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## CRAFTSMANSHIP, OPPORTUNITY AND PERSPECTIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN RURAL AREAS IN BULGARIA

G. Slavova\*

Department of Economics of Agriculture, University of Economics-Varna, Bulgaria

### ABSTRACT

The development of crafts is among the major directions for the development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas. It includes many activities associated with manual preparation and creative manufacturing of objects. Traditional crafts are an expression of the particular cultural values, originality, uniqueness and ethnicity of each nation. They can be divided into traditional crafts, which are based on old technologies, and more contemporary crafts that have inherited older techniques. The goal of this article is to reveal the opportunity for revival of rural areas of the country through the revival of Bulgarian crafts assisted by the initiative and support of the European Union Programme for rural Development, Axis Three, and through the development of non-agricultural activities in these areas.

**Key words:** Rural regions; Craftsmanship; Handicrafts; Rural Development, Program for rural development, rural tourism; non-agricultural activities.

According to the World Book Online Encyclopedia<sup>1</sup>, rural areas are non-urban areas. They have low population density and for the large part the land therein is used for agricultural works. In most parts of the world, rural areas are decreasing, and this phenomenon dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century as regards to the territory they occupy, and as regards to the share of the population residing therein.

According to the definition provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development / OECD<sup>2</sup>, "... rural areas encompass land, people and other resources within the country and small settlements outside the direct economic influence of the large city centers.

The definition "rural" is a territorial and spatial designated concept and it is not just limited to specific land, degree of economic development

or a given branch of economy or a given economic branch, these are specific areas, situated between the big cities, and therefore shall have specific characteristics, different from the characteristics of the city. These areas are populated by less organized population, and forests, lands, residential and agricultural buildings are situated, and they all could and do actually contribute to the variety of these areas.

The rural areas of the European Union are an important part of it and its identity. According to the standard distribution more than 91% of the territory of the European Union consists of "rural areas" and over 56% of the population of the European Union lives therein. In Bulgaria, the municipalities where no settlement exists with population exceeding 30 thousand people are defined as rural areas. According to this definition, 231 municipalities

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<sup>1</sup> [bg.wikipedia.org-раздел селски райони](http://bg.wikipedia.org-раздел селски райони), 23 май, 2013

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation\\_for\\_Economic\\_Co-operation\\_and\\_Development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development) - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 23 May, 2013

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\*Correspondence to: G. Slavova, Department of Economics of Agriculture, University of Economics-Varna, Bulgaria, Varna, 9000, Atanas Georgiev Street 37, fl.18, N 5, Email: [ggss@abv.bg](mailto:ggss@abv.bg), tel.: 52 61 16 45, mob.: Tel. 08 77 19 88 34

are classified as rural municipalities. They are 81% of the territory and 42% of the population of the country<sup>3</sup>.

20 predominantly rural areas, 7 interim areas and just 1 predominantly urban area –Sofia City, exist in Bulgaria. The predominantly rural and interim areas form 98.8% of the country, and just the rural areas are 84.3%. As at the year 2012, 28 administrative districts exist in our country, and the number of cities in Bulgaria is 255, and the number of villages is 5047.

In the last decades in Bulgaria the urban population has sharply increased, unlike the rural population, which is progressively decreasing. In the last 20 years, the population in able bodied age, living in the villages in Bulgaria, has decreased significantly. The trend for urbanization is preserved in cities, where 5 338 261 people leave as at the beginning of 2013, or 72.5% of the whole population of Bulgaria, whereas 2 026 309 people leave in villages, or 27.5% of the population of the country.

The settlements network in Bulgaria consists of 7 big cities with population exceeding 100 000 people, 27 towns with an average amount of population between 30 000 and 100 000 people and 200 small towns with population below 30 000 people.

After the most recent census in 2011, 181 settlements are unpopulated. In 21% of the populations, i.e. in 1/5 of them, are resided by 1 to 50 people. According to the National Institute of Statistics in Bulgaria as of 2012, 5047 villages, out of which 2011 have population of up to 200 residents, and according to thorough research, made by Rural Development Program /RDP/, it has been established that the conditions in 900 villages are favorable for the development of rural and other alternative types of tourism.

The rural areas in Bulgaria are characterized with underdevelopment in economical, social and cultural aspect, aging population, low standard of life, deteriorated infrastructure, and all disadvantages related thereto. This is a result of social, political and economical processes that have objectively occurred, but

also the neglect and underestimation of the results of this unfavorable development. Concurrently, these regions have significant natural, human, economical and cultural potential, the development and the full-scale utilization of which is mandatory.

The development of craftsmanship in Bulgaria is deeply rooted in our country's historical past. (1) Today it stands out as one of the major trends for development of non-agricultural activities in the rural areas. The craftsmanship involves a range of activities which find expression in handiwork and artistic creation of objects. The national crafts are a manifestation of the cultural values, the originality, the distinctiveness and the ethnic identity of each nation. They can be classified into traditional crafts based on old technologies and more contemporary activities which include the inheritance of the old technologies, but have also undergone some modern development adjusted to the customer's preferences. Some of the crafts popular in Bulgaria have been practiced for centuries, while others are a contemporary invention or a result of the popularization of particular crafts initially practiced in a very constricted geographical area. Most crafts involve a complex mixture of various shares of skills and talent, but they could also be mastered on a basic level by anyone who wishes so. Higher levels of mastership related to a specific craft require flair for art which essentially includes a sense of rhythm, proportions, colour as well as elevated spirituality, exuberant imagination and knowledge of specific traditional motives and activities. There is an abundance of craft activities available in our country. Their preservation and development can be efficiently stimulated by the Rural Development Programme and, more specifically, by its third axis oriented to the development of the non-agricultural activities in those regions. (2) The Bulgarian national crafts are divided into specific types of activities according to the particular materials they employ. Since it is not practicable to present all the Bulgarian crafts here, the table below represents the activities in the rural areas of the country.

<sup>3</sup> <http://prsr.government.bg/index.php/bg/> - Ministry of Agriculture and Foods and Rural Development Program in Bulgaria, May 23, 2013

**Table 1. Basic crafts practiced and developed in Bulgaria**

	<b>Major trend</b>	<b>Craft</b>	<b>Craft's specificity</b>
1.	<b>WOODWORKING</b>	<i>Manufacture of wooden utensils and everyday objects items through woodcarving and woodturning</i>	Woodcarving is one of the oldest crafts in Bulgaria related to woodworking. This type of crafts still exists today, but mostly as tourist attraction because it does not require professional education or continuous training, as specialized tools are also not necessary for its implementation. Its development is related and furthered by the resources of the existing forests and the wood derived from them. Most often the woodcarvers prefer walnut trees, ash trees, pear trees, apple trees and plum trees as sources for working material.
		<b>Cooperage</b>	The entire technological process for manufacturing of barrels or casks requires preliminary prepared dry oak, mulberry or acacia staves. First, their length need to be equalized, they have to be cut and, by means of a special sample ( <i>chap</i> ), to be adjusted to each other. In this way, the desired capacity of the barrel is achieved. Until the beginning of the last century, the hoops were made of split hazel poles and later they were replaced by metal hoops. Today, the small kegs for rakia (the national brandy) (known as <i>pavurcheta</i> ) with capacity of 1 liter are very much in demand, being highly appreciated by the western tourists.
		<b>Decorative woodcarving</b>	Decorative woodcarving is divided into two main styles: more ordinary style, known as 'shepherd's style' and fine style known as 'ecclesiastical woodcarving'. The origin of the first style is mainly attributed to the shepherds – their daily life and activities. In their work, they used predominantly various types of hardwood (beech wood, walnut wood, maple wood, sycamore wood) and with the help of a knife and a chisel, they carved out objects for personal use: spoons, shepherd's crooks, pipes, wooden bowls, yokes etc. They are decorated by means of wood burning, painting (with charcoal or other colouring agents) and more seldom with deep three-dimensional carving; they are mainly used as souvenirs and are offered to foreign and Bulgarian tourists. The ecclesiastical woodcarving is used in the depiction of many traditional forms and ornaments creating complex artistic compositions which adorn ceilings, iconostases etc.
2.	<b>METALWORKING</b>	<b>Goldsmith's trade</b>	The goldsmith's trade is a main craft, which was very much in demand and highly valued not only in the past, but today as well. It is one of the few crafts which traditions are preserved in Bulgaria so far, while keeping the standards of high value and strong consumer's interest with regard to their

			<p>services. In the past, the main objects crafted by the goldsmiths were women's adornments: belt buckles, rings, bracelets, earrings. In the working material of gold, silver, copper and precious stones, the goldsmiths saw a means of expressing man's connection with nature and therefore they elaborated such ornaments: leaves, flowers, birds, blossoming branches. Today, this handicraft is mainly oriented to the creation of rings, bracelets and necklaces. The implementation of the complex technique of filigree, which imparts a high artistic value to the pieces of work with their ornaments resembling painted golden laces is highly valued. The basic element used in re-creating this ornamental work is the plant motif.</p>
		<b><i>Coppersmith trade and wrought iron work</i></b>	<p>In the past, the blacksmith trade and the coppersmith trade were widely spread. Today, in the context of the contemporary economy, they are not so popular but can still be used for the production of copper souvenirs and wrought iron ornaments. The coppersmiths can work out household utensil, but they are mostly used for decorative purposes, as souvenirs. The wrought iron work finds application in elaborating decorative ornaments for windows, verandas, terraces, spiral stairs, candlesticks, fences, stained glass pieces etc.</p>
3.	<b><i>PROCESSING OF TEXTILE AND NATURAL FABRICS</i></b>	<b><i>Weaving</i></b>	<p>Weaving is one of the most ancient trades in Bulgaria. It consists in weaving of fibers which is performed by hand-loom or looms attached to the wall. It was only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when a system for industrial production of textile of short fiber cotton was developed, as the short fiber cotton is distinctive for its high quality. Today, the cotton is the basic material for the manufacture of clothes, but this mainly applies to industry, as handwork is labour-consuming and non-profitable. In the recent years, the technology of mixing cotton with synthetic fibers in the production of clothes is considered a bad approach because it diminishes the quality of the products and deprives the consumers from the necessary comfort.</p>
		<b><i>Embroidery and ornamental sewing</i></b>	<p>Embroidery work in Bulgaria is distinctive for its abundance of patterns, stitch types and colours. All that endues the traditional ornaments with a character of uniqueness. The floral motifs stand out as dominating representational approach here: stylized flowers (roses, tulips, carnations), wheat and symbols like for example the symbol of the Tree of life. The elements representing animal motifs are more uncommon, consisting of chicken and horse figures. The main objects where embroidery technique is employed are: manually embroidered covers,</p>

			square covers, napkins, handkerchiefs, shawls, belts, shirts – all made of linen or cotton, including manually embroidered linen pillow cases and bags as well.
		<b><i>Knitting</i></b>	Knitting is a handicraft dating back to ancient times, which still seems to bear a remarkable relevance to the modern age. It produces clothes (made of wool, cotton or other material) like socks, hats, gloves, table-centres, covers and other products of that particular applied art.
		<b><i>Carpet weaving</i></b>	This craft is characteristic to the Bulgarian regions and produces various types of carpets, most renown of which are the carpets carrying the patterns of the creative styles in Chiprovo, Kotel, Sliven and Koprivshitsa. They differ from each other not only by the type of their artistic touch, but also by the length of the fabric they are made of, as well as by the various styles used in working out the ornaments.
3.	<b><i>LEATHER PROCESSING</i></b>	<b><i>Furriery and hatter's trade</i></b>	These crafts relate to manufacturing of fur products. Those products were widely used in the everyday life of Bulgarian people in the past as, apart from the popular fur-coats and fur-hats, other products were crafted like leather straps, leather shoes ( <i>tsarvuli</i> ), horse-collars, saddles as the latter were made by craftsmen referred to as saddlers ( <i>sarachi</i> ); it is where the so-called saddler trade originates from, as this trade is not practiced anymore. Furriery is exclusively Bulgarian type of trade which is still functioning in some regions of Bulgaria, predominantly mountain areas: Stara Planina region, Rila and Rodopi region, Pirin region and others.
4.	<b><i>CLAY PROCESSING</i></b>	<b><i>Pottery-making and ceramics</i></b>	This is a trade very peculiar and traditional to Bulgaria dating back to the times when Thracians and Romans inhabited our territories. This craft relates to making earthenware: pots, pitchers, vases, dishes, cups, plates and other utensils, including earthen jars, hotchpotch pans, censers and other products. This craft was very broadly spread and actively practiced in our lands in the past, as it is still popular today. Its characteristic features consist of intricate patterns, frescoes, lines and details diligently elaborated and drawn on the ceramics. It is achieved by several traditional colouring techniques: engraving, coloured drawing and application of additional figures.

In addition to the crafts described above, there are other trades still practiced today like masonry, confectionary, tailoring, jewelry making, manufacture of national costumes, manufacture and repairs of national musical instruments, including contemporary musical instruments, national doll making, artistic design of stone and glass, hand bookbinding, watchmaking, engraving, painting and engraving of glass, fireplace manufacturing, well construction, chimney-sweeping, upholstery, manual production of signboards and advertisements, tailoring services, bicycle repairs, vulcanization, manual production of decorative furniture for gardens and repairs of tubular and soft furniture, hairdressing, locksmithing, shoemaking trade, boza making trade, bread-making trade as part of these trades have become permanent occupations while others can turn to economically expedient activities, which have the potential to revive in the rural areas and bring permanent incomes for the owners who practice them. Another such successful trade is pyrography, known as the art of 'drawing with fire'. It consists in scorching designs onto wooden surfaces and its techniques date back to ancient times. Straight or curved lines, circles, branches or floral motifs are burned onto the wooden surfaces by means of heated knives and broaches. Thus, many objects used in everyday life can be decorated and also many souvenirs designed.

Initially, the patterns were depicted in black and white, while at present they are coloured with various agents. The motifs used in decorating wooden wine vessels (*baklitsi*), salterns, jewelry boxes and phials (*muskali*) are most often drawn on the ornaments characteristic of the decoration used in national fabrics, embroidery and the national costumes. There are 57 trades registered at the Regional Chamber of Crafts as most of them have already fashioned their contemporary patterns and enjoy effective marketing. All these specific activities create opportunities for development of the rural areas by opening new occupations and performance of additional services related to them. The earthenware souvenirs most often enjoy a great demand in the market being an object of interest on the part of foreign and Bulgarian tourists. They are represented by various articles: hand-made ceramic plates, cups, coffee sets, tea sets,

milk vessels, rakia sets, wine sets, as well as hand-made earthenware dishes, cooking vessels (*gyuvecheta*), large baking dishes (*tavi*), jugs, vases, bowls, fruit bowls, inscriptions containing interesting wishes written on ceramic tablets, and other household utensils including hand-made ceramic ashtrays, candlesticks, bell-shaped ceramic pieces, ceramic jewelry and various art pieces.

Another ancient occupation peculiar to Bulgaria's living standards is the silkworm-breeding trade, known as productions of silk. The technology used to produce silk threads in our country does not significantly vary in comparing to the other silk producing countries from overseas. This particular fabric is obtained by the cocoon of the silkworm species bred in domestic conditions. At a specific stage of their life cycle, the silkworms undergo transformation from a pupa into a cocoon. The silkworm feeds on mulberry leaves, which resources are in sufficient quantity in our country, thus being an advantage for the development of this trade in the Bulgaria's rural regions.

Another old trades which are an object of interest and are still successfully practiced, thus revealing a great economic potential, are rose-picking and rose-distillation, production and processing of rose-blossoms, production of rose water and soap-making trade including production of soaps with rose fragrance. Those trades are characteristic of Karlovo and Kazanlak valley and are considered as one of the emblematic trades to Bulgaria. The regions marking the most prominent development of crafts are the Central Balkan regions – Gabrovo Balkan area (Etar Ethnographic Open-air Museum (3), Tryavna, Bozhentsi), Troyan Balkan area (Oreshak, Troyan, Beli and Cherni Osam, Apriltsi) (4), Rila and Rodopi mountains region.

For example: The National exhibition of crafts and arts, located in Oreshak village. The exhibition complex was built in 1971 on an area plot of 50 acres, with total build-up area of 4200 square meters. The museum is unique to Bulgaria because it displays pieces of work from the national folk crafts, elaborated by Bulgarian artisans from across all ethnographic regions of Bulgaria. In the complex, one can enjoy pottery work, original wood-carving pieces, various

fabrics and wrought iron works made by artisans from all over the world.

Etara Ethnographic Open-air Museum, located near Gabrovo town is unique and original not only to Bulgaria, but to Europe and to the rest of the world. It was open in 1964 and is situated at a distance of 8 kilometers to the south of Gabrovo town. There are 50 objects exhibited in the museum – water facilities, houses with craftsman workshops and objects of public interest. The purpose of the exhibition is to reveal the unique traits of the architecture, daily life and the economic history of Gabrovo region during the Renaissance and the second halves 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bulgaria does not have outdoor and indoor museums with such abundant exhibition in all of its regions, but in every Bulgarian area there are specific trades carrying developmental potential which can be employed for tourist attraction and become a source for additional incomes for the owners who practice them.

In conclusion, there are several developmental trends which stand out with regard to the revival of the Bulgarian craftsmanship in the rural areas: The weak points with reference to the development of craftsmanship in Bulgaria are:

1. Insufficient number of able-bodied population, capable of labour activities in most part of the Bulgarian villages
2. Significant part of the population of the rural areas does not have the adequate professional training as to practice a particular trade, due to the lack of vocational schools training children.

Strong points:

1. Availability of a large number of material and natural resources in the rural areas which can be used in manufacturing the products
2. Availability of free plots for construction of craftsman workshops and craftsman ateliers
3. Availability of free labour force which can be re-qualified through professional courses and obtain certificates for professional skills
4. Strong existing traditions governing the development and the practice of the Bulgarian trades

The threats:

1. The continuing negative growth in the population of these regions.
2. The preferences for development of only agricultural activities and forestry on the part of the population inhabiting those areas
3. Lack of initiative on the part of the rural population to diversify the activities of their region by developing crafts

Opportunities:

1. Creation of art workshops and ateliers in the rural areas of the country which will significantly increase the competitiveness of the Bulgarian rural areas in comparison to the rural areas of other countries
2. The international developmental trends in tourism are very favourable with regard to offering of sustainable tourism products as well as craftwork products like attractive souvenirs as keepsakes of our country
3. Preservation of the Bulgarian identity, rich spirituality and originality by means of developing more craft activities in Bulgaria
4. Creation of sources of additional incomes for the population in the rural areas.

Inferences:

1. There is a necessity of developing a holistic state policy for support and development of craftsmanship in the rural areas of Bulgaria
2. A necessity of creation of opportunity, as a priority, during the new program period as from 2014 until 2014, for a financing scheme as per the Rural Development Program, with the purpose of making small and average-sized ateliers for artistic craft activities in the rural areas of the country
3. In correspondence with European Union programs for exchange of traditional and cultural values, following the European motto for unity in diversity, it is necessary to build a stable connection and unified policy for the organization of craftwork art exhibitions of work pieces crafted in different countries of the European Union, and namely in many rural regions of various countries. An appropriate example for this are the guest exhibitions displayed in Etara Ethnographic Open-air Museum in Oreshak village and in Bozhentsi Ethnographic Open-air Museum in Shiroka Laka.

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