

DEVELOPMENT OF COMPLEX APPROACH TO DEFINING THE NOTION "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TERRITORIES"

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ABSTRACT

The existing scientific approaches (territorial, production, social, and complex) as to defining the essence of the notion "rural territories" have been considered in the article. The author's understanding of this notion has been expressed. The research of the social approach is based on defining the rural territory as to its population. The considered production approach as to defining the essence of the rural territory has revealed the divergence between the existing practice and the theoretical model. Taking into account the prospective changes in the kinds of rural territories because of global urbanization and the creation of suburban areas, the expediency of using the system methodology for the scientific investigation of rural territorial formations has been substantiated. Such methodology helps to give not only the internal characteristics of the object, but is manifested through mutual relations with other objects.

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Introduction

The process of decreasing the economic and social significance of the agrarian sector in the development of rural areas in the countries of the EU took place gradually, and different forms of small businesses successfully developed in the countryside. In Ukraine the decline of agriculture and transformation of economic structures in the branch did not stimulate the successful development of rural territories in other directions, different from the usual traditional ways of farming in our country.

Structural changes in the agrarian sphere of Ukraine occurred quickly and were connected with serious economic and social problems which were impossible to solve using the traditional methods. Under such conditions, first of all, rural communities have to become the object of the state support and attention. In future, as the experience of the Western European countries, in particularly, Poland has shown, the importance of these communities will be growing.

Working out the clear program of rural territories' development is a strategically important aspect of Ukraine's functioning on the whole and envisages the clear formulation of the conceptual-terminological structure. The notion "rural territories" has been characterized by scholars for a long time. Nevertheless, up to this time there is no clear, common formulation of the essence of this scientific word combination. The rural subject-matter in Ukraine and abroad has always been topical; depending on the economic system the attention has been paid to various directions – social, economic, or ecological. Taking into the account the fact that Ukraine is an agrarian country (40 million hectares of farmlands) with fertile black soil and the considerable number of rural population (31,3%), preserving rural territories has the important social-economic meaning considering the improvement of the current legislation and choosing the course of entering the EU.

Given the facts presented, the aim of the article is analyzing the scientific approaches as to understanding the essence of rural territories and formulating our own view of it.

1. Literature review

The notion of rural territories and their development has been considered in the works by such famous scholars as: Slavov (2007), Lysenko (2009), Lisovyi (2007), Shapoval (2002), Yurchyshyn (2005), Melnyk (2004), Prokopa (2007), Pavlov (2005),

Sabluk (2006). But, in spite of the value of the performed research, the question of the essence of the notion "rural territories" has remained disagreed.

Rural territories are considered in various functional meanings: geographical, regional, economic, and managerial. There are several definitions of rural territories, as this notion is versatile and complex considering its historical formation. Even in the limits of one sphere of social existence, for example, legal, depending on the peculiarities of the definite branch, various attributive properties of this notion acquire priority. For instance, administrative-territorial division of a definite rural region is of priority importance for the administrative law; for the land law it is the rational organization of the territory of administrative-territorial formations and economic subjects, and also the forms of property on land inside this territory; for the criminal law it is mutual location and the correlation of the natural and artificial factors, forming the corresponding rural territory, that is the environment and conditions of probable committing crimes, etc. Also the notion "rural territories" acquires various meanings and manifestations, depending on the aim and complex of tasks, caused by the peculiarities of each separate theme in the scientific investigation, even in the limits of one field of law.

Let us present the views of Ukrainian scientists concerning the definition of rural territories (Table 1).

Table 1. The views of Ukrainian scientists concerning the definition of rural territories

Authors, source	Theoretical approach	The essence of the definition
Slavov, 2007: 69; Lisovyi 2007: 36	Territorial	Rural territories are connected with the territory, geographical formation, location outside cities or towns which has definite resources with the corresponding administrative bodies
Shapoval 2002: 75		Rural territory is a historically formed settlement structure which unites a number of villages, settlements, khutirs (isolated farmsteads) in its limits, and they are under the jurisdiction of village, (settlement) councils

Melnyk 2004: 342	Territorial	Rural territory is a historically formed element of the settlement network, which unites organizational and functional totality of settlements, villages, khutirs, one family, and other dwelling formations, which are under the jurisdiction of village, (settlement) councils
Polozhaenko 2013: 149	Production	The territorial organization of the society covers the organization of the social production, system of settling, territorial nature using, economic, administrative-economic division into districts
About planning the territory of rural locality infrastructure 2000 b	Social	Rural territory is the territory on which the share of the rural population in its general number exceeds 15-50 %
Yurchyshyn 2005: 7		Rural territory is distinguished by: the area of land, where it is located; the population and the number of employed in production and service; the volume and structure of production; the development of social and production infrastructure; the form of employment of the people, residing here, and by other features
Pavlov 2005: 35	Complex approach	Rural territories as a complex natural, production-economic, social, political, and territorial formation, which is under the administrative influence of various subjects, represented by the state power bodies, the bodies of local self-government, business structures, and public organizations
Sabluk 2006: 22		Rural territory as a complex, multi-functional natural, social-economic, and production system with its own quantitative, structural, natural, and other characteristics. The village is one of the important elements of the formation system of rural territories, and its development is impossible without the formation of the highly technological and profitable agrarian sector, new organizational structure of agriculture, and its infrastructure

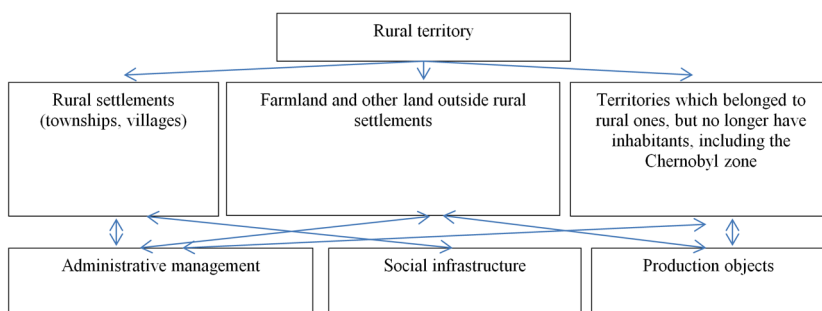
Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, generalizing the definition of the scholars, we can come to the conclusion that the rural territory is a historically formed, social-natural spatial formation, which includes natural, material, and technical resources, social and production infrastructure; it unites organizational and functional totality of townships, villages, which are under the jurisdiction of village

(settlement) councils and comprises farmland and other land outside the rural settlements together with production objects located on it. According to the statistical data, there were 10279 village councils in 2015.

The components of the notion "rural territory" as to the territorial approach are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Practical approaches to treating the notion "rural territory"



Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, according to *the territorial approach* the notion “rural territory” is of great importance in the context of sustainable development. Etymologically, the word “territory” is of Latin origin from the word “land” (Hubeni 2007). But land is of too broad notion, according to the State Standard 26640-85, it is the most important part of the environment, which is characterized by the space, relief, soil, entrails of the earth, waters, and it is the basic means of production in agriculture, and also the spatial basis for the distribution of economic branches (Melnychuk 2006: 28).

There are about 100 of usages of the term “territory” in the current Land code, and also there are various notions connected with this category in different interpretations, but its essence and content are not disclosed (Land Code 2002). The natural (geographic) understanding of the territory is given in Article 1 of the Law of Ukraine “About planning and building of territories” (it is not currently in force), according to this Article, the territory is a part of land surface in the defined limits (boundaries) with its own geographic position, natural conditions and resources created by people’s activities, and also with air space and entrails of the Earth, located under it (About planning... 2000 a).

According to the residual principle, Lisovyi (2007: 36) defines rural territories as one of the most important parts of the national economic complex of the country, which includes the habitable area outside cities or towns with its conditions and resources, rural population, and various basic assets on these territories. In turn, Kornev (2009: 68) interprets rural territories as all the populated areas, except town, work, health resort, and country cottage settlements. And acc. to Shapoval (2002: 73), rural territory is a historically formed settlement structure, which unites in its bounda-

ries the totality of villages, settlements, khutirs, which are under the jurisdiction of village (settlement) councils. Thus, the territory, where people reside, is called the rural populated area. In compliance with the Order of the State Committee of Town-Planning and Architecture (“Town-planning and building of town and rural settlements DBN 360-92”) (2009), the rural populated area (rural settlement) is a united compact place of people’s residence, who are mainly engaged in agriculture and other territorially dispersed branches, and it is provided with the objects of social and production purpose. All the rural territories of Ukraine are subdivided into villages and townships.

2. Approaches to the formation of rural settling system in Ukraine

A village is one of the kinds of populated areas in Ukraine and some other countries, the smallest administrative-territorial unit in Ukraine and Belarus, one of the most ancient names of the Slavonic settlements.

By the beginning of 2015 there had been 28388 villages in Ukraine, while in 2014 there were 28397, as it is reported in the site of the State Statistical Service of Ukraine. There became fewer villages in Kropyvnytskyi (-2), Mykolaiv (-4), Poltava (-1), Rivne (-1), and Ternopil (-1) regions.

A township – is the town settlement, which is intermediate between the rural populated area and town according to its functional use in the system of the administrative-territorial structure, but as to its population it belongs to the town. In the period 2014-2015, there were 885 townships in Ukraine.

In compliance with the Regulations approved on March 12, 1981 by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council

of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, such populated areas could be included in the category of townships, which are located near industrial enterprises, construction sites, railway junctions, hydro-technical installations, enterprises engaged in production and processing farm products, and also the populated areas, on the territory of which there are higher and secondary specialized educational establishments, research institutions, health resorts, and other permanent inpatient and convalescence facilities, which have the state dwelling fund and the population over 2 thousand people, not less than 2/3 of them are workers, office workers, and the members of their families (The Order... 2009).

In separate cases, the populated areas with the population of less than 2 thousand, but not less than 500 people can be included into the category of townships, if they have the near prospect of economic and social development, increasing the population.

But in accordance with Part 1 of Article 133 of the Constitution of Ukraine, the system of the administrative-territorial arrangement of Ukraine is composed of: regions (oblasts), districts, towns and cities, districts in towns and cities, settlements, and villages. Thus, such kinds of settlements as townships have no constitutional and legal status in the legislation of Ukraine (The Constitution 2011). Nevertheless, on the whole, the term "settlement" is not interpreted in the legislation of Ukraine, so various populated areas are called settlements in different regions of the country.

In general, the administrative-territorial structure of Ukraine is rather chaotic. If etymological principle is used, the township is a large village. But very often not big populated areas having about twenty farmsteads are called settlements, and it is connected with the historical stages of

their development (maybe the Russian language term «поселок» (settlement), which has no meaning of the size is taken for the comparison). The organizational-legal form does not depend on the number of residing people, for example, the population of the village Velyki Sorochyntsi in Myrhorod district, Poltava region is 3533 people, while only 2500 people live in the township of Komyshnia (the word township has remained, because in the past it was the district center), the township Romodan has the population 3225 people (it is the township, because in the past the people residing on its territory were engaged in various kinds of non-agricultural activities, and at present the territory is an important railway junction). There are almost no townships in the western part of Ukraine.

There is no organizational-legal form "khutir" (isolated farmstead) in Ukraine. Khutir is a kind of the rural settlement, a farmstead with the land belonging to it; it was often a small rural single farmstead settlement outside the village. During the New economic policy, the Soviet power was tolerant to khutirs, but began to liquidate them during the collectivization of agriculture, calling khutir peasants as "kurkuls" (rich peasants) and pretending that they were the main obstacle to collectivization. In 1959, there were about 7 thousand khutirs in Ukraine. In 1960-1970s the policy was held both in Ukraine and all over the USSR connected with the liquidation of "non-promising" villages, first of all, khutirs, as if they impeded the process of the enlargement of rural settlements. These settlements were joined to the nearest villages and taken off the register, the social sphere establishments were liquidated in them (medical and obstetrical centers, primary schools, and clubs); they gradually degraded and lost their inhabitants. At present, the word "khutir" can be heard

at bus stations as counting-out the cost of the number of kilometers to the place which is called so by the people.

Not big settlements, which have a temporary significance and unstable composition of population or they are the objects of official functioning in the system of a definite economic field (buildings of railway services, foresters', and permanent

way experts' houses) are not independent populated areas and belong to the settlements, with which they are connected administratively and territorially.

In compliance with the Order of the State Committee of Ukraine of Town-Planning and Architecture (point 1.6), rural populated areas are subdivided into groups as to their population (Table 2).

Table 2. Groups of rural populated areas

Groups	Population, thousand people
Considerable	From 3,0 to 5,9 and more
Large	From 0,5 to 3,0
Average	More than 0,2 to 0,5
Small	To 0,2

Source: The Order... 2009.

Thus, rural populated areas in Ukraine are subdivided into considerable, large, average, and small. In accordance with the Law of Ukraine "About the priority of social development of the village and agro-industrial complex in the national economy" (Article 10), the state protects the rural settlement network irrespective of its category, dimension, the location of rural populated areas. Any transformations of rural settlements (uniting, separating, renaming, transferring to another category, etc.) can be done by the decision of the sessions of district Councils of People's Deputies and only by the will of the residents of these settlements (About the priority... 2015).

The network of townships in Ukraine is characterized by considerable regional differences, which is stipulated by various conditions and factors of its formation. The regional differences of demographic parameters and the density of townships (average, the largest, the smallest ones) in Ukraine are presented in Table 3. The largest number of townships according to the data by January 1, 2004 had been in Donetsk region – 131 and Luhansk – 109 townships. But at present it is impossible to define the average population on these territories (because of the occupation), that is why we will take into account the territories, which are controlled by Ukraine.

Table 3. Regional differences of demographic parameters and the density of townships in Ukraine in 2015

Ukraine, region	The number of townships	The density of townships (the number per 1 thousand km ²)	The average population of townships, thousand people	The share of the township population in urban population, %
Ukraine	885	1,47	5,1	13,2
Kharkiv region	61	1,94	6,7	16,3
Chernivtsi region	8	0,99	6,8	15,2

Source: Own elaboration.

Herewith, the smallest population of townships in Lviv region is 3,6 thousand people, while the largest is in Chernivtsi region – 6,8 thousand people. The highest share of township population in urban population is in Zakarpattia – 29,3%, and the lowest is in Lviv region – 7,5%.

There are the regions where the rural population outnumbers the urban one. For example, these are Ternopil and Vinnytsia regions. The highest index of the rural population density per 1 km² is in Chernivtsi region (about 67 people), Ivano-Frankivsk, and Zakarpattia regions.

The system of rural settling in Ukraine has been formed for centuries and thousands of years. Natural conditions considerably affect the character of rural populated areas, and namely:

- in the north (Polissia) not large settlements with the population 250-500 people prevail. They are located on the hills, in dry places;
- in the Forest-Steppe the villages are more populated – 500-1500 people. They are mainly located in river valleys and ravines;
- in the South the villages have the population of several thousands. Sometimes these villages stretch for many kilometers along rivers and gullies;
- in the high mountain part of the Carpathians separate farmsteads are scattered on the slopes several kilometers away from each other, and, in fact, they do not form villages.

The territories, which in the past were marked as a rural populated area, are also included in rural territories, but at present they do not have this status in connection with natural, mechanical, and social movement of the population or they are contaminated zones (Chornobyl district).

Farmland and other land outside rural settlements together with production ob-

jects located here are the following component of rural territories.

Garden plots are not included in rural territories. A cottage house is a house or a temporary building of an urban dweller, located outside the town or city on the plot of 0,06 hectare ("six hundredth parts of a hectare in size"). Such garden plots became widely spread after the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR "About the collective and individual engaging in keeping a kitchen-garden and orchard by workers and office workers" (February 1949). Garden plots are included in the collective property (they are created as cooperatives of market-gardeners, flower-growers, etc.), as a rule, they are located in the suburban zone and can have the town address.

Social approach stipulates the definition of the rural territory as to the amount of its population. In particular, Kornev (2009: 68) noted that the rural territory is the territory, where the share of the rural population in its general number exceeds 15-50%. But it is not mentioned in the scientific paper how to define this share.

Let us stress that relatively to the content of the phenomenon, the notion "rural territory" while using territorial approach is considered by the international organizations as the territory with a definite density of population. Recognizing a considerable contribution of the international organizations in the sphere of investigating rural development we should like to express our own point of view: at present it is difficult to achieve the agreement concerning the universal definition of the rural territory, which will be acceptable for all the countries and can be used in any situation, as, for example, the division into rural territories and towns, cities can be defined at the political or administrative levels (Prushkivskyi 2014: 130).

Nevertheless, we should not forget about the differences in the development of rural territories, that is why the mechanism of their support by the state and civil institutions has to be diversified. In fact, the functions of preserving and organizing agro-landscapes on the rural territories can be performed by agricultural subjects,

and such work has to be paid by the state. The preservation of the territories in Poland is performed by such a scheme.

The average value of the density of rural population varies in different countries because of different classification in these countries (Table 4).

Table 4. The criteria of defining rural settlements in the OECD countries

State	The criteria of definition
Australia	Dispersely settled groups of the population less than 1000 people
Austria	Populated areas with the population up to 5000 people
Canada	Locations having the territory up to 400 km ² and the population up to 1000 people
Denmark, Norway	Settlements having the population up to 200 inhabitants
Great Britain	Farming territories having the population up to 10 000 people
France	Populated areas having the population up to 2000 people
Switzerland, Portugal	Populated areas having the population up to 10 000 people

Source: Own elaboration.

In general, two viewpoints should be singled out: 1) rural settlements can be different as to their size, but they are small (having the population up to 10 000 people); and 2) they are mainly located in the districts with a low density of population.

Referring to the experience of European countries, the Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) considers the rural territories such administrative units of the local level which have the density of population up to 150 persons per 1 km². The EU supplements this definition with some other signs:

- the regions where over 50% of the inhabitants live in populated areas with the density of population less than 150 persons per 1 km² – rural regions;
- the regions where from 15 to 50% of inhabitants live in populated areas with the density of population less than 150 persons per 1 km² – mainly rural regions;
- the regions where up to 15% of inhabitants live in populated areas with the

density of population less than 150 persons per 1 km² – to a considerable extent rural regions (Hubeni 2007: 85).

In the Western economic science, a multi-criteria approach to defining rural territories is used, according to which they are considered as (Kosodii 2009: 135):

- the space where the settlement and its infrastructure have only a small share of the landscape;
- the environment where pastures, forests, mountains, and deserts predominate;
- the settlement with a low density of population (about 5-10 persons per 1 km²);
- the place where the majority of people are engaged in agriculture;
- the territory where the price on land is relatively low;
- the locality, which is characterized by high transaction expenditures, connected with long distances from towns, cities and unsatisfactory infrastructure.

3. Peculiarities of the traditional lifestyle in the rural locality

Rather complicated is the question connected with defining such a notion as modern "rural style of life", especially for such post-industrial European countries as Germany, France, Belgium, and others. Too large differences have been observed not only among the continents (the South – the North, the West – the East), separate groups of countries, but inside separately taken countries.

Western sociologists define four types of the traditional lifestyle in the rural locality:

- the style of measured way of life of the inhabitants of small populated areas, who are more accustomed to contacting the nature, than people;
- the style of patriarchal way of life, which is based on the family (khutir) farm with conservative following the traditions of everyday life and land use;
- the style of urbanized way of life of the inhabitants of settlements and villages, situated in the sphere of influence of cities and towns; pendulum labor migrations are characteristic of such settlements and villages or the population here is engaged in narrow specialized agri-business to satisfy the demand of town markets selling farm products;
- the style of suburban life, characteristic of the persons who reside in suburban zones, value open space and nature itself, but do not manage a household there.

There is also the *production* approach, according to which the territorial organization of the society comprises organizing social production including territorial division of labor; the system of settling;

territorial using of nature; science and scientific-technical activities; administrative-territorial division; economic, social, ecological-economic division into districts; territorial aspects of economic relations. Nevertheless, to our mind, the "anthropological" approach is the closest approach, which clears up the essence of the notion "territory" in its broad meaning. Human factor is the basis of the approach mentioned above. For instance, the existing theoretical model of the territorial anthropological-ecological system includes the population and corresponding to it area of vital functions (the environment of settlements, production, municipal, and recreation territories).

The main functions of rural territories are as follows:

- agricultural production and partial processing of farm products;
- forestry, timber cutting, and hunting;
- a part of extraction and processing industry, which has no town creating power;
- recreational services to the population;
- nature protection measures (reserved areas, nature reserves, protective zones, etc.);
- spatial-communicative function;
- the place of dwelling of a part of labor resources working in towns, cities.

At the same time, we do not agree with the statement, that traditionally rural territories are connected with agrarian production. Although agriculture is highly developed, convalescence and recreation function of rural territories is considerably expressed on Zakarpattia and in the South of Ukraine. At the same time, Prokopa (2007: 53) mentions, 64,7% of the working rural population are engaged outside "the formal" sector of agricultural economics. The example of the effective development of subsidiary small holdings are the

rural territories of China, where beginning from 1979 people began to be engaged in non-agricultural kinds of activities, so the peasants “stopped working on land, but remained in their native villages”.

Dynamic urbanization of the XIX-XX centuries developed new social structures, different from “the traditional” organizations of the rural locality. That is why preserving the traditional style of life in modern small

settlements is important for supporting their rural “character”, because these peculiarities attract tourists from town districts “to the village”.

The system of rural settling, as well as the specifics of agricultural production, have also influenced the type of rural settlements, which, according to their characteristics, considerably differ from towns (Table 5).

Table 5. The comparative characteristics of rural and town territorial sub-systems of the society

Defining factors	The features of rural territorial sub-system	The signs of town territorial sub-system
Economic	Mainly of agro-industrial production, recreation	Mainly of industrial production
The kinds of using the territory	Mainly for agricultural purposes	Mainly for industrial purposes
The method of building the territory	Rural, of farmstead type	Town, of industrial type
The type of settling	Petty-dispersed	Concentrated
Social-stratum	Prevailing of peasants	Prevailing of workers and office-workers
The way of life	Rural	Urbanized
Density of population	Low	High
The sphere of social services	Elementary, not developed	Multi-functional, developed
Transport network, communication	Not organized, not developed	Dispersed, developed
Ecological	Recreation and biosphere- nature protective zone	The zone of high technogenic (man induced) burden

Source: Own elaboration.

However, the town has always been considered as a standard; at the same time the differences and peculiarities of the town, city, and village as the types of settlements, industry, and agriculture as various branches of the national economy, the living conditions of rural and town population have been ignored. The dichotomy “village-town” has been identified through the dichotomy “agriculture-industry”.

Rural territories are similar to each other in structure at their low level, but they differ concerning the content, local specifics, and they include khutirs, villages, and settlements. The next level of rural territories is the district. Structurally, it looks like the totality of the mentioned territories of the lower level, belonging to a definite administrative district. At the regional level, rural

territories are the spatial-functional segment of the region (Poltava region has 25 districts). The region, in its turn, as a component of the macro-territory (the state territory has 24 regions) is a definite part of the social, natural, economic, infrastructural, cultural-historic, and, as a matter of fact, spatial potentials of the state, which is under the jurisdiction of the local bodies of power.

On the example of using the system methodology in the research of rural territorial formations, held by the scholars such as Pavlov (2005) and Sabluk (2006), one can come to the conclusion, that the systemacity as a phenomenon, is not the internal characteristics of the object, it is represented in its mutual relations with other objects.

If we take into account the investigations as to the number villages in Ukraine and its regions in 1991-2013 held by the portal "Tyzhden.UA" we will receive shocking results: since 1991, 641 rural populated areas, including 40 settlements and 601 villages, have disappeared from the map of Ukraine (Tyzhden. UA 2013).

Communicating with the elder generation of the inhabitants of various villages, rather often we heard the explanations that this situation in the village is advantageous to the state and companies with a large capital. People consider, that it was programmed beforehand – the technology of the latent (concealed) genocide of the village. It is being introduced to decrease the number of villages and the rural population maximally, and then to sell the fertile soils and territories to farmers-monopolists or foreign investors. As far as the people who are able to work, they will be used as a cheap labor force. They say this is a new kind of economic expansion (Disappearing Ukrainian... 2016). But in case a considerable part of the land and animal burial sites are plowed, the ecological disaster may happen.

Mainly young people are against such a scenario of the common deal. They say that the village is losing its competitiveness and attractiveness to the youth. There are no prospects in the village from the economic point of view: there are no propositions of qualified work, interesting places for recreation, and infrastructure. The young people are not interested, they do not expect their development and the future of the village on the whole. They explain the process of the village "vanishing" by the global tendencies – nowadays IT technologies and intellectual work in the office are in demand, but not the natural economy or work in the field or on the farm. That is why they plan to live in a town somewhere abroad.

In the future the rural territories will be changing, which is connected with the global urbanization and creation of suburban areas for raising the comfortable conditions of peasants' life. Besides, the majority of non-functioning settlements will be used as objects of the agrarian sphere. At present, there are no effective state programs of developing or changing the format of village activities in Ukraine, and the process of breaking up the rural communities is continuing accompanied by the weak process of decentralization.

Conclusions

Thus, it is necessary to take into account the world tendencies, which are defining for providing the sustainable development of rural territories. In the conclusion, it should be stressed, that the notion "sustainable development of rural territories" has been connected not only with agricultural production, which remains mainly decisive; but very often, it is also connected with the alternative kinds of economic activities, that are reflected in a number of strategic documents of the EU.

Thus, one can expect, that during the preparation to joining the EU the corresponding processes will take place in Ukraine. The changes to the Laws which are currently in force, and organizational structures, that are the main elements of the institutional system, have to be aimed at the systematic raising the rates of rural territories' development. The additional aim of modifying the functioning of institutional mechanisms must be leveling the regional disproportions. The research shows, that in the recent years the institutional changes have not performed their functions completely. This fact is a proof that solving the problem of differences between rural territories and towns, cities has not achieved its aim from the point of view

of economic development. To some extent, this confirms the absence of the impact of decisions contained in the regulatory documents aimed at decreasing the regional differences.

While defining the essence of rural territories, it is necessary to take into account territorial, social, and production factors. But, first of all, this is the territory where people live, and it is expedient to take into account their interests during making any transformations.

Thus, the notion "rural territories", as a concept, generally characterizes the open space with a sparse system of settling, low density of population, and small settlements having the population up to 10 000 people. Besides, the communities of these settlements keep the tendency to traditionalism and a definite conservatism in their culture.

That is why, generalizing the works by the scholars, we can come to the conclusion, that the rural territory is a historically formed, social, natural spatial formation including natural and material-technical resources, social and production infrastructure; it unites organizational and functional totality of townships, villages, which are under the jurisdiction of village (settlement, township) councils, and includes farmland and other land outside rural settlements together with production objects, located on them.

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