



Characteristics and Processes in the Rural Settlements and Centres and Their Role in the Integration Processes: The Case Study of Carpathian Serbia

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Introduction

Carpathian Serbia includes the part of East Serbia, being in fact a Carpathian area south of the Djerdap Pass. This region has common borders with Romania and Bulgaria, in the North and East side, with the right valley watershed towards V. Morava River on the West, and the South border being formed by the mountains: Rozanj, Rtanj, Tupiznica, Stara planina (J. Markovic, 1980)¹.

The natural landscape of this region is very complex. The most striking character of relief is the Djerdap Pass with its artificial lake. The peculiarity of the climate is: relatively cold and long winters with quite a lot of snow. Population is predominantly Serbs. The Timoc Region is known to have the lowest population increase in Serbia. The economic potential of this region is much greater than its economic development. Mineral and energetic sources are especially significant (copper, brown coal). Cattle breeding constitutes a tradition for this area, while industry is predominantly located in the East part of the region. Tourism is estimated as field of great perspective.

In the Carpathian Serbia there are very complex and favourable natural conditions for economic development and the creation of larger population agglomerations. However, this region is at the periphery of Serbia and the conditions for its integration to the other parts of the Republic, including the fact that it is a transition area, are very unsuitable. On the other hand, this region has a high potential for interregional relationships with Romania and Bulgaria.

Condition and changes of rural settlements

This area with scattered settlements holds within ten municipalities 306 settlements with 309.085 inhabitants, according to the census from 2002 (4,1% in the total population in Serbia and 9,6% of Republic's territory). The network of settlements is two times more spread, whereas the population density is two times lower than in Serbia. The average settlement (1.010 inhabitants) is also smaller and counts less people than in Serbia (table 1).

Characteristic for the Carpathian Serbia are the settlements with less than 500 inhabitants (more than a half settlements), the bigger settlements with more than 2.000 inhabitants having a participation of only 6%. The process of the diminishing of the number of inhabitants after the SWW can be observed in almost 90% of the settlements. Depopulation is permanently increasing phenomenon especially between 1981 and 2002. This process has brought along a growth in the settlements under 500 inhabitants, almost doubling their number. On the contrary, the settlements with more than 2.000 inhabitants decreased with 23%. We observe a decrease in the number of the members within a family as well, which was reduced from 4,1 to 3,2, after SWW. The population growth is noticed only in few municipality centres.

¹ This paper includes all municipalities with centers which belong morphological defined area Carpathian Serbia.

Table 1. The main characteristics of settlements in Carpathian Serbia (RZS, 2003).

Municipalities	km ²	Number of settlements	Number of inhabitants 2002	Settlements per 100 km ²	Inhabitants per km ²	Average settlements
Golubac	368	24	9.913	6,52	27	413
Zagubica	760	18	14.823	2,37	20	824
Kucevo	721	26	18.808	3,61	26	723
Bor	856	14	55.817	1,64	65	3.987
Kladovo	630	23	23.613	3,65	37	1.027
Majdanpek	932	14	23.703	1,50	25	1.693
Negotin	1.089	39	43.418	3,58	40	1.113
Boljevac	827	20	15.849	2,42	19	792
Zajecar	1.069	42	65.969	3,93	62	1.571
Knjazevac	1.202	86	37.172	7,15	31	432
Total	8.454	306	309.085	3,62	35	1.010

Geo-morphologic characteristics of the territory, historic and economic conditions influenced the settlements type, the settlements density and the population density. The largest number of municipalities, without municipality centres had 25-50 inhabitants per km² after SWW, and less than 25 inhabitants per km² in 2002. As the morphologic characteristics were one of the most important factors for the formation of settlements, the greatest density of settlements can be found in the rivers valley in the East part of region. The active population dates according to the Census of 2002 are in comparison with the dates from the former periods. Changes in these activities after 1991 were negligible. Villages belong to the compact type of settlements. Their evolution was spontaneous and they have round or irregular form. Their compact houses are set down without order, since the streets are snaky. The villages on the more important roads lose their initial characteristics and become line settlements with big houses. The structure of the active population shows the greatest participation (near 50%) in the primary activities. Economic activities have a little bigger participation in the total of the population than service activities. The last thirty years of agricultural status change was very strong, more than 20% (table 2).

Table 2. Active structure and changes of active population in the municipalities of Carpathian Serbia 1961-1991.

Municipality	Active structure 1991 (%)			Changes in the active structure 1961-1991 (%)		
	p	s	tq	p	s	Tq
Golubac	64,48	19,02	16,49	-12,53	4,53	8,00
Zagubica	76,24	12,78	10,98	-10,08	5,56	4,52
Kucevo	60,04	21,47	18,49	-11,44	3,74	7,70
Bor	16,54	52,68	30,78	-24,90	8,45	16,44
Kladovo	38,57	30,42	31,02	-33,29	17,40	15,88
Majdanpek	29,93	50,67	19,40	-33,48	22,67	10,81
Negotin	63,04	13,46	23,51	-17,21	8,10	9,11
Boljevac	61,68	25,00	13,32	-11,79	4,83	6,96
Zajecar	34,74	33,12	32,14	-26,44	15,59	10,85
Knjazevac	40,15	39,41	20,44	-22,19	15,65	6,55
Average	48,54	29,80	21,66	-20,34	10,65	9,68

p – primary activities, s – secondary activities, tq – tertiary- fourth activities.

In all municipalities the changes had the same direction (growing the secondary and tertiary-fourth activities), but the intensity of the changes was different. Stronger agriculture changes took place in the municipalities with more developed or with bigger centres. Only a fifth part of the settlements have less than 50% inhabitants in the primary activities. Most of them have more than 25% of the population active in agriculture.

Centres

The Processes of industrialization and urbanization concentrated population and economic activities in centres having two roles: that of development (those centres producing

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the developing of the other settlements in their area of influence), and that of nucleus of growth, producing more expressed polarization in the settlements network of the area.

The progressive growth of the region, and its functional-physical structure, had a low level in the sixties. For the next thirty years these centres knew a considerable degree of transformation (table 3).

The concentration level in 1961 was of only 18,5% and it increased to 41,2% in 1991. The average municipality centre rose more than twice. The unbalanced and polarization sized structure (from a few thousand to 40 thousand inhabitants in the biggest towns Bor and Zajecar) is one of the characteristics of those centres (SZS, 1994). The Serbian Census of 2002, however, shows a depopulation in 70% of centres after 1991 (table 3).

Table 3. Population and functional processes in centres network.

Centres	Number of inhabitants			Active structure 1991 (%)			Changes in the active structure 1961-1991 (%)		
	1991	2002	1991-2002	p	s	tq	p	s	tq
Golubac	1.887	1.899	100,6	20,0	36,0	44,4	-27,3	8,2	19,0
Zagubica	3.037	2.826	93,1	48,6	19,2	32,1	-32,1	10,0	22,1
Kucevo	4.408	4.526	102,7	12,9	33,5	53,6	-23,6	-1,4	25,1
Bor	40.325	39.403	97,7	1,0	60,8	38,2	-1,2	-11,4	12,6
Kladovo	9.281	9.111	98,2	6,7	46,9	46,4	-28,6	23,2	5,4
Majdanp.	11.721	10.004	85,4	0,9	72,1	27,1	-2,7	-2,7	5,4
Negotin	16.789	17.762	105,8	5,3	33,0	61,6	-13,2	5,9	7,2
Boljevac	3.784	3.771	99,7	17,0	44,5	38,5	-19,2	25,7	-6,5
Zajecar	39.160	39.676	101,3	3,5	46,9	49,6	-9,4	8,7	0,7
Knjazev.	19.490	19.309	99,1	5,4	61,6	33,1	-15,8	25,6	-9,7
Sum/Ave-rage	149.882	148.287	98,9	12,1	45,5	43,4	-17,3	91,8	81,3

At the beginning of this period only two of these centres (towns or mining settlements) had a higher level of active structure development. The process of changing the dominant economic activity – agriculture - was of different intensities and experienced little changes in the centres, since these have already reached a higher level of more developed activities participation. The change direction was also different – some centres experienced growth in economic activities, and other – in service activities.

Six of the centres are towns (four towns in 1961)². The concentration and the structure of activity in the towns of this region reached the highest level of development. That level enabled the functionality of the regional towns, as well as indorsed the towns to become geographic poles of development in the network of settlements. That effect is manifested in many ways: the attraction of workers and the concentration of the population, the increase in the number of the daily commuters, the forming or strengthening of second economy poles in the neighbouring settlements, and functional and morphological changes in the surrounding settlements, etc.

This region has a considerable geo-potential for the formation of bigger cities, although its geography, traffic position and morphological characteristics caused the lower level of development in the network of centres and also the lower level of the development changes within the surrounding settlements, in comparison with the greater territory of Serbia. Towns are usually located at the mutual intersection of river valleys. In those localities there are fortifications from the Roman period (Savic O, 1977).

The towns in Carpathian Serbia belong to the second stage of town evolution (Negotin), or they find themselves in a transition to its third stage, just like the suburban settlements consisting in the following five towns: Bor, Zajecar, Knjazevac, Majdanpek, Kladovo. The basis of the settlement system includes a town of medium size and diversified structure of activity with considerable degree of concentration and presenting the characteristics of a development pole

² A settlement can be regarded as town if it has the following characteristics: more than 5.000 inhabitants, developed structure of activities, responsibility of centre in network of enclosing settlements, quicker development than other settlements in the vicinity (Veljkovic A, Jovanovic B. R, Tosic B., 1995).

(Veljkovic A, et al. 1995). Around the towns, there are settlements with expressed depopulation, which occurred as a result of the town polarization impact and with little changes in the structure of activity. In the lower development phase of the third stage the centre of the system is a medium-size town of distinctly non-agrarian type (less than 10% of the population in the agrarian sector) and of developed nucleus of activity with the characteristics of a pole of development and agglomeration. Much of the structure of activity has been conformably shaped. In the network of rural settlements around the town there are also several settlements of a mixed type.

Tendencies in the Development Process of Centres and Settlements

A spontaneous process of strong changes in the Carpathian Serbia will be manifested through different directions and changes in the variation of the number and structure of activity of the settlements inhabitants.

The main tendencies in the population changes in this region would be reflected through depopulation in most of the settlements and through migration to the municipality centres or to their neighbouring settlements. The process of agricultural activities abandonment will be in the condition of appeasing with the aspiration to a balanced or harmonized structure of economic and service activities. The most important and the most dynamic settlements will be the municipality centres, and their areas of influence will aspire to reaching an equilibrium condition with the administrative borders. The Spontaneous concentration of the population in the settlements placed along the roads would be a more intensive outline of the urbanization process.

The main concept of future development and organization of the settlements within municipalities would be the community of settlements. The settlements having the most attractive localities, a good potential of development, service facilities, holding the status of core areas, tradition and development tendencies, will result in becoming the poles of the areas of influence.

In keeping with this concept of future development of the settlements in this area, a system and a subsystem of different hierarchical levels should be formed. The greatest number of settlements in this region, except for the settlements in the municipalities from the West part of the region (Golubac, Kucevo, Zagubica), have the elements of a unique system of settlements with two main towns, Bor and Zajecar, functioning as a double centres (Ciklusevic D. 1998). The sub-regional centres, the towns Negotin and Knjazevac, are taking over a part of the functions of the regional centres.

Some of these centres were formed and developed due to mining industries (Bor and Majdanpek). Those cities produced copper and gold. During the 1960s and 1970s their municipalities had the highest level of national income in Serbia. Due to the fact that at the end of the last century the Serbian industry was ruined, these centres absorbed a lot of unemployed workers. Beside, the national income per individual is one of the lowest in Republic.

The European Integration Process in the Region

In modern Europe, trans-border cooperation represents one of the most effective instruments for connecting the countries to their wider surroundings. This (complex) form of regional differentiation and development is very advanced in the Western part of the continent³. As opposed to the western part of Europe, in its Eastern and South-Eastern part, the formation of trans-border regions is in most cases less influenced by internal initiatives, and rather by pressures and actions of the EU, which financially supports their formation and consolidation to a great extent. Not only that certain states in these parts of Europe extremely slowly join the regional opening process (usually exercised by forming the trans-border regions), but, furthermore, certain parts of their political structures, both at a local and national level, are

³ Before the last enlarging, trans-border regions in the EU occupied about 40% of its territory, and encompassed a quarter of the total population of this strong political-economical association. According to: Structural policies and European territory – Cooperation without frontiers, Office for publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2002, p. 6.

seriously disturbing this process. The reasons for such are many, but they can be mostly defined either as a resistance related to the opposition towards the integration processes on intra- and inter-regional level, or as an intention to obstruct the legal functioning of a state and the establishing of a civil society. However, all these states, if they completely and not only formally want to join the united Europe, which is becoming a conglomerate of regional units, have to follow entirely the rules and principles of the EU. Furthermore, they have to start with both the intraregional differentiation and the forming of real trans-border regions. These are the key elements for establishing a connection with the closest surroundings and a “softening” of the state borders in this part of Europe.

Serbia is considerably late, both in the process of regional differentiation and in the forming of new spatial-functional structures (as one of the agents of regionally balanced development), and in the establishment of complex (regional) relations with the surroundings. These are, among others, the prerequisites for intensifying the processes of integration into the new European political and economical space. Simultaneously, Serbia is late in the formation of trans-border forms of regional cooperation, especially in its Western and Southern parts. Solid forms of trans-border regions connecting Serbia to its surroundings are important also because of the fact that the state borders in this area are very poorly transparent. They represent a serious obstacle (inherited, but recent as well) to the development of complex relation between the particular units, and to the general stabilization (political, economic, social) of this area. Consequently, such “rigid” borders, especially those between Serbia and the newly established states (republics of former Yugoslavia) have “cut” the areas that were previously closely connected and inter-dependent in a functional sense. The new borders have created a new, artificial barrier, which did not only slow down, but even stopped the development of the newly formed border areas in these countries. That is one of the significant reasons for all states in this part of the European macro-unit to form the trans-border regions which would have an important function of revitalization of the already split connections. The regions would considerably enhance the total development, not only in their own areas, but in the wider surroundings as well.

In the border regions of Serbia, five euro-regions have been established, encompassing the territories of the neighbouring states. These associations have been established in the late 20th or early 21st century, and none of them have reached a significant level of cooperation yet.

One of them is “Danube for the 21st century”. This euro-region encompasses almost all the area of Eastern or Carpathian Serbia with centres in Zaječar; Kalafat (Romania) and a couple of municipalities of South-Western Romania; and the urban region of Vidin (Bulgaria). Eight of ten municipalities in this Carpathian region (Boljevac, Bor, Kladovo, Knjazevac, Majdanpek, Negotin, Sokobanja and Zajecar) are included in the euro-region Danube 21 (figure 1).



Figure 1. The Euro-region „Danube for the 21st century“⁴.

The main goal of this euro-region is to solve all problems in this area. Some activities are in connection with the economic development, as well as with the relationships established between small and middle size firms, and the development and protection of the environment. Besides, this region wants to control mutual trade, to prevent illegal economy, as well as to prevent the smuggling that exists in this part of Balkan Peninsula. This association forces connections between Vidin and Kalafat by building a bridge across the Danube from Bulgaria to Romania. Tardy bureaucracy on both sides of the Danube and centre-oriented government are still

⁴ This map is taken over from: Ilies A. (2004), *Romania Euroregiuni*. Editura Universitatii din Oradea, Oradea.

obstructing the process of integration of this region. Furthermore, there are some problems about the issuing of visa, especially in the near future. That is why border crossing is limited.

The second euro-region, which also includes part of this region is Eurobalkans (Nis, Sofia, Skoplje) consists in the territory of 25 municipalities in South-Eastern and Eastern Serbia – wider area than the urban region of Niš (Serbia and Montenegro); counties on the territory of western Bulgaria in the wider surroundings of Sofia; and a narrow belt around Skopje, in Macedonia. Six of ten municipalities in Carpathian Serbia (Bor, Kladovo, Majdanpek, Boljevac, Zajecar and Knjazevac) are included in Eurobalkans euro-region as well (figure 2).



Figure 2. Euro-region „Eurobalkans (Nis, Sofia, Skoplje)“.

Besides achieving integration, the main aim of the region is the construction of the highway Nis-Sofia and the railway Skoplje-Sofia. This project projected the building of new border crossings in between Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia. Besides, these regions want to contribute to the development of regional policy, small and middle size firms, the collaboration in culture and education, as well as the solving all economic problems in this area (Dimitrov M. et al 2003; Totev S.,

Boyadjieva M. 2003).

The main concept of future development of these euro-regions is based on local power and on small municipalities formed by settlement communities.

Those regions can considerably contribute not only to the stabilization and the more intensive development of this area, but also to its complete binding to the rest of the continent. In other words, they can show the willingness of the states from this part of the macro-unit to completely accept some of the basic principles of the EU (cooperation, connecting, transparency of borders etc.). Moreover, the important function of all trans-border regions for the area of Serbia would be to diffuse the effect of the so-called Schengen borders, which will shortly appear in the East (towards Romania) and South-East (Bulgaria). So, those two euro-regions should have the very important role to initiate further collaboration between the populations in the three countries. This is especially important for Serbia, because this part of the euro-region will soon be out of the European Union.

The formation, consolidation and development of trans-border regions would be significant for optimally valorising its geographic position, the most important potential of Serbia, which is presently poorly used in spite of being its comparative advantage. Regarding the fact that this area is crossed by two European multi-modal traffic corridors (VII and X, relatively well technologically equipped), which are the communication axes not only for Serbia, but for the whole South-Eastern Europe, these areas are a significant factor for the development of regional systems (including the trans-border ones). Lack of solid and stable regional structures in this area decreases – to a certain extent – the significance of these communication directions. However, they do represent the “spine” of Serbia’s future regional development and solid connecting, not only with the closest, but with the wider surroundings (South-Eastern Europe) as well. At the same time, they are an important element of the future complex integration with all the countries of the European Union.

Conclusion

The network of settlements and centres in Carpathian Serbia has developed predominantly spontaneously with no optimum usage of their geo-potentials. The settlements have a bordering position and a periphery status within the inhabited areas of Serbia. This region is distinguished by undeveloped background and weak developed connections with the near and far areas. The main configuration of the settlements’ network was formed in the nineteenth century, undergoing little changes up to the present. The centres’ network, formed

by traffic factors, trade and handicraft development, had intensively changed due to the existence of the industrial mining centres.

The Eastern area of this region, along Timoc and Danube rivers, has, in relation with the West mountain sector, better natural potentials for concentration of population and activities, just like the higher number of settlements and the population density are in the East bordering area. The advantages of its position along the Danube were unused by many of the settlements, therefore they are still less developed. The Bor and Majdanpek centres had a powerful development influenced by the economic factors (mining and metallurgy), even if these two towns are on the less suitable territory for settling. However, the situation was changed during the last years. However, those two municipalities have one of the lowest incomes in Serbia.

On average, the settlements and centres of this region are less developed, since their basis is agrarian settlements with intensive depopulation, lower level of economy, service equipment and public infrastructure. The defined centres have a high level of agricultural activities and an unsatisfied level of, concentration, industrialization and urbanization and moderate changes in the transformation of neighbouring settlements. The processes going on in the settlements and in the centres are predominantly uncontrolled, so in time many problems have accumulated. One of those is the two quite different directions in the settlements changes, the weaker growth of a few urban centres with increasing infrastructural problems, on the one hand, and the stagnation and decreasing of development, followed by depopulation, in a greater number of settlements, on the other hand. By using planned actions in developing settlements and centres, a part of these problems could be overcome. This border zone in Serbia has a very important role in the integration processes going on in South-Eastern Europe, and especially in the territory situated on the opposite side of the future European Union. In this region, two euro-regions were formed, aiming at developing collaboration between Serbia and Romania and Bulgaria, as well as, at solving all the problems arising in this part of the Balkans.

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