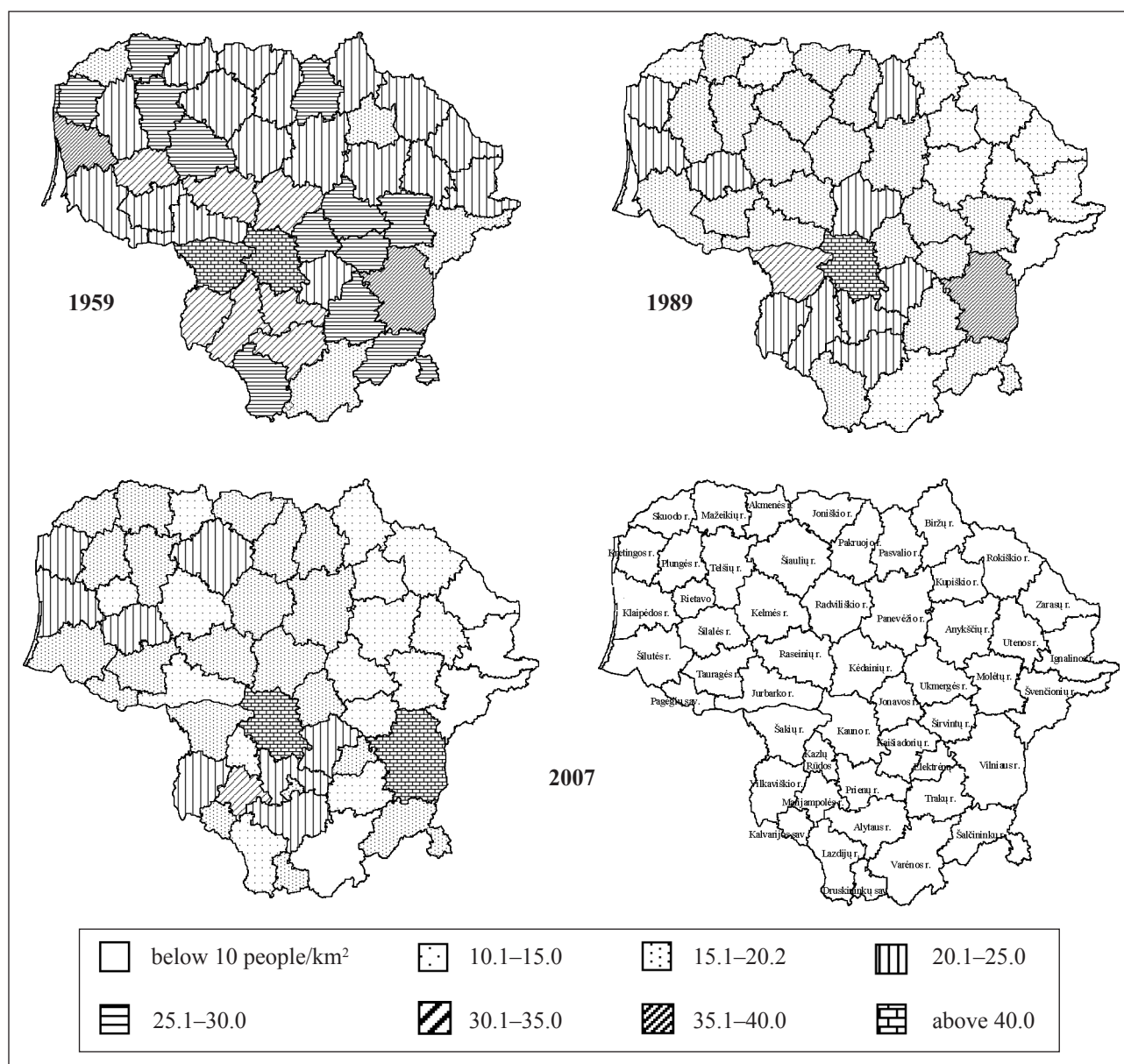


Figure. Territorial and administrative distribution of rural population density
Pav. Kaimo gyventojų tankumo teritorinė sklaida ir administracinis suskirstymas

The indices of population density are better for comparing the rural population dynamics because the population numbers are given for administrative units of a changing size. For a better apprehension of the specific features of Lithuanian regional population dynamics by foreign readership, the administrative distribution of the country is presented.

DYNAMICS OF THE TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL POPULATION

1897. At the end of the 19th century, the absolute majority of Lithuania's population lived in rural territories (86.5%). The density of population in the larger part of the country (Panevėžys, Raseiniai, Telšiai, Trakai and Vilnius counties) ranged within the limits of 33–35 per sq km (Table 2).

The lowest values of population density were recorded in the Šiauliai and Švenčionys counties (31–32 per sq km). The larger part of the latter then was outside the present territory of Lithuania. The highest values of population density were characteristic of the south-western part of Lithuania: 38–48 per sq km in the Kaunas, Kalvarija and Vilkaviškis counties and even 80.4 per sq km in the Marijampolė county. The reason could be more productive lands and lower forestation. Also, in West Lithuania the value of population density exceeded the average value of the country (33.9 per sq km).

1923. The total population amounted to slightly over two million people. The rural population accounted for 85.1% of the total (Table 1). The population census did not include the Vilnius and Klaipėda Regions. The rural population density was lower than in 1897 (32.7 per sq km). The territorial contrasts of density were even more pronounced. The highest values of population density were recorded in the Vilkaviškis (44.6 per sq km), Marijampolė (37.3) and Šakiai (37.0) counties. The lowest values were obtained in the Panevėžys, Telšiai and Zarasai counties

(less than 30 per sq km), and they were slightly higher in the Šiauliai, Lazdijai and Tauragė counties.

1939. On the eve of World War II, the majority of Lithuania's population lived in rural areas (2341.6 thou or 77.1%; population density was 36.1 per sq km). Since then, the number and density of rural population had been decreasing.

The main territorial features of rural population density had been preserved with the only difference that in many counties the values were slightly higher (by 2 persons per sq km) than in 1923. South-West Lithuania and the Klaipėda Region continued to be the most densely populated rural areas of the country. The lowest values of rural population density were characteristic of North Lithuanian and South-East Lithuanian counties.

1959. This year was marked by significant changes in the number and density of rural population. In 1939–1959, the rural population of Lithuania reduced by almost half a million (497.7 thou). Yet the rural population still accounted for 71.7% of the total. The population density reduced to 26.2 per sq km. Depopulation was then characteristic not only of rural areas, but also of the country in general (Table 1). This was an outcome of the pre- and post-war events.

Considerable changes occurred in the distribution patterns of rural population density (Fig. 1). The regional differences became more prominent and reached even 3.1 times (e. g. 48.4 per sq km in the Šakiai district and 15.8 per sq km in the Švenčionys district). Higher values were characteristic of the districts of the largest cities and lower values of the peripheral districts. The Sūduva ethnical region and the central districts of the country were most densely populated.

1989. Rapid changes of the number and density of rural population were taking place in 1959–1989. The number of rural population reduced by 482.8 thou or by 28.9%, and the density by 7.6 persons per sq km, or by 29%. The growth of urban population accounted for the growth of total population (by

Table 2. Number and density of rural population in 1897
2 lentelė. Kaimo gyventojų skaičius ir tankumas 1897 m.

County <i>Apskritis</i>	Area km ² <i>Plotas</i>	Number of population <i>Gyventojų skaičius</i>	Density pop. / km ² <i>Tankumas žm. / km²</i>
Kalvarija	1 257	6 1047	48.6
Marijampolė	1 307	10 5048	80.4
Vilkaviškis	1 715	67 802	39.5
Kaunas	4 029	156 511	38.8
Panevėžys	6 215	209 913	33.8
Raseiniai	6 485	227 907	35.1
Telšiai	5 306	177 146	33.4
Šiauliai	6 922	217 332	31.4
Ukmergė	5 866	215 586	36.8
Švenčionys ¹	5 237	166 083	31.7
Trakai	5 872	200 037	34.1
Vilnius ¹	6 196	208 348	33.6
Zarasai ¹	5 437	197 024	36.2
Total	61 844	2 209 784	35.7

¹Parts of Švenčionys, Vilnius and Zarasai counties were beyond the territory of Lithuania.

¹Dalis Švenčionių, Vilniaus, Zarasų apskričių buvo už dabartinės Lietuvos ribų.

978.1 thou). The rural areas were inhabited only by 32.3% of the total population (Fig. 1).

In 30 years, the density of rural population had reduced in all districts except Vilnius. In many districts, the density of rural population amounted to 15–20 per sq km. The difference between the highest and the lowest density values (Kaunas and Švenčionys districts) reached more than 4.3 times. Higher than 30 per sq km values of rural population density were recorded only in the Kaunas, Šakiai and Vilnius districts (Fig. 1). The peripheral rural districts, north-eastern in particular, were most sparsely populated.

2001. In the last decade of the 20th century, the rates of depopulation of the rural areas slowed down (since 1989, 35.2 thou or 3%; the density values reduced only slightly). According to the population census of 2001, the Lithuanian rural areas were populated by 1152.8 thou people or 33.1% of the total population). The density of rural population was 19.1 per sq km.

In 12 years (1989–2001), the density of rural population changed differently. In many districts it reduced, while in 12 districts (situated mainly in the Žemaitija ethnical region and Middle Lithuania) it slightly increased. The rural population density values reduced mainly in the districts of North and North-East Lithuania. In the Švenčionys and Varėna districts, they did not reach 10 persons per sq km.

2007. In the last 6 years (2001–2007), the rates of depopulation of rural areas have slowed down even more (28.2 thou, or 2.5%; density 0.4 per sq km). One third of the total population (33.2%) resided in rural areas.

The territorial dynamics of rural population density was different. In ten districts it increased: by 3.5 persons per sq km in the Kaunas district, 2.8 per sq km in the Klaipėda and slightly less in the Mažeikiai, Panevėžys, Kretinga and other districts). In some other districts it decreased: Kaišiadorys by 1.5, Anykščiai 1.3, and Molėtai and Pasvalys 1.2 persons per sq km.

In 2007, the regional contrasts of rural population density were most prominent and reached even 5.9 times (45.6 per sq km in the Kaunas district and 7.7 per sq km in the Švenčionys district). In four districts, the density values were lower than 10 persons per sq km (Fig. 1). The most densely populated rural areas were in the districts of the largest cities and the most sparsely populated rural areas were in the north-eastern part of Lithuania and peripheral districts (Figure 1).

MAIN CAUSES OF RURAL POPULATION CHANGES

The rapid reduction of the number and density of rural population in the 20th century was caused by many factors. The main of them are losses of population during and after the war, deportations, collectivisation, abolition of the system of individual farmsteads, rapid urbanisation, reduction of the natural population increment, etc.

A significant part of rural population was lost during and after World War II. Many people from rural areas were exiled to Siberia, confined in concentration camps, deported to Germany as labour force, left the country or perished.

The Soviet social-economic policy was unfavourable for the growth of rural population. The forced collectivisation impelled many rural residents (especially younger ones) to leave their native land. They moved to cities where the rapid industrialisation raised a strong demand for labour force. In later years, extensive land reclamation works were started and the system of individual farmsteads was liquidated. Many people moved to cities. In some years, the number of rural population would reduce by 24 thou per year.

For a long time, the natural population increment had been the main source of population growth. However, the decreasing number of rural population (especially at the expense of young people) changed its age structure and reduced the natural increment. Since 1978, the natural population increment has mainly been negative. At the beginning of the 21st century, the death rate exceeded the birth rate in the rural areas by 6–7 thou people (Statistics..., 2005).

Towards the end of the century, the rates of depopulation of the rural areas slowed down. In the first years of independence (1991–1996), the number of rural population even increased by 10 thou. In later years, the number of rural population continued to reduce due to the negative natural increment and emigration.

PERIODS OF RURAL POPULATION DYNAMICS

In different periods of the 20th century, the number and density of rural population changed differently. The changes were related not only to the intensity but also to the directions of the process. The number of rural population had been increasing

Table 3. Density of rural population in some districts, 1939–2007
3 lentelė. Kaimo gyventojų tankumas kai kuriuose rajonuose 1939–2007 m.

District <i>Rajonas</i>	1939		2007		Change pop. / km ² <i>Kaita žm. / km²</i>
	Area km ² <i>Plotas</i>	Density pop. / km ² <i>Tankumas žm. / km²</i>	Area km ² <i>Plotas km²</i>	Density pop. / km ² <i>Tankumas žm. / km²</i>	
Alytus	3 166	35.2	1 400	20.1	–15.1
Trakai	3 671	33.7	1 185	14.2	–19.5
Šakiai	1 760	35.4	1 442	18.3	–17.1
Vilkaviškis	1 316	46.1	1 245	22.4	–23.7
Mažeikiai	1 960	32.0	1 301	17.8	–14.2
Telšiai	2 621	27.3	1 419	16.8	–10.5
Kėdainiai	2 429	32.4	1 651	19.6	–12.8
Panevėžys	4 382	29.2	2 176	19.1	–10.1
Biržai–Pasvalys	2 724	32.3	2 734	14.9	–17.4
Rokiškis	2 165	36.4	1 789	12.0	–24.4
Lietuva	64 782	36.1	63 782	17.6	–18.5

until World War II. Later on, it began to reduce. Four periods in the transformations of the density and number of the rural population can be distinguished (Table 3).

1. In the first half of the 20th century, the absolute majority of Lithuania's population resided in rural territories. Emigration of Lithuanian population to other countries and to urban areas of the country was compensated for by the high natural increment of population. The number of rural population did not reduce but even increased by 147.4 thou (+ 6.7%) in 1897–1939 (by 3.5 thou people every year) (Table 3).

2. In eleven World War II and after-war years, the Lithuanian rural territories lost more than one fifth of their population (497.7 thou people; 45.2 thou every year). Those were the years of exile, departure from the country and other kinds of population losses.

3. In the years of Soviet occupation, the rates of depopulation of rural areas were especially high. In 42 years (1950–1992), the number of rural population reduced by 669.0 thou (36.3%) or 15.9 thou people every year. The depopulation was predetermined by social–economic conditions, collectivisation, liquidation of the system of individual farmsteads and other circumstances.

4. Since the first years of independence when rural population accounted for one third of the total population, the number of rural residents continued to reduce, yet at slower rates. In 15 years (1992–2007), this number reduced by 50.3 thou, or 3.5 thou per year, as a result of emigration and a negative natural increment of population (Table 3).

In 110 years (1897–2007), the number of Lithuanian rural population reduced by over a million people (by almost a half) or by 10 thou people every year on the average (Table 4). The highest reduction rates were characteristic of the period which began in 1939. In 68 years (1939–2007), the number of rural population reduced by 1217.0 thou (51.8%), or 17.8 thou people every year on the average.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN RURAL POPULATION DYNAMICS

Changes of rural population in the 20th century took place in all regions, but followed different patterns. The regional differences became very prominent since 1939 when the number of rural population reduced almost by half (Table 4).

Higher (than country's average) rates of reduction of rural population were characteristic of many peripheral districts and the north-eastern part of Lithuania. The rates were lower than the average values of the country in the central part of Lithuania (Kėdainiai, Panevėžys, Šakiai, Alytus, and some West Lithuanian districts). The number and density of rural population in Vilnius and Kaunas districts increased. In the Kaunas district, the density of rural population increased by 9.5 persons per sq km and in the Vilnius district by 5.5 persons per sq km.

The different dynamics of rural population in various Lithuanian regions were predetermined by specific regional circumstances. For example, the growth of rural population in Vilnius and Kaunas districts was predetermined by restrictions of urban development in the Soviet years. There still remained a possibility to settle in city outskirts what initiated the appearance of large rural settlements, such as Avižieniai, Pagiriai, Rudamina, Domeikava, Raudondvaris, Neveronys and others (Statistikos..., 2002; Statistikos..., 2003). Residents of these settlements could easily find jobs in the city enterprises and establishments.

The marked reduction of rural population in Akmenė and Vilkaviškis districts was conditioned by their experimental status while liquidating the system of individual farmsteads.

The dynamics of rural population was strongly influenced by the geographical situation, forestation, land productivity, industrial development, communication, traditions and other factors. The depopulation process and migration were the prime causes of reduction of rural population in North-East Lithuania, later in many peripheral districts and eventually in Žemaitija.

POSSIBLE FUTURE DYNAMICS

The reduction of rural population (number and density) shows a tendency of its future development. The process is taking place almost in all districts. The regional differences also tend to increase. The reduction of rural population will be predetermined by emigration (of young people in particular), the deteriorating age structure of population, the negative natural increment, liquidation of institutions important for rural population, and other factors.

Lithuania has many small rural settlements inhabited by old people. The census of 2001 showed that there were 4577

Table 4. Different periods of rural population dynamics
4 lentelė. Skirtingi kaimo gyventojų kaitos laikotarpiai

Year <i>Metai</i>	Number of population, thou. <i>Gyventojų skaičius, tūkst.</i>	Change <i>Kaita</i>		Number of years <i>Metų skaičius</i>	Average change per year, thou. <i>Vidutinė kaita per metus, tūkst.</i>
		Thou. Tūkst.	%		
1897–1939	2194.2–2341.6	+147.4	+ 6.7	42	+3.5
1939–1950	2341.6–1843.9	–497.7	– 21.3	11	–45.2
1950–1992	1843.9–1174.9	–669.0	– 36.3	42	–15.9
1992–2007	1174.9–1124.6	–50.3	– 4.3	15	–3.4
1897–2007	2194.2–1124.6	–1069.6	– 48.8	110	–9.7
1939–2007	2341.6–1124.6	–1217.0	– 51.8	68	–17.9

(24.8%) of settlements with five and less residents. These settlements will disappear first.

The reduction of the number of rural population and rural settlements will be enhanced by the deteriorating social position of rural residents and closure of the objects of service infrastructure. The diminishing number of shops, schools, health care establishments and other important institutions will aggravate even more the laborious existence of rural population.

The territorial redistribution of rural population and stronger territorial differences of rural population density can be expected in the future. The number and density of rural population in peripheral districts are likely to reduce even more. This is implied by rural population dynamics of recent years. In 2001–2007, the Lithuanian rural population reduced by 2.4% and its density by 0.9 persons per sq km. Meanwhile, the values in the Ignalina district are 11.9% and 0.9 per sq km, the Zarasai district 9.3% and 1.0 per sq km, Švenčionys district 8.2% and 0.7 per sq km, and Varėna District 7.6% and 0.8 per sq km.

The reduction of rural population in the peripheral and forested districts and districts with poor communication systems presumably will go along with the growth of rural settlements in the neighbourhood of larger cities, in the Coastal Zone, localities with better transport systems, and recreational zones. In the last six years, the number of rural population in the Kaunas district grew by 8.5% and the density increased by 3.6 persons per sq km. In the Vilnius district, the respective values are –6.8% and 2.8 and in the Klaipėda district 8.3% and 1.8.

The number and system of rural settlements will change. In the future, the Lithuanian rural population will live in a smaller number of rural settlements.

CONCLUSIONS

A survey of the number and density of rural population in Lithuania and analysis of their territorial distribution lead to the following conclusions:

1. The dynamics of rural population in various years of the 20th century differed. In the first half of the century (before World War II), the number and density of rural population were increasing. In later years, they had been reducing rapidly.

2. The highest reduction rates were characteristic of the war and post-war years and years of Soviet occupation. In 1939–1992, the number of rural population reduced by 1166.7 thou, or 49.8%.

3. Deportations, deaths in the fields of war, and migration to urban areas were the main causes of rural population reduction in the war and post-war years. The main causes in the Soviet years were forced collectivisation, liquidation of the system of individual farmsteads, land reclamation and the rapid industrialisation.

4. After the restoration of independence, the number of rural population has been reducing, but at slower rates. Today, only one third of Lithuania's population resides in rural territories. Negative natural increment, emigration and moving to

urban areas are the main causes of the ongoing reduction of rural population.

5. The dynamics of the density and number of rural population has followed different regional patterns. The highest rates of depopulation of rural areas are characteristic of the peripheral districts and North-East Lithuania. Slightly lower rates are characteristic of the central part of Lithuania. In the outskirts of the largest Lithuanian cities Vilnius and Kaunas, the number and density of rural population have even increased.

6. The dynamics of rural population shows a future trend of reduction. It will be predetermined by the age structure of population and social–economic transformations in rural areas. The number of rural settlements is likely to reduce and the regional differences of rural population density will become stronger.

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Algirdas Stanaitis, Saulius Stanaitis

LIETUVOS KAIMO GYVENTOJŲ TERITORINĖS SKLAIDOS KAITA XX A. (1897–2007)

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Lietuvos kaimo gyventojų skaičiaus kaita šalyje ir jos regionuose atskirais XX a. laikotarpiais, regioniniai kaitos skirtumai ir priežastys, prognozuojami galimi pokyčiai ateityje.

Straipsnyje panaudoti 1959, 1989, 2001 m. gyventojų surašymų duomenys, taip pat perskaičiuoti dabartinei teritorijai 1897 ir 1939 metų bei einamosios statistikos paskelbti 1950 ir 2007 metų duomenys; pasinaudota ir 1923 metų surašymo duomenimis. Nagrinėjami duomenys yra perskaičiuoti dabartiniam Lietuvos plotui. Kadangi atskirais metais administracinių vienetų dydis ir gyventojų skaičius skyrėsi, juos buvo sudėtinga palyginti. Lentelėse pateikiamas ne tik gyventojų skaičius ir tankumas, bet ir administracinių vienetų plotas.

Kaimo gyventojų kaita atskirais XX a. laikotarpiais buvo skirtinga. Pirmoje amžiaus pusėje (iki Antrojo pasaulinio karo) jų skaičius ir tankumas didėjo, vėliau sparčiai mažėjo. Labiausiai kaimo gyventojų mažėjo Antrojo pasaulinio karo ir pokario metais bei sovietinės okupacijos laikotarpiu. 1939–1992 m. jų sumažėjo 1166,7 tūkst., arba 49,8%.

Svarbiausios mažėjimo priežastys karo ir pokario metais buvo trėmimai, žūtys kare, kėlimasis į miestus, sovietinės okupacijos metais – prievartinė kolektyvizacija, vienkiemų sistemos likvidavimas, melioracijos darbai, sparti industrializacija. Atkūrus nepriklausomybę kaimo gyventojų mažėja ir toliau, nors ne taip sparčiai. Dabar kaime gyvena tik trečdalis šalies gyventojų. Svarbiausios mažėjimo priežastys – neigiamas natūralus prieaugis, emigracija, kėlimasis į miestus.

Atskirais XX a. laikotarpiais kaimo gyventojų skaičius ir tankumas kito nevienodai ir skyrėsi ne tik intensyvumu, bet ir kryptimis. Iki Antrojo pasaulinio karo kaimo gyventojų skaičius didėjo, o vėliau mažėjo.

Per 110 metų (1897–2007) Lietuvos kaimo gyventojų sumažėjo daugiau kaip milijonu (beveik perpus), arba vidutiniškai kasmet po 10 tūkstančių. Didžiausias mažėjimas užfiksuotas nuo 1939 m., kai per 68 metus (1939–2007) gyventojų skaičius sumažėjo 1217,0 tūkst. (51,8%), vidutiniškai po 17,9 tūkst. kiekvienais metais.

Skirtingą kaimo gyventojų ir jų tankumo kaitą atskiruose rajonuose lėmė kai kurios specifinės regioninės priežastys – geografinė padėtis, miškingumas, žemės našumas, pramonės plėtra, susisiekimas, tradicijos ir kiti veiksniai. Dėl depopuliacijos ir migracijos pirmiausiai kaimo gyventojų pradėjo mažėti šiaurės rytų Lietuvoje, vėliau – daugelyje pakraštinių rajonų, o vėliausiai – Žemaitijoje.

Kaimo gyventojų mažėjimas tęsis ir ateityje, ir tą sąlygos kaimo gyventojų amžiaus struktūra bei socialiniai-ekonominiai pokyčiai kaime: mažės kaimo gyvenviečių skaičius, didės regioniniai kaimo gyventojų tankumo skirtumai.