

The Graying Periphery: Aging and Community Development in Romania and Bulgaria



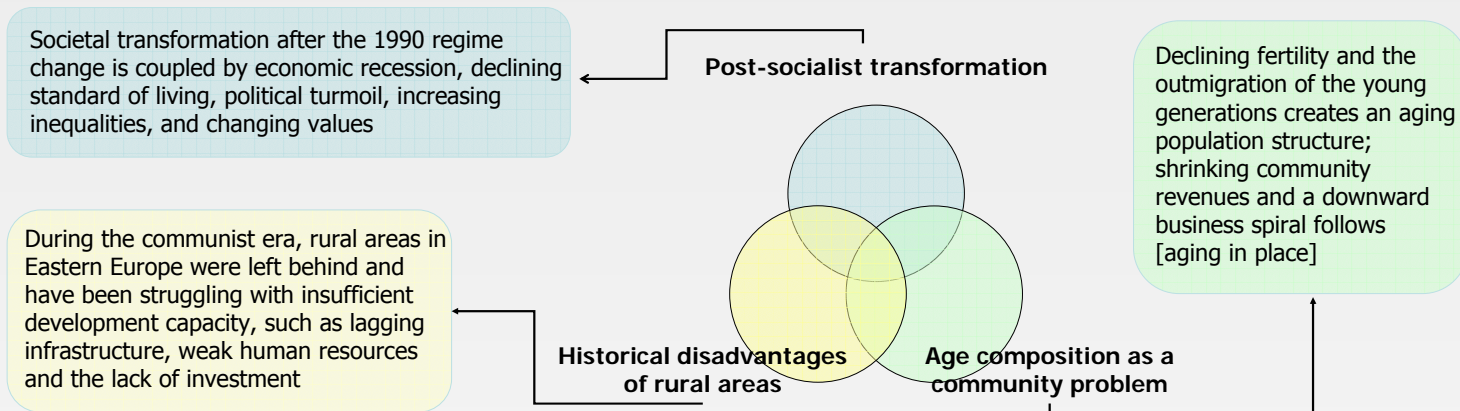
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A holistic view

- Rural aging in Eastern Europe is a complex challenge for community development, stemming from three different factors
- Vulnerability appears at multiple levels as various unfavorable trends interact with each other



Research topics

- Aging in Bulgaria and Romania in the European context
- Aging as a community development challenge
- Policy implications of aging in place

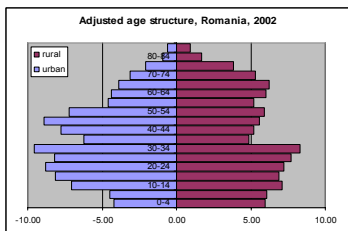
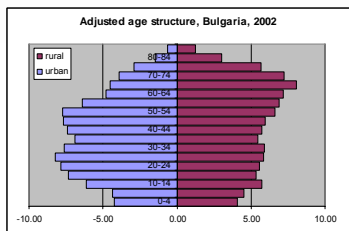
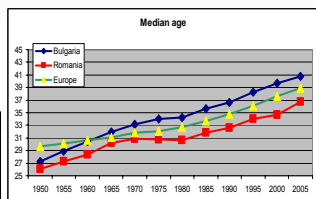
Methods

- Comparative demographic analysis of aging
- Community case studies in rural Romania (Feleacu, Sulita) and Bulgaria (Karantsi, Shtraklevo)

Findings – demographic analysis

- Median age in Bulgaria has been 2 years above the European average (39 years in 2005), in Romania it is two years below it
- Percent 65+ in both Bulgaria and Romania is rapidly increasing and projected to double (to 30%) by 2045
- Active age population is expected to shrink after 2010 in both countries; its share is projected to decline from 70 to 55% by 2050
- Aging is a function of declining fertility, improvements in life expectancy between 1950 and 2005 were modest in both Bulgaria and Romania
- Adjusted urban and rural age structures show dramatic rural aging in Bulgaria; rural Romania has more reserves in the younger ages resulted by the abortion ban in the late 1960s
- Despite the relative differences between those two countries, rural areas struggle with multiple challenges due to aging in place

| Life expectancy (both sexes) | 1960/65 | 2000/05 | Improvement |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Europe | 69.8 | 73.8 | 4 |
| Bulgaria | 70.2 | 72.4 | 2.2 |
| Romania | 66.8 | 71.3 | 4.5 |



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2006 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.



Findings – community case studies

- Most respondents believe that either the family or the state take care of the elderly
 - Problem 1: breakdown of family support system (changing families)
 - Problem 2: breakdown of state healthcare and pension systems (structural adjustment programs)
- Aging is primarily seen as a result of young outmigration, often emigration to Western countries
- Loss of businesses as a concern is overshadowed by the loss of young people in agriculture, and the parallel transformation of rural societies
- Solution is usually expected from somebody else: indirect evidence for low community capacity
- Pessimism is widespread, the elderly is often characterized as miserable, hopeless, and lonely
- Occasional immigrants to rural communities have trouble with integration, they remain outsiders

Conclusions

- Demographic trends do not favor rural Eastern Europe, and these trends are unlikely to change in the near future
- Rural places in new EU member states need a long time to address their historic disadvantages, especially in the context of the periphery's general backwardness
- Only some selected rural areas do well: places close to urban areas and places with significant natural or cultural amenities (rural tourism)
- Aging in place does not only start a cycle of economic decline, but leads to the concentration of vulnerable populations in rural areas that are vulnerable themselves
- Policy options are limited, insufficient local capacity makes the families to remain the primary support system amidst the family transformation in Eastern Europe

This project was supported by the Kansas State University Small Research Grant competition.
The research is hosted by **Demographic and Social Change in Eastern Europe** program at the Kansas Population Center.
www.ksu.edu/sasw/kpc/eedemo