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Knowing when it is time to go: managing rural decline in Central and Eastern Europe

Over six thousand Russian villages became totally uninhabited, since the last census in 2002, bringing the total number of empty settlements to approximately nineteen thousand—another 36,000 communities house less than people each. Nowhere else in the world is the pace and scale of rural depopulation as dramatic as in Russia (Wood 2012)—the collapse of the state farms and the loss of much rural industry encouraged many to leave. Moreover, the abolition of the residency system of *propiska* allowed greater freedom of movement within Russia. This decline in the rural population coincides with a significant reduction in the overall population—demographers estimate that the population of Russia will shrink by 17 million, by 2025, and over three-quarters of it will live in cities (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007).

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon, and it was only in the past five years that the world population changed from a majority residing in rural areas to a majority living in urban environments. The size of these new mega cities can create a host of problems—as well as open up new possibilities for rural dwellers. Where there are high birth rates and falling mortality rates, much of the population increase is concentrated in towns and cities. By 2025, for example, the Turkish population is predicted to grow by 22.3 million, with much of the increase being squeezed into Istanbul and its surroundings (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007). At the same time, the overall rural population in Turkey is predicted to shrink by 2.45 million (UN DESA 2012).

In many parts of Europe, and especially in Eastern Europe, the prognosis is that the overall population levels will shrink, and that there will be a significant 'greying' of the population. By 2025, for instance, the median age in Slovenia will be 47 and 20 per cent of Bulgarians will be over 65 years old (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007). Consequently, the debates on the implications of demographic change in Europe are increasingly broad, addressing not only economic implications but also the consequences for political participation (Goerres 2009), for family relations (Czekanowski 2011), and for the organisation of education systems (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007).

Population changes clearly warrant long-term management. If projections are a sound base for planning, then many rural settlements may no longer require a school in a few years, although they may require a different kind of health service. However, the danger is that cutting back on public services will simply accelerate

out-migration and further weaken the attraction of certain settlements. Moreover, in some places in Europe, maintaining good public services may still be insufficient to reverse negative demographic trends—a recent report on policy alternatives for those regions facing demographic pressures was at a loss as to what to recommend to Sachsen Anhalt (ESPON 2013: 59):

> In a nutshell, it appears that a weak reproductive potential, ageing and depopulation are the biggest challenges for the case study regions. The relatively high birth rates in the Scandinavian regions and the comparatively "young" age structure of the Hungarian regions' population attenuate these problems somewhat. For Sachsen-Anhalt, on the other hand, it seems that the gathering demographic clouds have no silver lining.

The aim of this article is to consider how demographic changes might influence the future management of rural public services in Central and Eastern Europe. The focus will be on services for the young and the old, drawing on recent sociological and anthropological research. The first argument of this article is that the nature of rural–urban ties is a distinct feature of Central and Eastern Europe—and one that might be considered an underused resource when contemplating future settlement needs. As Table 1 (p. 35) shows, rural populations still account for a significant portion of the overall population. The second argument of this article is that migration has especial importance for rural development. On the one hand, in contrast to other parts of Europe, rural in-migration in Central and Eastern Europe is often associated with the urban poor, seeking to reduce their living costs, rather than the affluent, seeking a peaceful retirement. On the other, combined with changes in fertility and mortality, out-migration has had a very uneven effect on rural settlements. In some areas, remittances provide some compensation, smoothing out income losses and sometime taking conspicuous consumption to new levels. However, with the appearance of significant numbers of settlements with only double-digit populations, additional out-migration can fatally undermine the viability of some rural communities.

Of course, dealing with unpredictable population changes poses a question of great emotional and sentimental importance—but it also has clear, practical, social as well as economic dimensions. The argument here is that understanding the dynamics of rural population change is important because it potentially affects many more people than just those who live in the rural areas. Planning for smaller populations can be a spur for innovation in public service management, creating new connections among local administrations and taking planning decisions with a far greater attention to their potential demographic impact.

This article draws mainly on the situations in Romania, Hungary, and Serbia. Each country displays different dimensions of demographic change. Romania has a large rural population, still strongly connected to food production—yet, many of her rural areas are also subject to strong migratory pressures. In Hungary, where

the rural population is significantly lower, the exit from food production is more rapid. Serbia is included because rural population change seems to be less affected by rapid out-migration or widespread withdrawal from agriculture and food production.

Average urban population (percentage)						
Country	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**2020***
Denmark	79.1	83.7	84.8	85.1	86.8	88.1
France	71.1	73.3	74.1	76.9	85.2	89.6
Hungary	60.1	64.2	65.8	64.6	69.0	73.4
Ireland	51.7	55.3	56.9	59.1	61.9	65.1
Romania	40.3	46.1	53.2	53.0	52.8	53.5
Serbia	39.7	46.1	50.4	53.0	56.0	59.6

* Predicted figures.

Source: Based on UN DESA (2012).

Table 1: Average urban populations for Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and selected countries between 1970 and 2020

Following this introduction, the article continues with outlining some of the problems in identifying the true size of the rural population, in the second section. This is then followed by a discussion on the implications of continued population decline for rural public services, in the third section. This section focuses on some of the challenges in maintaining rural schools. It also considers how the ownership of land can sometimes be a distorting factor in considering the needs of the rural elderly. The fourth section considers some alternatives for rural public service delivery, including how this might be organised by combinations of regional and local authorities—the article offers only limited discussion on the financial implications of such changes. The conclusions are briefly outlined in the fifth, final section.

Profiling the rural population

One problem with understanding the process of rural population change is that it is difficult to determine which areas are most likely to be affected by declining populations. Although the current resident population is a good indicator, it is not so sensitive to capturing the actual dynamics of population and residency in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Hungarian anthropologist András Czegledy (2002) coined the phrase 'urban peasant' to describe those people who spent their weekends and summers in the countryside, usually staying in houses that had been in their family's possession for some time and that, more often than not, still had an elderly relative living there fulltime. This group was not driven to produce food by economic necessity—rather, their connections to the countryside reflected their attachment to 'self-provisioning', the opportunity to spend time with family, and their enjoyment of sharing the fruits of their labour with friends, family, and neighbours. Czegledy argued that urban peasants were important because they could not only ensure the upkeep of rural properties, they could also take care of elderly relatives and even neighbours. In Romania and Serbia and, to a lesser extent, Hungary, maintaining connections to rural relatives remains an important source of additional food—in return for their labour, urban households can stock up on fresh fruit and vegetables, meats, wines, brandies, and other foods preserved through pickling and drying.

A second category of rural resident which might not appear in statistics is children temporarily in the care of their grandparents. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, although by no means only here, it has long been common for children to spend large parts of their long summer break in the countryside. In some countries, this practice has been extended to all year round. For instance, urban children living with their rural relatives have become a significant feature of migration in Romania, where often both mother and father migrate to work in Spain, Italy, or elsewhere. One of the most common problems this creates is with schooling. Not only do many grandparents find it difficult to support children in their schools, but the absence of their parents can make it more difficult for children to concentrate and do well at school. Successive governments and civic organisations have introduced various measures to ameliorate some of the problems created by both parents being away for lengthy periods (Ulrich et al. 2011). For example, civic organisations have been working with schools to ensure that parents are sent weekly reports on their child's progress, and, in 2008, the government announced a programme to support Romanian teachers in Spanish schools, thereby encouraging migrating parents to take their children with them.

Arguably, both categories transcend the notion of visiting guests by either the frequency or length of their visits, resulting in variations in population numbers over time and space. Those areas closer to cities and larger towns, for instance, are more susceptible to such population fluctuations, whereas places with fewer amenities and badly served by transport connections receive far fewer of these urban visitors.

Whether rural out-migration will be temporary or permanent has become an important question for both researchers and policy makers. Sandu (2000), for instance, surveyed almost every village settlement in Romania to determine what influence the local environment had in shaping the nature of migration patterns.

He found, for example, that 60 per cent of all circular or return migration in the rural areas originated in only 4.4 per cent of villages (Sandu 2000: 18). On the one hand, villages with populations of around two thousand people, close to European highways, and with a history of commuting, higher numbers of young people, and relatively high unemployment were more likely to experience circular rather than permanent migration. On the other hand, villages further away from large settlements—those that had smaller populations and those that had lost their administrative functions—were more likely to experience permanent out-migration.

Of course, incorporating such findings into policy and planning is by no means straightforward. Migratory flows can be fickle, and the lengths of time spent away or the actual amount of remittances sent back are very hard to predict. Higher numbers of migrant children might be good for rural school numbers, but, with unpredictable economies in countries such as Spain and Italy, it is hard to decide whether these children are staying in the countryside for the long or short term. In a similar vein, the presence of 'urban peasants' at weekends and for holidays can suggest both a healthy state of urban–rural connections as well as an absence of alternative local employment.

Some implications of continued population decline for rural public services

In Hungary and Romania, the responsibility for organising rural public services changed significantly with decentralisation in the early 1990s followed by a steady regionalisation and recentralisation of powers from the mid 1990s onwards (Thelen, Cartwright, and Sikor 2008). In Hungary, for example, local authorities could elect to run a range of public services with co-financing from central transfers and with some support and supervision from county level. Many villages chose to run their own schools, only to find that they were unable to adequately maintain them in the face of rising maintenance costs and falling pupil numbers—and, thereby, falling per capita transfers. In recent years, many smaller settlements unilaterally transferred responsibilities onto county authorities, leaving many of the latter in significant debt.

In respect of the elderly, the local authorities had relatively little scope for providing services. There were virtually no residential facilities for the elderly outside the major urban areas. Local authorities in Romania, for instance, could assess individual household means and, where they fell below the minimum income, the households would be entitled to extra funds. Similarly, local social workers could draw up lists for provision for extra winter fuel or for the distribution of occasional food aid from the EU.

Increasingly though, the design of public services is the shared task of the self-governing settlement—*comună*, in Romania—and intermediate regional authorities, who may outsource specific tasks to professional providers. In Hungary, for example, the homecare visits for the elderly are organised by micro-regional authorities, but can be delivered in conjunction with the social services department from larger conurbations. In other words, although the smallest settlements may no longer have principal responsibility for organising public services for the elderly or for school children, they can still play an important role in representing local needs.

From a national or strategic point of view, advocates for rural areas face a conundrum. If they support efforts to move out of agriculture to other productive sectors, this might encourage further out-migration and therefore accelerate the demise of villages. Alternatively, if they focus on the quality of rural roads, schools, energy supply, and essential public services, would they be ending up in making large claims on the national budget? The current structure of the EU's Rural Development Fund reflects this division between sector and area support. Whilst the two main and well funded measures under Pillar One deal with agricultural development, the other instruments under Pillar Two have the more nebulous goal of trying to diversify the rural economy and improve the quality of life. This section of the article focuses on this latter dimension by looking at the relationship between two key public services—rural schooling and services for the elderly—and demographic decline.

For some, maintaining the local, rural schools is paramount, because they are the ultimate symbol of future population development. Without them, young families will neither stay nor move into the area. Although this sounds intuitively correct, to what extent is it backed up with research evidence? Living in rural areas may have other attractions and, as in many parts of the world, children can always 'commute' to school. The situation of the elderly represents another issue that might be more susceptible to emotional and ideological arguments rather than evidence-based ones. In all likelihood, the profile of the many of the smallest settlements will continue to be heavily skewed towards the over 60s. Without significant changes, elderly residents will be loath to relocate, which means that large numbers may well be in need of access to good quality public services. However, the kinds of services that are found in urban areas—such as residential care homes or dedicated health services—are usually lacking in rural areas. Could their extension to the rural areas be afforded and, if presumably not in many cases, what kinds of provision could realistically be imagined?

Assessing the contribution that schools make to rural life is a minefield. A study of small schools in Hungary argued that there were many shibboleths from both the right and the left that made impeded rational discussion (NIPE 2006). At the time of the study, there were 1,220 small village schools with a total of 111,352

students. The average student population was 91 and the average population of the villages concerned was 1,022. However, contrary to received wisdom, these schools were neither significantly more expensive than their urban counterparts nor were they poorer in educational outcomes, once they had been controlled for basic socio-economic starting points. (Longstanding consensus on the reasons explaining educational achievement identifies the socio-economic background of the family way ahead of the specific characteristics of schools.) More specifically, the study revealed that '[i]f the minimum number of students per school was raised to 150, the national educational costs would be reduced by 2 per cent; if the minimum was raised to 200, there would be an overall saving of 5 per cent. This relatively modest saving would require four to five hundred rural schools to be closed down' (NIPE 2006: 8).

In terms of sustainability, recruiting teachers for rural schools was generally harder than recruiting for urban schools. However, according to NIPE (2006), this problem could be partially mitigated if would-be teachers had a better insight into the challenges of rural schools, as well as were there to be preferential pay and promotion possibilities. Trainee teachers tended to gain their practical experience in larger, better equipped urban schools. One current problem was that rural teachers occupied a special position within their immediate communities, that was part social worker, fund raiser, grant writer, event organiser, and / or career adviser. Whilst local officials and residents may be grateful for teachers who willingly volunteer for these additional responsibilities, it might not be a realistic means for addressing rural needs in the longer term.

For example, in an echo of the famous Brazilian family support, the *bolso familia*, and as a means for reducing dropout rates from school, receipt of certain child benefits in Hungary and Romania is conditional on school attendance. By making the class teacher directly responsible for recording attendance, and thereby appearing to control access to the payment, teachers can sometimes find themselves in direct confrontation with parents. It is perhaps too much to expect young rural teachers to take on organising the sports team, rounding up the truants, cajoling the feckless, negotiating cost sharing with the local council, as well as teaching three or four different subjects. In other words, decision makers at county or national level would do well to reconsider whether these expectations are a realistic basis for attracting and maintaining professional public services.

Kovách and Kučerová (2006), in their 'rise' of the new 'project class' in the countryside, argued that not everyone welcomed the extension of traditional professional duties. In their words, the so-called project class was made of rural professionals such as doctors and teachers who offered their services, on a paid or unpaid basis, to write projects for regional, central, European, or other kinds of funding. Their skills could be used to understand grant requirements, assess financial implications, and then contrive activities that could fit within the relevant

terms of reference. According to the authors' informants in the villages under study, doctors, for example, should be doctors and teachers should teach. Expecting these rural professionals to assume active roles in finding funds by writing and, worse, administering complex grants was bound to be at the expense of their primary duties. In any event, how could these people presume to say what the village needed? Were their plans outlined in the local manifestos or were they another example of important decisions emerging by default rather than democratic discussion?

The NIPE (2006) study highlighted the fact that the role and sustainability of rural schools can be approached in different ways. Obvious shortages in teaching resources can be mitigated by promoting mobility within the general teaching profession—through dual appointments, for instance, and through promoting teacher sharing between urban and rural schools.[1] Other studies drew attention to the importance of greater parental participation in school activities (Kovacs-Cerović, Vizek-Vidović, and Powell 2010). Although this proposal is by no means uncontroversial, with substantial doubts over the optimal way to manage voluntary parental labour, there have been a number of positive instances in the region where extracurricular activities—sporting events and even the physical upkeep of school buildings—have drawn directly on parental involvement (for an extended discussion of the issue of parental participation in schooling in South-Eastern Europe, see Kovacs-Cerović, Vizek-Vidović, and Powell 2010).

In relation to public services and benefits for the rural elderly, several studies identified significant discrepancies between rural and urban residents (Milbourne 2012). In the 1990s, those who had worked for the state or in collective farms were frequently receiving lower pensions compared to their urban counterparts. Although many factories and urban state enterprises were bankrupt, the income loss for rural pensioners was aggravated by the rapid decline in the provision of basic public services in the countryside. However, as far as the state authorities were concerned, rural underemployment and low pensions were ameliorated by rural households having reclaimed agricultural land during the 1990s reforms. In their survey of rural poverty in Romania in 1998, the National Commission of Statistics (NCS 2000: 30) concluded that possession of land was the single most important dividing line in the rural areas between those above and those below the poverty line.

Whilst land has always been an important asset in supporting rural livelihoods, it did not always follow that land ownership translated into significant crop yields, rents, or other incomes. As Katherine Verdery (2004) showed, the distribution of collective farmland in Romania created significant social conflict in the country.

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[1] This approach is reminiscent of the appointment strategy of the Church of England and its efforts to ensure that rural parishes are supplied with vicars and curates.

Land restitution may have been the critical goal for many, but, when this was totally divorced from actual ability to use, its pursuit could appear dishonest, particularly when others who had worked for years for collective farms only received tiny plots of marginal land. Verdery (2004) showed how the social divisions created by land reforms undermined the cultivation of local land—those who were relatively land rich tended to be labour poor and those with labour were unwilling to work for those who, they felt, had cheated them from their fair returns.

The consequences of land divisions were to be further compounded when it became clear that central decision makers also saw land ownerships as real incomes. In the 1990s, in Romania, Serbia, and, to a lesser extent, Hungary, social welfare transfers shifted towards means testing when it came to assessing entitlements (Barr 2005). In Romania, for example, the programme of minimum income support made a detailed set of standards for the valuation of household assets and their imputed income. Ownership of land was assessed by size, the level of local rents, and the quality of the soil. According to researchers commissioned by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), this land valuation process frequently worked to the detriment of many rural households (Sinclair et al. 2002: 11). Given their limited revenue raising powers, it was critical that local authorities maximised central transfers and minimised local contributions. If local land values could be set at an artificially high level, then the level of imputed incomes from land would lift households above the poverty threshold and thereby lose any entitlement to minimum income support. With local authorities obliged to contribute 20 per cent of the costs of minimum income support, inflating land values reduced local social security bills. The DFID researchers found that, in some parts of Romania, rural land values exceeded those in the most exclusive capital suburbs in the country (Sinclair et al. 2002: 11).

There were other ways in which land ownership could disadvantage the rural elderly. Decollectivisation created an enormous number of property owners.[2] Kin relations once again became very important for determining who had a stake in the income coming out of the countryside. However, in the land reforms, it was not always optimal to register every kin claimant. Both rural and, to some extent, urban households disguised the actual distribution of within-family land-related incomes by registering ownership in the name of a single elderly relative. Not only could this strategy help avoid taxation, it could also maintain entitlement to certain welfare benefits or simply avoid the costs of land registration. In some instances, each individual plot had to be measured by a surveyor and maps had to be drawn up and entered into the cadastre, incurring relatively prohibitive costs for cash poor

[2] There are few figures on the number of property owners created in the land reform process. However, to give an idea, there were 6.3 million applications following the Romanian land reform in 1991 (Cartwright 2001: 118).

households (Cartwright 2001). In Hungary, much of the land that was owned by younger family members was held in so-called undivided shares. These plots were usually grouped into a single field or area which then made it easier for larger producers to rent and use the land. It is true that such inheritance practices led to familial disputes, and some hitherto unquantified social costs—for instance, it was estimated that over one million cases of intergenerational land disputes filled up the Romanian courts in the 1990s (Cartwright 2001: 118). However, it also made sense to assume that the traditional practices of family inheritance would eventually govern, and there was neither pressing social need nor popular pressure to identify each and every actual owner in the land books. However, one consequence was that land valuation rested upon a series of fictions whose implications became steadily more disadvantageous to those who had the misfortune to be listed as owners.

A recent research programme on rural social security revealed some interesting practices for assessing local needs and distributing resources (von Benda-Beckmann, Thelen, and Kovács 2012). Whilst benefit regulations usually counted land as an asset, local social workers could sometimes collude with family land arrangements in order to ensure access to benefits. In one Romanian case, for example, if the social worker recorded the four hectares belonging to the grandfather in the house, then his 14 years old grandson would become ineligible for a school-related allowance. However, knowing that the land yielded very little income and that the parents spent a great deal of their time looking after their infirm parents, the social worker excluded the land from the list of household assets. In another case, the rules for the allocation of winter fuel, often in the form of wood, provided that garden plots should be taken into account in determining entitlement. Social workers sympathetic to those elderly that were either unable to cut wood themselves or had no family to assist them, would fail to record the full size of garden plots, thereby ensuring more elderly households could benefit.

Whilst local discretion could sometimes alleviate land-related complications, in other cases, the room for manoeuvre was more limited. Fox (2009) gave the example of the allocation of direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy in Romania. Although the programme was supposed to offer financial support to those actually working the land, where local rent contracts were unregistered, as was often the case, it became virtually impossible for local officials to ensure that direct payments were made to the actual working tenants rather than the registered land owners.

Connecting population change to public service policy

So far, the aim of this article has been to identify several practical considerations in assessing rural public services, such as, for example, the importance of maintaining good relations between urban and rural areas. Although the practice of extended families coming together to grow their own food may be waning, there are other strong reasons to invest in rural–urban linkages, not least their ability to support elderly relatives as well as care for younger family members. Where the house in the country is a means of escape, and where the area is blessed by attractive landscapes, well connected, and supplied with necessary infrastructure, the near future outlook might be positive. Such scenarios could be encouraged by investing in rural sports, leisure facilities, grants for modernising older properties, and ensuring good connections to utilities and communication technologies. In areas that are less well endowed, the situation might be bleaker and, without serious attention, settlements might be looking at complete depopulation within a matter of decades.

Given the role public services play in the quality of rural life, this section examines various alternatives that could be considered by rural and regional planners.

Whilst the problems of running rural schools have been relatively well documented, there has been much less attention given to the implications that the collapse of preschool facilities has on rural areas.[3] This may reflect cultural practices that valorise early childcare being almost exclusively carried out within the family. No doubt, young women being able to take extended leave to look after their children can reduce pressure on the local labour market. However, as attendance rates in urban kindergartens remain at high levels, it could be that cultural preferences alone cannot account for the lack of village kindergartens. Nevertheless, rather than seeking to reopen old kindergartens, villages might support children attending private family homes, with hosting parents receiving some training which would then allow them to host other parents' children within their own homes or in some facility offered by the local authority.

For older children, the reinvention or extension of boarding schools can connect those living in remote areas to more populous areas and help rural schools retain sufficient numbers. In Austria, there have been experiments with creating multigenerational households, with those who are no longer able or willing to live

[3] The figures from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH 2013) do not distinguish between urban and rural institutions, but the overall figures do show a significant reduction in places and pupils. In 1990, there were 4,718 kindergartens in Hungary and, by 2011, this was down to 4,336. In the same period, the number of children attending kindergarten dropped by 50,000.

independently sharing facilities with young boarders coming in for the week. An additional advantage of reviving larger rural institutions is the support they could give to the local economy. Not only could they offer modest numbers of employment opportunities, but they could deliberately source the majority of their food and fuel needs through local suppliers. Creating more ethanol-supplied power plants at the local level, for example, can reduce costs and increase opportunities for local land owners.

Encouraging people to move out of family homes located in remote or sparsely populated areas would need to be very carefully handled. In a minority of cases, it might be possible to physically transport old buildings to areas that are more established and have better facilities and amenities. However, in most cases, the costs would be prohibitive and physical relocation saved for houses with historical or architectural merit. Undoubtedly there will be many who do not want to move, and, for this group, the question is how best to organise access to services for them. In Serbia, where mobility amongst the rural population is less pronounced, elderly families whose children live far away can face problems. Local initiatives in the south of the country have introduced a system of care workers who are paid to look after basic needs such as fetching medicines, cleaning, and generally making sure that the old and housebound are well (von Benda-Beckmann, Thelen, and Kovács, 2012). It is increasingly common for health workers to make home calls as part of their regular duties. In other situations, they might cooperate with the local authority to carry out basic medical tests in the village cultural house. These mobile services can take advantage of communication technologies to connect isolated households to medical centres.

A final alternative is one that could be called the Cinderella option.[4] As in the story, whilst Cinderalla slept for her hundred years, a wall of thorns and bushes grew up to hide the palace. In the same way, rather than let the landscape become full of empty properties, roads could be closed, green boards put up, and access to abandoned villages restricted until such time as a new use might be found. One problem for poor local authorities is that, in the absence of owners, they are obliged to carry out basic maintenance on empty or abandoned properties, and are usually unable to recoup their costs. Placing responsibility for maintaining abandoned properties in the hands of a local or national trust is a proposition that runs the same risks as taking care of abandoned land. In law, the property still belongs to someone, even if they have no wish to live, rent, maintain, or otherwise dispose of the property. In countries with a history of confiscations and expropriations, state acquisition of private property remains a very sensitive issue. Undoubtedly, there

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4 This was proposed by Christine Dissman (2009) who argued for its application in the context of towns of the former German Democratic Republic that were seeing rapid population decline, with accompanied multitudes of empty properties.

would also be significant financial implications for running the programme on a national scale.

Conclusion

The sheer variety of rural environments and the complexity of their population dynamics make any general statement suspect. And yet, there does appear to be a trend that is going to transform the rural landscape over the next twenty to thirty years. Unless there are active efforts to maintain strong connections between urban and rural areas and new forms of employment opportunity developed, there will be increased concentrations of poverty in the rural areas and there will be many more villages where the fulltime residents can be counted only in double figures. Focusing on the management of public services draws attention to the ways in which their provision can mitigate or, in some cases, perhaps even reverse the trend towards the potential ghettoisation of the elderly rural poor. Combined with dedicated accommodation and supplied with commuting teachers, there is no reason why specialised and mainstream educational facilities cannot be located in rural areas. In other cases, such as providing adequate healthcare services for the elderly, there is less chance that their provision will reverse negative demographic tendencies. Instead, the justification for introducing a more mobile organisation of public services is to take into account the legitimate desire of the elderly not to be uprooted from their homes and to ensure that the decline in the rural population is managed decently.

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