

# DEURBANIZATION AS POSSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Georgi Boykov, Ph.D.

Rilski Center for Natural and Social Sciences

Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

[gboykov77@yahoo.com](mailto:gboykov77@yahoo.com)

---

## Introduction

The overexpansion of the cities during the last two centuries, caused by rapid urbanization and industrialization, led to unprecedented increase in the economical and social development.

The Human Race went through a phase of abrupt transformation of the natural resources into human wealth, which turned into affluence for the general population (or at least for large part of it).

The intensive extraction and usage of fossil fuels and their derivatives as chemicals into the food production led to abundance and price drop, which on their turn allowed the possibility to sustain large population. Then the consumption turned from covering basic needs to chasing wishes.

Now that we are facing the truth behind the rapid social transformation, we can see the actual price we paid for it: depleted natural resources, water scarcity, erosion of arable land, shrinking flora and fauna over the land and in the seas, overburdened cities and declined urban areas, etc.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, The Human Race entered the Resource Scarcity Era, which means that the “Affluent Society” is something we cannot sustain further, as the current levels of consumerism and overcrowded cities could not be supported without continuous flow of resources.

But there is a solution.

The declined rural spaces are now far more attractive for those urban dwellers, who decide to split apart with the overconsumption (best described as a “rat race”), noise, traffic and other urban problems and began to reconsider the urban way of life in a search for a more balanced one, closer to the long forgotten rhythm of the Nature.

In the process of searching for a more balanced way of life, such urban dwellers decide to leave the urban space and to migrate to the rural areas.

Such process, known as Deurbanization, was witnessed throughout the history, but the contemporary version reveals new, specific aspects.

Those new rural dwellers are searching for “space”, “freedom”, to live closer to the nature, to spend more time with the family or friends, etc.

The new rural dwellers also change their understanding of the food and the diet (in some cases even one of the main reasons to migrate), as they are look for healthier food and lifestyle, which the supermarkets and the food chains in the urban spaces have difficulties to meet, as usually they are offering mostly industrial food.

The production of biologically produced food is far more labour intensive, with more care, without usage of chemicals, as during the times of the Traditional Societies, which in turn lowers the profits.

This is in total contradiction with the philosophy of the industrial agriculture, which cannot afford to change their entire production process in order to be able to biologically produce food, which is a very costly move, with the perspective of lower profits. This is why usually the easy way is just to “polish green”.

But the resource scarcity and the shift in the consumers demand are putting enormous pressure on that.

In their search for more balanced lifestyle, naturally, the new rural dwellers put great importance to the proximity to the earth and to what it gives us. Disappointed by the supply of the food industry and industrial agriculture offer to the market, the new rural dwellers are taking a step forward, although to some it may seem like a backward one, and decide to grow food to meet their needs. In some cases the food they produce exceeds their own needs and is offered for exchange or sometimes even for sale.

The process reveals how sustainable food chains could be build, as the process of Deurbanization offers interesting alternative, where consumers could establish direct connections with [a local] bio food producers or even to produce the food by themselves.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used is on desk research and in-depth interviews, carried out in Bulgaria. The questionnaire with more than 100 questions was designed to cover several aspects. More than 30 respondents took part.

## **Results**

All respondents in the In-Depth Interview cultivate plants, vegetables, trees, vines and some of them also grow animals (mostly small mammals or hens). Some even breed horses that are used for riding or as part of a business (riding schools, rural tourism, etc.). There are also cases of bee-keeping for the production of honey and the cultivation of various types of flowers and herbs.

Other interesting to mention thing is that the new rural dwellers are looking to preserve or revive traditional agricultural practices.

Readapting to the new environment, the understandings of this ex-urban dwellers expand in many ways is an attempt to merge with the local rural community, their understanding and traditions, but at the same time also adding new energy and ideas. Part of this process is also the search to reestablish old farming traditions and practices, combined with a new understanding in the food production, like the Permaculture. The outcome is a small scale production of food with a very high quality, enough to cover a household needs and also often a revival of traditional varieties, improved by new understanding in the food production, which is more biologically and nature-friendly oriented.

## **Conclusion**

We can assume that one of the important aspects of Deurbanization is precisely related to the change in Food Systems, as the new rural dwellers are changing drastically their patterns of food consumption and as a result they not only switch their diet to more biological foods, but also they tend to produce locally food for their own consumption or even to exchange or sell.

The impact of this change in patterns is difficult to be predicted, as further research is needed, but it seems that the process of Deurbanization offers the possibility to build up sustainable food chains.

**Contact Information:**

Author: Georgi Boykov, Ph.D.

Affiliation: Rilski Center for Natural and Social Sciences, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

E-mail: [gboykov77@yahoo.com](mailto:gboykov77@yahoo.com)