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Social cohesion in rural areas: service provision, commuting and mobility

Policy evaluation usually is focused on particular RDP intervention activities often neglecting whole rural and regional development context, as a result ignoring important agents and resources of rural development. For example, socio-economic impact of small towns to the surrounding territories, changes in the employment structure of rural population are unconsidered in RDP intervention measures in Latvia.

The main issue addressed in this study is interaction of policy of agricultural and rural areas with the regional and cohesion policies.

This paper is based on an empirical study of everyday commuting models and spatial practices of different social groups of rural people in Latvia. The survey was conducted in 2011 as a part of the mid-term evaluation of Rural Development Programme for Latvia 2007-2013 (RDP), axes 3 and 4 measures.

The theoretical basis of research is rooted in the mobility studies (Urry, 2000, 2007; Kanzler, Kaufmann, Kesselring, 2008) and sociological and geographical conceptualization of space and place (Gieryn, 2000, Cresswell, 1996, 2006).

The main focus is on analysis of relationship between commuting, mobility and the place-attachment. What are the main reasons of rural population mobility and everyday commuting? What services and where rural people use? What should be done to make rural places more attractive for people as places of work and residence?

The main conclusion of the study is that the concept of service provision in rural areas has changed –wide offer of services in rural areas should be replaced by accessibility of services in the nearby towns.

Key words: rural and local development, LEADER approach, social cohesion