

# Creative views on solving the problems of social policy in Russia and Belarus in rural areas

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**Abstract.** The article raises the issues of the ultimate effectiveness of regulatory measures of a social nature carried out by the state in rural areas of Russia and Belarus. For this purpose, the results of individual government directives are compared with the dynamics of demographic indicators, employment, real incomes, housing provision in rural areas, the structure of household expenditures. The problem areas of social policy in rural areas of Russia and Belarus are considered. As creative views on the solution of social problems in rural areas, options for the introduction and development of innovative agro-industrial ecosystems, which are defined by the authors as a set of economic, social, energy, information, marketing, financial and other entrepreneurial business structures that cover all the problem areas of development, are proposed.

## 1 Introduction

The authors distinguish several levels of creative management, which can be extended to all areas of activity and social life [1]:

- Macro-level of creative management
- Meso-level of creative management
- Micro-level of creative management.

The hierarchy of governance creativity by level concentrates on approaches to the system of public administration. The uniqueness of the creative model of corporate governance between the subjects of socio-economic interaction determines the system, which can be characterized by the national goals and strategic objectives of the system development.

The “creative management” concept is understood by the authors as a management based on the synergistic interaction of imagination, originality and creativity based on the highest level of professionalism aimed at non-standard way of creating unique products of activity. Synergetic interaction does not have clearly defined and balanced segments, is not subject to rigid schemes, goes beyond the limits of structures and powers. At the same time,

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a framework approach in creative management is still necessary to monitor the system development. The strongest marker of creative government at the state level is positive change in the life quality of the population, however, this is a time-delayed result.

The collapse of the Soviet Union into independent states, whose goal was the transition to a socially oriented model of market relations can also be considered the result of creative management, but only now, more than 30 years later, we can assess the social and economic transformations carried out. Earlier works of the authors analyzed the creative management of the transport sector of the economy in social and public development [2], analyzed the role of the human factor, including the creative component, in the implementation of state programs to develop the transport complex of Russia and Belarus [3]. No doubt, the effectiveness of creative government at the state level, as well as at any other level, is unpredictable and assessing its results is not an easy task. The authors note that it is not always possible to obtain the target result in the system development, solving the problems of stabilizing the socio-economic situation and seeking to reduce social tensions in a permanent environment [4].

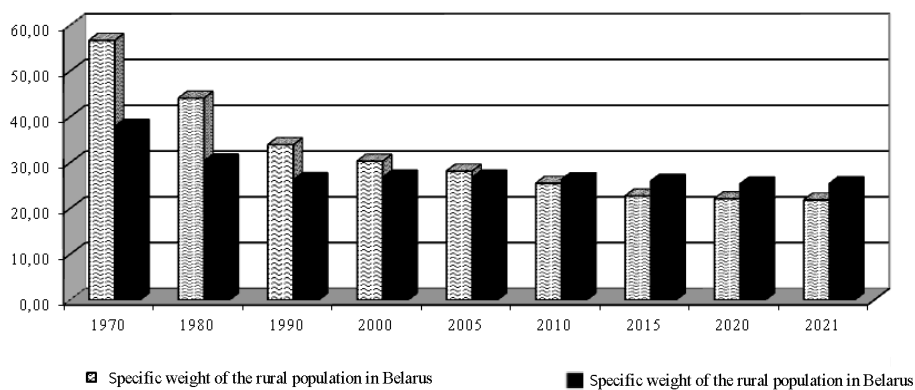
The assessment of opening up opportunities for the development of non-standard ideas, innovative technologies at the level of rural areas is a manifestation of creative management at the micro level, but is the result of creative management at the state level. The development of creativity as a character trait, originality of thinking, non-standard management decisions, unique approaches to farming is possible only in an innovative environment, which is provided by the creativity of the views of the management system.

In this context, it is very exciting to study the results of the impact of creative management on the development of rural areas. Two friendly post-Soviet countries, Russia and Belarus, were chosen for analysis. Sustainable development of the agro-industrial complex, provides solutions to the problems of food program not only in Russia and Belarus, but also in Europe, Africa and Asia. It is no coincidence that the Governments of these countries pay special attention to the development of social policy in rural areas. As a reliable exporter of agricultural products, the agro-industrial complex of Russia and Belarus brings a significant part of the GNP.

The end indicators of the social effectiveness of creative public policy aimed at solving the problems of rural areas is a change in the quality of life of the rural population [5]. Transformational processes in social policy aimed at changing the quality of life in rural areas, in our view, most clearly reflect the dynamics of the rural population, living conditions, including the cost structure, job security and housing. Unfortunately, statistical records of the population living in rural areas show a steady decline, which in principle is also characteristic of the developed world, experiencing an era of “industrial renaissance”. However, the agricultural exporting countries of Russia and Belarus, whose important export item is increasingly marked by agricultural products, are experiencing complex transformation processes and exhibit alarming trends.

## **2 Materials and methods**

Creative management promotes the realization of creativity in the professional sector and can solve most of the problems of reducing the rural population. Historiographic analysis shows that a significant acceleration in the rate of reduction of the rural population is noted already in the 70s, and then in the “dashing” 90s, in connection with this we cannot consider the only cause of this process the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakdown of economic ties. The 70s were marked by the concentration of economic resources on large construction projects in the industrial technology. Therefore, the agricultural sector was developed and financed on the residual principle, as a consequence, the share of the rural population was rapidly decreasing (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Dynamics of the share of the rural population in the total population of Russia and Belarus for 1970-2021, %. *Source:* authors' calculations based on [6, 7].

Thanks to government measures, the decline in the share of the rural population has been slowing since the post-crisis period – since 2010. At this time in Russia the “State program for the development of agriculture and regulation of markets of agricultural products, raw materials and food” (RF Government Decree of 14.07.2012 No. 717) was adopted, in Belarus – the Program of Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2011-2015, which also included the social development of rural areas and innovative development of agriculture.

However, as a result of the death of elderly rural residents, the departure of young people to cities and to work abroad, the number of settlements on the territory of Russia, although insignificant by 0.8% [8], but still declined. At the same time, the number of rural localities without the status of a separate entity increased by 27.4%, amounting to 24,751 settlements by 2021. In the territory of Belarus, the rural population decreased from 23,389 in 2012 to 2018. The population in Belarus decreased from 23,389 in 2012 [9] to 23,078 in 2018. [10].

A study on health care can complete the picture. The methodology for assessing the effectiveness of national projects and state programs, particularly in the field of health care, as a tool to ensure the development of human capital in Russia, is quite revealing [11].

Thus, the measures previously taken by the Government have hardly changed the trend of population decline in rural areas.

Considering the historical experience, Russia and Belarus have developed a number of state programs related to changing the demographic situation in rural areas. By 2020, it was objectively necessary to take some stock.

Studies show that to change the situation as a basis of economic stability of socio-economic systems the resource endowment, the investment climate and the effectiveness of the regional authorities are required [12]. From these positions, efforts were focused on the development of rural areas.

However, it was noted that there were far fewer young people in the countryside, and this phenomenon could not but affect the projected size of the workforce and the development of rural entrepreneurship. The aging of the rural population is outlined, which in general is objectively expected, and, therefore, all actions to create an innovative environment are in vain and not expedient.

The result is a vicious circle: on the one hand, the lack of an innovative environment for development forces young people to seek new opportunities, carrying out migration processes, on the other hand, the creation of this environment is not appropriate, as there is no guarantee that it will be in demand. It becomes clear that it is necessary to look for creative solutions for the development of social policy in relation to rural areas based on which the innovative agro-industrial ecosystem will be formed.

Optimization of management of innovative agricultural economy is based on creative level of thinking and high level of education of rural population [13]. In this case, the key role is played by the creative level of public administration, providing the processes of the economy diversification as an innovative environment that provides:

- High cultural and spiritual level of development of the rural area
- Flexible, dynamic infrastructure, including all possible sources of information, information and education centers, institutions and organizations interested in the development and implementation of creative ideas
- Comfortable investment climate aimed at the development of creative start-ups in agriculture
- Institutional environment that protects and nurtures venture capital.

Among the previously noted indicators of the effectiveness of social policy, one of the most important and motivating is the change in the dynamics of income of rural residents. We should consider the relative level of real income and the structure of expenditures to characterize the level of income stability. The social policy of the government in Russia and Belarus ensured a stable tendency during the 20 years when the gap between the average wage level in the country and in rural areas reduced. In Russia it was by 39% [14], in Belarus – by 10%, the value of disposable resources in Belarus – by 4% [6, 10, 15-17]. However, the persistent gap in the level of wages of rural residents compared to the level of wages of urban residents in Russia by 30%, and in Belarus by 40% is a very significant value. This is one of the main reasons for the outflow of young people from rural areas.

At first glance, the social policy of income equalization is quite effective, and the level of social protection in rural areas has increased. The gap between the proportion of people living below the poverty line in rural areas and the average for the Republic of Belarus decreased during these years from 16.7% in 2005 to 8.1% in 2020 [7, 15]. However, on average in Belarus, for example, the proportion of people whose income is less than the minimum subsistence budget during this period decreased by 2.2 times, and in rural areas – only 1.8 times. In Russia, despite the fact that from 2000 to 2020 the proportion of people with incomes below the subsistence budget decreased from 28.9% to 12.1%, among the rural population by 2020 it is still high – 24.9% [14]. Therefore, the process of leveling the social stratification of the rural population is much slower than we would like.

Partially, the rural population compensates for its relatively low income with products from private subsidiary plots (in Russia, this compensation is absolutely insignificant and makes up less than 6% of all food expenses [14]). In Belarus, however, this compensation is 35.1% of all products used in urban areas against 38.1% in rural areas according to 2020 data [17], however, this analytical comparison is oversimplified in the light of the constant unbalanced growth of prices. In particular, in Russia the producer price index of industrial products for 2000-2020 outstripped the price index of agricultural products by an average of 7-10% annually, except for 2019 [14], making the real living standards of the rural population even lower. In Belarus, from 2000 to 2008, this advance averaged 9-11% annually. And only the global financial crisis changed the situation in the opposite direction (3-4% ahead of the growth of agricultural prices), but insignificantly and not for long after the crisis of 2015-2016, the rate of price growth in both industries almost equalized [17, 18].

Low incomes and uncertainty in employment are supplemented by domestic insecurity. In Russia as a whole during 2000-2020 the housing fund per one inhabitant of cities increased by 40.1 %, in rural areas – by 37.7 % [14], in Belarus it increased by 23 %, and in rural areas this index increased by 30.8 % [9, 17, 18]. However, in rural areas of Belarus, for example, the highest level of housing provision per inhabitant (Table 1) and the lowest level of capitalization of buildings and provision of living conditions are statistically recorded. In addition, when calculating the amount of living space available to urban residents, in case they have villas, country houses in the countryside, which are often more comfortable than the usual private buildings of the urban type it is not taken into account.

**Table 1.** Availability of housing stock of the population of Belarus for 2000-2020. *Source:* [6, 16-18].

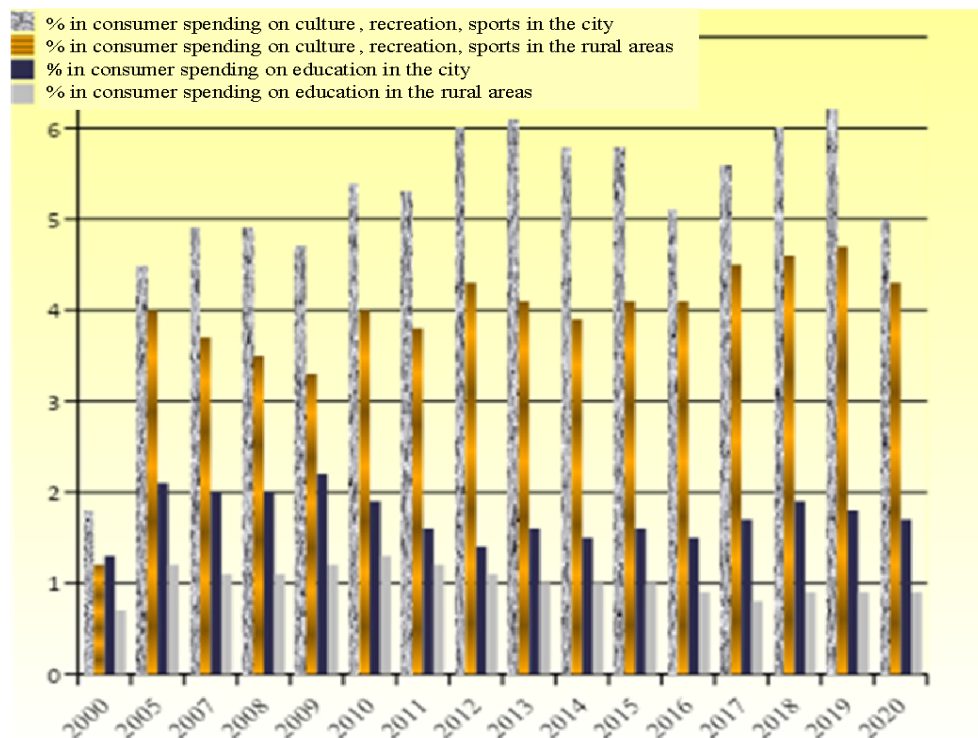
Years	2000	2005	2010	2011	2014	2015	2016	2017	2020
Housing stock per 1 resident in the city, m <sup>2</sup>	19.3	20.8	22.1	22.5	23.5	23.8	24	24.3	25.7
Including the specific weight of the state housing stock, %	27.5	20.8	16.1	14.8	8.3	6.9	5.7	5.4	5.5
Housing stock per 1 resident in the village, m <sup>2</sup>	25.9	28.5	32	33	35	35.7	36.5	36.8	37.3
Including the specific weight of the state housing stock, %	8.9	9.9	10.2	10.1	7.7	7.1	6.8	6.8	6.7

Comparison of the degree of social support of the population with housing from the state fund in these countries as a whole and in rural areas (Table 1) shows an effective policy of smoothing this difference. Over 20 years the ratio between the proportion of public housing in the country as a whole and in rural areas in Russia has decreased from 2.5 times in 2000 to 1.3 times in 2020, in Belarus – from 3 times in 2000 to complete leveling out by 2015. Moreover, the share of public housing in rural areas after 2015 began to exceed by several percent the figure for the country as a whole.

The following was adopted to improve the provision of housing for the rural population:

for Russia – Cabinet of Ministers Decree of 29.11.2019 No. 509 “On approval of the procedure for forming and approving lists of participants in measures to improve housing conditions for citizens living in rural areas”, RF Government Decree of 31.05.2019 No. 696 “On approval of the state program of the Russian Federation “Integrated development of rural areas”, Program “Young Rural Specialist in 2021”, for Belarus – Presidential Decree of 23 February 2012 No. 100 “On measures to improve accounting and reduce the number of empty and dilapidated houses in rural areas,” as well as September 13, 2018 No. 663, which approved the Regulations on the sale of residential premises located in rural areas and owned by the Republic of Belarus. HTTP The last Provision introduced norms relating to the sale at auction of unclaimed residential premises of the state housing fund in rural areas and allowing the sale of such residential premises through auctions in the absence of persons in a state body (organization) that need to improve their housing conditions or refusal of such persons to purchase residential premises.

The social policy regulating the existing level of culture and recreation in rural areas is commendable. In particular, in Belarus the share of expenditures of the population on culture, sports and recreation has increased 2.7 times in 20 years (from 1.8% to 5%), but 3.6 times in rural areas (Fig. 2). However, the gap in the share of household spending on culture, sports and recreation between urban and rural areas is still significant (1:1.3).



**Fig. 2.** Comparative dynamics of the share of expenditures of the population of Belarus in urban and rural areas on sports, culture and education for 2000-2020, %. Sources: [6, 7, 16, 17].

Due to the arrival of IT technologies in everyday life, the level of relevant expenditures has increased, but the population of rural areas is increasingly forced to spend on education, not because of its inaccessibility (enrollment in universities provides benefits to representatives of rural areas), but because of the aging of the average villager and the decline in relative real incomes. We should also mention the closure of many libraries in rural areas (if in 2010 in Russia there were 35.800 libraries, then by 2020 there were 32.900 [14], and if in Belarus there were 2,753 of them in 2013, by 2020 there will be 1,938), as well as the reduction of community centers for young people (from 2,742 in 2013 to 2,087 in 2020) [17, 18].

When traditional principles and methods of management fail to produce targeted results, there is a need for creative development ideas.

Analysis of official statistics from the two countries reveals the following negative trends, which require creative solutions for the current stage of development:

1. Crisis phenomena in the development of the economy associated with the restrictions during the pandemic coronavirus and involvement in the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine negatively affect the demographic and socio-economic trends in rural areas.

2. Low incomes and the unsatisfactory living conditions in rural areas force people to migrate internally to cities and district centers.
3. A tangible contribution to social instability in rural areas is caused by the state of current and the prospects for further employment. In 2011, 9.7 % of all employed in agriculture, forestry and fishery were registered in Russia [19], while in 2021 it will be 5.9 % [20]. In Belarus it is similar: in 2000 – 15.2% of all employed people, in 2005 – 11.9%, in 2010 – 10.4%. – 10.4 %, and in 2020 – 8.7% [6], i.e., during the 20 years the economy of these branches has reduced almost half of its workforce.

Thus, a serious revision of the list of social benefits in rural areas, pension and labor legislation to increase the degree of social protection of the rural population is required. At present, the State Program of Comprehensive Development of Rural Areas for 2020-2025 (Russia) and the State Program of Agricultural Business Development in the Republic of Belarus for 2021-2025 have been adopted. Their effectiveness depends on the comprehensiveness of measures taken to improve living conditions, culture and recreation in rural areas.

### **3 Results and discussion**

Based on this analysis, we can conclude about the need to find creative solutions for the development of rural areas and innovative agro-industrial ecosystem, as an important branch of the food supply of countries and the most important article of export income.

The problem of declining and aging rural population is identified, the main advantages of urban life compared to rural life: wages are lower than the national average, hard work, lack of access to business structures, payment of utility bills in % ratio to wages higher than in the city, cultural and spiritual component is lower, family institution is undermined, opportunities for implementation and development are low. Creative activity and creative idea must be supported by realized plans and high achievements, otherwise intrinsic motivation is broken [21].

In fact, we need creative solutions at the state level: how to attract young people and specialists to rural areas and how to provide opportunities for development and self-realization higher and better than in the city, since the role of personal factors, which include creative thinking, is the basis for the creation of innovative models [22].

At the same time, the advantages of living in the countryside are quite objective: the ecology and the environment are incomparably cleaner, there are more opportunities for comfortable housing and this fact gives rise to the idea of creating innovative agro-industrial ecosystems.

Researchers note that rural businesses often have more limited and costly access to specialized business services and service providers compared to urban ones [23]. Rural entrepreneurial businesses face limited access to information, which is primarily due to the lack of information and communication technology services in rural areas [24]. In this regard, being part of the system, which is a set of economic, social, energy, information, marketing, financial and other entrepreneurial business structures will help in solving the emerging problem areas of development.

Agri-food ecosystems can also solve a number of significant limitations with attracting the necessary specialization labor, and the role of creative entrepreneurship in the sustainable development of rural areas is incredibly important [25].

In the system of development of large agro-industrial ecosystems, it is difficult for rural businesses to maximize the benefits of synergistic interaction between the subjects of socio-economic relations. The integrative processes of economic growth that take place in agro-food ecosystems are not peculiar to rural entrepreneurial structures [26].

Entrepreneurial ecosystems require compliance with specific requirements and strict adherence to procedural rules [27]. Creative solutions on the part of state authorities are required in the search for options for special synergistic interactions within ecosystems.

In addition, the lack of sources of funding for entrepreneurial activity is a very pressing problem especially for the implementation of creative ideas, the results of which cannot be evaluated in traditional ways [28]. Organic incorporation into the agro-industrial ecosystem can also be an effective way to solve this problem, and economies of scale can serve as a real opportunity for development.

## 4 Conclusion

At present, Russia and Belarus have completed the implementation of state programs for the development of agricultural business in 2016-2020, but adopted similar programs for 2021-2025, with fundamentally new approaches to social policy in rural areas. Their effectiveness depends on the comprehensiveness of measures taken in the areas of entrepreneurship, welfare, culture and recreation in rural areas. However, the study of trends in the development of rural entrepreneurship, as well as the study of conditions for the development and functioning of rural areas, is insufficient. The role of creative approaches to the formation of rural social policy at the state level in both Russia and Belarus is incredibly significant. As a fundamentally new, creative approach to the development of rural areas, the article proposes the creation and development of agro-industrial ecosystems, which, along with large agro-industrial complexes, should organically fit rural business structures.

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