

# Models of rural shrinkage in East and West

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The paper delivers findings of a recently finished ESPON project on shrinking rural regions. The project was implemented by a consortium whose composition permitted a comparative study of the structural causes of rural shrinkage in various macro-regions of the European continent represented by Spain, Finland, Germany and a number of Eastern and South Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland). Two models of rural shrinkage were unfolding from the case study analyses. One of the models has been prevailing in the Southern and the Northern countries caused primarily by spatial factors and processes such as the complex phenomenon of peripherisation. The other model was identified in East Central European and South East European countries that transformed from state socialism three decades ago. In these countries causes of rural depopulation had been rooting in such historical cataclysms as establishment of the communist dictatorship in the 1950s, forced collectivisation during the 1960s, then – after some decades of relatively peaceful rural regeneration – a reversed cataclysm of political transformation during the 1990 with reprivatisation of collective property resulting in a deep structural crisis in rural areas and increased within country rural-urban migration flows. These domestic population flows were followed after the EU accession by labour migration and emigration to the West and South speeding up the process of population shrinkage significantly. What comes next in these rural contexts? Are there adequate policies at the national levels addressing the phenomenon of rural shrinkage? Mitigation or adaptation is the dominant policy response at the local levels? These are the questions the paper intends to reply.