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LITHUANIAN REGIONS BY THE TYPE OF RURAL SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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Rural areas face constant increase of partially used rural social infrastructure (hereinafter referred to as RSI) facilities, coordination of which shows insufficient level of description and professionalism, functions performed by RSI organisations are not aligned. As a result of a bad situation of rural social infrastructure, small rural areas face with decline. The research aim – having theoretically analysed the factors that determine social infrastructure development, to make the analysis of RSI situation and the analysis of the factors that influence development in Lithuanian rural regions. The following objectives have been solved: analysed theoretically the factors determining the development of the rural social infrastructure; analysed the condition of RSI and the factors influencing upon its development in Lithuanian rural regions. The research methods are the survey and the analysis of the scientific literature, scientific literature systemization, matching and comparison, multiple-criteria statistical data analyses and syntheses, expert evaluation. Integrated RSI condition indicators were calculated for each municipality and compared with indicators established for other municipalities in order to determine the RSI development level of each region. Analysis' results showed that the sector of communications and telecommunications is valued best, while the sector of protection of persons and property is assessed worst. Bad RSI situation is observed in 35.29 percent Lithuanian municipalities. There is no rural territory, showing perfect level of RSI development. This permits to draw a conclusion about the differences of the situation of the whole infrastructure system and social-economic problems. Problems of territorial and social cohesion are formed due to the uneven RSI development in individual regions/municipalities. Regions/municipalities with poor RSI lags behind the needs of local population are less attractive for investments, settling down, living, resting, such areas show higher unemployment rate, lower disposable incomes of households, residents are forced into a corner, limited sustainable development, and weak local economy.

Keywords: rural social infrastructure, factors that determine the development, condition of RSI, type of RSI.

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas cover about four-fifths of the EU territory; therefore, they are especially significant for the development of the territory of the entire Europe. Integrated development of rural areas is one of the most important goals of rural development policy, which is the second support of the EU General Agricultural Policy if considered to EU extent. Integrated approach is necessary, because, on the one hand, support of development of multifunctional agricultural sector is needed, while, on the other hand, a broader social and territorial rural context needs to be supported as well in order to make agriculture function in it (Augimo ir uzimtumo..., 2006).

Administrational-territorial regions, but not separate settlements are considered as the object of rural policy in many countries. The present development level of transport means and road network, various forms of provision of social infrastructure services in the majority of regions have already formed the habits for living and working in different settlements; however, this does not lead towards sustainable consumption and does not increase harmony of settlement development and social cohesion. Special attention should be paid to this tendency during analysis of small regions. There is a threat of depopulation in some less populated areas because driving to work to the city does not coincide with usual behaviour, while the concentration of social infrastructure objects and services in certain areas has a negative impact on the competitive abilities of the region and small rural areas. As a result of a bad situation of rural social infrastructure (hereinafter referred to as RSI), small rural areas face with decline.

Scientists highlight the necessity to improve the infrastructure of the regions. According to B. Melnikas (2003), improvement of infrastructure enables modernisation and creation of a new environment for high quality social and economic regional development, also improved regional infrastructure provides broader opportunities to attract further

investments in regional social and economic system, activate social and economic development, create new working places, and upgrade working places in the infrastructure sector.

C. Butler, Flora and J. L. Flora (1993) analyzed the entrepreneurial social infrastructure as an important mechanism of institutional analysis as a basis for change their research. They identified 3 components of entrepreneurial social infrastructure: symbolic diversity, resource mobilization, and quality of linkages. The research showed that "communities that have entrepreneurial social infrastructure can begin to deal with the complex, messy, unreliable indicator problems of development and change. They focus not on immediate short-term solutions but on the process of empowering people for the long term".

Scientists (Swanson, 1992; Miller, 2001; Sharp et al., 2002; Melnikas, 2003; Skinner, 2006; Snieska, Zykiene, 2010; Jasaitis, Ratkeviciene, 2012; Péti, 2012; Zitkus, Mickeviciene, 2013) agree that the essential condition for promoting social and economic development in rural areas is to thoroughly improve regional infrastructure according to sustainable development principles. A. Yessengeldina, D. Sitenko, A. Seitalinova (2014) formulated the concept of sustainable development mechanism of social infrastructure, which in the narrow sense is "certain system actions for sustainable and balanced functioning of the social infrastructure aimed at improving the welfare of the population, in the broad sense – is a set of methods, activities, performance, incentives, which impacts on certain socio-economic, institutional, administrative, organizational and ethical processes in the area of social infrastructure in order to increase its effectiveness".

Improvement of social infrastructure, which covers social systems (education, health and social care, development of culture and art) and various systems with intellectual purpose, promotion of regional business, sustainable creation of workplaces and introduction of innovations, is one of the directions for infrastructure development in rural regions. However, the problem is that the majority of RSI objects in rural areas are used partially, their coordination is not professional and is defined insufficiently. Moreover, the functions carried out by RSI organizations are not sufficiently mutually coordinated. Therefore, the analysis and evaluation of RSI situation and the factors that influence the development in Lithuanian rural areas are needed.

The research object – RSI situation and factors that determine the development in rural areas.

The research aim – having theoretically analysed the factors that determine social infrastructure development, to make the analysis of RSI situation and the analysis of the factors that influence development in Lithuanian rural regions.

The following objectives have been set out:

1. To analyse theoretically the factors determining the development of the rural social infrastructure.
2. To analyse the condition of RSI and the factors influencing upon its development in Lithuanian rural regions.

The research methods are the survey and the analysis of the scientific literature, scientific literature systemization, matching and comparison, multiple-criteria statistical data analyses and syntheses, expert evaluation.

Factors that determine the development of rural social infrastructure.

The analysis of RSI has revealed that RSI determines the lifestyle that is typical to rural areas, relationships and regional culture (Lietuvos kaimo..., 2005). Thus, in order to reach territorial and social cohesion, rural social infrastructure is indeed significant, because it does not only satisfy individual and social needs of residents, ensures harmonious development of rural areas, but also ensures the main functions of rural area (Table 1).

Table1. Rural social infrastructure connection with the concept of sustainable development and rural functions

Sustainable development dimension	**RSI content**	**RSI performs the following functions in rural area** (Jasaitis, Ratkeviciene, 2012)
ENVIRONMENT ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONAL	INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS 1. Education, training, consultancy 2. Health, social security 3. Transportation and Communications 4. Culture, sports, recreation 5. Utilities and municipal services 6. Trade and public catering services 7. Personal and property protection	1. Residential, recreational 2. Educational 3. Moral training and cultural heritage 4. Preservation of traditional landscape 5. Economic activity, diversification 6. Relaxation, rehabilitation

RSI development is the formation of strong communities through continuous territorial development and activities involving society, distribution of resources, strengthening of the competencies and trust among people and communities by giving them a chance to take effective actions and leading roles (Firm Foundations..., 2004). The latter one should be supplemented by the aspects of service availability and accessibility and define RSI development goal, i.e. formation of sustainable society.

New way of thinking about sustainability is resilience. By definition resilience depends on being able to adapt to unprecedented and unexpected changes. Resilience is a more strategic than normative concept, because, to be effective, resilience must be explicitly based on, and informed by, the environmental, ecological, social, and economic drivers and dynamics of a particular place, and it must be integrated across a range of linked scales (Pickett et al., 2004).

According to J. Ahern (2011) "achieving a resilient sustainability will depend on significant innovations. In the 21st century, much of the infrastructure of the developed world will be replaced or rebuilt, and even more infrastructure

will be needed to service the rapidly expanding cities of the developing world. Ironically, when viewed as an opportunity, the magnitude of global infrastructure (re)development represents an unprecedented opportunity to redirect and (re)conceive the process of urbanization from one that is inherently destructive to one that is sustainable and resilient in specific terms. This is the promise and challenge of green infrastructure as a key idea to build resilience capacity".

R. Hassink (2010) describes why some regions manage to overcome short-term or long-term economic adversity to maintain a high quality of life for regional residents while others fail. Scientist made the analysis on Regional resilience and find out that resilience fraught with both methodological and philosophical difficulties but remains a subject of interest because of its significance and the multiple variables at play in the region.

The researches S. Christophersen, J. Michie, P. Tyler (2010) identified the factors which enable a region to adjust and adapt over time. A modern productive infrastructure (transport, broadband provision, etc.) is one of the factors. But others – a strong regional system of innovation; strength in factors that create a 'learning region'; a skilled, innovative and entrepreneurial work-force; a supportive financial system providing patient capital; a diversified economic base, not over-reliant on a single industry are very close with social infrastructure and strategies.

Scientists S. T. A. Pickett, M. L. Cadenassso, J. M. Grove (2004) opinion, that resilience capacity requires building an adaptable social infrastructure to assure meaningful participation and achieve equity in the face of socio-economic change and disturbance, and meaningful participation by stakeholders in planning and policy decisions.

Concepts of regional attractiveness are analysed, sets of economic, political and social indicators for evaluation of social and economic attractiveness are specified and a model for attractiveness evaluation is proposed in this paper. Analysis' results showed that regional attractiveness for all target groups (residents, visitors and investors) depends on quality of conditions for living and business development. Following this conclusion authors argue that development of social and economical infrastructure to big extent influences attractiveness of a region.

The analysis of scientific works, which introduce the problems related to the factors that determine RSI situation, permits to notice that scientists choose two analytical sections: scientists investigate the complexity of factors or the group of factors of any one type. I. Lengyel (2003), G. Bristow (2005) distinguish these factors according to their impact on development, while Reiljan et. al. (2000) distinguish them according to a possibility to control these factors. Internal and external factors are one of the most frequently used classification in scientific works.

RSI management is an open system and the peculiarities of its management are determined by social and cultural, political and legal, environmental (natural) and economic factors, which are especially highlighted and considered as priority nowadays (Jiang XU, Yeh, A.G.O. 2005; Kresl, 1995; Posayanant, Chareonngam, 2010). The assumption can be made that a dynamic environment changes not only the conception of infrastructure as the object, but also the factors that affect the development of infrastructure are changing as well. The scientists (Zalimaite, Balezentis, 2012) distinguish two factors, i.e. infrastructure as a significant link of public sector and the state as the subject of infrastructure development policy (the state frequently becomes the main owner of infrastructure objects and equipment, and sometimes can force capital owners to invest in the development of infrastructure). Thus, these ideas suppose the opinion that RSI are developed by changeable public demands, which are closely related to determinative cultural and psychological factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to assess rural social infrastructure (hereinafter referred to as RSI) and define their types, experts have been questioned. The expert survey aim was to justify the importance of sectors and indicators for the evaluation of RSI conditions. Experts were surveyed in order to find out if the selected sectors and indicators are relevant, if the indicators really belong to the allocated sector, if there have not been misses any significant indicators and how meaningful they are. Experts were chosen considering their qualification (research and occupational activity related to SI management) and experience (the average work experience of experts who were questioned was more than 23 years). The experts, who agreed to take part in the research, assessed indicators ranking them in accordance with their significance.

8 sectors have been distinguished when evaluating quantitative differences of RSI conditions: education, training, consultancy (S_1); communications and telecommunications (S_2); utilities and municipal services (S_3); transportation (S_4); culture, sports, recreation (S_5); trade and public catering services (S_6); health and social security (S_7), personal and property protection (S_8). The final list of indicators for the assessment of the RSI condition includes 30 indicators in total. (Table 2).

As one can see from information provided in Table 2, sectors with most indicators included (5 each) were education, training, consultancy, culture, sports, recreation, and health and social security, while sectors with least indicators included (2) were trade and public catering services sector. Hence, the integrated indicator comprises 8 sectors characterised by 30 indicators.

Seeking to define the types of RSI to which different regions of the country belong, these regions were grouped according to each selected RSI indicator. Having considered the equivalents of the second level of the Lithuanian regional framework and the European Union nomenclature of territorial units, five regions of higher rank were distinguished, i.e. the groups of the regions with a different RSI development level. The main intervals were chosen so that the median interval value would be close to the average value of the country's indicator, whereas the rest intervals would depict deviations to one or another side. In examining RSI, the assumption is made that the average of the country shows that local demand is satisfactory in regard to comparative economic activity (sector) approach. The average of Lithuania is the reference point of RSI support. RSI situation is corrected starting with the worst developed region.

Table 2. Indicators selected for the assessment of the condition of rural social infrastructure

EDUCATION, TRAINING, CONSULTANCY SECTOR (S_1)	COMMUNICATIONS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR (S_2)
• Number of general education schools per 1000 residents • Number of students per teacher • Percentage of pre-school children attending pre-school • Percentage of pre-school children attending pre-school • Number of pre-school children not attending pre-school • Percentage ratio between rural population with higher education and secondary education	• Mobile GSM (2G) network coverage, percentage • Mobile UMTS (3G) network coverage, percentage • Number of post offices per 100 km²
UTILITIES AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES SECTOR (S_3)	**TRANSPORTATION SECTOR (S_4)**
• Total residential area having water supply, percentage • Total residential area having wastewater system, percentage • Container sites for recyclables, units	• Local roads density km/100 km² • Length of local roads with improved road surface, km • Number of public passenger transport routes • Number of personal vehicles per 1000 residents
CULTURE, SPORTS, RECREATION SECTOR (S_5)	**TRADE AND PUBLIC CATERING SERVICES SECTOR (S_6)**
• Number of culture centres per 1000 residents • Percentage of population participating in cultural activities • Number of members in art enthusiast collectives per 1000 residents • Number of rural community organizations per 1000 rural residents • Number of library branches in rural areas per 1000 rural residents	• Number of retailer enterprises per 1000 residents • Number of public catering enterprises per 1000 residents
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY SECTOR (S_7)	**PERSONAL AND PROPERTY PROTECTION SECTOR (S_8)**
• Number of health care facilities (outpatient clinics, hospitals, medical stations) per 1000 residents • Available places in care facilities for the elderly and the disabled per 1000 residents • Number of children who have received services at day care centres per 1000 children • Number of social workers and volunteers (at day care centres, child care facilities, adult care facilities) per 10 000 residents • Number of residents who receive social services at home	• Number of police officers per 100 000 residents • Percentage of all registered criminal offences solved • Number of Fire and Rescue Department and Detention Advice Service teams per 1000 residents

The assessments of different regions were converted from the assessment in natural measurement units into interval score scale by giving the value from 1 to 5 (very good – 5, good – 4, satisfactory – 3, poor – 2, very poor – 1) according to each selected indicator. The overall assessment of the region by separate RSI sector was obtained by adding the product of region's evaluation in points according to a certain RSI indicator and significance coefficient of the indicator established by experts.

The overall evaluation of RSI sectors of the region (I_{KSI_j}) was obtained as the arithmetic sum of points received during evaluation of a separate RSI sector:

$$I_{KSI_j} = \sum_{j=1}^{m} S_{ij}$$

here: I_{KSI_j} – integrated indicator of rural social infrastructure situation in the region j; S_{ij} – integrated indicator of a relevant sector *i* in the region *j*; m – the number of RSI sectors.

EVALUATION OF THE SITUATION OF RSI AND ITS SECTORS IN LITHUANIA

Having analysed the distribution of Lithuanian regions and municipalities according to the situation of rural social infrastructure, the following was found out: the weakest RSI parts were the protection of persons and property, trade and public catering services, health and social security sectors between 2008 and 2012 (Table 3).

The protection of persons and property sector is the most backward RSI sector. The average points received during evaluation of sector situation are 11.63 percent lower than the overall rural social infrastructure, 32.14 percent lower than the sector of communications and telecommunications, which is the best developed sector in Lithuania and gets

approximately 2.28 points (Table 3). The scope of variation of the protection of persons and property sector (2.67) if compared with other RSI sectors shows that a difference between the best and the worse situation of the sector among the regions and the municipalities is average.

Table 3. Indicators for assessing the situation of RSI and its sectors in Lithuania, including their variations between 2008 and 2012

Indicators	Education, training, consultancy sector	Communications and telecommunications sector	Utilities and municipal services sector	Transport ation sector	Culture, sports, recreatio n sector	Trade and public catering services sector	Health and social securit y sector	Personal and property protectio n sector	Overall RSI
Average of the country	2.56	3.36	2.57	2.44	2.68	2.33	2.39	2.28	2.58
The scope of variation	2.77	3.66	3.41	2.56	3.38	2.57	2.82	2.67	1.29
The maximum value	Birstonas munici-pallity	Kaunas district, Kazlų Ruda mu-nicipality, Mari-jampole district	Kaunas district, Kedainiai district	Marijam-pole district	Varena district	Anyksciai district, Moletai district, Utena district	Pakru-ojis district	Ignalina district	Birs-tonas munici-pality
The min-imum value	Alytus district	Birzai district	Moletai district, Svencio-nys district, Zarasai district	Svencion ys district	Vilnius district	Kaunas dis-trict, Pagegiai municipality, Vilnius district	Jonava district	Kaunas district, Vilnius district	Salcinin-kai district

Even nineteen Lithuanian regions and municipalities form a region, which is distinguished for especially poorly developed sector of protection of persons and property. Fifteen regions and municipalities (or 29.41 percent) of Lithuania have a poorly developed sector of protection of persons and property. The points received during situation assessment of the protection of persons and property sector in the aforementioned areas are 3.07 percent lower than the average. There are only two municipalities in which this sector is well-developed and takes the first and the second place, i.e. the best situation of the protection of persons and property sector is observed in Ignalina district and Birstonas municipality. The points received during assessment of the situation of this sector in these two municipalities are 60.96 and 60.52 percent higher than the average (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of Lithuanian Districts and Municipalities by the average condition of rural social infrastructure between 2008 and 2012

District and Municipality	Condi-tion of RSI	Condition of S_1	Condition of S_2	Condition of S_3	Condition of S_4	Condition of S_5	Condition of S_6	Condition of S_7	Condition of S_8
Very poor									
Salcininkai	**51**	19	47	48	27	49	40	48	45
Trakai	**50**	15	26	47	41	45	48	46	44
Poor									
Lazdijai	**49**	43	46	36	48	32	43	38	3
Pagegiai	**48**	40	34	16	31	44	50	47	30
Svencionys	**47**	38	43	50	51	12	38	3	32
Alytus	**46**	51	6	40	37	41	47	30	25
Druskininkai	**45**	6	44	18	47	47	16	50	21
Vilnius	**44**	44	7	3	12	51	49	45	50
Vilkaviskis	**43**	32	39	6	25	43	28	34	48
Varena	**42**	20	45	31	49	1	29	32	12
Radviliskis	**41**	47	16	34	28	15	41	17	27
Jonava	**40**	17	18	15	24	40	36	51	38
Silalė	**39**	35	42	26	16	30	30	23	18
Birzai	**38**	34	51	39	44	4	15	18	16
Elektrenai	**37**	9	8	45	8	21	46	36	46
Ignalina	**36**	11	50	38	32	10	33	33	1
Kazlu Ruda	**35**	42	2	44	38	23	45	22	31
Siauliai	**34**	49	9	9	22	38	39	29	35
Kelme	**33**	41	41	23	30	24	21	28	20
Silute	**32**	46	24	8	18	48	26	16	34
Satisfactory									
Rietavas	**31**	14	32	27	50	8	34	20	22
Panevezys	**30**	50	17	12	15	20	42	25	41
Klaipeda	**29**	28	27	4	33	46	7	42	37
Kaunas	**28**	18	3	2	2	50	51	49	51
Raseiniai	**27**	37	37	28	26	18	10	15	39

District and Municipality	Condition of RSI	Condition of S_1	Condition of S_2	Condition of S_3	Condition of S_4	Condition of S_5	Condition of S_6	Condition of S_7	Condition of S_8
Kretinga	**26**	29	20	14	19	36	35	41	28
Prienai	**25**	31	22	20	20	35	27	26	23
Plunge	**24**	12	33	21	17	29	11	44	19
Kaisiadorys	**23**	27	28	25	9	37	22	13	43
Pasvalys	**22**	23	30	35	42	3	12	24	40
Zarasai	**21**	26	49	49	35	2	24	2	4
Rokiskis	**20**	10	48	33	5	16	18	7	13
Joniskis	**19**	24	35	37	40	22	23	4	11
Sirvintos	**18**	3	14	41	43	7	5	31	33
Kedainiai	**17**	13	21	1	7	26	44	35	42
Moletai	**16**	4	15	51	13	28	2	37	10
Skuodas	**15**	22	40	11	36	39	17	9	7
Mazeikiai	**14**	16	4	22	3	25	20	43	36
Pakruojis	**13**	21	25	42	45	19	19	1	8
Ukmerge	**12**	36	13	32	23	6	8	6	49
Kupiskis	**11**	7	23	43	46	11	6	11	5
Jurbarkas	**10**	30	12	5	11	27	14	39	29
Telsiai	**9**	25	36	19	4	33	25	12	15
Sakiai	**8**	33	5	10	14	31	31	19	24
Taurage	**7**	45	11	7	6	34	9	40	26
Akmene	**6**	39	10	24	21	13	37	14	9
Kalvarija	**5**	8	31	17	39	9	32	8	6
Utena	**4**	2	38	30	10	14	1	10	17
Anyksciai	**3**	48	19	29	34	17	3	5	14
Good									
Marijampole	**2**	5	1	13	1	42	13	21	47
Birstonas	**1**	1	29	46	29	5	4	27	2

The protection of persons and property sector is exceptionally poorly developed in Kaunas district and Vilnius district. The average points received during the assessment of this sector are lower by 1.28 points if compared with the average of the country (Table 4). Such situation of the protection of persons and property sector shows that this particular sector needs to be improved most. Special attention should be also paid to especially small number of police officers per 100 000 residents. The rate is very small in 23 regions and municipalities (that makes 45.09 percent), which were selected for evaluation.

Even 47.06 percent of all the regions and municipalities of Lithuania are the regions with either a very poor or poor situation of trade and public catering services sector (Table 4). The average points of the region, which has a very poor situation of the sector of trade and public catering services, are 60.50 percent lower if compared with the region those situation of the aforementioned sector is good, and is 39.48 percent lower than the average points of this sector in Lithuania. The worst situation of this sector is observed in Kaunas district and Vilnius district and Pagegiai municipality, which have a very small network of retail trade and public nourishment companies. The situation of trade and public catering services sector in 24 municipalities is worse than the average of the country.

The scope of variation of health and social security sector gets 2.82 points, and it is relatively high if compared with other sectors (Table 3). The assessment of health and social security sector situation permits to say that the situation of this sector is either poor or very poor in 56.86 percent of all the regions and municipalities of Lithuania. In addition, health and social security sector is poorly developed in rural settlements and in the regions, which include the biggest cities of the country, i.e. Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipeda (Table 4). The assumption can be made that the residents of these regions use the services of social infrastructure objects in the city.

A very interesting situation can be observed in rural areas of Druskininkai municipality. Druskininkai is famous as health resort; however, this area takes the fiftieth place (gets 1.39 points) by points received during the assessment of health and social security. The aforementioned area has a very small number of health care institutions (dispensaries, hospitals and medical stations) per 1000 residents (the number of these institutions declined by 13.58 percent in 2012 if compared with 2010), a very small number of places for old people and the disabled in foster houses per 1000 residents and a very small number of social workers and volunteers per 10 000 residents (in day centres, foster houses for children, foster houses for adults). It can be said that the centre with recreational resources focuses on the satisfaction of the needs of incoming tourists instead of local residents, i.e. SI management is directed towards further markets.

The sectors of communications and telecommunications, culture, sport and recreation, i.e. the sectors, which are generally developed by private business companies, is the strongest side of RSI. The situation of these sectors is good in most rural areas of the country. The results of assessment show that the sector of communications and telecommunications is valued best (3.36 points) (Table 3), and the situation of this sector is either very good or good in the greatest part of Lithuania (72.55 percent). The average points of the sector are 30.23 percent higher than all RSI. The scope of variation of the sector gets 3.66 points, which is the biggest if compared with other sectors. The scope of variation shows that the best situation of the sector of communications and telecommunications, which is observed in Marijampole (5.00 points), significantly differs from rural areas in Birzai district (1.34 points) where the situation of this sector is the worst. Although

this sector is one of best-developed RSI sector in Lithuania, 9.8 percent of all regions, which were evaluated, are distinguished for a very poor situation of this sector. The worst situation is observed in Birzai, Ignalina, Zarasai, Rokiskis and Salcininkai regions (take the 51st–47th places) (Table 4). These differences are determined by uneven degree of communication network coverage. Moreover, the number of post offices per 100 km² is irregularly distributed territorially. For example, there were on the average 12 post offices and branches in rural areas of Marijampole district in 2012, and 1.59 of them were per 100 km². The worst situation is observed in Birzai district (there were six post offices here, and 0.41 of them were per 100 km²) (Statistics Lithuania, 2013). Thus, the residents of the aforementioned rural areas have unequal opportunities to have access to these services and this is related with time wasting, higher financial and other expenses.

The analysis of culture, sport and recreation sector permits to say that although this sector is one of the best developed RSI sectors in Lithuania by average points received during the assessment, the situation of the sector of culture, sport and recreation is either very poor or poor in 13.73 percent and 25.49 percent of regions and municipalities. The assumption can be made that many cultural centres do not fulfil their direct purpose: some cultural centres have turned to craft centres and do not provide cultural services. Craft centres have to solve difficult tasks. In order to survive, craft centres are forced to provide services to further markets, because they could not survive from local residents only. In addition, attention should be paid to the problem, which is often discussed in public, i.e. the fact that Lithuanian residents are relatively passive and do not show a great wish to participate in cultural or similar activities.

Integral assessment of RSI situation has revealed that there is none rural area in Lithuanian regions and municipalities, which could be proud of a well-developed RSI. Only the sectors of communications and telecommunications (5.0 points) of Kaunas district, Kazlu Ruda municipality and Marijampole district, and the sector of utilities and municipal services of Kaunas district and Kedainiai district (4.41 points) have received the highest points. Meanwhile, three RSI sectors of Vilnius district (Culture, sport and recreation; trade and public catering services; protection of persons and property) received the lowest points (1.0). For this reason, this region belongs to a group of 18 regions, those RSI is evaluated poorly (2.37 points). The points received during the assessment of RSI situation in Vilnius district are 10.85 percent lower than the average of the country and 25.32 percent lower if compared with the best RSI situation, which is observed in Birstonas municipality. Good situation prevails not only in Birstonas municipality (the 1st place), but also in Marijampole ditrict (the 2nd place) (Table 4). The points received during the assessment of RSI situation in Birstonas municipality and Marijampolė district are 19.38 and 18.61percent higher, respectively, than the average of Lithuania. RSI situation in more than half of the regions and municipalities (i.e. 29) of Lithuania is assessed satisfactory and the points vary from 2.93 to 2.51. The average points of this region are 5.43 percent higher than the average of the country and 43.92 percent higher if compared with the region with the lowest average points. RSI is worst developed in Salcininkai (the 51st place) district and Trakai (the 50th place) district.

Thus, RSI sectors in different regions are developed differently and therefore it might lead to economic-social problems. The regions with poorly developed RSI become less attractive for living. In addition, these regions have higher unemployment rates, lower income, residents become the outsiders of the society; moreover, harmonious regional development becomes limited. The lacks of RSI sectors create the environment, which does not promote, does not activate and finally reduce efficiency of the whole RSI and economic-social development of that rural area. Consequently, these factors negatively affect the development of the region, the whole district and the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Individual municipalities cannot prosper alone due to global competition for new companies, tax payers and tourists. In order to be successful and create attractive regions, cooperation is necessary despite of the boundaries of municipalities. Cooperation should include urban and rural areas, but the functions performed by territorial units should act on the principle of complement.

The differences of the situation of rural social infrastructure show that social infrastructure of Lithuanian rural areas according to sectors and areas are not even and balanced, while the resistance is weak. Poor RSI situation reduces the competitive abilities of a municipality and the whole region.

The sector of communications and telecommunications is valued best (3.36 points), while the sector of protection of persons and property is assessed worst (2.28 points). The average points received during the assessment of the first sector are 30.23 percent higher if compared with the overall RSI, while the situation of the sector of protection of persons and property is bad and the average points received during the assessment are 11.63 percent lower than the overall RSI. The least differences between the best and the worst points (2.56 and 2.57) are typical to the sector of transport and the sector of trade and public catering services.

Calculation results show that RSI got 2.5–3.0 points in more than half of the regions and municipalities (56.86 percent). Bad RSI situation is observed in 18 (or 35.29 percent) Lithuanian regions and municipalities. There is no rural territory, showing perfect level of RSI development. This permits to draw a conclusion about the differences of the situation of the whole infrastructure system and social-economic problems: regions and municipalities with poorly developed RSI are less attractive for living, investing and resting. Moreover, these areas face with higher unemployment rates, residents are pushed from social and economic life, and harmonious development becomes limited.

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