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Evaluation of Sustainability of Bulgarian Agriculture and Its Subsectors

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ABSTRACT

In Bulgaria, like in most countries, there is practically no in-depth study on sustainability of agriculture and its subsectors. This paper tries to fill the gap and assess the sustainability of Bulgarian agriculture and its subsectors. First a holistic hierarchical framework for assessing integral, economic, social and ecological sustainability of Bulgarian agriculture is suggested including 17 principles, 35 criteria, and 46 indicators and reference values. After that, an assessment is made on the overall and aspects sustainability of major crop, livestock and mixed subsectors of Bulgarian agriculture. The assessment is based on first-hand information collected though in-depth interviews with the managers of "typical" farms in analyzed industries. The study has found out that there is a considerable differentiation in the level of integral and aspects sustainability in agriculture and individual sub-sectors in Bulgaria, with mixed livestock-breeding, mixed crop-growing, and perennial crops sub-sectors having the highest integral sustainability, while pigs, poultry and rabbits; vegetables, flowers and mushrooms, and mixed livestock-crops subsectors the lowest one. There are also substantial variations in the levels of economic, social and ecological sustainability of different agricultural sub-sectors and individual indicators with the highest and lowest values showing (critical) factors enhancing and deterring particular or overall sustainability of evaluated agro-industries. Results on the integral agrarian sustainability level of this study based on the micro sub-sector (farm) data are similar to the previous assessment based on the aggregate sectoral (statistical, etc.) data.

Keywords: *sub-sectors, agriculture, sustainability, economic, social, ecological, Bulgaria*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of assessment of level of agrarian sustainability and its economic, social and ecological aspects is among the most topical in developed and developing countries alike (Bachev, 2010, 2018; Bachev et. al., 2016, 2017; Bachev and Terziev, 2018, Bohlen and House, 2009; Candido et al., 2018; De Oliveira, 2018; FAO, 2013; Hayati et. al., 2010; Ikerd, 2015; Ivanov et al, 2009; Gliessman, 2016; Gemesi, 2007; Gitau et al., 2009; Jalilian, 2012; Irvin et. al., 2016; Lopez-Ridauira et. al. 2002; Ramírez-Carrillo et. al., 2018; Sauvenier et al., 2005; Terziev et al., 2018; Todorova and Treziyska, 2018; VanLoon et al. 2005; Zvyatkova and Sarov, 2018). Despite enormous progress in the theory and practice of this new evolving area, still there is no consensus on how to assess agrarian sustainability due to diverse understandings, approaches, methods, employed data, etc. In Bulgaria (like in most countries), comprehensive sustainability assessments are mostly on sectoral (Bachev et. al., 2017) or farm (Bachev, 2016, 2017; Bachev and Terziev, 2017) levels while there is practically no in-depth study on sustainability at subsector (industry) level. The goal of this paper is to assess the sustainability of different subsectors in Bulgaria.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to assess agrarian sustainability of agricultural subsectors in Bulgaria a hierarchical system is developed including 17 principles, 35 criteria, and 46 indicators and reference values. Principles are the highest hierarchical level associated with the "universal" functions of agricultural system and represent the state of sustainability in 3 main pillars/aspects of sustainability (economic, social, and ecological). Criteria represent a resultant state when the relevant principle is realized. Indicators are quantitative and qualitative variables of different types (behaviour, activity, input, effect, impact), which can be assessed allowing the measurement of compliance with particular criteria. Reference Values are the desirable levels for each indicator according to the

specific conditions of each subsector which assist the assessment giving guidance for achieving (maintaining, improving) sustainability. The approach for formulating and selecting principles, criteria and indicators for assessing sustainability level are presented in details in our previous publications (Bachev, 2016, 2017, 2018).

In Bulgaria, like in most countries, there are no official aggregate data for calculating most of the socio-economic and ecological sustainability indicators at sub-sector level. In order to assess the level of sustainability of major agricultural industries (sub-sectors) in-depth interviews with the managers of 80 commercial farms of different types and locations in 4 major administrative and geographical regions of Bulgaria (North-Central, South-Eastern, South-Central and South-Western) were held in 2017. "Typical" farms for different regions and industries were identified with the assistance producers' professional associations, National Agricultural Advisory Service, Executive Agency for Vine and Wine, processing, bio-certification and service organizations, and local government. Farmers of different types were surveyed -: different legal entities (natural persons, sole traders, cooperatives, companies); farms of different sizes (semi-market, small size for the sector, average size for the sector, large sizes for the sector; and farms in different production specialization (arable crops, vegetables, flowers and mushrooms, perennials, grazing livestock, pigs, poultry and rabbits, mixed crops and mixed livestock breeding). The survey includes many questions in 4 major areas: general characteristic of farms; primary information for calculating economic indicators for agrarian sustainability; primary information for calculating social indicators for agrarian sustainability; and primary information for calculating environmental indicators for agrarian sustainability.

Calculated quantitative and qualitative levels for each indicator are further transformed into a unit less index of sustainability. After than the integral index for a particular criterion, principle, and aspect of sustainability, and the integral sustainability index for each surveyed farm is calculated as arithmetic average applying equal weight for each indicator in a particular criterion, of each criterion in a particular principle, and each principle in every aspect of sustainability. The composite sustainability index of a particular sub-sector is an arithmetic average of the indices of relevant farms belonging to that industry. For assessing the level of sustainability of agricultural sub-sectors the following scales defined by the experts in the area are used: 0,85-1 - a high level of sustainability; 0,50-0,84 - a good level of sustainability; 0,25-0,49 - a satisfactory level of sustainability; 0,12-0,24 - an unsatisfactory level of sustainability; 0-0,11 - non-sustainable level.

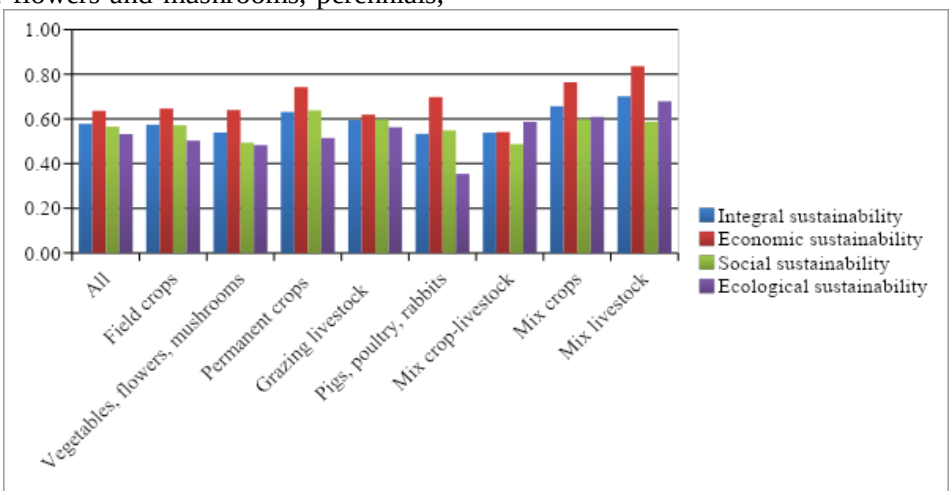


Figure1. *Sustainability level in different sub-sectors of agriculture*

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

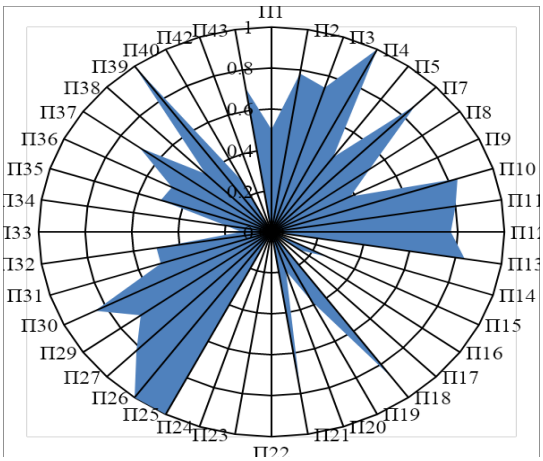
INTEGRAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN DIFFERENT SUB-SECTORS

The assessment has found out that with the highest integral sustainability is the mixed livestock-breeding (0,7) and mixed crop-growing (0,66) sub-sectors, followed by the perennial crops (0,63). (Figure1). Therefore, the mixed livestock-breeding and crop-growing farms and the farms with perennials contribute

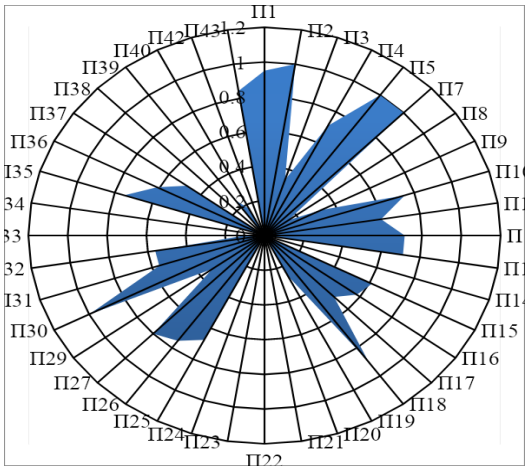
in highest degree for improving the integral sustainability of Bulgarian agriculture. From the other hand, the farms specialized in pigs, poultry and rabbits (0,53); vegetables, flowers and mushrooms (0,54) and mixed livestock-crops (0,54) have the lowest integral sustainability. This means that these subsectors decrease to the biggest extent the agrarian sustainability in the country. Similar to integral sustainability, the sub-sectors with the highest economic sustainability are: mixed livestock breeding (0,84), mixed crop growing (0,76) and perennial crops (0,74). The mixed crop-growing production has the highest ecological sustainability (0,61) and one of the best social sustainability (0,6). The perennial crops sector has high social sustainability (0, 64), but lower than the average and almost satisfying ecological sustainability (0, 51). The social sustainability of farms specialized in grazing livestock has comparatively high level of social sustainability (0,6). The social sustainability in mixed crop-livestock farms has satisfying level (0,49). The pigs, poultry and rabbits' farms have lowest and satisfying level (0,35), like the farms for vegetables, flowers and mushrooms (0,48). The field crops farms have good, but relatively low ecological sustainability (0,5), close to the satisfying level. The different agricultural sub-sectors are characterized by important variation of levels of indicators for agricultural sustainability.

The productions specialized in field crops have high economic sustainability for: labour productivity (1) and share of sold output in the total (0,87); high social sustainability for net farm income/ average income in the region (0,84), degree of compatibility to normative labour conditions (0,84), education level of the manager (0,88), share of unoccupied permanent work positions in the total number of employed (1) and share of unoccupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed (1); and high ecological sustainability for dynamics of used agricultural land in last 5 years (0,82), compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (0,85) and protection of natural biodiversity (1) (Figure 2).

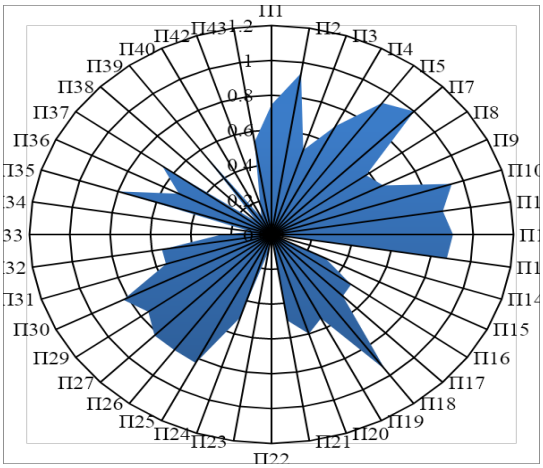
Field crops



Vegetables, flowers and mushrooms



Perennial crops



Mixed crop-growing

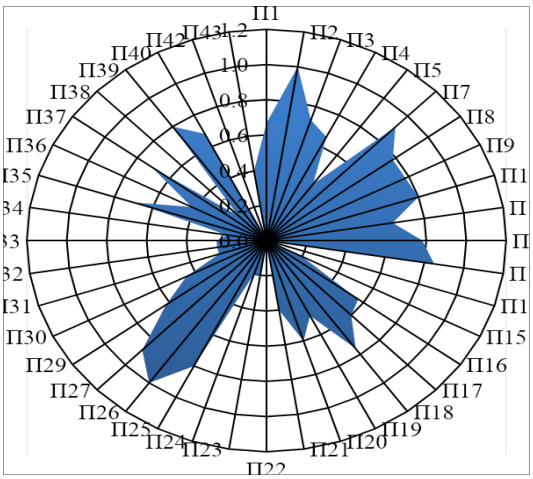


Figure2. *Sustainability indicators* in different crop-growing sub-sectors of agriculture*

**П1-Direct payments in the net income; П2-Share of own capital in the total one; П3-Profit/production costs; П4-Labour productivity; П5-Land productivity; П6-Livestock productivity; П7-Share of sold production in the total one; П8-Sales growth in the last three years; П9-Investments growth in last 5 years; П10-Net farmer's income/ average income in the region; П11-Payment of hired labour/ average income in the region; П12-Degree of satisfaction from farmer's activity; П13-Degree of compliance to normative labour conditions; П14-Presence of a family member ready to take the farm; П15-Number of family members working in the farm; П16-Age of manager; П17-Participation of training programs in the last 3 years; П18-Education level of manager; П19-Share of occupied with special agricultural education / qualification; П20-Degree of participation of women in the farm management;*

П21-Number of participation in professional organizations and initiatives; П22-Share of hired workers, members of trade unions; П23-Public positions occupied from the farmer, manager and owner; П24-Participation in local initiatives; П25-Share of non-occupied permanent work positions in the total number of employed; П26-Share of non-occupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed; П27-Change of UAA in last 5 years; П28-Change of livestock number in last 5 years; П29-Soil erosion; П30-Compliance of nitrate fertilization to norms; П31-Compliance of potassium fertilization to norms; П32-Compliance of phosphorus fertilization to norms; П33-Share of arable land in the total UAA; П34-Keeping the practices of landscape maintenance; П35-Degree of pollution of underground waters with nitrates;

П36-Level of fuel consumption; П37-Level of electricity consumption; П38-Presence of protected species on the farm territory; П39-Natural biodiversity protection; П40-Number of cultural species; П41-Respecting of animal welfare norms; П42-Implementation of principles for organic production; П43-Yield variation of main crops for 5 years; П44-Percentage of mortality of livestock for 5 years.

Source*: survey with managers of farms, 201 7 and author's calculations*

The sub-sector of field crops has satisfying economic sustainability for land productivity (0,45) and investments growth in last 5 years (0,38). The social sustainability of field crops productions has satisfying levels for number of family members working in the farm (0,27) and share of employed with special agricultural education/qualification (0,38); unsatisfying levels for manager's age (0,15) and degree of participation of women in the farm management (0,2). The field crops are socially unsustainable in relation to: presence of a family member ready to take the farm; participation in education programs in the last 3 years, share of hired workers, members in trade unions; public position of the farmer, manager or owner and participation in local initiatives. The ecological sustainability of field crops farms is satisfying for level of fuel consumption (0,48), presence of protected species on the farm territory (0,4) and number of cultural species (0,28); unsatisfying for share of arable land in the total agricultural land (0,13) and keeping of landscape maintenance practices (0,2); and unsustainable regarding the application of the principles for organic production.

Productions, specialized in vegetables, flowers and mushrooms have high levels of indicators for: economic – share of direct payments in the net income (0,95), share of own capital in the total (1), land productivity (1) and share of sold production in the total (1); social – education level of manager (0,9); and ecological – compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (1) (Figure 2). At the same time these productions have satisfying levels of sustainability regarding the economic indicators profit/ production costs (0,34) and investment growth in last 5 years (0,33); social: for the share of employed with special agricultural education/qualification (0,26); and ecological: soil erosion (0,33) and level of electricity consumption (0,49). The sub-sector of vegetables, flowers and mushrooms has unsatisfying levels of economic sustainability regarding the sale growth in last 3 years (0,15) and for ecological sustainability: natural biodiversity protection (0,25) and number of cultural species (0,17).

This production is unsustainable in relation to many social and ecological indicators: presence of a family member ready to take the farm, degree of participation of women in the farm management, number of participation in professional organizations and initiatives, share of hired workers, members of trade unions, public positions of the farmer, manager or owner, participation in local initiatives, share of arable land in the total agricultural land, keeping of practices for landscape maintenance, presence of protected species on the farm territory and implementation of principles for organic production.

The sub-sector of perennial crops has high economic sustainability regarding the share of own capital in the total (0,93), land productivity (0,93) and share of sold output in the total one (1) (Figure 2). The social sustainability of

perennial crops is also high for some indicators: net farm income/ average income in the region (0,94), payment of hired labour/ average income in the region (0,86), degree of satisfaction from farm activity (0,9), compliance degree of normative labour conditions (0,88), education level of manager (0,96), share of unoccupied permanent work positions in the total number of employed (0,83) and share of unoccupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed (0,82).

This sub-sector is with high ecological sustainability only for the dynamics of the used agricultural land in the last 5 years (0,82) and the compliance to norms of the nitrate fertilization (0,82). Satisfying is the social sustainability in relation to the number of family members, working in the farm (0,3) and manager's age (0,49), and socially unsustainable for: presence of a family member ready to take the farm, share of hired workers, members of trade unions and public position of the farmer, manager or owner.

Unsatisfying is the ecological sustainability for share of arable land in the total agricultural land (0,24), number of cultural species (0,11) and implementation of principles for organic production (0,18). They are ecologically unsustainable regarding the keeping of practices for landscape maintenance and presence of protected species on the farm territory.

The mixed crop-growing productions have high sustainability for the following economic indicators: share of own capital in the total (1) and share of sold production in the total (0,91); the social indicators – degree of compliance to normative labour conditions (0,85) and share of unoccupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed (1); and the ecological indicator – dynamics of UAA in last 5 years (0,88) (Figure 2). The mixed crop-growing productions have satisfying levels of sustainability for the economic indicator – land productivity (0,4); social indicators: share of employed with special agricultural education/ qualification (0,48) and number of participation in professional organizations and initiatives (0,4); and ecological indicators: compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (0,45), level of fuel consumption (0,42) and variations of yield from main crops for 5 years (0,4).

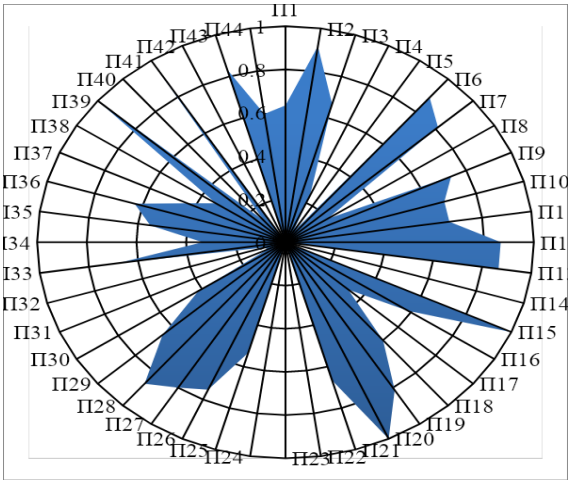
The level of sustainability is unsatisfying regarding some social and ecological indicators: number of family members working in the farm; public position of the farmer, manager or owner and participation in local initiatives (0,2 each); compliance to norms of the potassium fertilization , compliance to norms of the phosphorus fertilization and share of arable land in the total agricultural land (0,25 each), and keeping of practices for landscape maintenance and presence of protected species on the farm territory (0,2 each). This productions' type is socially and ecologically unsustainable for: presence of a family member ready to take the farm, share of hired workers, members in trade unions and implementation of organic production principles.

The sub-sectors with livestock productions also have big differences in the levels of indicators for agricultural sustainability. The herbivore livestock's productions have high economic sustainability for the share of own capital in the total (0,92), livestock productivity (0,89) and share of sold output in the total (0,81); high social sustainability for degree of satisfaction from farming activity (0,87), degree of compliance to normative labour conditions (0,87), number of family members working in the farm (1), share of employed with special agricultural education/ qualification (0,81) and degree of participation of women in the farm management (1); and high ecological sustainability for the dynamics of the number of raised animals in the last 5 years (0,87), natural biodiversity protection (1), meeting of norms for animal welfare (1) and variation of yield from main crops for 5 years (0,83) (Figure 3).

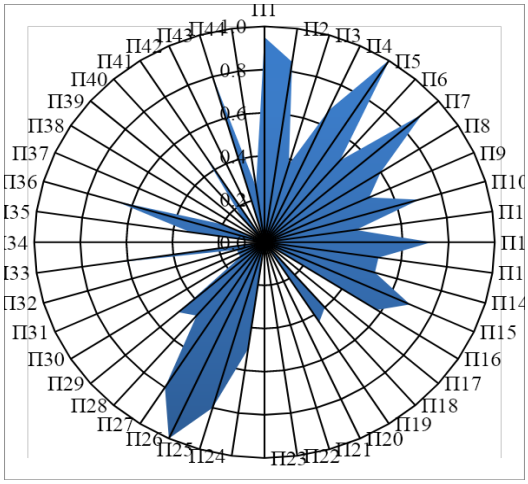
Specialized productions from herbivore livestock have satisfying social and ecological sustainability for: participation in education programs in the last 3 years (0,33), public position of the farmer, manager or owner (0,33), compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (0,42), keeping of practices for landscape maintenance (0,33), level of consumption of electricity (0,43) and presence of protected species on the farm territory (0,33). The sustainability is unsatisfying in relation to the following economic, social and ecological indicators: labour productivity (0,24), land productivity (0,06), sales growth in last 3 years (0,2), compliance to norms of potassium fertilization (0,08), compliance to norms of phosphorus fertilization (0,08), number of cultural species (0,13). The productions of grazing livestock are socially unsustainable for: presence of a family member ready to take the farm; share of hired workers, members of trade unions; participation in local initiatives and

ecologically unsustainable for the implementation of principles for organic production.

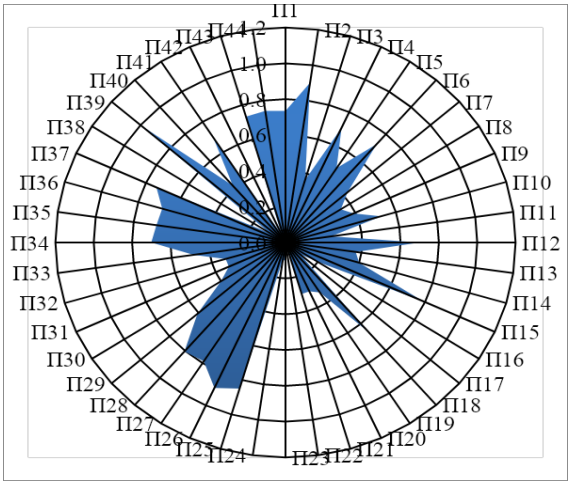
Grazing livestock



Pigs, poultry and rabbits



Crop-livestock (mixed)



Mixed livestock-breeding

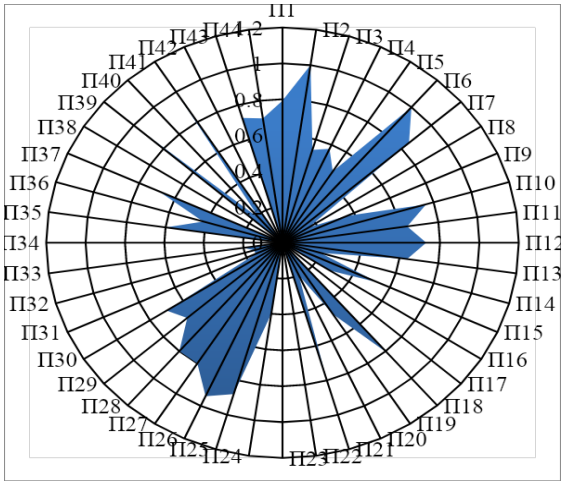


Figure3. *Sustainability indicators* in different livestock sub-sectors of agriculture*

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

The production specialized of pigs, poultry and rabbits has high economic sustainability regarding the share of direct payments in the net income (0,95), the share of own capital in the total (0,84), the land productivity (1) and the share of sold output in the total (0,91) (Figure 3). In social aspect this type of production is strongly sustainable for the share of unoccupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed (1), and from ecological aspect, for: variations of the yields of main crops for 5 years (0,81). Satisfying degree of sustainability have the following indicators: payment of hired labour/ average income in the region (0,4), education level of the manager (0,4) and share of employed with special agricultural education/qualification (0,44). There is a social unsustainability for: participation in education programs in last 3 years, degree of participation of women in the farm management, number of participation in professional organizations and initiatives, share of hired workers, members of trade unions and public position of farmer, manager or owner. From ecological aspect the pigs, poultry and rabbits' productions have satisfying level of sustainability for: dynamics of the number of raised livestock in last 5 years (0,45), degree of pollution of underground waters with nitrates (0,33), and mortality percentage of animals for 5 years (0,26). This sub-sector has unsatisfying ecological sustainability for: compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (0,13), compliance to norms of potassium fertilization (0,13), compliance to norms of phosphorus fertilization (0,13), level of consumption of electricity (0,2) and number of cultural species (0,15). These productions are unsustainable for: meeting of practices for landscape maintenance, presence of protected species on the farm territory, natural

biodiversity protection and implementation of principles for organic production.

The mixed crop-livestock productions are economically sustainable only regarding the share of the own capital in the total (0,9); highly sustainable from social aspect for the share of unoccupied permanent work positions in the total number of employed (0,85) and share of unoccupied seasonal work positions in the total number of employed (0,89); and ecologically highly sustainable for: dynamics of the number of raised livestock in las 5 years (0,81) and protection of natural biodiversity (1) (Figure 3).

The sustainability of crop-livestock holdings has satisfying levels of economic indicators for profit/ production costs (0,37), land productivity (0,49), share of sold production in the total (0,43), sales growth in last 3 years (0,34) and investments growth in last 5 years (0,39); social indicators: degree of compliance to normative labour conditions (0,37), presence of a family member ready to take the farm (0,4), share of employed with special agricultural education/qualification (0,33), degree of participation of women in the farm management (0,3), number of participation in professional organizations and initiatives (0,3); and ecological indicators for compliance to norms of nitrate fertilization (0,4), compliance to norms of potassium fertilization (0,33), compliance to norms of phosphorus fertilization (0,33), share of arable land in the total agricultural land (0,49) and number of cultural species (0,42). These productions have unsatisfying levels of sustainability for the ecological indicator presence of protected species on the farm territory (0,1) and for several social indicators: payment of hired labour/ average income in the region (0,24), manager's age (0,2), participation in education programs in last 3 years (0,1), public positions of farmer, manager or owner (0,1) and participation in local initiatives (0,1). These productions are socially unsustainable regarding the share of hired workers, members of trade unions and ecologically unsustainable for the implementation of principles of organic production.

The production of the mixed livestock is highly sustainable in relation to: share of own capital in the total (1), livestock productivity (1), share of sold output in the total (0,94), sales' growth in last 3 years (1) and investments growth in last 5 years (1) (Figure 3). This sub-sector is socially strongly sustainable for: net farm income/average income in the region (1), degree of satisfaction from farming activity (1), number of family members working in the farm (0,86), participation in education programs in last 3 years (1), number of participations in professional organizations and initiatives (1), and share of unoccupied seasonal working positions in the total number of employed (1). In ecological aspect the production sustainability is high for lot of indicators: dynamics of UAA in last 5 years (0,95), dynamics of the number of raised livestock in last 5 years (1), soils erosion (1), share of arable land in the total agricultural land (1), keeping of practices for landscape maintenance (1), degree of pollution of underground waters with nitrate (1), presence of protected species on the farm territory (1), natural biodiversity protection (1) and meeting the norms for animal welfare (1).

The mixed livestock productions have satisfying social sustainability regarding the share of employed with special agricultural education/ qualification (0,39); and unsatisfying ecological sustainability for level of fuel consumption (0,25) and number of cultural species (0,1). This type of productions are unsustainable for several social-economic and ecological indicators: land productivity, presence of a family member ready to take the farm, degree of participation of women in the farm management, share of hired workers, members of trade unions, public position of the farmer, manager or owner, participation in local initiatives, compliance to norms of the nitrate fertilization, compliance to norms of the potassium fertilization, compliance to norms of the phosphorus fertilization and implementation of principles for organic production.

Comparison of Assessment of Agrarian Sustainability With the Previous Studies in the Area

The multi-indicator assessment of agricultural sustainability in the surveyed 4 geographical regions of the country shows that the integral indicator of overall sustainability is 0,58, which expresses a good sustainability level of agriculture (Figure 1).

The biggest value has the indicator of economic sustainability (0,64), the social sustainability shows lower value (0,57) and the ecological sustainability is close to the unsatisfying value level (0,53). Therefore, the improvement of the last two indicators is critical for maintaining the good agricultural sustainability of the country.

According to the precious study based on aggregate sectoral (statistical, etc.) data using the same methodological approach (Bachev et al., 2017) the integral sustainability index of the Bulgarian agriculture is 0.58 which correspond to a Good sustainability. The same study has found out that the Economic sustainability of the Bulgarian agriculture is Good (index of sustainability 0.7), while the Social and the Environmental sustainability are also as Good but with a lower index (for both of them is 0.53) close to satisfactory level.

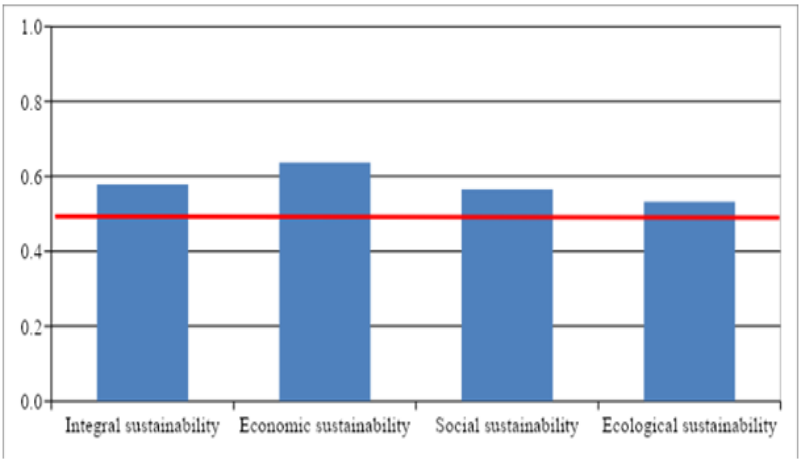


Figure4. *Integral, economic, social and ecological sustainability in analysed 4 administrative regions of Bulgaria*

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

Therefore, integral assessment results based on the "micro" subsectors (farm) data are similar with the results based on aggregated sectoral (statistical, etc.) data. It means that both approaches are reliable and could be simultaneously used for assessing agrarian sustainability at various levels – sector, subsector, region, and farm. The analysis of private indexes on basic principles, criteria and indicators of the sustainability gives also opportunity to identify components contributing for the levels of different aspects of agricultural sustainability in the country. The current assessment ascertained that the ecological sustainability is relatively low due to the fact that the indicators for the principles "land quality" (0,44), "biodiversity" (0,38) and "organic production" (0,11) are low (Figure 5). Thus, the improvement of these low levels of above-mentioned principles is a factor for maintenance and rising of ecological and integral sustainability in the sector. Also it becomes clear that despite the relatively high integral economic sustainability, the indicator of adaptability to economic environment is relatively low (0,54) and critical for maintaining the reached level. Analogically, for the social sustainability improvement would contribute mostly the increase of low levels of indicators for the principles "farming conservation" (0,52), "gender equality" (0,40) and "social capital" (0,17).

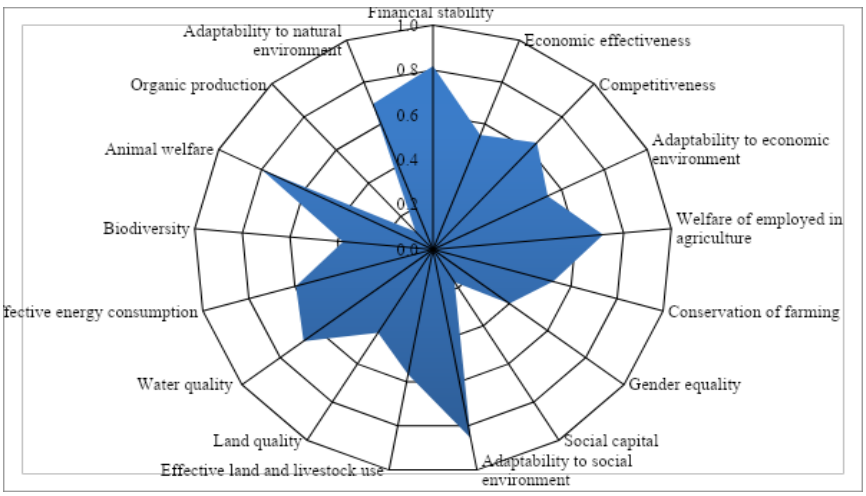


Figure5. *Sustainability index according the main sustainability principles in analysed in 4 administrative regions of Bulgaria*

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

The profound analysis according different criteria and indicators gives opportunity for detailed analysis of elements contributing for/or decrease the agricultural sustainability level. For example, the low levels of ecological sustainability are determined from the low criteria "conservation and improving of soil fertility" (0,46); "balanced land use structure maintenance" (0,35; "landscape elements conservation" (0,30); "natural biodiversity maintenance and improvement" (0,46); "cultural biodiversity maintenance and improvement" (0,29) and "organic production increase" (0,11) (Figure 6). The unsatisfying levels according these criteria for ecological sustainability are (pre)determined of low levels of indicators for eco-sustainability, as: insufficient conformity of norms for fertilization with potassium (0,38) and phosphorus (0,38), high share of arable land in the total agricultural land (0,33), low degree of compliance with practices for landscape conservation (0,3), insufficient protected species on farms' territory (0,18), limited number of cultural species in farms (0,29) and low degree of application of organic production principles (0,11) (Figure 7).

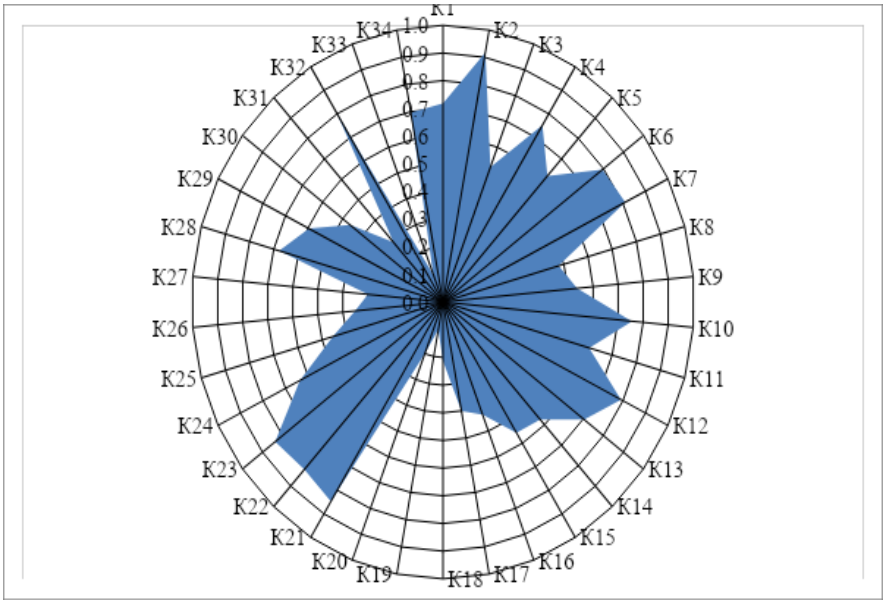


Figure6. *Sustainability index according the main criteria* in analysed 4 administrative regions in Bulgaria*

** K1-Decrease of dependence on subsidies; K2-Minimization of dependence on exterior capital; K3-Positive or high profitability; K4-Maximal or increasing labour productivity; K5-Maximal or increasing land productivity; K6-Maximal or increasing livestock productivity; K7-Conservation or increase of sold output share ; K8-Conservation or increase of sales; K9-High investment activity; K10-Incomes parity with other sectors; K11-Equitable distribution of income in agriculture; K12-Sufficient satisfaction of farmer activity; K13-Satisfying labour conditions; K14-Keeping the number of family farms; K15-Knowledge and skills increase; K16-Conservation and improvement of agricultural education; K17-Equality of relations man-woman; K18-Participation in professional organizations and initiatives;K19-Participation in public management;*

K20-Contribution for the development of region and communities; K21-Sufficient potential for reaction to activity cession and to demographic crisis; K22-Keeping or increase of UAA size; K23-Keeping or increase of livestock number; K24-Minimization of soil losses; K25-Keeping and improvement of soil fertility; K26-Keeping of balanced land-use structure; K27-Protection of landscape elements; K28-Keeping and improvement of water quality; K29-Minimization of conventional energy use; K30-Keeping and improvement of natural biodiversity; K31-Keeping and improvement of cultural biodiversity; K32-Implementation of principles of animal welfare; K33-Organic production increase; K34-Sufficient adaptability to climatic changes.

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

Social sustainability in agriculture is usually decreased almost by: lack of family member, ready to continue the farm work (for individual and family farms) (0,13), elderly age of managers and farm owners (0,41), insufficient participation in training programs in the last years (0,33), low share of employed with special agricultural education and qualification (0,44), insufficient participation of women in the farm management (0,4), low participation of farms in professional organizations and initiatives (0,43), lack of membership of hired workers in trade unions (0), weak participation in the public governance from the side of farmers, managers

and owners (0,1), and insufficient involvement of farms in local initiatives (0,2).Critical for the keeping and improvement of the sector's economic sustainability are the increase of production profitability (0,52) and the keeping and increase of sales (0,48). The low levels of indicators for sustainability show also the specialized areas for agricultural sustainability improvement through adequate change of farms strategies and/or of public policies in relation to the sustainable development of the sector, of different sub-sectors, ecosystems and farms types. On the other hand, the high levels of some indicators express the absolute and relative advantages of Bulgarian agriculture regarding the sustainable development. On the actual stage they are expressed in: high share of own capital in the total capital of farms (0,92), high share of sold production in the total output (0,81), lower share of non-occupied permanent (0,81) and seasonal (0,88) work places in the total number of employed, increase of UAA (0,82) and livestock number (0,84) in the last years and respect of norms for animal welfare (for the livestock breeding farms) (0,8).

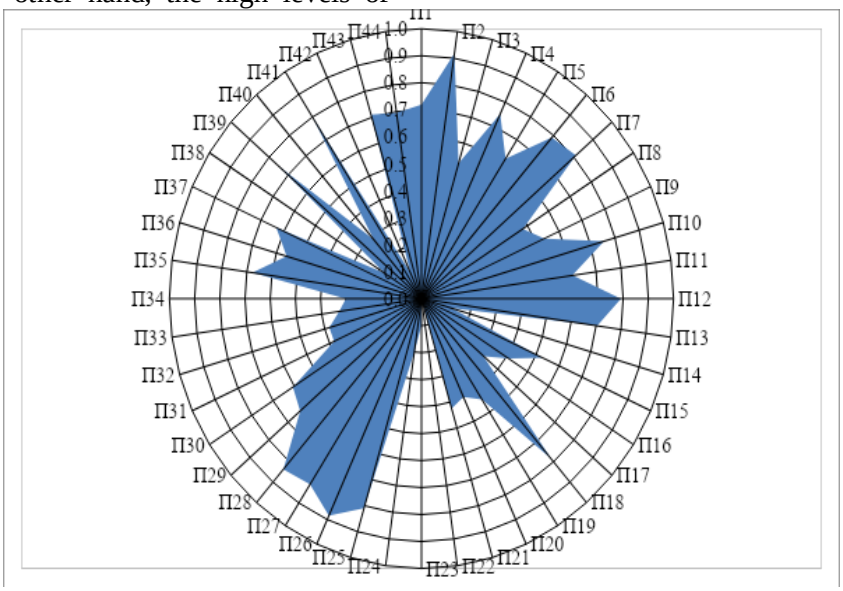


Figure7. *Indicators* for sustainability in analysed 4 administrative regions in Bulgaria*

Source: *survey with managers of farms, 2017 and author's calculations*

CONCLUSION

This first in kind assessment on agrarian sustainability at sub-sectoral level in Bulgaria let make some important conclusions about the state of their sustainability, and recommendations for improvement of managerial and assessment practices. Elaborated and experimented holistic framework gives a possibility to improve general and aspects sustainability assessment. That novel approach has to be further discussed, experimented, improved and adapted to the specific conditions and evolution of each sub-sector as well as needs of decision-makers at various.

There is a considerable differentiation in the level of integral and aspects sustainability in individual sub-sectors in Bulgaria. With the highest integral sustainability is the mixed livestock-breeding, mixed crop-growing, and perennial crops sub-sectors while pigs, poultry and rabbits; vegetables, flowers and mushrooms, and mixed livestock-crops subsectors have the lowest integral sustainability. There are also substantial variations in the levels of economic, social and ecological sustainability of different agricultural sub-sectors and individual indicators with the highest and lowest values show (critical) factors enhancing and deterring particular or overall sustainability of evaluated agro-industries.

Results on the integral agrarian sustainability level of this study based on the micro sub-sector (farm) data are similar to the previous assessment based on the aggregate sectoral (statistical, etc.) data. Having in mind the importance of holistic assessments of this kind for improving agrarian sustainability, farm management and agrarian policies, they are to be expended and their precision and representation increased.

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