



**REGIONS
& CITIES**

**European Week
Brussels 8-11 October 2018**



European Week of Regions and Cities University 6th Master Class

Book of papers



European Week of Regions and Cities University

6th Master Class on EU Cohesion Policy

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INCREASING SOCIAL AND SPATIAL EXCLUSION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS OF LITHUANIA

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Abstract.

Recently, the social and spatial exclusion of the population has been increasing, which adversely affect the welfare of the country. Twenty-two sparsely populated municipalities have been selected as the subject of the research. These are municipalities (LAU-1) where the rural population density at the beginning of the 2017 did not exceed 12.5 inhabitants per square kilometer.

The spatial exclusion of sparsely populated areas (hereinafter – the SPAs) population is particularly high, it is characterized not only by the distance to the service centers, but also by reduced access to services for the reduction of public transport services. This is a service for the welfare of the population, and jobs are moving away from the population. Therefore, all regions of the country are rarely inhabited, they have a particularly poor demographic situation, they are unattractive for investment, a network of education, health and other institutions is rapidly disappearing. It only further growing the social and spatial exclusion of the population, which adversely affects the demographic, social and economic processes.

The analysis of SPAs and their increasing territorial distribution would contribute to justice, social cohesion and territorial inequalities in the area. Data from the Lithuania Department of Statistics and experience from several years of expeditions to sparsely populated areas have helped us to make some conclusions. At the end of the work, recommendations are presented that can contribute to better regional policy in Lithuania.

Keywords: social exclusion, spatial exclusion, sparsely populated areas, Lithuania.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, an increasingly expanding network of sparsely populated areas (hereinafter – the SPAs) has been observed not only in Lithuania but also in other European countries. Particularly, SPAs are relevant to the Northern European countries, which have successfully implemented the special regional development policy programs for many years (Jauhiainen, 2000). In the Nordic countries, strategies are being developed to address SPAs issues (Gloersen, 2009). The Nordic countries' successful regional policy, the observation of permanent regions is contributed by organizations such as the Organization of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas. Meanwhile, the SPAs settlement network in Lithuania is being explored only in the second decade (Marcinkėnaitė, 2001, 2003; Daugirdas, 2002; Daugirdas, Baubinas, 2003, 2007, 2008; Daugirdas et al., 2013; Baranauskienė, Daugirdas, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to reveal the social and territorial distribution in Lithuanian SPAs. To achieve the target of the work, the data analysis of the period of 2001-2017 was chosen which is accessible from the database of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics. For the analysis of social and spatial exclusion, changes in the network of institutions of general education schools, health and cultural centers were chosen.

Twenty-two sparsely populated municipalities (hereinafter – the SPMs) (LAU-1) have been selected as the **subject of the research** in which the rural population density in 2017 at the beginning of the year does not exceed 12.5 inhabitants per square kilometer. Low population density is one of the most important indicators of the problem region and the exclusion criteria. During the period under review, the number of SPMs has increased from 7 to 22 and is about 45% of the country's territory. In such territories, the implementation of state regional policy becomes a complicated problem. Support for these territories should ensure the welfare of the population, but this is not always done rationally. This is also due to the high social and spatial exclusion of the population. Therefore, such areas need to be rescued. Much effort must be made to slow down the negative demographic, social, economic and other processes occurring in problematic territories that affect social and spatial exclusion.

Research methodology. The spatial exclusion is growing in Lithuania and long-lasting problem regions appear in various parts of the country. The regional differences of welfare are growing fast. To prevent spreading of regional disparities we need to know present situation – the actual distribution of problem regions and consequences for their residents.

In this paperwork, the concept of the spatial exclusion is related to the term “social exclusion” and is presented and associated with SPAs. Spatial exclusion means, that the territories are in the periphery, away from the country or regional centers, institutions providing basic services are far, more difficult to access. The formation of such region is influenced by natural conditions, low economic development, service accessibilities (educational, health care, cultural institutions etc.), etc. The main indicator of spatial exclusion

is the availability of transport. In these territories, the self-consciousness of the population changes, they increasingly consider themselves peripheral inhabitants living on the “outskirts of the world”, forgotten by the state, condemned, left by the will of destiny (Daugirdas et al. 2013, Giddens, 2005, Persy-Smith, 2000).

Therefore, when analyzing SPAs of Lithuania, it is important to reveal common issues between the growing spatial exclusion in SPAs of Lithuania and how it is related to territorial cohesion. The links can be revealed by analyzing: relation between demographic, social and economic structures of inequality, as well as how territorial cohesion at different all Lithuania or European affects spatial justice.

Since SPAs are peripheral areas, the analysis of this work analyzes indicators (depopulation, number of schools, health and cultural centers) chosen based on Pociūtė (Pociūtė, 2014), Daugirdas and Burneika (Daugirdas, Burneika, 2006) distinguished the peripheral evaluation criteria (demographic, infrastructure availability and socio-economic) which reveals the growing social and spatial exclusion of SPAs. Data analysis was performed using mapping and geographic data analysis methods, description of territorial regularities, comparative territorial analysis using the GIS program. I understand that the system of selected indicators is rather subjective and greatly depends on my decisions as researchers to underline one or another issue.

The results section of the article is divided into two parts: general analysis of the change in depopulation and analysis of impact of changes in the social/public services network on social and territorial exclusion. The recommendations are presented at the end.

THE TRENDS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN LITHUANIA

The depopulation process in Lithuania is rapid, and the gap between center and periphery in the country is increasing, allowing one region to grow and others to ‘fight’ for survival (Ubarevičienė, van Ham, 2017). The three biggest cities – Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda – in Lithuania stand as national centers (Burneika et al., 2017) and compete on a global scale. Meanwhile, the rural territories are rapidly depopulating, leaving several socio-economic problems for the remaining residents in the region to face (Daugirdas et al., 2013; Pociūtė, 2014).

In Lithuania, the trend of population decline was highlighted in 2004 after joining the European Union (emigration grew). However, the country experiences a deep demographic crisis not only because of this - low birth rates, aging populations, and the demographic composition of the population unfavorable to reproduction (Statistics Lithuania 2018). In 2001-2017, 699,127 inhabitants emigrated from Lithuania and 109,243 of them were from SPMs (15,6%) and 217,691 residents immigrated to Lithuania, of which 27,460 (12.6%) were in the SPMs. Due to a high

emigration and low immigration, the share of migration in Lithuanian depopulation amounted to 68.9%, SPMs - 74.9%. During the period of 2001-2017, the population of the country decreased from 3,486,998 to 2,847,904 (the change is -18%), and SPMs - from 680,252 to 487,555 inhabitants (change -28%).

In addition to emigration, an important demographic factor linked to the decline in population density - the natural change of population (Fig. 1). It has been negative for more than two decades in the country, especially for SPMs. In Lithuania, during the period of 2001-2016 due to the natural population change, the number of inhabitants has decreased by 185,577, of which SPMs – 80,682 (43.5%).

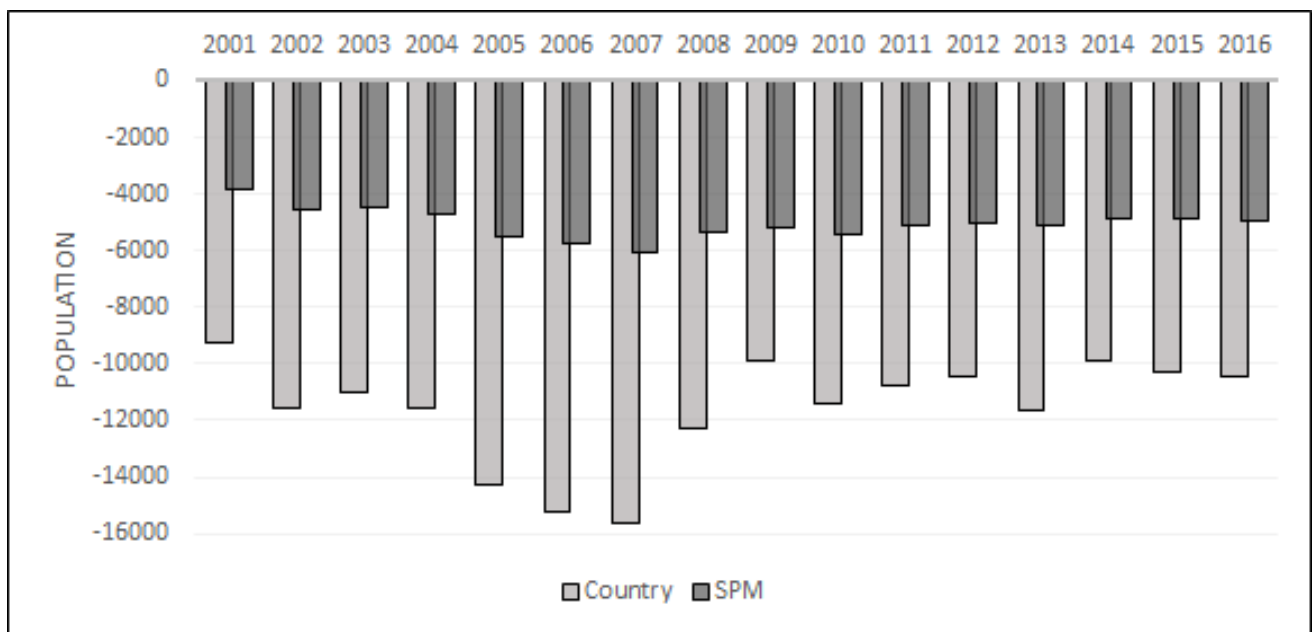


Figure 1. Natural change of population in the sparsely populated municipalities of Lithuania in 2001–2016 (population) (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

When analyzing the population according to their age structure (0-15 years, working and retired) (Fig. 2), it is seen that in 2017 at the beginning of the year, young people were mostly in Western Lithuania and in the major cities of Lithuania and in the municipalities around them. Comparing with country average (15.77%) there is fewer young people in SPMs (13.88%). The territorial distribution of the working-age population is similar and compared to the national average (61.85%), the SPMs are smaller (59.85%). The regions of the retirement age are mainly in Northeastern Lithuania and Southern Lithuania, the regions coincide with SPMs, where the share of the retirement age (26.26%) exceeds the national average (22.38%) even by 3.88 percentage points.

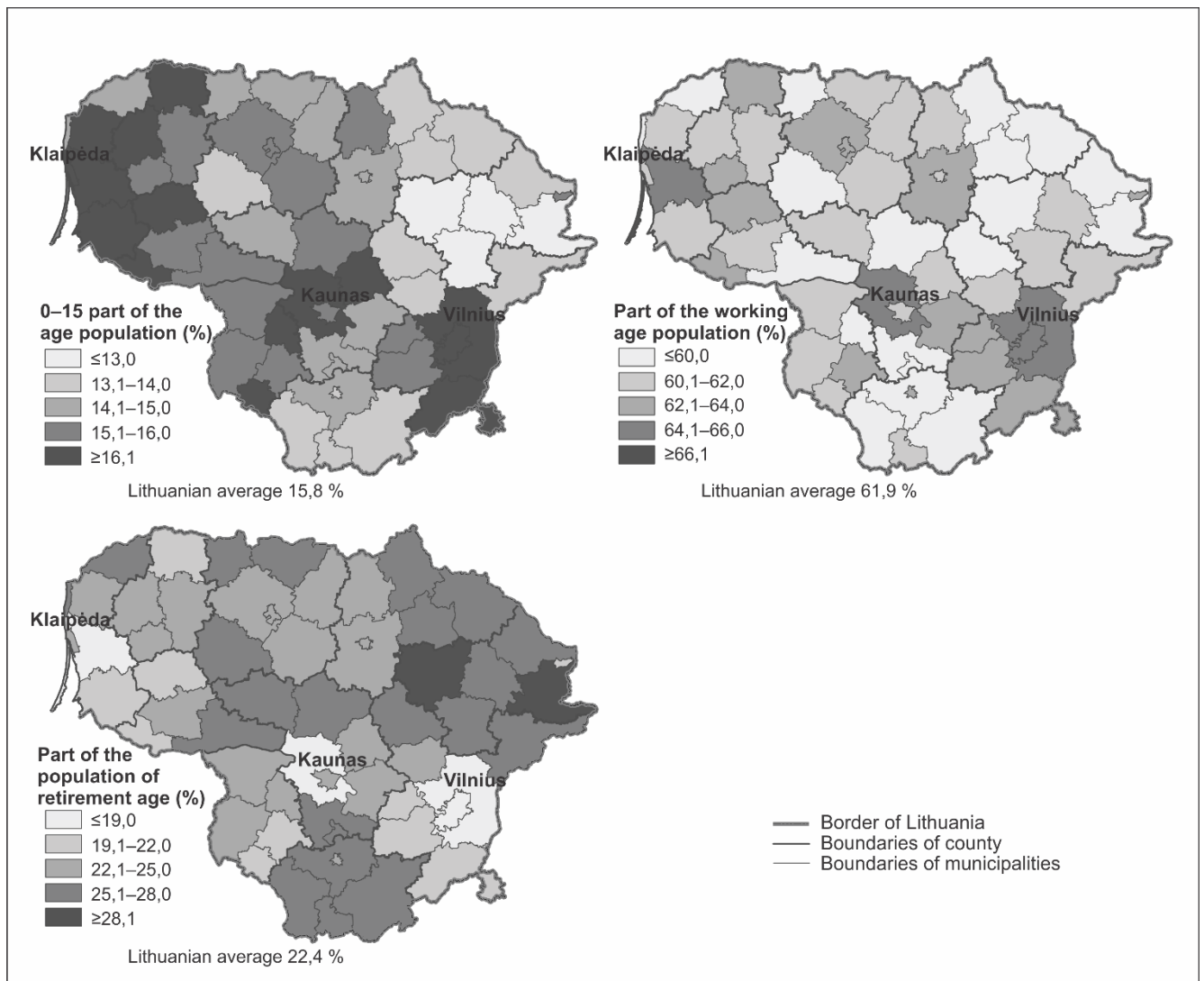


Figure 2. Population according to their age structure in municipalities in 2017 (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

Due to the above-discussed tendencies, the average population density of SPMs in 2001–2017 significantly decreased (Fig. 3): in 2001 it was 13.2 inhabitants per square kilometer, in 2001 – 10.6 inhabitants per square kilometer, in 2017 – 9.1 inhabitants per square kilometer only. Now in more than half of SPMs, the density of inhabitants is less than 10 inhabitants per square kilometer. The average population density of the rural population in the country is decreasing slower: in 2001 it was 17.7 inhabitants per square kilometer. in 2011 – 15.6 inhabitants per square kilometer and 14.3 inhabitants per square kilometer in 2017. In SPMs, during 2001–2017 the population density decreased much faster (31.1%) than the national average (19.2%). Therefore, the entire country's rural territory is rapidly approaching the status of a sparsely populated area. If trends do not change, and there are no preconditions for this, the rural area of Lithuania will sparsely live 10–12 years later.

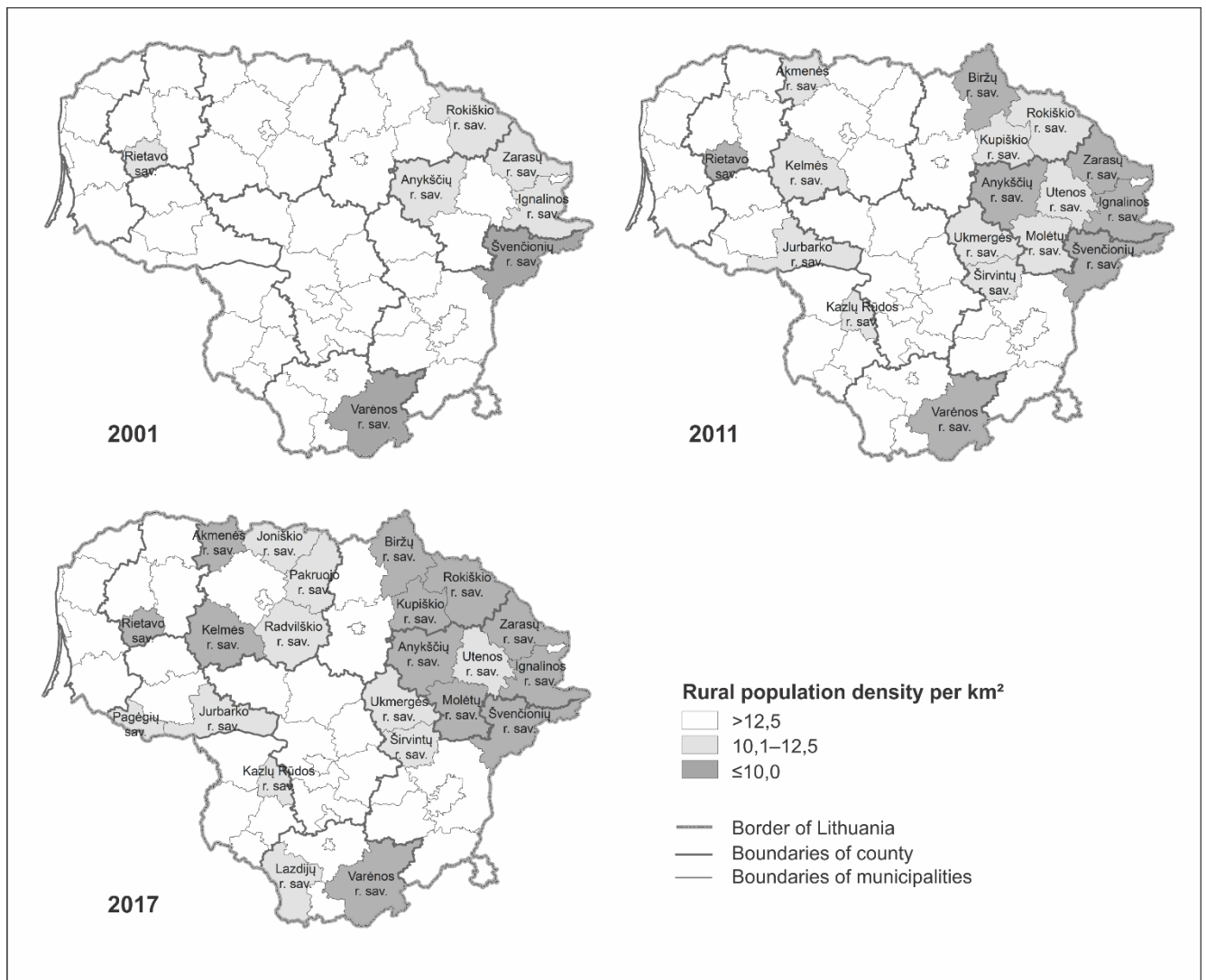


Figure 3. Sparsely populated municipalities of Lithuania in 2001–2017 (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

DECREASED ACCESSIBILITY OF SPAs SOCIAL SERVICES – THE REFLECTION OF SOCIAL AND SPATIAL EXCLUSION

General education schools

The decreasing network of general education schools – a key factor affecting social and spatial exclusion. Most importantly, the school is the main institution that ensures the viability of the local community. The closure of a school in the village consequently has led to a rapid decline in the population, especially in families with children of school age. After closing the school, the network of other institutions providing public services are also disappearing. Therefore, such areas become unattractive, basic services are increasingly moving away from the population, they are more difficult to reach due to less accessible public transport, and local people experiencing spatial exclusion (Daugirdas et al., 2013; Kriaučiūnas et al., 2016; Baranauskienė, Daugirdas, 2017).

The school network is shrinking across Lithuania, except for the largest cities in Lithuania. This is especially noticeable in the North-East, where schools tend to concentrate in the administrative centers of the municipalities. Such areas are not helped by the renovation of institutions or roads, the repatriation of settlements - investment in the environment does not attract more population and does not change the critical demographic situation (Baranauskienė, Daugirdas, 2017).

During the period of 2001-2016, statistical data showed, that the worst situation in SPMs is other rural territories. In the period under review, the number of general education schools (49.3%) have double decreased in Lithuania: in cities - 13.9%, in SPMs - 61.9%, and in all rural areas - 68.2% (Fig. 4). Most notably, the network of schools disappears in eastern Lithuania (Ignalina, Molėtai district municipalities) and other municipalities of the region: in Lazdijai, Alytus, Pasvalys, Skuodas, Raseiniai district municipalities and Rietavas municipality they dropped by as much as 70-75%. The number of pupils decreased by 45,1%: in cities – 41.1%, SPMs – 61.9% and in all rural territories – 57.8% (Fig. 4).

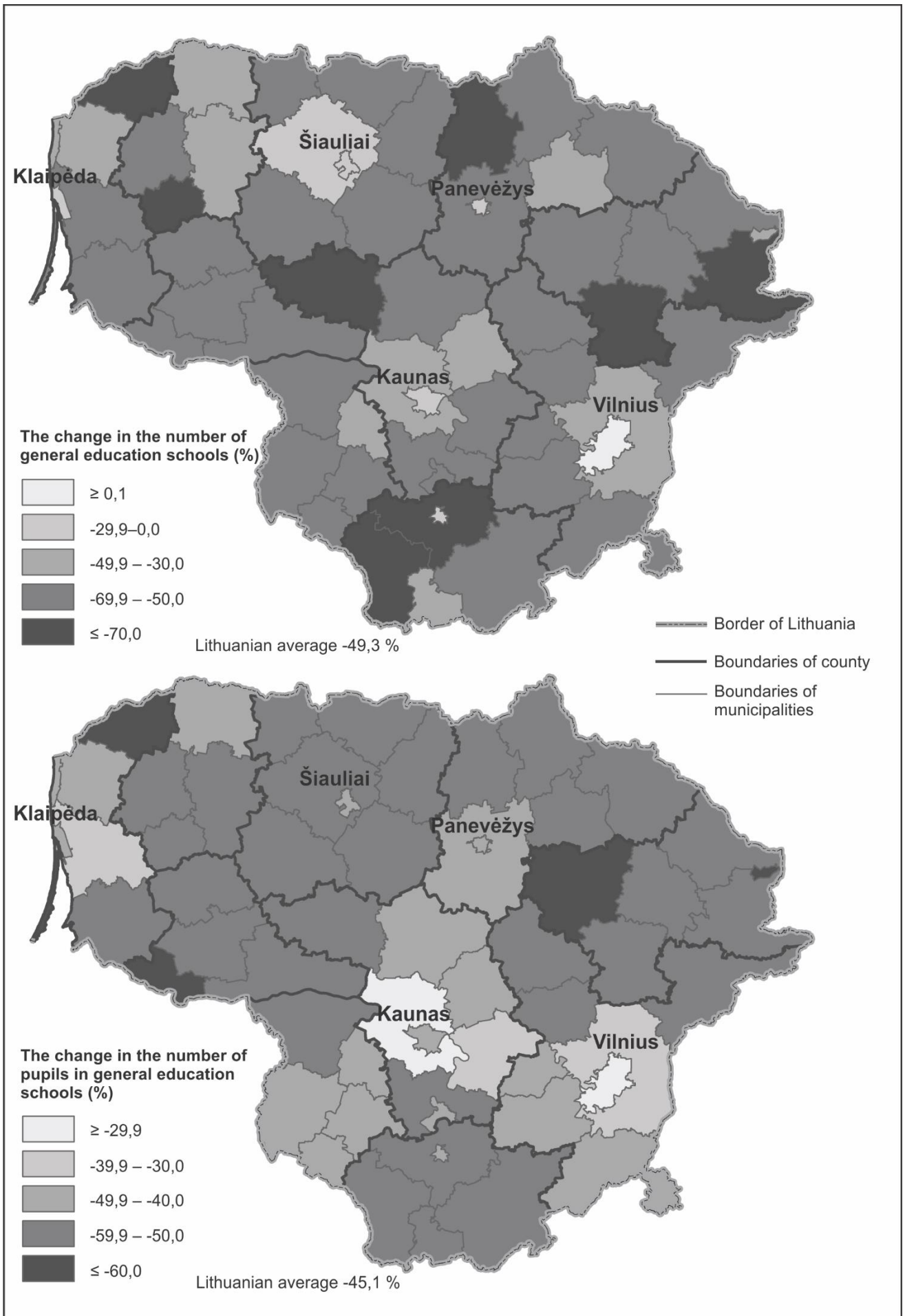


Figure 4. Change in the number of general education schools and pupils in municipalities in 2001-2016 (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

During the analyzed period, the proportion of students per pupil per teacher dropped significantly from 12.1 to 10.7 pupils, in cities - from 13.4 to 11.8, in rural areas - from 9.2 to 7.6 (Fig. 5). A higher number of teachers in rural areas could provide a better quality of education as the teacher can focus more on each student, but studies and student achievement often show counterproductive results.

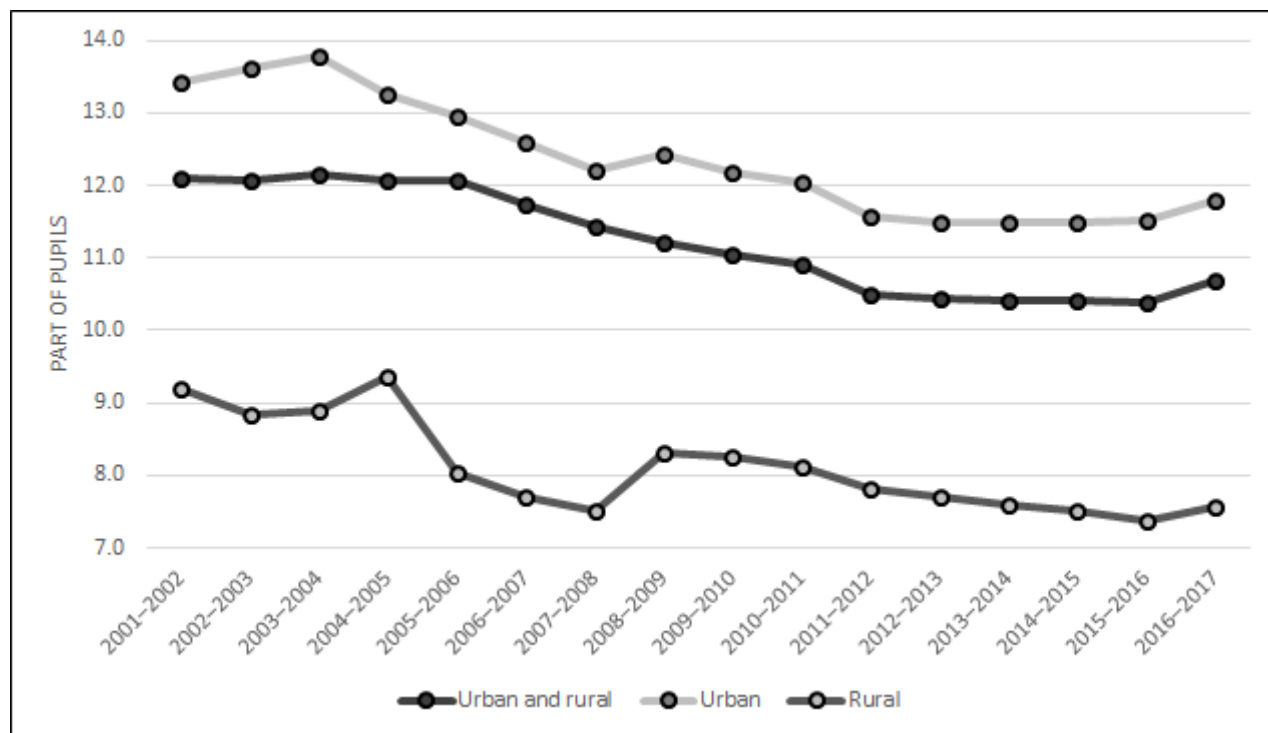


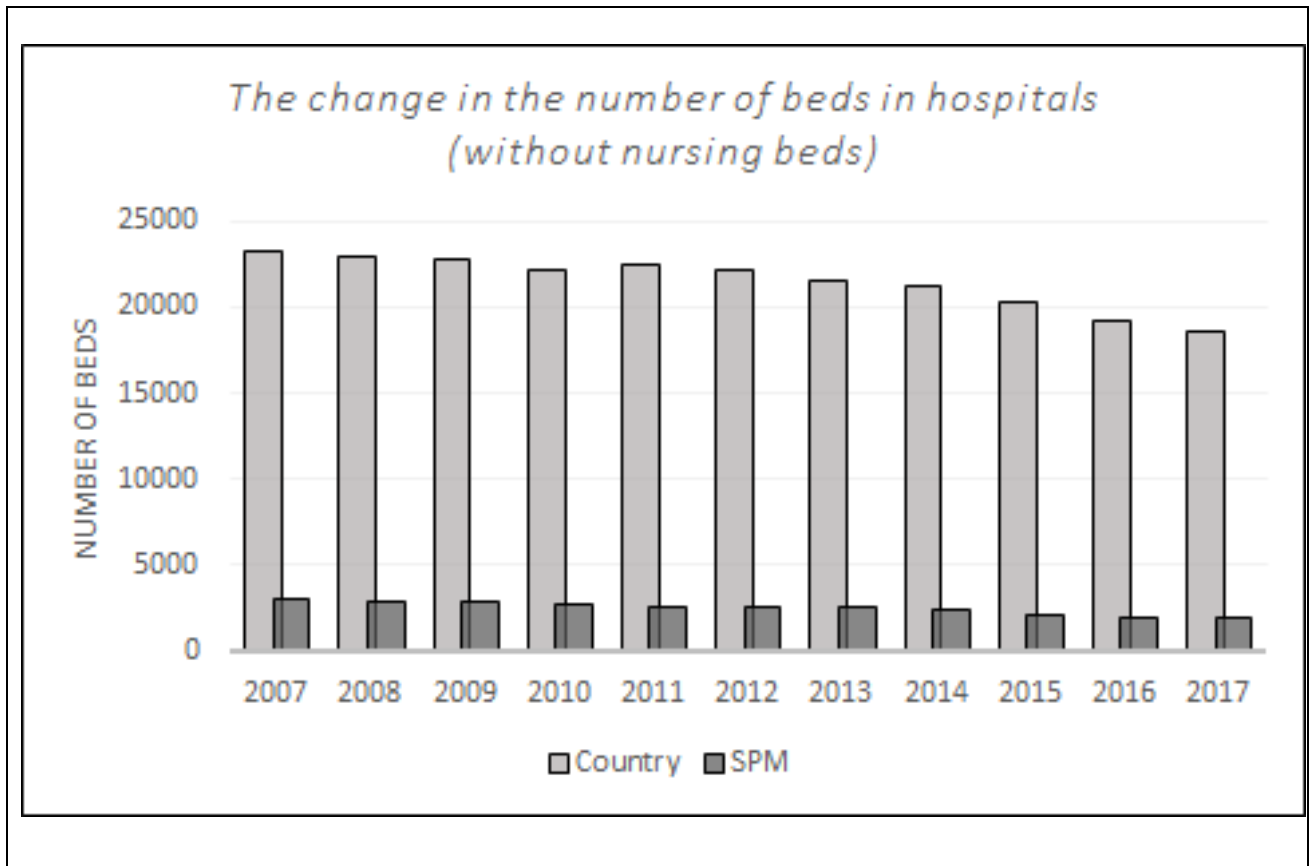
Figure 5. The proportion of pupils to the teachers of general education schools (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

One of the main reasons for this is that rural areas and SPMs teachers usually work in more than one workplace because in the absence of full workload they are forced to work in several general education schools, traveling through several settlements. Since 1/9/2018, the regularized (36 hours) workload will not necessarily improve the situation everywhere, because many teachers working in SPMs may not be fully charged even at multiple schools, as these areas are often faced with an insufficient number of classrooms.

The biggest problem is that after the closure of the schools, other institutions important for the settlement, such as kindergartens, medical centers, post offices, etc. are also being closed (Pociūtė, 2014).

Health Care institutions

Currently, newly adopted legislation related to health care in Lithuania aiming at increasing the quality of medical services and their accessibility by reorganizing the network of health care institutions in the country. Accepted edits allow to optimize your current home maintenance network.



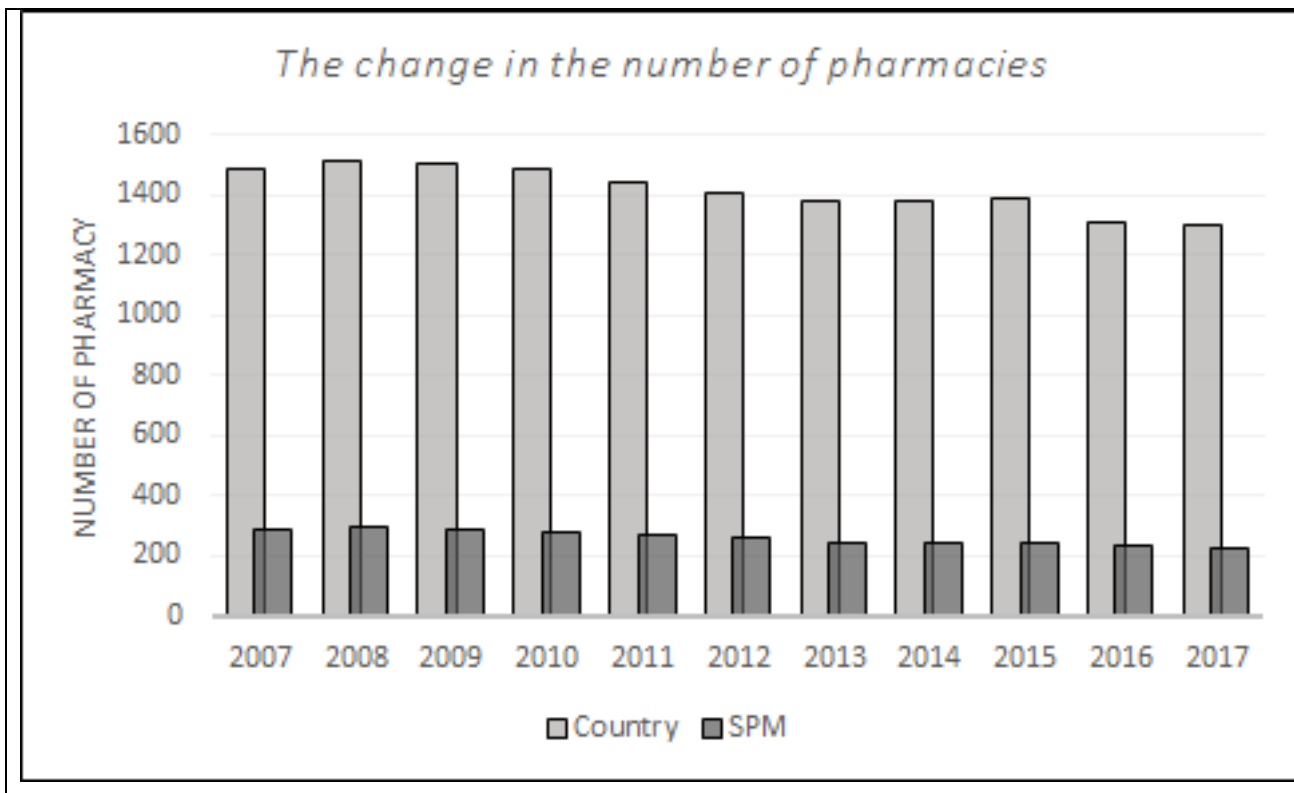


Figure 6. Change in the number of beds and pharmacies in Lithuania in 2007-2017 ((Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

According to a data of 2007-2017 from department of statistics, the number of beds in Lithuanian hospitals decreased by 20.17% (without nursing beds) (Fig. 6), while in SPMs the decrease was even 36.11%, where there is a larger proportion of the elderly population and who are usually in need of doctors' care. Also, during this period, the analysis of the pharmacy and its affiliate network shows a decrease in these institutions: decrease in the country is 27.11%, in SPMs – 21.95%. This decrease in the number of beds and the network of pharmacies shows that for an increasing proportion of the population, these services are more difficult to access. In SPMs, (especially in Eastern Lithuania) it is facing with such problems that many local outpatients have been abolished in the centers of the dispensaries (Kriaučiūnas et al., 2016) while the number of services provided in hospitals is decreasing in municipal centers (e.g.: some districts do not have a maternity sections and residents are forced to drive even to Vilnius).

Cultural Centers institutions

According to statistical data, the number of cultural institutions is decreasing. According to this data, in the period of 2001-2017, the number of cultural centers in Lithuania has decreased by 31,89% and in SPMs – 31.07% (Fig. 7). However, when it is observed that the number of schools and the number of cultural institutions is also dimming, the population loses a cultural focus, has

no place to gather, unite. When leaving cultural centers only in larger settlements, villagers who lose their sense of communion suffer (Kriaučiūnas et al., 2016).

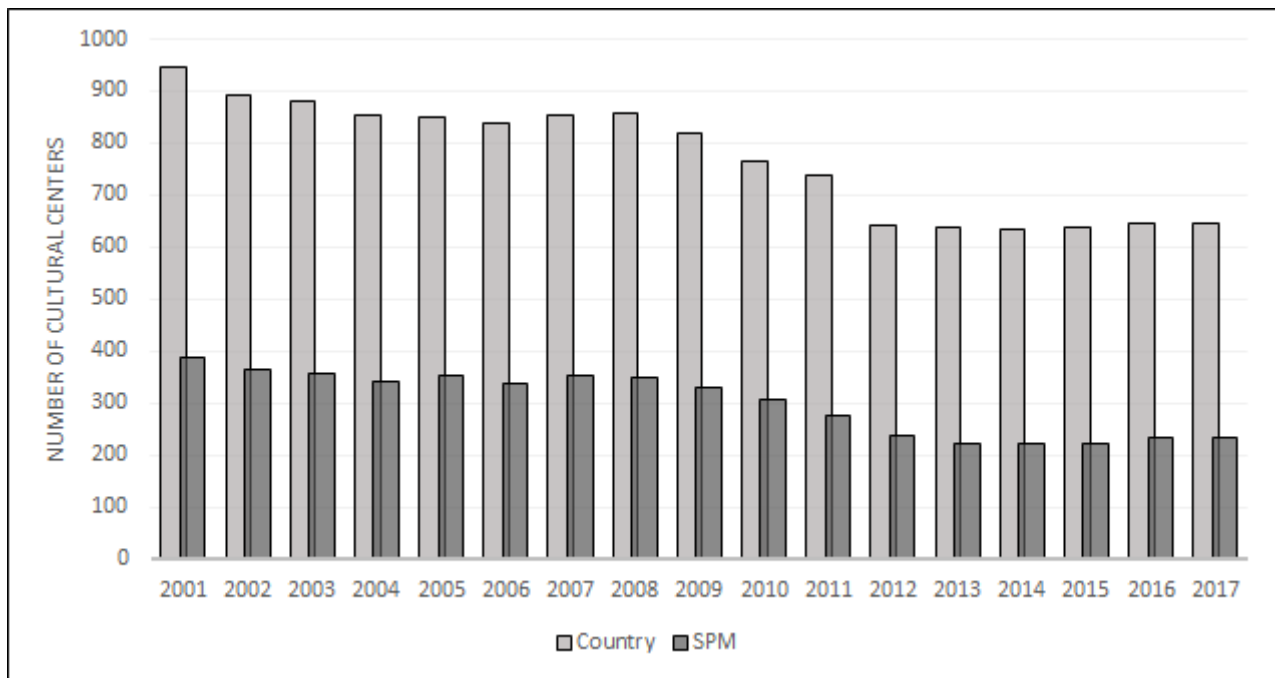


Figure 7. Change in the number of cultural centers in Lithuania in 2001-2017 (Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2018).

CONCLUSION

- The number of SPAs population will continue to decrease, there are no assumptions for changes that will improve the situation.
- The interrelationships between spatial and social exclusion is clearly visible with SPAs, which is closely related to peripherality/peripherization (moving towards periphery).
- SPMs will become the main problem areas. The closure of schools will also impact other public/social services (health institutions, cultural centers, etc.) It will remain in larger settlements and in municipal administrative centers only.
- Northeast and south-eastern Lithuania is becoming a particularly problematic region, and in these territories social and territorial tendencies have changed, there is still no improvement.
- SPAs are an indicator, which showing what is waiting for other areas.

Since the population of SPMs decreases and affecting the network of general education schools, the availability of high-quality education must be ensured and therefore these **recommendations** are being made:

- the selection of renovated schools should be based on demographic projections (it would allow to assess whether the school will not be closed soon due to the lack of students, or the buildings will not be abandoned); small portable modular elementary schools could be one way to save money and save the school closer to the population;
- a more deliberate reorganization of schools should be implemented;
- could be applied to rural schools (especially SMP): allow classes to be formed with fewer pupils; to impose a lower obligatory workload for teachers; to pay a special (sizeable) supplement to salary for teachers working in sparsely populated areas to attract better specialists, younger teachers.

The population of the elderly in SPMs is increasing, and a network of healthcare institutions should be reviewed, which should focus more on providing social services for the elderly. Due to the poor availability and lack of health services, the quality of access to health services should be improved, at the request of inhabitants of SPAs, they should receive the same accessibility and opportunities as the population of the big cities.

The most important factor to be used to apply the measures to stabilize the school network, the availability of health and other services, is to establish a low population density threshold that should be consistent with educational, health and other policy makers and in line with the scientific advice (currently the village density threshold may be offered from 10 to 15 inhabitants per square kilometer).

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