

Manors as rural development drivers

This research analyzes the impact of manors on the population development of remote rural areas in Estonia after the post-COVID-19 era of expanding distance work and the second house boom.

Estonia has been a manor-country throughout history. Manors have been dominant rural economy drivers for centuries: employers and innovators. According to the observations, the well-kept manor complex possesses a considerably better demographic situation in the nearby area. The manors influence the place's spirit and identity: the inhabitants' pride and attachment to the place. Heritage sites and manors are often in the service of the tourism industry, but their impact on population development has yet to be studied. Hypothetically, good-looking and intensively used manors (as local business centers) surrounding villages are characterized by a considerably better demographic situation.

We will design and test a comparative analysis of manor and non-manor settlements using 2021 and previous censuses' village-level population data, the Estonian Land Board transactions database, and the manor's database. As the intensity of manor utilization depends considerably on their accessibility and location (and to reduce the workload), the intention is to focus on the remote areas where population density is less than 8 in/km² and/or the distance from the closest center is more than 50 km. Such areas make up 50% of Estonia's territory, with only about 10% of the population. Another criterion would be the maintenance and functionality of manors, which is why there is a need for the corresponding typology. Additionally, we intend to carry out selected case studies in the pre-defined manor-type villages, investigating:

- place attachment and identity,
- stories about the manors and places,
- local cultural and social capital.