

# ABSTRACT

This study examines accessibility to services in rural areas from the point of view of both permanent and part-time residents. The concept of a service often encompasses both services and goods. A key component is interaction between the service provider and the consumer. Accessibility entails experienced, social, cognitive and financial distance as well as physical distance. This study focuses on the perspectives of physical distance, transportation and spatiality in a variety of rural areas. Many changes in the rural environment, such as population decline and ageing, the increasing focus on services and reliance on cars, changes in the municipal structure and the evolving service offerings of stores as well as the increase in leisure time, affect the accessibility of services.

This study investigated the accessibility of services on a national level as a function of geographic distance and time on the road network using methods based on geographical information. Accessibility zones were drafted for the most important immediate services and service clusters of different sizes. In addition, the study assesses potential applications of location-based accessibility data in planning and development.

The featured case study involves second home owners of Kouvola residing permanently in another municipality. Using surveys and focus group interviews, the study examined the ratio of supply to demand for private services. Demand from part-time residents can help not only to maintain current services, but also to promote the creation of new services, which benefit also the permanent residents of the rural area. As second home owners spend increasing amounts of time in their secondary residences, possibly becoming full-time residents, the demand for services in the region increases. Currently, most second home owners travel by car and consider services to be fairly accessible.

However, location-based information indicates that the access of permanent residents to services has deteriorated in many areas. Sparsely populated areas in particular have seen considerable increases in distances to services. The population has concentrated close to municipal centres, but the accessibility of services in rural population centres has worsened slightly. Municipal centres and villages play a key role as service clusters and crossroads of everyday mobility. Removing services from such centres often lengthens necessary trips by dozens of kilometres. On average, the distance from a second home to a point of service is longer than from permanent places of residence, but second home owners may access services not only from

their second home, but also on their way to their secondary residence or closer to their permanent home.

Different rural areas require different emphases in promoting accessibility to services. In sparsely populated rural areas, the vitality of smaller municipal centres is emphasised, along with the condition of local roads and the availability of public transportation services. Rural heartland areas still typically feature several functioning village centres in addition to municipal centres, thus requiring determined public support to maintain adequate levels of services. Consistent attention must focus on maintaining and developing services in rural areas close to urban centres. In rural areas with large second home owner populations, the location and transportation of routes to holiday residences should be considered, along with the seasonal nature of the demand for services and sufficient levels of the services required to maintain the appeal of the area. Different solutions for transportation and services, such as multi-service locations, mobile services, carpooling and guaranteeing rides home, can promote the maintenance of services in all rural areas.

The demand for local services from part-time residents is likely to increase in future. As the large post-war generation ages, it will require an ever-increasing range of services available at their second homes also. Utilising the demand boosted by second home owners requires modernisation of the rural service environment and, consequently, openly available information on such services.

Location-based information on the service network and accessibility to services may, based on this study, serve in many different ways in evaluating and developing the service network, in classifying areas, in highlighting the significance of part-time residents and in anticipating future developments.

Cuts in the public service network require additional resources from either society or individual inhabitants to maintain access to services. In the field of private services, good accessibility is a competitive factor, and part of providing good service.

**Keywords:** rural areas, services, accessibility, distance, geographic information, central network, land use, second homes, surveys, Kouvola