

# THE CHANGING IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE FORMER DGR

Dr. Elke Knappe\*

## Abstract

Studies of changes that are taking place in rural territories in a transitional economy are given little attention in comparison to studies of metropolitan centers and largest urban agglomerations. This is due to the fact, that changes in rural territories do not happen so rapidly, and also because rural territories very rarely draw the attention of domestic and foreign investors.

**Key words:** agriculture, rural areas, former GDR.

## SPREMINJANJE POMENA KMETIJSTVA NA PODEŽELJU NEKDANJE NDR

### Izvleček

Raziskavam sprememb na podeželju trazicijskih gospodarstev je namenjeno malo pozornosti v primerjavi s študijami metropolitanskih središč in večjih mestnih aglomeracij. Vzrok je v tem, da se spremembe na podeželju ne odvijajo tako hitro in da podeželje redko pritegne pozornost domačih in tujih vlagateljev.

**Ključne besede:** Kmetijstvo, podeželje, nekdanja NDR.

---

\* Dr. Elke Knappe, Institute of Regional Geography, Schongauerstr. 9, 04329 Leipzig

## **Introduction**

However, a closer examination reveals that rural territories, in the same way as cities, are characterized by high dynamics of transformations. But these processes are reflected in scientific geographical literature to a significantly lesser degree. With increasing industrialisation the picture began to change. Industrialisation did not just implicate the built up areas - the towns, industry was even established in rural areas, service and craft enterprises were created. That is, the population of the countryside increasingly found work in fields outside agriculture.

### **The changing importance of agriculture in the rural areas of the former GDR**

In the area of the former GDR (German Democratic Republic - former East Germany) after the Second World War there was a development in this respect that demonstrated a totally different aim from that for example in the Federal Republic.

The GDR agricultural policy had the declared aim of transforming agriculture and with its help to achieve stable self-sufficiency in food provision for the population. The first step was the land reform of 1945/1946, a continuous process of collectivisation followed through the founding of agricultural producers' co-operatives, that alongside the state domains became more and more the generators of agricultural production in the GDR. Agriculture got an unusually high status for an industrialised country and agriculture was often the most important component in the life of a village. The enterprise was not just an employer, it provided for other needs, such as transport, the building of roads and paths, the building and maintenance of kindergartens etc.

In collective farms the jobs were not just in farming itself, but here there were work opportunities for those in many other professions such as cooks, clerical workers and craftsmen. This is the reason why the working population of small villages was nearly all employed by the local collective farm or parts of it.

The increasing specialisation and industrial production in farming resulted in types of work that were advantageous for the employment of women.

The working hours were regulated, especially in animal husbandry, there were days for housework and child-care was assured.

With the political and economic change the situation in the villages changed abruptly. The agricultural producers' co-operatives were dissolved, those setting up again or enterprises that followed considerably reduced the number of people employed.

Table 1: The number of employees per 100 ha farming land.

Tabela 1: Število zaposlenih na 100 ha ...

Year	The number of employees
1989	14.2 in the former GDR
1992	3.5 in the new Federal Lands
1999	1.9 in the new Federal Lands (4.0 in the old Federal Lands)

Source/vir: Agricultural Report 1999.

From this it is clear how far-reaching the change in the villages was. Even if some of the freed-up workers were able to take the legally regulated early retirement or were already of a pensionable age, so for many there was no longer any hope of finding work in the agricultural sector. The consequence of this for the younger more mobile generation was to leave the village and search for work in the town. In particular in the sparsely populated north not just a few villages lost inhabitants especially the younger ones. For the older people the fact that they have property in the village is often of importance and for this reason they are less mobile.

If the collapse of the earlier agricultural producers' co-operatives led to a considerable loss in quality of living then the loss of the many workplaces was more serious and divided the village community into two contrasting sides: the people who still had employment and the unemployed.

Farming with the setting aside of land areas and with sinking numbers of animals can no longer be the one and only employer in the village. The problem lies in the fact that the previous farming of large areas with its high need for workers had led to a village mono-structure, that renders the change in structure more difficult. In particular the women are affected by this difficulty, who in the earlier co-operatives mostly did the simple jobs, whether in the fields or the stables. There is now less need for them, so

there is a higher percentage of women than men affected by unemployment (62.5% in 1997 - Agricultural Report 1998). The situation of employment in German agriculture demonstrates the current structural change very clearly. Alone as a result of the age structure of those employed in farming at present it is to be expected that in the next 10-15 years annually 25,000-50,000 people will reach a pensionable age and leave work. In contrast the influx of young workers is only 10,000-15,000 per year.

The decrease in workers is shown in Tables 2 and 3 as well. Further to be learnt from these tables is that a difference between the new and the old Federal Lands is becoming noticeable. Whereas in the old Federal Lands the family workers were in the majority, in the new Federal Lands it is the outside workers who have been employed by a private (limited) company or legal entity. This is explained by the privatisation of the previous agricultural producers' co-operatives and the relatively low number of newly set-up family farms.

Table 2: Workers in agriculture (new Federal Lands).

Tabela 2: Delavci ....

Year	Family workers	Outside workers	Seasonal workers	Total
1994	44,100	113,000	7,600	164,700
1995	47,800	106,200	7,400	161,400
1996	48,500	103,600	7,400	159,500
1997	42,500	100,500	7,500	150,500

Source/vir: Agricultural Report 1998

Table 3: Workers in agriculture (old Federal Lands).

Tabela 3: Delavci ...

Year	Family workers	Outside workers	Seasonal workers	Total
1970	2,475,800	130,600	101,400	2,707,800
1980	1,827,900	92,900	85,300	2,006,100
1990	1,411,800	84,600	73,300	1,569,700
1994	1,170,000	75,500	83,000	1,328,500
1995	1,099,200	72,000	77,200	1,248,400
1996	1,049,700	70,000	75,300	1,195,000
1997	1,010,500	92,000	75,000	1,177,500

Source/vir: Agricultural Report 1998

The current situation is made more difficult by the fact that employment outside agriculture has also been strongly diminished. So for example in some regions of Saxony the textile industry was an employer, in Thuringia it was mining - but all these areas show a decrease in employment or have come to a total standstill. Occasionally the booming construction industry can take on those searching for employment, but even here no further increase can be expected.

The tertiary sector has progressed further, new workplaces have been created in administration, some in commerce, some who were previously clerical workers have set up enterprises as self-employed craftsmen. The total extent of these newly created workplaces is not very great and differs from region to region. In the case of villages that are situated in a place with good communications or perhaps near a larger town a good development of most fields can be observed. These villages are less affected by a loss in population. In contrast through the allocation of economically priced building land they have the possibility of growth in population. The increasing mobility of the population renders it possible for a greater daily distance between home and the workplace. Therefore the decision, to live in one's own house with garden in the country and to work in the town, is taken more frequently. As previously mentioned, only villages that are situated near urban centres can take advantage of this. This is more frequent in the south of the former GDR than in the north, especially the north-east. Regional disparities between north and south are very obvious. In particular those regions, which only got support within the framework of the GDR's structural policy after the Second World War (Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Brandenburg) currently have the greatest difficulties with the change in structure. In many places the hope is cherished that the development of tourism will be the right thing to give the weaker regions a boost in development. Often the villages, for example in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, have got charming countryside but it is to be doubted whether tourism will be in a position to compensate for the missing workplaces. As with these tourism concepts it is above all a 'gentle' or alternative type of tourism (except from the case of the coastal area and the large lakes), it will only be able to play a supplementary role.

## Case study: village Fuchsheim

An example from the countryside surrounding Leipzig makes the process of change clear.

It is the case of the village Fuchshain in the Muldental region. As shown in the table 4, it was a traditional farming village.

In 1946 the number of farms rose, because the agrarian reform took place and some refugees from the former East Prussia received land.

After 1960 all farmers had become members of one of the seven agricultural producers' co-operative. In the eighties continues the process of concentration in the agriculture, in this time were founded two Agricultural Producers Companies - one for husbandry and one for plant production. The area of the plant production cooperative is not only located in the surrounding of the village Fuchshain, also the area of the neighbouring villages was part of this big cooperative. This development was part of the policy in the former GDR - to produce in the agriculture like in the industry. After 1991 there was a new change, the agricultural producers' co-operative was transformed into an agricultural company and two farmers set up independent family farms again. Two farmers are working in the industry and farming is only a parttime job.

It is worth noting and symptomatic that there was a decrease in those employed in agriculture.

Table 4: The number of farms/agricultural companies in the village of Fuchshain.

Tabela4: Število kmetij ...

Year	No. of farms/agricultural enterprises
1935	93
1946	120
1960	7 (APC)*
1989	2 (APC)**
1998	2 farms, 2 farms parttime, 1 company

Source/vir: own surveys, Kinne 1998

**Table 5: Average size of the farms and number of workers in the agricultural enterprises in the village Fuchshain****Tabela 5: Povprečna...**

Year	Size of the farms/enterprises	No. of workers
1935	14 ha	350 + 100 seasonal
1946	11 ha	Approx. 400
1960	185 ha	Approx. 300
1989	4.200 ha	131 + 58 seasonal
1998	26 ha (2 private farms)	4
	1.297 ha (1 agricultural company)	24 + 4 trainees + 4 seasonal

Source/vir: own surveys, Kinne 1998

Not only the number of farms changed, the size and the number of workers too (table 5). The most remarkable change were in the eighties, the cooperative for plant production had a size of 4.200 ha. After the reunification only two former farmers started once more with the private farm, but they have too small farms for profitable farming.

The most important enterprise for the village is the agricultural company, 24 inhabitants are working in this company, and, very important too, 4 trainees have the possibility to learn a qualified job.

**Table 6: Number of animals in the farms of the village Fuchshain****Tabela 6: Število ....**

Year	No. of horses	No. of cattle	No. of which cows	Pigs
1935	140	650	457	660
1946	100	400	350	500
1960	45	650	450	No datas
1989	8	1.340	805	3.375
1998	12	532	286	2.511

Source/vir: own surveys, Kinne 1998

Table 6 shows that the number of domestic animals went into decline, this occurred in whole territory of the former GDR. To modernize the husbandry

is very expensive and the new enterprises have not sufficient capital. Therefore most of them are specialised in plant production. In this field they have advantage of the bigger farm sizes and they are able to produce profitable.

In addition the development in population numbers is interesting. For many years the population had remained almost unchanged at about 600 residents. After the allocation of building land in 1993 it rose and currently there are 1010 residents in the village. These new residents are only living in the village, they are working in other places, for example in Leipzig. So, the village consist of two parts: the old one with the typical farmhouses and the new one with the new detached houses.

## **New processes in rural areas**

In the meantime projects of the 'third work market' have brought employment. The disadvantage of these projects is that in the rarest of cases they can be developed into a measure whose economic success is great enough, that a project generates so many financial means that it can be continued without subsidies. A further form that characterises the face of many villages is the use of buildings as week-end or summer accommodation. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania there are small villages or parts thereof where half the building stock is already used in this way. On the one hand it can be seen as positive, as the buildings are conserved. On the other hand a new type of village resident is thereby created, who does not feel particularly attached to the village either through work or the function of living there and who participates less in village life.

In a similar way this is the same for the 'new residents' in the villages that are close to large towns. The allocated building plots are mostly separated from the actual old centre of the village. Although these people are continually in the village they commute to their workplaces in the daytime and are thus in a different situation from those who live and work in the village. The new residents have a strained relationship with agriculture as they feel at times that it detracts from their quality of living. A further phenomenon, that did not exist in the former GDR, is the separation between the owner of the agricultural enterprise and the enterprise itself. Following reunification farmers from the old Federal Lands bought up areas of land in the new Federal Lands, in particular in the agricultural favoured areas such as the

Magdeburger Börde. There was little or no need for the farm buildings, they were torn down or used for other purposes outside agriculture. This also gave villages a new appearance and agriculture was given a different status.

## **Future perspectives for agriculture in the rural areas of the former GDR**

To sum up it has been established that agriculture, which had a greater status in the former GDR and was an important employer in the countryside, has lost this role. The far-reaching structural change resulted in a considerable decrease in workplaces. This had as a consequence that in mono-structured villages in the north of the former GDR a large majority of the village population, of those mostly women, has been affected by unemployment. In this connection let it be stated, that the women really try to overcome this situation - they do it on the one hand by working in agriculture itself (approx. 20 % of managers in the new Federal Lands are women, in the old Federal Lands it is only 9 %). They also open up new possibilities for themselves. Such income combinations can be seen above all in the service industry. There are pilot projects that are sponsored by the Federal Government. Projects such as SELF (Strukturentwicklung durch Landfrauen) - country women create structural development in rural areas. The brief of the project is to mobilise and support the own potential of the people living in the rural areas. It is assumed that women can be the main link between agricultural and non-agricultural activity. Therefore they can contribute a lot to the improvement of the social atmosphere in the village. Thus they can stem the tendency especially for the younger and well trained members of the population to leave.

This is all the more important as in the area of the former GDR a strong north - south incline can be observed. This means, that in the sparsely inhabited more agriculturally oriented north, such terms as shrinking workplaces, decoupling of economic development, lacking quality of life, emigration and social erosion are quite appropriate for describing the situation. In contrast the villages in the south with economic land prices, empty buildings that can be converted and a good infrastructure are as attractive for residential purposes as for establishing an enterprise. These opportunities must be recognised and used for the development of a village. With globalisation, the service and information culture, as well as virtual enterprises, completely new perspectives can be opened up for the villages.

## **THE CHANGING IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE FORMER DGR**

### **Conclusion**

The following conclusion can be derived that not just the status of agriculture in the rural regions needs to be conceived afresh it is surely also important to evaluate the commercial activities in accordance with the differentiation of rural areas in order to avoid conflicts of use if possible. So for example one would choose a different type of agriculture in region that is suitable for holidays than in a region that is less attractive. This means that in such country like Germany in the rural areas are going on two important processes:

1. the agriculture is no longer the main employer in the rural area
2. the must look for a successfull combination with the other possible economic activities in the countryside.

An other important change is, that agriculture given such tasks as the conservation of the natural foundations of life and the care of the countryside alongside the provision of high quality nourishment for the population. The condition for this change is to be accepted by those who are affected and indeed the whole of society. If this is the case then we will get closer to the aim of safeguarding or enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas.

## **SPREMINJANJE POMENA KMETIJSTVA NA PODEŽELJU NEKDANJE NDR**

### **Povzetek**

Podeželje v NDR se je po 2. svetovni vojni razvijalo popolnoma drugače kot v Zahodni Nemčiji. V NDR so želeli pokriti vse domače potrebe po hrani. Prvi korak k temu cilju je bila zemljiška reforma 1945/1946. Nadaljevala se je s kolektivizacijo, ki se je odvijala prek ustanavljanja kmetijskih zadrug in je z državnimi posestvi postala vedno močnejši dejavnik kmetijske proizvodnje. Kmetijstvo je v izrazito industrijski državi dobilo nenavadno pomemben položaj. Kmetijska podjetja so delavcem nudila poleg zaposlitve vse za življenje potrebne storitve, od prevoza, gradnje cest, stanovanj, do otroških vrtcev. V teh podjetjih so našli zaposlitev tudi številni drugi poklici. Prebivalci manjših vasi so bili tako v celoti zaposleni na državnem posestvu. S političnim in gospodarskim obratom se je položaj v vseh možno spre-

menil. Reorganizirana podjetja so odpuščala delavce; številni mladi so se morali odseliti v mesta. Istočasno so skoraj povsem propadla tekstilna podjetja na Saškem, v Turingiji so zaprli rudnike. Terciarni sektor se sicer krepi, a zelo počasi. Izvod iz krize se kaže le vasem, ki so v dosegu dnevne migracije večjih mest. Najbolj so prizadeta severna območja, ki so bila redko poseljena, izrazito usmerjena v kmetijstvo in niso imela razvitetih drugih gospodarskih dejavnosti.

Spremembe so opazne tudi v funkciji vasi in njihovi zgradbeni strukturi. V nekaterih vaseh, zlasti na jugu, je polovica zgradb spremenjena v počitniška bivališča. Naselja blizu mest se širijo z novogradnjami »prišlekov«, ki nima-jo pravega odnosa do vaške skupnosti.

Kmetijstvo v nekdanji NDR je izgubilo nekdanji pomen. Razpadla monokulturna posestva so povzročila brezposelnost, posebno ženske delovne sile. Le-ta se je v novem položaju v veliki meri odločila za delo na domači (vrnjeni) kmetiji ob dodatni zaposlitvi v terciarnih dejavnostih. Nekateri vidijo rešitev v informacijski tehnologiji, ki naj bi podeželju omogočila nov razvojni sunek.

## References

**Agrarbericht** 1999, Bonn.

**Becker, A.** (Hrsg.), 1997, Regionale Strukturen im Wandel. Beiträge zu den Berichten der Kommission für die Erforschung des sozialen und politischen Wandels in den neuen Bundesländern e. V., Opladen.

**Becker, H.**, 1997, Dörfer heute - Ländliche Lebensverhältnisse im Wandel 1952, 1972 und 1993/95. Forschungsgesellschaft für Agrapolitik und Agrarsoziologie e. V., Bonn.

**Henckel, H.**, 1993, Der ländliche Raum. Stuttgart.

**Jaksch, T. et al.** (Hrsg.), 1996, Landnutzung in Mittel -und Osteuropa. Budapest.

**Johaentgens, A.**, 1996, Das Dorf als Wohnstandort. Bonn.

**Le Heron, R.**, 1996, Globalization, Sustainability and Apple Orcharding, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. In: Economic Geography, 72, S. 416-432.

**Oberbeck, H. und R. Oppermann**, 1994, Agrarwirtschaft und Dorf am Scheideweg. In: Soziale Welt 45, S. 259-278.

**Roberts, R.**, 1996, Critical Rural Geography. In: Economic Geography, 72, S. 359-360.

**Siebert, R. und T. Jaksch**, 1998, Entwicklungstendenzen der Humanressourcen in den ländlichen Räumen Mittel- und Osteuropas im Verlauf des Transformationsprozesses. In: Latvijas Lauksaimniebas Universitate 2: Homo Ruralis S. 157-163. Jelgava.