

UDK 911.37(497.2) "1992/2009";
711.2(497.2) "1992/2009"

Прегледни чланак

Review article

Valentin Mihailov**CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITIES IN BULGARIA. A GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW**

Извод: У овом раду су представљени основни географски проблеми повезани са развојем градова у Бугарској и динамици урбанизацијских процеса у периоду преласка ка тржишној економији. Осим тога, акценат рада пада на анализу чиниоца повећавања броја градских насеља током истраживаног периода (1992–2009). У 2011. години, број градова у Републици Бугарској је изнео 256. На почетку 21. века територијална организација градских насеља сачувала је свој значај у односу на целокупни социо-економски развој земље. У току транзицијског периода уједно велики, као и мали градови наишли су на низ изазова и проблема у свом социо-економском и демографском развоју. У вези са тиме, у овом раду су анализирана главна питања повезана са просторним аспектима демографских, социјалних и економских промена бугарских градова на основу података из 1992, 2001. и 2009. године.

Кључне речи: градови, Бугарска, постсоцијалистичка трансформација, деиндустријализација, демографска криза, нови градови

Abstract: In this article, basic geographical changes, tendencies and problems connected with the development of the Bulgarian cities and the process of urbanization in the post-socialistic period have been analysed. Moreover, an emphasis was put on the reasons for the increase in general number of urban settlements from 1992 to 2009. In 2011, the number of towns and cities in the Republic of Bulgaria is estimated on 256. In the early 21th century, the territorial organization of the urban network have had an important influence on the entire socio-economic development of Bulgaria. Nevertheless, during the transformation period the cities and towns in Bulgaria have encountered a number of challenges and problems of socio-economic and demographic character. Therefore, the spatial aspects of the main demographic, social and economic changes in Bulgarian cities and towns during the post-socialist transformation, based on data from the years 1992, 2001 and 2009, have been analysed in the paper.

Key words: cities, Bulgaria, post-socialist transformation, deindustrialization, demographic crisis, new towns

Introduction

In Bulgaria, during the period of post-socialist transformation, the cities and towns have encountered a number of challenges in their socio-economic and demographic development. In this context, the main objective of the current

paper is to outline the current trends and problems in development of cities and urban network in the country. For this reason, in this study based on data from the years 1992, 2001 and 2009 the basic directions of cities development have been analyzed. The paper also considers new political and economic conditions causing difficulties in adapting these cities to the rules of market economy, as well as the outflow of their population on working age and difficulties in implementing new large investment projects. The article has focused on changes in socio-economic development during the post-socialist period of cities in two main aspects. The first aspect is connected with transformation of economic and administrative functions, the second one – with changes of microgeographical structure of the cities connected with the transformations of urban landscape.

At the beginning, it is necessary to make some methodological remarks. The administrative-territorial structure of the Republic of Bulgaria is divided into two categories: the territorial-administrative units (districts and municipalities) and territorial ones (cities and villages). Specificity of the Bulgarian administrative-territorial model is about the problems of urban development which are resolved in the frame of municipalities and districts. The cities and towns are not represented as juridical entities in the framework of the administrative-territorial organization and social-political relations.¹ Among the contemporary Bulgarian cities, only four of them (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Yambol) are self-contained administrative units. The most important socio-economic indicators of development are usually presented according to the administrative-territorial units in official statistical publications in Bulgaria. Since 1990 the studies on Bulgarian cities network have been limited in analyzing to some common population indicators. These circumstances have directly reduced quantity and quality of the scientific investigations and preparation of applied models and recommendations for optimization of national settlement network.

To conclude this introductory part, in this article the analyses of the urban network and the development of cities in Bulgaria are mainly based on data from population censuses. For 2009 these are data from the current demographic statistics. The socio-economic changes in medium-sized towns are analysed on the basis of: the author's own data collected during the area researches; and the limited data for selected years found in some sectoral strategies for national development, as well as in regional plans for development of the Bulgarian districts.

The cities and urban network in Bulgaria: the heritage of the socialist era

The most intensive urbanization processes in Bulgaria took place in the period of socialist industrialization. During that period, the number of urban

¹ Law of Administrative-Territorial Division of The Republic of Bulgaria, 1995.

population in Bulgaria was tripled. The actual number of the cities is twice higher than that in the middle of XX century. Simultaneously, there was a decrease of demographic weight and functional importance of small towns, regardless of their total number increase. There was an intensive concentration of population in the large and medium cities, especially in the basic industrial centres. In the late 60's and during the 70's, another major transformation started in order to overcome the hitherto scattered structure of the settlement network. There was also shaped a new spatial path of settlement systems organization, called in the theory and practice of urban planning „settlements networks”, „urban networks” or „settlements systems”². In those years, the new urban units, as a consequence of intensified economic and transport connections between separate cities, occurrence of common system of social services in the district administrative units, commuting, transferring functions to the suburban peripheries and extension of physical boundaries of cities also appeared. In scientific literature as urban agglomerations have been identified: Sofia-Pernik, Varna-Devnya, Plovdiv-Asenovgrad-Krichim, Burgas-Kameno, Haskovo-Dimitrovgrad-Simeonovgrad. In more cases the medium-sized towns also participated in those agglomeration structures. More polycentric character of urban agglomerations had the local urban system of Veliko Tarnovo-Lyaskovec-Gorna Oriahovitsa in North-Central Bulgaria.

Most of the close contacts, between the cities in the country, existing until the beginning of the 90's, were next broken. Primarily, it was a result of the breakdown of the centrally planned economic system, breaking of the cooperative system in functioning of industrial plants and as a result of a decrease of a daily work migration. In the post-socialist transition, the spatial concentration of urban population in Bulgaria has been primarily characterized with location in separate „points” of the national space, while retaining the classical traditions of the „autonomous” city. Between them there are usually the extensive undeveloped natural areas or the unusable agricultural ones.³

Many socialist towns and cities rose as a consequence of the positive trend in migration flows from rural areas to cities and also due to development of various non-agricultural functions, mostly the industrial and administrative ones. Often in that period the new towns were proclaimed according to subjective and ideological factors. For instance, there were villages being a birthplaces of a high officers from a Communist Party or centres of guerrilla activity during the World War Two. K. Kodjabashev recalls the fact that the

² A strategy for territorial development of the Republic of Bulgaria / Tendencies and problems in organization and development of the settlement network, 1995. National Centre for Territorial Development and Housing policy, Sofia, p. 8–10.

³ V. Mihaylov, 2009. Cities and urban network transformations in Bulgaria during the post-socialistic period, WSU, Kielce, Academic Research, N 2, p. 66–67.

process of creating the new cities showed particular intensity in the 60-s and 70's. According to the politics in those days, in the Jubilee years of taking the State power by the Communist Party (9th September 1944), on 09.09.1969 the government announced 33 new cities, and on 9th September 1974 – 40.⁴ An especially interesting case is the town of Pravets, the birth place of the long-standing General Secretary of Communist Part Todor Zhivkov (1911-1998). In 1981 Pravets received the urban status because of 1300 Jubilee of foundation of the Bulgarian State on the Balkans.

Generally, the number of Bulgarian cities grew from 110 in 1946 to 238 in 1985. In 1946 there were 5 medium-sized towns, which shifted to higher category during the socialist period (Varna, Burgas, Pleven, Ruse and Stara Zagora). To great extent, the increase of number of cities is directly connected to intensive population growth of former small towns, to a small degree – because of receiving an urban functions from village settlements. The important feature is that almost all large and medium cities in Bulgaria were the regional administrative and economic centres and still remain these functions during the whole 20th and the beginning of 21th century. Only three cities make exceptions of the mentioned rule – these are Varna, Montana and Blagoevgrad, which got ahead and seized leadership positions in their region respectively from Shumen, Lom and Petrich.

There were only few more distinctly deflections in development of the Bulgarian large and medium cities. The rest of all 28 contemporary district centres, except Dimitrovgrad⁵ and Smolian, performed various central functions before World War Two. The city of Dimitrovgrad was founded in the 50s as a model of a socialist city and the centre of heavy industry (the cement and chemical plants). It was reflected on implementing a socialist realist approach to its spatial planning and architectural style and forms. Construction of the city began in 1947 through the merger of villages Rakovski, Maryjno and Chernokonyovo. The town of Smolian

⁴ K. Kodjabashev, 1998: Peculiarities on development and territorial organization of cities in Bulgaria. Collection of papers from Scientific Conference „100 year geography at Sofia University”, p. 200.

⁵ Dimitrovgrad, Blageovgrad and the small town of Antonovo (district of Targovishte) were the three of several towns which names were given after Bulgarian communist functionaries (Dimitar Blagoev, Geogri Dimitrov and Anton Krstev). In spite of acute public discussions, only these two above-mentioned towns kept their names after the democratic changes. Shumen, called Kolarovgrad (after the name of Vasil Kolarov) in 1950, returned to its historical name in 1965. From medium size category, the towns of Mihaylovgrad, Stanke Dimitrov and Tolbuhin returned their historical names after the breakdown of communist system – these are respectively Montana, Dupnitsa and Dobrich. From the small towns, it concerns Michurin, Temelkovo, Pelovo and Grudovo which received new names after the collapse of communism – today they are respectively Tsarevo, Batanovtsi, Iskar and Grudovo.

founded in 1960 as a result of unification of three villages – Smolian, Raykovo and Ustovo, lying in the Rodophe Mountains, near the Bulgarian-Greece state border, closed until the 90's. This was a main factor of the socio-economic, transport and economic isolation of Smolian, and slow growth of its population number. Nowadays Smolian is the smallest medium-sized town in Bulgaria.

We can recall that during the socialist period, the large cities and medium-sized towns developed the polyfunctional economic structure, consisted by industry, administration, education, culture, health care, trades, transport and, rarely – tourism. The highest share of cities' domestic product had a heavy industry, especially in the case of Burgas, Stara Zagora, Plevna, Pernik, Dimitrovgrad, Vratsa, Vidin, Kurdjali, Razgrad, Kazanluk, Lovech etc.

The share of the cities' categories in the urban network of Bulgaria

As a consequence of almost 50-years period of forced urbanization, today the urbanization ratio in Bulgaria is relatively high, comparing to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. According to data from 2009, the share of urban population is a bit more than 70%.⁶ However, in many cases, this is so-called pseudourbanization, typical for the small towns, where the share of their population continues rural lifestyle and work in farm. This also may be applied to settlement landscapes and economic specialization as well.

The number of cities and the level of urbanization after 1989 showed the steady growth, despite the total population reduction in the country (about 1.3 million people) and remigrations of adults from the cities and small towns into the villages, because of cheaper costs of living allowance and returning property to agricultural land. Number of cities increased from 236 in 1990 to 255 in 2009 (Table 1) and, after receiving the urban status by Ignatievo (Varna district) in March 2011 – to 256. There is no uniform approach of classification of cities by population in the Bulgarian scientific literature. But, usually they are divided into the following groups: large cities - with a population exceeding 100 thousand people (7); medium - from 30 to 100 thousand (26); small - from 10 to 30 thousand (37); and very small - less than 10 thousand (183). The demographic and socio-economic domination of the capital city is typical for the urban network in Bulgaria and, the high number of relatively small regional centres. From Bulgarian cities, 220 of them are centres of municipalities. Between them are 28 cities which performed functions of administrative centres of districts. In general, during the post-socialist period these central places have retained their administrative functions and impact on the smaller towns of the relevant administrative unit. They still are centres of health care, elite secondary schools and other social and cultural services, fulfilling the needs of the population of the whole district.

⁶ Source: Law of Administrative-Territorial Division of The Republic of Bulgaria, 1995.

Table 1. – The dynamics of the share of urban population by categories in Bulgaria during the period 1992–2009

Category of cities/year	1992				2001				2009			
	Number of cities	%	Total number of population in thousand	%	Number of cities	%	Total number of population, in thousand	%	Number of cities	%	Total number of population, in thousand	%
Over 100 thousand	8	3,33	2621,6	46	8	3,3	2561,9	46,8	7	2,3	2436,9	45,1
30-100 thousand	25	10,5	1463,8	25,6	24	9,9	1277,4	23,3	26	10,2	1451,2	26,9
10-30 thousand	53	22,2	881,4	15,4	48	19,8	882,4	16,1	37	14,6	722,9	13,4
Less than 10 thousand	152	63,8	737,7	12,3	162	66,9	752,8	13,7	185	72,3	878,6	14,6
Total	238	100	5704,5	100	242	100	5474,4	100	255	100	5401,2	100

Sources: *Own calculation on the basis of: www.nsi.bg; Population 2007, 2008. Sofia, National Statistical Institute; Population according to districts, municipalities and settlements, 2002. Sensus 2001. Sofia, National Statistical Institute.*

Primarily, the composition of the district centres consists of medium-sized towns and large cities. This category has included 20 cities which have executed district functions by means they carrying out a fundamental role in promoting settlement network and the territorial-administrative development of the country. Their main task is to execute mediate functions between the capital and the smallest territorial-administrative units (municipalities). Until 1989, each of these centres developed with priority by concentrating various functions - ideological, administrative, financial, health, social, cultural ones etc. Until the 80s the city districts showed a significant increase in population due to positive migration growth, consisting of the working-age population and the members of their families.

The post-socialist development of the Bulgarian cities has been characterized with some peculiarities and discrepancies. In that period, one old rule has been confirmed. The areas whose lack of large and rapidly developing cities are still backwarded in terms of the demographic and socio-economic development. That is one of the major reasons for the emergence and maintenance of the territorial discrepancies in the socio-economic incomes and infrastructure allocation, too. Under the mentioned conditions the class of medium and small towns has been developing poorly. They are situated in traditionally underdeveloped territories, like: the border areas in Western Bulgaria (it concerns mainly Vidin, Montana, Pernik and Kjustendil districts); mountainous territories in Southern-Central Bulgaria (Smolian, Kurdjali); mountain and foothill areas in the central parts of the country (Lovech, Gabrovo, Kazanluk, Sliven); mostly rural regions in North-Eastern and South-Eastern Bulgaria inhabited by Turkish population (Shumen, Dobrich, Razgrad, Targovishte, Silistra). Typical for these

areas are: an advanced underpopulation and the dispersed and undeveloped urban network, in which the central administrative and economic functions are performed by the medium-sized towns.

Table 2. – Population dynamics of large and medium-sized towns in Bulgaria in the post-socialist period (1992–2009), in thousand

City	Region	The highest adm. function	1992	2001	2009	Index of population dynamics, 2009/1992, 1992 = 100
Sofia	SW	C	1114,9	1091,7	1165,5	104,5
Plovdiv	SC	DC	341,0	338,2	348,4	102,1
Varna	NE	DC	308,4	312,8	320,8	104,0
Burgas	SE	DC	195,6	192,3	193,7	99,0
Ruse	NC	DC	170,0	161,4	156,5	92,0
Stara Zagora	SE	DC	150,3	143,4	140,4	93,4
Pleven	NC	DC	130,8	121,8	111,4	88,3
Dobrich	NE	DC	104,4	100,0	92,6	88,7
Shumen	NE	DC	93,3	89,2	86,8	92,7
Pernik	SW	DC	90,5	85,9	78,9	87,1
Yambol	SE	DC	91,4	82,6	77,1	84,3
Haskovo	SC	DC	80,7	80,3	77,0	95,4
Pazardjik	SC	DC	82,5	78,8	75,3	91,2
Blagoevgrad	SW	DC	71,4	71,1	70,4	98,5
V. Tarnovo	NC	DC	67,5	66,8	67,1	99,3
Vratsa	NW	DC	75,5	68,9	61,1	80,8
Gabrovo	NC	DC	76,5	67,0	60,2	78,8
Asenovgrad	SC	MC	52,3	51,9	51,5	98,3
Kazanluk	SC	MC	60,0	53,7	49,5	82,4
Vidin	NW	DC	62,6	57,3	49,4	78,9
Kiustendil	SW	DC	54,4	49,9	45,9	84,3
Kurdjali	SC	DC	45,7	45,6	45,5	99,4
Montana	NW	DC	52,4	49,1	45,3	86,4
Dimitrovgrad	SC	MC	50,9	45,7	39,5	77,5
Lovech	NC	DC	48,2	44,1	38,5	80,0
Silistra	NE	DC	48,3	41,9	37,7	77,8
Targovishte	NE	DC	43,0	40,6	37,3	86,9
Dupnitsa	SW	MC	41,3	38,1	36,0	87,0
Svishtov	SC	MC	30,4	30,5	35,4	116,5
Razgrad	SE	DC	40,9	38,9	34,5	84,5
G.Oriahovitsa	SC	MC	38,9	35,4	32,4	83,3
Smolian	SC	DC	34,0	33,0	31,7	93,1

Sources: Own calculation on the basis of: Population 2007, 2008. Sofia, National Statistical Institute; Population according to districts, municipalities and settlements, 2002. Census 2001. Sofia, National Statistical Institute; www.nsi.bg. Abbreviations: SW – South-Western region; SC – South-Central region; SE – South-Eastern region; NE – North-Eastern region; NC – North-Central region; NW – North-Western region; C – capital; DC – administrative centre of district; MC – administrative centre of municipality.

If we compare the statistical data from censuses, they designate that in the period 1946–2001, the highest growth had cities with population over 100 thousand. As Mladenov and Dimitrov (2009) have noted, the size of population of Varna and Burgas in that period increased over 4 times, and in Sofia, Stara Zagora, Ruse and Pleven – over 3 times.⁷ Furthermore, the essential factor in this growth rate was the positive trend of migration flows. Despite the falling number of people of the cities over 100 thousand, during the period of democratic changes, almost half of the urban population in the country are still concentrated in this group. Furthermore, in the period 1992-2009 the three biggest cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna increased the number of their population.

Figure 1. – The territorial structure of the large and medium-size cities Bulgaria



Source: *Own elaboration.*

The demographic dynamics of medium-sized towns can be divided into two subperiods. On December 31. 2009, the number of medium-sized towns in Bulgaria was estimated on 26. The total number of their population is 1451.2 thousand. The sub-period 1992–2001 was that of distinct tendency toward reducing the number and proportion of the population of medium-sized towns. The total population of this category reduced at 184 thousand (Table 1). The share of medium-sized towns fell from 25, 6% (1992) to 23,3% (2001). This was the result

⁷ Mladenov Ch., Dimitrov, E., 2009. *The processes of urbanization in Bulgaria since of the end of World War Two.* Geography'21, N 3, p. 24.

of a decline of the population number in all the cities in this category, and moving the town of Lom to a smaller city group, with the population number below 30 thousand. During the second subperiod, which started in 2001, Sliven and Dobrich joined the medium-sized towns. As a result, the share of this category rose by 3,3% in 2001-2009 (*table 1*). During the last two decades they were also seriously affected by the economic and demographic crisis. Both cities lost their position as 100-thousand cities after the decrease of number of their residents with 88 % in 1992–2009 (Table 2). The only city from this category, which showed increasing population number during the period of common demographic stagnation, is Svishtov, on the Danube. Although it is situated in a relatively high urbanized administrative unit, its population increased by 116,5 % in 1992-2009 period, thanks to preservation of its industrial, cultural and educational functions.

Simultaneously, the towns from the smallest category that consists of the towns below than 10 thousand also indicated growth. In the sub-period 1992-2001 they increased their total population number from 737,7 to 752,8 thousand. Until 2009 in that category already lived 878,6 thousand people. Another important trend in the contemporary development of settlements in Bulgaria is increasing number of the category of very small towns in 1992-2007 (from 152 to 185). Their share in the urban population increased from 12,9% to 14,6 %. That is a direct effect that the small towns with category from 10 to 30 thousand shifted to a smaller category. It was due to the demographic crises and the received urban statute of 21 big villages. The smallest town in the country still remains Melnik located in southern mountain Pirin near to the Bulgarian-Greece state boundary. That town has only 375 inhabitants. In comparison to Melnik, the smallest Bulgarian town, the Aydemir (Silistra district) – the biggest Bulgarian village, is almost 20 times greater. The number of inhabitants of Aydemir is 7557.

The contribution of new towns in the development of the post-socialist urban network

It must be taken into consideration that, apart from an intensive expansion of predominately quantitative type of urbanization, the urbanization ratio in Bulgaria is not the result only of actually obtained city functions from the former villages. During the last 50-60 years, frequently received urban status from given locality is a result of ambitions of local government structures to gain a more socio-cultural prestige and investments on the occasion of shifting to the category of urban settlements. For socialistic period as well as transition one, the representatives of local self-government have used the option, which has opened The Law of Administrative-Territorial Division of The Republic of Bulgaria. According to the article 33 (1), in order to proclaim a given village for town it is necessary to fulfill following requirements: social and technical infrastructure must be built and the number of population should be over than 3500 for the villages and for the tourist

resorts - not less than 1000 inhabitants. During the last two decades, 21 villages received the urban statute. But, there are exceptions to that rule. As the example of Hadjidimovo i Slivo pole has shown, the urban statute can be received even if the settlement has less than 3500 inhabitants (*tab. 3*).

Table 3. – The new towns in Bulgaria after 1989

Settlement	District, region (NUTS 2)	Year of receiving urban status	Number of population, 31.12.2009
Zlatitsa *	Sofia, SW	1991	5145
Pirdop *	Sofia, SW	1991	7749
Hadjidimovo	Blagoevgrad, SW	1996	2657
Bojurishte	Sofia, SW	1997	5314
Bania	Plovdiv, SC	2002	3498
Aksakovo	Varna, NE	2002	7897
Slivo pole	Ruse, NC	2002	3169
Primorsko	Burgas, SE	2002	3340
Vetren	Pazardjik, SC	2003	3473
Kostandovo	Pazardjik, SC	2003	4341
Sarnitsa	Pazardjik, SC	2003	3607
Głodjevo	Ruse, NC	2003	3659
Kiten	Burgas, SE	2005	1163
Sveti Vlas	Burgas, SE	2006	3634
Kuklen	Plovdiv, SC	2006	5896
Marten	Ruse, NC	2006	3691
Dobrinishte	Blagoevgrad, SW	2006	2736
Momin Prohod	Sofia, SW	2006	1561
Aheloy	Burgas, SE	2009	2240
Chernomorets	Burgas, SE	2009	2177
Ignatievo	Varna, NE	2011	4300

Sources: *Own elaboration on the basis of: www.nsi.bg; P. Mihaylov, 2006, Changes in number and the statute of settlements and administrative-territorial organisation in Bulgaria. Geography'21, 1.; Population 2007, 2008. Sofia, National Statistical Institute.*
 * Zlatitsa and Pirdop became separate cities as a result of split of the city Srednogorie in 1991.

In spatial aspect, southern Bulgaria has a monopol in the process of occurrence of new towns which number is 16. On the NUTS 2 level, the largest number of new towns are concentrated in South-Western, South-Central and South-Eastern regions. Since the 80's only in North-Western Bulgaria no village has received the urban statute. This feature has additionally deepened the discrepancies in urban network development between the Bulgarian regions.

Five of the new towns such as Primorsko, Kiten, Sveti Vlas, Chernomorets and Aheloy, are resorts located in the Black Sea. That is geographical region with a traditionally high level of urbanization. The new towns from that area received the urban statute thanks to positive dynamics in development of settlements near the Black Sea. It is a result of realisation of many private projects in the tourism sector and opening hundreds of new hotels and entertainment places, too. Majority of

those settlements has changed in a positive direction. They have become modernized thanks to a built-up new infrastructure, the expansion of services. These towns also have enlarged their spatial extension. This is not the case that Sveti Vlas (Saint Vlas), which was a calm sea village and was in a shadow of the near resorts Sunny Beach and Nessebar at the end of the 20th century, today is called “Bulgarian Monte Carlo”. But, in many cases the expansion of construction led to destruction of valuable natural resources for tourism such as sand beaches and beach dunes.

Figure 2. – A spatial location of the new towns in Bulgaria



Source: *Own elaboration.*

An urban statute also received three national important resorts. These ones are Dobrinishte and Momin Prohod from the Sofia district and Bania from the Plovdiv district. These three towns are traditional centres of mountain and balneological tourism. The rest of new towns mainly occurred on the grounds of villages the majority of which population in working age is still employed in agricultural sector. A typical examples for that are Kuklen, Vetren, Kostandovo, Glodjevo oraz Aksakovo. The economic specialization of the above-mentioned new towns is dominated by industry sectors based on agricultural inputs and forestry.

Main tendencies in the economic development: deindustrialization and marketization

The current national strategic projects and plans pay particular attention only to the development of largest cities and agglomerations in Bulgaria such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Pleven Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo,

Haskovo. What is more, the “National Regional Development Strategy 2007–2013” has given priority to the development of the capital and few largest cities, which should be centres of regional development, investments and innovations, highly qualified labour force and modern education. Nevertheless, for the last 130 years, after the National liberation the practice has shown that the largest Bulgarian cities have always been flexible enough and have been successfully and self-dependently adapting to different socio-economic and political conditions despite the fact whether or not there were special stimulating agents from the state authorities.

To a much smaller degree, the mentioned conclusions may concern to the medium-sized and, especially, to the small towns. For many of them, the manifested growth in the framework of the socialist model of development to considerable degree happened due to strong paternalistic approach to urban and economic planning. During the 90’s the representatives of these categories fell in deep crises and new unknown conditions of socio-economic development including marketization, globalization and liberalization. Until the 1990 the economic profile major of the Bulgarian towns predominated from some industry enterprises, each of them ensured thousands labour places and was a solid source for the local budget. Actually, the crisis has covered all the towns in the country, although in no equally degree. To 1990 in these cities there was constructed and operated at least one great factory on sectors such as: ferrous and nonferrous metallurgy, engineering and chemical industries. The factors such as, loss of markets in former socialist block, entering on the world market of cheaper goods produced in the South and Southeast Asia, the technological backwardness (in some cases), the errors in privatization processes led to the complete liquidation of dozens of large industrial enterprises. For these entities, as a whole, still there are not found significant alternatives.

During the 90’s, the gradual liquidation of significant part of industrial enterprises caused high unemployment rate and durable social exclusion. These changes have provided to active emigration processes and deep demographic crisis which appeared in the 70’s and 80’s. At the time of deep structural embarrassments, among medium-sized towns were those which had developed industry on a large scale: Vratsa, Vidin, Montana, Pernik, Kiustendil, Razgrad, Shumen, Kurdjali, Dimitrovgrad and Yambol. Additionally, the old socialist model of social and economic development in small towns located by borderlines was also broken. The liquidation of the big units of the Bulgarian Army took place in dozens of towns along western (Bregovo, Breznik, Slivnitsa) and southern (Malko Tarnovo, Simeonovgrad, Harmanli, Elhovo, Topolovgrad and others) border of the country.

A typical example for failed transformation is the city of Vidin located in underdeveloped trans-border zone of North-Western Bulgaria. During the transition period this city lost over 10 thousand people who emigrated to work abroad, mainly to Greece, Italy, Spain and the Czech Republic. What is more, the economic and demographic problems led to liquidation of inter-urban transport network in 1998.

At the beginning of the 90's, the international importance had the row of full-liquidated enterprises. Among them were, for example, the iron foundry plant and the chemical one in Vratsa, the tire factory in Vidin, chemical plant in Yambol which produced synthetic fibers based on raw materials from petrochemical complex in Burgas. Till now, although with strongly reduced production capacity, some industry enterprises are working, as pharmaceutical plant in Razgrad, chemical plant in Dimitrovgrad, trucking and car parts company in Shumen. There are some industrial establishments, which have comparatively successfully continued their activity in the new economic conditions. Among them are, for instance, the nuclear plant in Kozlodui (the North-Western Bulgaria), „Berg Montana Fitingi” specializing in manufacturing of galvanized and black malleable iron fittings, „Monbat” producing accumulators for cars, the lead-zinc plant in Kurdjali, „Stale Industry” – in Pernik, the sugar plants in Gorna Oriahovitsa. This group contains also „Arsenal” – Kazanluk, the greatest entity in today's Bulgaria specializing in manufacture of machinery and equipment. In 2007 it employed almost 5000 workers. Good economic results have also shown some enterprises of the porcelan and ceramic industries located in Sevlievo (the North-Central Bulgaria).

As a whole, investments in modern service activities such as finance, stock trading, banking, retail, information technologies are concentrated mainly in Sofia and the remaining large cities. In the period of transition to market economy Sofia approved its leadership positions in foreign investments. Its share is more than 50 %. The capital city, both with its agglomeration area, has provided 30 % from national GDP. According to main indicators of socio-economic development Sofia is rather more similar to conditions of development of other capital city from Central and Eastern Europe than to the rest of Bulgarian cities and towns. A new impulse for modernisation of the capital took place in January 21st 1998 when the first stations of Sofia metropolitan was opened. In 2009 the first line connecting western quarters „Obelia” and “Liulin” with the south-eastern quarter of “Mladost” was completed. So far, the Sofia Metropolitien has had 19 kilometers length and 17 stations.

The group of largest cities that includes the cities of Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Ruse, Stara Zagora and Pleven was under the negative influence of the economic and demographic crisis during the 90's. Generally, from that group only Plovdiv and Varna have had positive dynamics of population from 1992 to present. But, thanks to remaining various central functions, this category of cities managed to catch up the losses from the beginning of social-economic transformation. Furthermore, these large cities have consolidated themselves as makroregional centres of development under the conditions of integration and membership in European union. For instance, opening of boundaries for free movement of people, commodities and the capital have been influenced by positive economic dynamics of Ruse. That city is located in the Danube river, only 64-cilometres to Romanian capital Bucharest. Apart from increasing

number of foreign tourists and international social contacts, there are a large number of common economic projects being realized with Romania. What is more, the shopping-tourism is also widely spread.

In post-socialist development, with some success, there are few medium-sized towns, like Blagoevgrad, Veliko Tarnovo and Svishtov. They have developed their old functions as the centres for higher education, the social and market services and the national transport nodes as well. This fact allowed these cities to attract and retain jobs of thousands of young people from all regions of Bulgaria. At that time, the respectively favourable demographic structure resulted in rapid development of various service activities in the university centres. Only in Blagoevgrad, the number of students equals nearly 20 thousand.

The main factor for the current disparities in the development of Bulgarian urban network is the territorial over-concentration of foreign investments in three largest cities. According to Strategy for promoting investments in the Republic of Bulgaria (2005, p.10), during the period 1992–2004 r. the overall value of foreign investments in the national economy is estimated on almost 10 mld US dollars. However, 77, 7 % of them were concentrated in Sofia-capital, Plovdiv, Varna and the Sofia districts. Apart from few exceptions, in new economic conditions the investments in medium and small towns are generally limited in some service economic activities, for instance, banking, little office-centres, petty trade, entities for foreign car repair, hotels and restaurants. The foreign investments in textile and clothing industry mostly of Italian and Greek origin are noted in all medium and many small towns. They are still helpful to limit female unemployment, but the earnings in those activities are very low, often close to minimum wage level, and many of these entities function in informal sector.

As we showed in the previous part, in 2009 almost 87 % from the urban network of Bulgaria is presented by small and very small towns below 30 thousand (*tab.2*). Among them are some centres which inherited the old urban functions. The biggest towns of this category, according to 2009, are following: Petrich (29,9 thousand) and Sandanski – (27,0 thousand) from the Blagoevgrad district, Velingrad (23,6 thousand) from the Pazardjik district, Karlovo (24,1 thousand) from the Plovdiv district, Nova Zagora (23,6 thousand) from the Stara Zagora district, Samokov (26,2 thousand) from the Sofia-district and Lom (24,3 thousand) from the Montana district. They have developed industry, tourism, the transport of regional or national importance, as well as the administrative functions. Under the market economy conditions dozens of small and very small towns managed to preserve one or more successful enterprises specialized on the subregional or even national scale. The earnings in those towns during the system changes and the employment level were more favorable in comparison to their overall level in the country. Among these centres we can distinguish the next ones: the centre of nuclear energetics Kozlodui (the Vratsa district); the centres of thermal energy Galabovo and Radnevo (the Stara Zagora district); chemical industries in Devnia (the Varna district);

Sevlievo (the Gabrovo district) - earthenware production plant, electronics, and others; Rudozem (the Smolian district) – a centre of production of perfumery and cosmetics and extraction of lead and zinc ores. But, it must be taken into account that mentioned examples are rather exceptions to the general situation dominated by the economic and demographic crisis. The phase of great construction boom had a great influence on some small resort towns as Bansko, Dobrinishte, Apriltsi, Chepelare, Nessebar, Sozopol, Obzor and others.

Because of gained different results in economic transition, the cities show different level of unemployment. Such conclusion can be made on the basis of data from the Government Employment Agency. Furthermore, most of them have the unemployment rate below the national one. However, unemployment in most cities in this category vary from 2 to 4 times over the level of the leading national social and economic centres. Taking into account data of July 2009, unemployment in Sofia was only 2%, 3,3% in Varna and 5,4% in Plovdiv. While, the unemployment ratio of medium-sized towns is the smallest in Dobrich (5,2%), Gabrovo (5,3%), Svishtov (5,4%) and Shumen (5,6%). Simultaneously, the highest values of the index for the district centres is registered in some peripheral cities, where a considerable number of poorly educated Gypsy or Turkish population live, as well as Montana (10,4%), Smolian (11%), Sliven (10,1%), Silistra (12 %), Targovishte (9,9%).

Socio-economic changes and micro-geographical structure of the Bulgarian cities

During the post-socialist transition, the mikrogeographical structure of the Bulgarian cities have been changing. This refers to their spatial-functional, symbolic and aesthetic aspects of development arising from the influence of market economy innovations, changes in the forms of ownership and introduction of democratic forms of local self-government. I. Dandolova (2002) investigated the changes in the urban residential architecture during the transition period. She made some general conclusions: there is a transition from collectivity to individuality, displacement of big blocks from the small cooperative housing and family houses of diverse architecture; there is the transition from the order to chaos. “The reforms into market economy in Bulgaria stimulated the citizens to be self-sufficient, more individual, and also involved tendency to individualization and spatial separation which is respective to both production and residential environment.”⁸

As Ilieva and Iliev have shown, the spatial changes include the expansion of the cities along the main roads nearby easy reach. The new residential districts, consisting of detached houses are built for wealthy people in the outskirts, although the process of suburbanization is slower. The relocation of housing construction, storehouses, the trade and service network, production activities, and

⁸ I. Dandolova, 2002. New signs and symbols in housing architecture of Bulgarian city at the 90s./ The city: symbols, images, identities. Lik, Sofia, s. 89.

other establishments in the suburbs both with urban settlements' territorial expansion will reduce the distance between them. The authors complete that "the present-day areas can be acknowledged as a product of two "rival" tendencies – an efficient land use and implementation of town-planning projects."⁹

The Bulgarian cities became the places of a great social polarization. It is clearly visible on the structure of urban environment, caused by post-socialist market changes. From one side, logically establishing of high-income residents groups in Bulgarian cities led to construction of new „neighborhoods of the riches". They are usually situated in surroundings of Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv and along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. There are the first closed settlements („gated communities"), completed to provide living comfort for wealthy citizens. There are dozens of similar settlements that were built during the transition period, located near Varna, Sunny Beach, Kableshkovo, Pomorie, Sveti Vlas and so fourth. On the other hand, the mentioned phenomenon is scarce in most medium-sized towns.

The emergence of dozens new private enterprises caused construction of new and advanced office spaces concentrated in large cities. In this respect without competition is still Sofia. There is a tendency to replacement of construction of business parks from the city centre to the peripheral parts of the capital where the cost of land is cheaper. In housing quarter of „Mladost" the biggest business park in South-Eastern Europe named „Business Park Sofia" was built. The first building in that place was completed in 2001. „Business Park Sofia" consists of 35 modern buildings with the business and commercial areas. Its total built-up area is estimated on 300 000 sq m. In the biggest Bulgarian business park more than 10 000 workers are being employed.¹⁰

At the same time, the antipode of modern and comfortable new closed settlements are Gypsy settlements in many Bulgarian cities and towns. The largest Gypsy quarters in Bulgaria are located in Sofia – „The Faculty" located in the western parts of the capital and it has about 45 thousand inhabitants, and „Stolipinovo" in Plovdiv (50 thousand inhabitants). The other largest ones all nearly composed of Gypsy population or showing its prevailing share are these: "Hristo Botev" i "Batalova vodenitsa" in Sofia, "Pobeda" („Victory") and "Akatsiite" in Burgas, "Sheker mahala" (Plovdiv), „Hope" (Sliven), „New Way" (Vidin), „East" (Kiustendil), „East" (Dimitrovgrad), „Kosharnik" (Montana), „Republika" (Lovech), „Izgrevev" (*Sunrise*) in Dobrich, „Stadiona" and „Mladenovo" (Lom) etc. As a whole, these Gypsy ghettos are more and more isolated from contemporary social, cultural and economic development. They are primarily constructed of illegal ramshackle buildings outside formal regulation plans, often without

⁹ Ilieva M., Iliev, I., 2010. Bulgarian urban settlements in the early 21st century. Bulletin of geography. Socio-Economic Series, N 13, p. 121.

¹⁰ www.businesspark-sofia.com

electricity and even sewerage facilities. They are centres of unemployment and non-educated labour force as well as other forms of social exclusion, segregation and auto-segregation. Moreover, poor hygiene conditions are the reason for the high proportion of sufferers from tuberculosis. Multiple problems of those settlements were aggravated during the transition period and their mitigation will require huge and long efforts from Bulgarian and European Union institutions so far.

Another important trend in the socio-economic and urban development is the degradation of the panel block houses, built more intensively in the 60's, 70's and 80's. First of all, former inhabitants of small towns and villages were settled down to these complexes due to manpower needed in construction and operation of new huge industrial plants. In the early 90's, similar estates were constructed in all city categories. Their common feature is a location away from the city-centre. They have underdeveloped the technical and social infrastructure, the large no developed areas between the separate buildings. The major part of their inhabitants are descends of former villagers who emigrated to the cities and towns in order to work in giant industrial enterprises. As a typical example of this type of quarters we can show the "Liulin" (120 thousand inhabitants) and „Mladost" (90 thousand) in Sofia, "Meden rudnik" - Burgas (80 thousand), "Storgozia" - Pleven (60 thousand), "Trakia"- Plovdiv (60 thousand), "Vladislav Varnechik" – Varna (46 thousand), "Dabnika" - Vratsa (25 thousand) etc.

Revitalization of these complexes and remediation of the high-rise panel blocks (which represent 1/3 of all housing stock in Bulgaria) is still backward in comparison with other post-socialist cities of East-Central Europe. The problems of these housing complexes result from ineffective government programs for remediation and because of low household budgets. The introduction of market mechanisms, the restitution and the development of private initiative have multiplied the prices per sq m. In Bulgarian cities the highest growth in housing estate prices was recorded in the period 2003-2008, due to the economic stabilization and growth, and a construction boom. Data for April 2008 (according to National Statistical Institute), showed that the highest housing prices are in Sofia (1186 euro) and Varna (1050 euro). In comparison, the highest prices of medium-sized towns were in Blagoevgrad (1194 leva or 597 euro per sq m) and Veliko Tarnovo (1174 leva or 583 euro per sq m) was nearly twice lower in comparison with. In some of the low developed and the peripheral district centres such as Kiustendil and Silistra, the average price per square meter of housing was below than 400 euro. This was the year when the process of housing estates in the country reached their highest values. Shrinkage of the market, the impact of financial crisis, the decline of the employment and the risk of taking credit led to a significant fall of the prices in the next two years (2008–2010). As a whole, the marketization of that sector after 1990 provided to increase the prices of private houses more than 140 times - from 6,5 leva (IV.1993) to 945 leva (IV.2010) per sq m.

The penetration of Western capital in the economic activities such as trade and tourism, and, to a lesser extent, industry, the internationalization of the economic relations are noticeable in the landscape of post-socialist cities and towns in Bulgaria. Powerful impetus to development of modern services in the private sector, for instance, banking, finance, telecommunications, retailing, undoubtedly contribute to improve the aesthetic level of many buildings and of the whole central urban areas. The new petrol stations, bank offices, business parks, logistics centres, hypermarkets, hotels, new factories were built. The recent ones were situated on the old industrial terrains or on completely new, previously undeveloped areas, within the built-up zones of the cities or on their immediate surroundings. At the beginning of 2011, the stores of some large foreign hypermarket chains as Kaufland, BILLA and Penny-Market (as well as Bulgarian “Technomarket”) have already operated in almost all large and middle-sized cities. Mainly in large cities and some of medium ones, where is a conducive economic environment, the stores of foreign trade chains such as METRO, Praktiker, T-Market, Plus, Carrefour and so fourth have also operated.

During several years (since 2005), the landscape of large cities in Bulgaria has been changing and modernizing through the introduction in their space of the malls, the modern successors of socialists “local universal stores”. They have introduced a new consumer culture in large cities and medium towns and diversified their architectural silhouette. Apart from commercial purposes, the malls have been performing important social functions as a source of reducing of unemployment. Apart from the capital and large cities, in medium towns, the first modern shopping centre of this type was opened in 2006 in Veliko Tarnovo. In the following years, similar projects were realized in Blagoevgrad, Yambol, Gabrovo, Silistra and Dobrich. In 2007-2008, the same project was planned in other medium-size cities, but due to financial crisis and reduction of incomes many investors cancelled their plans. This tendency has shown the low consumer demand and low standard of living in that above-mentioned size category in Bulgaria and, so far, the introduction of modern services was weaker than in the large cities.

Conclusion

As it was shown in the paper, there are a number of demographic, economic, environmental and spatial-functional changes in the post-socialist development of urban settlements in Bulgaria. After 20 years of social and economic adaptation of the Bulgarian cities and towns into democratic and market reforms, the changes in the urban network in the country may be shortly characterized by two notions: instability and polarization. As M. Ilieva and I. Iliev have noted, the socio-economic and demographic changes which took place in the period of transition did not disturb the urban settlements functions. The largest cities and middle-sized towns have preserved their polyfunctional

profile.¹¹ But, the basic contrast with the previous epoch is the considerable reduction of industry and increase of the service sector, both in the local GDP structure and in employment as well.

From one hand, as a whole, the medium and small towns in Bulgaria fell in a deep socio-economic crisis. The different social problems, especially those connected with unemployment and low incomes from work have been strained. Economic stagnation and low incomes of the population are still the main factors causing depopulation in Bulgarian cities and towns. Some of them, as Vratsa, Vidin, Silistra and Gabrovo, lost over than 20 % of their population between 1992–2009. However, this trend was also typical for small towns and villages.

From the other hand, the long period of social and economic changes and adjustment to newly conditions brought many new opportunities for development of the Bulgarian cities. Few of them, mainly the biggest, were able to use the market economy conditions as well as European integration policies and tools to ensure themselves the stable economic growth and an influence on the processes of urban development on a regional and local scale.

Валентин Михајлов

**САВРЕМЕНИ ТРЕНДОВИ У ДЕМОГРАФСКОМ И ДРУШТВЕНО-
ЕКОНОМСКОМ РАЗВОЈУ ГРАДОВА У
БУГАРСКОЈ – ГЕОГРАФСКИ ПРЕГЛЕД**

Закључак

Као што је приказано у раду, постоји низ демографских, економских, еколошких и просторно-функционалне промене у пост-социјалистичког развоја урбаних насеља у Бугарској. Након 20 година социјалних и економских прилагођавања бугарског градова демократским и тржишним реформама, промене у урбаним мрежама у земљи може бити укратко окарактерисани два појма: нестабилности и поларизације. Као М. Илиева и И. Илијев су указали на социо-економске и демографске промене које су се одиграле у периоду транзиције, а које нису реметиле функције градских насеља. Највећи и градови средње величине су очували свој полифункционалан профил. Али, основна разлика у односу на претходне епохе је значајно смањење индустрије и повећање у сектору услуга, како у локалним GDP структурама тако и при запошљавању.

Са једне стране, као целина, средњих и мали градови у Бугарској су пали у дубоку друштвено-економску кризу. Различити социјални проблеми, посебно они у вези са незапосленошћу и ниским приходима су истакнути. Економску стагнацију и ниске приходе становништва су и даље главни фактори који изазивају де-

¹¹ Ilieva M., Iliev, I., 2010. Bulgarian urban settlements in the early 21st century. Bulletin of geography. Socio-Economic Series, N 13, p.120–121.

популацију у бугарском градовима. Неки од њих, као Враца, Видин, Силистра и Габрово, изгубили су више од 20% становништва између 1992-2009. године. Међутим, тај тренд је такође типичан за мале градове и села.

Са друге стране, дуг период друштвене и економске промене и прилагођавање новим условима, условио је нове могућности за развој бугарских градова. Неколико њих, углавном највећих, могли су да користе услове тржишне економије, као и политике европских интеграција да би обезбедили стабилан привредни раст и утицај на процесе урбаног развоја на регионалном и локалном нивоу.