

FEATURES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS LOCATED IN THE SOUTH-CENTRAL PLANNING REGION IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

This article examines the state of rural areas in the South Central region of Bulgaria. A spatial assessment of the territorial and socio-economic development of the South Central region has been made. Based on statistical assessment, geographical analysis and socio-economic characteristics, the trends in the development of rural areas in the South Central Planning Region are derived. The article assesses the demographic condition of the population and the general condition of the settlements. Based on the presented overview of the rural areas in the South Central region, we can conclude that they lag behind in the pace of socio-economic development compared to the urban areas in the region. A more targeted regional policy is needed, including through the impact of European Union Funds to address regional disparities in rural areas in the South Central Planning Region.

Key words: rural area, development, region, regional policy, local area, management, space

INTRODUCTION

The spatial development of the separate territories in the modern states requires special attention and analysis. On the territory of countries like Bulgaria there are many separate rural areas. These rural areas need economic prosperity as well as modern development. The spatial view of the territory brings to the fore the natural conditions and resources, which together with the population are the basis of the socio-economic development of these territories. In Bulgaria, one of the most developed economic regions is the South Central Planning Region, but it also has a large share of rural areas that are experiencing difficulties in their socio-economic development. To a large extent, the rural areas of the South Central region in Bulgaria cover flat areas such as the Upper Thracian Plain, but also mountainous areas such as the Rhodopes, Sredna Gora and the Southern Ridge of the Balkan Mountains. The combination of different types of nature and different problems make the topic of rural areas in the South Central region very relevant and important in general for the regional development and management of the Bulgarian territory. The combination of urban and rural areas emphasizes the need to

achieve balance and integration of regional policy. A number of program and strategic documents set out mechanisms aimed at improving the socio-economic development of rural areas. In practice, focusing on rural issues is an opportunity to promote integrated territorial governance at regional level and to develop relevant successful regional policies [1]. The socio-economic development of rural areas is a challenge for both the public sector and regional business. This is because local development presupposes the functioning of an effective regional economy, which combines the specifics and peculiarities of the territories of Bulgaria and reveals the opportunities for them. In this regard, we can assume that the rational use of natural resources and demographic potential are necessary conditions for the socio-economic development of rural areas in the South Central region. Our focus on rural areas will be based on the assessment and analysis of the natural resource potential and the characteristics of the population and settlements, as a factor for regional development. The focus of the exhibition will be on bringing out the strengths of rural areas [2]. This means that those sectoral and demographic characteristics that can bring out the strengths of rural areas and successfully

integrate them into the regional economy in the South Central Planning Region will be identified.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the research is related to solving the problems of considering processes in the rural areas of the South Central Planning Region in Bulgaria. The socio-economic structuring of the population and settlements, as well as the branch problems in the rural areas are presented. For this purpose, statistical methods, comparative analysis, network approach and descriptive analysis were used for quantitative research of rural areas [3]. The study of statistics is the most used method in socio-economic research, which is the most popular and is sometimes identified with territorial development and the regional economy. Among the most important methods used for this purpose are: reference to expert assessment, systematic analysis and demographic analysis to fully assess the condition of the population and settlements, as well as to derive socio-economic patterns in the rural areas of the planning region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Geographical location of rural areas in the South Central region

The south central region is located in the southern part of the country, its astronomical position is between: $42^{\circ}40' / 41^{\circ}14' N$ and $23^{\circ}35' / 26^{\circ} 25' E$. The northernmost point is the municipality of Karlovo - Troyan Pass 1,525 m above sea level. $42^{\circ}40' N$, the southernmost point is Veika Peak (Gyumordzhinski Snezhnik), the village of Gorno Kapinovo, Kirkovo Municipality, $41^{\circ}14' N$. The westernmost point is the village of Bozova municipality of Velingrad $23^{\circ}35' E$, the easternmost point of the rural areas in the South Central region is the municipality of Svilengrad, it is the place where the valley of the Tundzha River and the northern border of the Republic cross. Turkey - $26^{\circ}25' E$. From a physical-geographical point of view to the north the region covers the ridge central parts of Stara Planina, to the

south the Western and Eastern Rhodopes. To the west it borders the mountains Rila and Pirin, and to the east the border reaches the valley of the Tundzha River. The South Central region covers the territories of the districts of Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Smolyan, Kardzhali and Haskovo and 57 municipalities. The region covers the western half of the Upper Thracian Lowland, the southern part of the Central Stara Planina, part of Sredna Gora, the sub-Balkan fields and a large part of the Rhodopes. The area of the region is 22,365.1 km² or 20.1% of the country's territory. Based on different atmospheric air circulation, which determines the different climatic zones of the continent of Europe, the territory of Bulgaria is located between two large climatic zones: Subtropical and Temperate. The South Central region and the rural areas within it fall within the boundaries of three continental climatic subregions: Temperate, Transitional and Continental Mediterranean climatic subregions. The rivers that are the basis for the formation of this catchment area are: Maritsa (21,084 km²), Tundzha (7,884 km²) and Arda (5,201 km²), occupying 31% of the territory of Bulgaria.

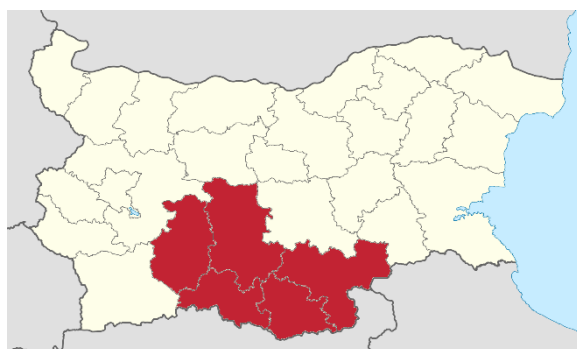


Fig.1. The map of South Central region, Bulgaria
Source: NSI, MRDPW.

Important for the height assessment of the planning region is the location of the settlements, the access to natural resources and especially the transport and infrastructural accessibility in spatial terms. There are different methodologies for selecting the indicators that should be applied in the economic assessment of the relief. Research in this direction shows that the use of a differentiated approach is necessary. Its application depends on the specifics of the

implemented implementation decisions. Usually the leading importance in the development of the territory in economic and economic terms is the vertical and horizontal division of the relief, the slopes of the slopes, the altitude [4]. From the point of view of the quantitative assessment of the predominant features of the relief on the territory of the South Central region, five main types of relief with regional significance can be distinguished: Lowland - Upper Thracian lowland; Plain-hilly, including the Karlovo valley, Sredna and Sarnena gora; Lowland

with the mountains of the Eastern Rhodopes and Sakar; Mid-mountain - Western Rhodopes and High-mountain - Troyan-Kalofer part of the Central Stara Planina and the high parts of the Western Rhodopes.

The altitude in the rural areas by districts of the South Central region of $0 \div 1,600$ m is indicated in tabular form. The study and analysis of the relief in vertical terms gives an idea of what economic activities can be developed in certain areas of rural areas related to altitude [5].

Table 1. Distribution of the territory by sq.km / percent and by meters above sea level in the Rural areas by districts of South-Central region

Region	Area in km ²		Measure	0-200	200-600	600-1,000	1,000-1,600	over 1,600
Rural areas in the South Central region	18,219,54	All	Sq. km.	4,235.68	9,738.63	3,318.21	4,203.89	868.58
			%	23.25%	53.45%	18.21%	23.07%	4.77%
		Urban regions	Sq. km	2,832.51	7,854.60	3,318.19	3,344.84	868.50
			%	15.55%	43.11%	18.21%	18.36%	4.77%
Rural areas of Kardzhali district	2,631,26	All	Sq.km	67.33	2,414.12	702.11	22.44	0.00
			%	2.10	75.30	21.90	0.70	0.00
		Urban regions	Sq.km	67.33	1,839.00	702.11	22.44	0.00
			%	2.56	69.89	26.68	0.85	0.00
Rural areas of Pazardzhik district	3,822,28	All	Sq.km	98.10	1,685.50	847.21	1,382.29	445.90
			%	2.20	37.80	19.00	31.00	10.00
		Urban regions	Sq.km	98.10	1,048.00	847.20	1,382.30	445.90
			%	2.57	27.42	22.16	36.16	11.67
Rural areas of Plovdiv district	5,204,63	All	Sq.km	1,642.30	2,514.21	859.97	836.08	119.44
			%	27.50	42.10	14.40	14.00	2.00
		Urban regions	Sq.km	1,546.48	1,842.80	860.00	836.10	119.40
			%	29.71	35.41	16.52	16.06	2.29
Rural areas of Smolyan district	2,333,37	All	Sq.km	3.19	102.14	820.34	1,963.08	303.24
			%	0.10	3.20	25.70	61.50	9.50
		Urban regions	Sq.km	3.20	102.10	820.30	1,104.00	303.20
			%	0.14	4.38	35.16	47.31	12.99
Rural areas of Haskovo district	4,228,00	All	Sq.km	2,424.77	3,022.66	88.58	0.00	0.00
			%	43.80	54.60	1.60	0.00	0.00
		Urban regions	Sq.km	1,117.40	3,022.70	88.58	0.00	0.00
			%	26.43	71.49	2.09	0.00	0.00

Source: Information from the NSI and author's calculation [11].

The consideration of the relief in vertical relation is connected with the economic, social, ecological and infrastructural development in economic relation of the whole region. Of the five districts of the South Central region with the largest territory is the relief with an altitude of 200 to 600 m. with the exception of Smolyan district, where over

80% of the territory falls in mountainous areas. The districts of Kardzhali and Haskovo fall vertically in the area of the plain-hilly relief, as the former has a minimal percentage of the relief in the mountain zone. For the district of Pazardzhik with the highest percentage are the territories of $600 \div 1,600$ m above sea level. Plovdiv district and the

adjacent rural areas to it for the most part fall in the range from 200 to 600 meters above sea level.

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Spatial location of settlements and assessment of the demographic situation

For the intermediate rural territories, the total number of rural municipalities should be between 15 ÷ 50% of the total number of the same in the region. The predominant rural areas must include more than 50% of the total number of rural municipalities in the region. The territories with municipalities with a population of over 30,000 are defined as urban areas. Table 2 shows the types of regions and population in the country and the region.

Table 2. Regions, territory, population and density for Bulgaria and the rural areas of the South Central region for 2018

Region	Territory		Population		Density
	Area (km ²)	%	Number of people (thousands)	%	People per km ²
Bulgaria	111,001		7,327,224		66,01
South central region	22,365	20.15%	1,479,373	20.19%	66.15
Rural areas in the South Central region	18,219.14	81.46%	700,640	47.36%	38.45
Intermediate rural areas	9,433.23	51.78%	363,660	51.90%	38.55
Predominant rural areas	8,785.91	48.22%	336,980	48.10%	38.35
Urban areas	4,325.88	19.34%	649,828	44.00%	151.00

Source: NSI and author's calculations [11].

Here is the ratio between the different types of regions in the South Central region for 2011. The intermediate rural areas in the region are 25 in number. Outside this typology remain 4 municipalities, defined as urban areas. The predominant rural areas are a total of 25. Outside the National Definition of Rural Areas, 3 municipalities remain defined as urban areas. The settlement structure gives an idea of the types of settlements, the environment in which they develop and the population that lives in them. This is the place where people carry out their socio-economic activities, determining their geodemographic behavior and culture. The indicators that are applied and used for the analysis of the settlement structure are the share and

dynamics of the urban / rural population, the number of districts, the cities, municipalities and villages [6]. The ratio between the number of urban / rural population determines the level of urbanization.

The settlements in the South Central region make up 24.61% of those in the country. All municipalities in the South Central region make up 21.60%, as the rural ones are 21.64%, the cities are 21.76% and the villages - 24.78% compared to the country.

Rural areas occupy over 80% of the territory of the region, settlements over 70% and the population is 47% of this region in 2011. The South Central region is no exception to the changes taking place at the national level.

Table 3. Presentation of the settlements in the South-Central planning region (including rural areas)

Regions	Area km ²	2004			2011			2018		
		Number of settlements	Towns	Villages	Number of settlements	Towns	Villages	Number of settlements	Towns	Villages
Bulgaria	111,001	5,333	246	5,087	5,302	257	5,045	5,268	257	5,011
South central region	22,365.1	1,511	54	1,448	1,306	54	1,252	1,302	54	1,248
Rural areas in the South Central region	18,441.7	974	45	929	975	46	929	972	46	926
Rural areas of Kardzhali district	2,634.3	352	4	348	353	4	349	352	4	348
Rural areas of Pazardzhik district	3,820.2	85	12	73	85	12	73	85	12	73
Rural areas of Plovdiv district	5,422.5	184	15	169	184	16	168	182	16	166
Rural areas of Smolyan district	2,338.9	156	7	149	156	7	149	156	7	149
Rural areas of Haskovo district	4,225.8	197	7	190	197	7	190	197	7	190

Source: NSI and author's calculations [11].

Table 4. Comparison of rural areas by population, area and population density in urban areas, 2018

Regions	Population	Share of the population (%)	Territory area (sq.m.)	Share of the territory (%)	Population density
Bulgaria	7,000,039	100%	110,371	100%	63.88
Northwest region	742,304	10.2%	19,047	17.2%	39.69
North Central region	784,168	11.2%	14,645	13.1%	54.2
Northeast region	929,035	13.3%	14,668	13.3%	63.76
Southeast region	1,032,079	14.7%	19,664	17.8%	52.87
Southwest region	2,102,205	30.0%	20,305	20.2%	63.55
South central region	1,410,248	20.1%	20,041	18.6%	105.2

Source: NSI [11].

The number of settlements decreased by 209 from the initial to the final period. The biggest decrease is in the villages in the region - in ten years they have decreased by 200. On the other hand, we can see the strong agglomeration potential, which combines rural and urban areas. The agglomeration processes are connected first of all with the work trips, but also with the trips related to training, service and in certain cases with the differentiation of the living and recreation environments [7]. Bad impact on the development of the South Central region for the period 2011/2018. has a decline in its population by nearly 87,562. or negative value

- 7.58% of the total. The main reasons for the decline of the population at the district level is the high mortality, low birth rate, migration to the capital and abroad of the population of childbearing age. The picture is similar in the rural areas of the South Central region in the period 2011/2018, when there is a decline in population by 8.87%. From 2018 to the previous study period (initial), the population decline was 51,416 people or 6.84%. The main reasons are high mortality, an aging population in rural municipalities, low birth rates and migration to large urban centers. The rural areas of Kardzhali district in the period also reported a decline in population by 7605

people or 8.47%. In recent years, the analysis shows that the rural areas of Kardzhali district have the smallest population decline compared to other areas. This is due to the relatively high birth rate and the minimal migration of the population to the large centers of the region. The rural areas of Pazardzhik district by 2018 report a decline in population by 18,614 people or 10.60%. As for the last 7 years of 2011. so far the population decline is 9%. The main reasons are high mortality and migration of the population of childbearing age to large centers. The rural areas of Plovdiv district also report a decline in population - 14,690 people or 4.15%. This region reports the lowest population decline in a ten-year period. The proximity of the large city center and the opportunity for realization of the young population in it, keeps the population in the rural municipalities located in the area. From 2011 to the previous study period (initial), the population decline is minus 3.40% or 9807 people. The worst situation is in the rural areas of Smolyan district in the period 2004/2018, where they report a decline in population by 11,439 people or 13.01%. The main reasons are high mortality and migration of the population of childbearing age to large centers. The situation is similar in the rural areas and in the district of Haskovo, where there is a decrease in the population of 13,217 people or by 12.35%. Migrations of the

population in the rural areas of the South Central region are caused by socio-economic reasons. The population is moving to territories that allow for a better social and economic way of life, ie. in the urban areas of large urban centers. The movement of the population in the rural areas of the South Central region is in the direction of village-town, village-village. In recent years, the process of suburbanization has intensified in large urban centers. The proximity of rural areas to cities forms labor migration within a working day, typical of the South Central region.

Challenges to the socio-economic development of rural areas

The localization of economic activities in the rural areas of the South Central region is developed on the basis of factors, different in type, but characteristic for a certain territory [8]. After the recovery of the Bulgarian economy in 2013, the rural areas in the South Central region began to develop at a satisfactory pace. It is evident from the table that the most developed are the rural areas in Plovdiv district, followed by those in Pazardzhik and Haskovo districts, and relatively slower development in those in Kardzhali and Smolyan districts. This trend is evident in the results of 2019 as the growth rate of GDP per capita is not as high as in 2013. This shows that rural development in the South Central region is relatively slow.

Table 5. GDP in rural areas of the South central planning region for 2013

	Agriculture	Industry	Services	BDS, BGN million	GDP, BGN million	GDP per capita, BGN
South Central region	749	4,063	6,081	10,894	12,618	8,756
Kardzhali	124	263	460	846	980	6,464
Pazardzhik	149	849	837	1,835	2,125	8,018
Plovdiv	244	2,211	3,477	5,932	6,871	10,187
Smolyan	84	361	408	853	988	8,760
Haskovo	148	380	899	1,428	1,654	6,976

Source: NSI [11].

Table 6. GDP in rural areas of the South central planning region for 2019

	Agriculture	Industry	Services	BDS, BGN million	GDP, BGN million	GDP per capita, BGN
South Central region	791	4,736	7,943	13,471	15,535	10,988
Kardzhali	145	374	598	1,117	1,288	8,472
Pazardzhik	162	801	1,088	2,051	2,365	9,213
Plovdiv	258	2,732	4,633	7,649	8,792	13,141
Smolyan	82	379	516	977	1,127	10,597
Haskovo	145	450	1,108	1,702	1,963	8,545

Source: NSI [11].

Given the slow socio-economic development of rural areas, they hope for targeted support, especially mechanisms to support the development of local business and improve the efficiency of the public sector. In this direction, it is necessary to segment various factors that will support rural development [9]. The grouping of the factors gives a more accurate idea of the economic activities that function and take place or are subject to development in the administrative-territorial unit.

Table 7. Share distribution of part of the economic sectors in the rural areas of the South Central region for 2011/2019

Share distribution of a part from economic sectors	Rural areas of the District												
	Kardzhali		Pazardzhik		Plovdiv		Smolyan		Haskovo		SCR		
	GVA Million	%	GVA Million	%	GVA Million	%	GVA Million	%	GVA Million	%	GVA Million	%	
2011	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3,498	2,59	77,896	57,66	41,194	30,49	5,044	3,73	7,465	5,53	135,097	100
	Mining industry	0,177	0,07	198,383	81,10	17,394	7,11	25,319	10,35	3,343	1,37	244,616	100
	Manufacturing industry	2,544	2,00	30,347	23,87	80,011	62,92	9,554	7,51	4,703	3,70	127,159	100
	Construction	2,900	4,62	6,567	10,46	9,022	14,37	35,878	57,13	8,431	13,43	62,798	100
	Trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	3,132	4,14	16,764	22,17	40,06	52,98	5,205	6,88	10,456	13,83	75,617	100
	Transport, warehouses and post offices	4,235	3,78	29,25	26,11	26,294	23,47	21,353	19,06	30,884	27,57	112,016	100
	Culture, sport and entertainment	0,484	0,28	6,396	3,75	19,322	11,32	17,074	10,01	127,371	74,64	170,647	100
2018	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0,702	0,64	70,948	64,25	28,83	26,11	1,930	1,75	8,012	7,25	110,42	100
	Mining industry	0,177	0,06	236,923	83,49	19,081	6,72	26,443	9,32	1,155	0,41	283,779	100
	Manufacturing industry	3,519	2,49	25,439	18,02	98,495	69,78	9,821	6,96	3,875	2,75	141,149	100
	Construction	2,721	4,46	13,635	22,34	8,548	14,01	7,513	12,31	28,604	46,88	61,021	100
	Trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	3,883	4,10	22,764	24,04	48,002	50,7	7,104	7,50	12,926	13,65	94,679	100
	Transport, warehouses and post offices	2,602	2,18	27,000	22,59	50,294	42,08	10,765	9,01	28,853	24,14	119,514	100
	Culture, sport and entertainment	1,720	0,82	4,279	2,05	15,791	7,57	25,192	12,07	161,739	77,49	208,721	100

Source: NSI [11].

The study and analysis of some of the economic sectors in rural areas by districts reveals the economic picture.

In rural areas, during the economic sector survey period, the analysis showed a decrease in GVA for agriculture, forestry and fisheries. A minimal reduction of GVA is also reported for the construction sector for the studied period.

The decline in GVA in the primary sector at the micro and macro level is due to a decrease in the volume of production, limiting the activity of traditional sub-sectors in the sector, lack of clustering in rural areas, production of identical agricultural products and lack of strategy [10].

The increase in the number of enterprises in the rural areas of the South Central region is due to the natural and climatic conditions and socio-economic activities aimed at stimulating this sector. The decrease in GVA for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is due to a reduction in the cost of production on domestic and foreign markets, analysis of the number of enterprises operating in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sector in rural areas. The region retains its specialization and is a leader in this field. A decrease in the number of enterprises is reported in the Mining and quarrying sector. GVA reports growth based on the increased cost of high-carbon and low-carbon minerals in the domestic and foreign markets. In the rural areas of the South Central region, despite the decline of enterprises in the Mining and quarrying sector, the region retains its specialization in this sector. In the Construction sector there is a decline in enterprises and GVA throughout the survey period in rural areas of the South Central region. Deteriorating socio-economic indicators at the micro and macro levels have a direct impact on the development and functioning of the sector. Rural areas do not specialize in this sector. Sector Trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles at the end of the study period there was a decline in enterprises. As reasons we can point out the migration to urban areas, the low socio-economic indicators of the population in these areas and others [12]. Rural areas retain the

specialization for this branch of the economy. In the other economic sectors there is an increase in the number of enterprises during the period of research and preservation of specialization by industry and growth of GVA.

In the Manufacturing industry, as a sub-branch of the Industry sector, for the country and the region a total increase of GVA for the studied period 2014-2019 was reported. For the rural areas of the South Central region, an increase of 9.91% is also reported. The growth of GVA at micro and macro level is due to the increased demand for finished products. In the Construction sector there is a growth of GVA for the country 13%, for the region - 20.66% and for the rural areas of the South Central region with a minimum decrease of 1.87%. The increased growth in the Construction sector in the country and the region is due to the intensified urbanization processes, development of new infrastructure sites, increased investment interest and the overall growth of GVA. For the rural areas of the South Central region, the minimal decline is due to the reduced interest of investors in rural areas, poor administration by the state and the migration of the population to large urban centers. In the sector Trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles for Bulgaria, the region and the rural areas of the South Central region for the same studied period growth is reported as follows: for the country 15.72%, for the region - 15.49% and for the rural areas of South Central Region - 20.13%. The overall increase in GVA is due to the increased purchasing power, the increased quality of services and their demand. In the Transport, warehousing and postal services sector, as a sub-sector of the Services sector, for the country and the region a total increase of GVA for 2014-2019 was reported. For the rural areas of the South Central region an increase of 6.27% is also reported [13]. The growth is due to the increased demand for transport services in the country and abroad, construction of warehouses and the development of courier services. In the Culture, Sports and Entertainment sector there is an increase in GVA for the country and the region, and for the rural areas of the South

Central region the growth is 18.24% for the period 2014-2019. The increased growth of GVA due to government policy aimed at improving cultural and sporting activities in rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that the South Central Planning Region has its centrifugation, but also differentiation between rural areas and urban areas. In this direction, efforts and implementation of regional policies are needed in order to improve the condition of rural areas and their spatial development. It is necessary for the Rural Development Programs, as strategic documents, to really support the rural regions at the level of planning regions by creating mechanisms for financing the rural development. In order to meet the identified territorial needs, rural development programs play a significant strategic role and are the backbone for achieving good results. For rural areas, it is necessary to direct investments to overcome structural problems in the food processing and forestry industries. In the South Central Planning Region, modernization and increase of production efficiency and productivity are needed to ensure added value to agricultural and forestry products and to increase the market opportunities of primary products. The aid must be targeted at sectors with potential for export and those important for the internal market, namely the sectors for processing and adding value of the following agricultural raw materials: milk, meat, fruit, vegetables, honey, cereals, oilseeds, technical, fodder and medicinal crops and grapes. The growth of innovative micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the modernization of tangible assets will improve the competitiveness. Priority should be given to investments for the creation and promotion of new products and diversification of the range of manufactured products.

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