



The Characteristics of Rural Settlements in the Macroregions of Serbia

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Abstract

This work gives the basic demographic, functional, and morphological characteristics of the rural settlements in the macroregions of Serbia-Vojvodina, central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija. The work defines the basic problems of the rural area in Serbia and the new ways of solving them in order to develop rural settlements and to have more even regional development.

Introduction

The rural settlements in Serbia, with their characteristics in the system of regional development, should be understood as an important factor of development, which influences the whole organization and physical planning. In physical planning, the rural settlements are usually not observed individually, they are treated as an element of the system of settlements on the whole.

Regarding the rural area, The Republic of Serbia is clearly heterogeneous. Serbia has different categories of rural settlements, from the most developed to undeveloped with different demographic, economic and morphological characteristics under various conditions of cultural and ethnic development.

The process of industrialization in Serbia after the Second World War brought many important changes in rural areas. Those changes are: decrease in number of agrarian population-de-agrarization and urbanization. This process caused the decrease in number of rural settlements and new structure of the population. The changes in the macroregions, of Serbia-Vojvodina, central Serbia and Kosovo and

Metohija were uneven and caused by the differences in the geographical environment, economic and urban development.

Demographic characteristics of the rural settlements

Uneven physical development in Serbia during the last 50 years resulted in negative demographic movements of the rural population. On one side, the rural settlements in the mountains as well as those in the border area are characterized by migrations of the population towards bigger industrial centers. On the other side, the rural settlements by the traffic arteries, in the valleys, near the cities, are developing and growing spontaneously (Ivkovic B., Nikic Z.1995). All this resulted in deeper regional differences and more expressed process of polarization and concentration of the population and the activities. In Serbia there are 6153 settlements, 69% of which are the settlements in central Serbia, 24% in Kosovo and Metohija while Vojvodina has only 7% in the total number of settlements in Serbia. By the census in 1991, in the central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija there are over 1300 people per settlement while the settlement in Vojvodina are the biggest, with 4,322 people an average (RZS, 1996).

The process of urbanization brought the redistribution of the population and its decrease in the rural settlements in Serbia (table1).

Table 1 - Characteristics of the degree of ruralization in the macroregions of Serbia

Area	Degree of ruralization in % (participation of rural population in total population)			Number of settlements 1991	Number of rural settlements 1991	Number of rural population 1991	Index of changes of rural population 1991 - 1961
	1961	1991	1991-1961				
Serbia	70.18	49.25	20.93	6,153	5,959	4,815,802	89.90
Central Serbia	71.37	46.43	24.94	4,238	4,122	2,697,211	78.35
Vojvodina	61.68	44.31	17.37	466	414	892,295	77.99
Kosovo and Metohija	80.54	62.69	17.85	1,449	1,423	1,226,296	157.94

The facts about Kosovo and Metohija for 1991 were estimated and accepted by the official services of the Republic of Serbia

Participation of the rural population in the latest 30-year - long census period from 1961-1991 was decreased in all three macroregions and mostly in central Serbia. In the end of the observed period the rural population of Serbia, except for Kosovo and Metohija was less than a half on total population. In Vojvodina and central Serbia the absolute number of rural population also decreased, for about 78 index points. On the other hand the rural population in Kosovo and Metohija increased for about 158 index points. This area is in demographic explosion.

The facts about the age structure of the population show the differences in the demographic growth. Kosovo and Metohija have almost a half of a population under age of 19 (in central Serbia and Vojvodina they are only one fourth of the population) and only 7% of old population (in other two macroregions there is over 18% of population over age of 60, in 1991). The average number of members in a family in central Serbia and Vojvodina is in decrease and it is 3.4 and 2.9 in 1991. In Kosovo and Metohija this value is in constant increase and it is 6.8 (SZS, 1995).

One quarter of active population in Serbia is in agriculture (in central Serbia it is 27% and in Vojvodina it is 17%). The process of decrease in number of agrarian population is most intensive in Kosovo and Metohija and the rate of decrease is one of the highest in modern economic history (Veselinov D, 1987). Agricultural working class in Serbia is old in its structure. It is estimated that 75% of rural farms in Serbia do not have and will not have a new generation to work on them (Tošković D, 1995). Deagrification leads to depopulation, which causes some more regional differences (Djekić S, 1995). There is a discord between the share of agricultural and rural population on one side and nonagrarian and urban population, on the other side, which is in constant increase and which is the result of the fact that there is a great number of people who left agriculture but

still live in rural settlements (Cirić J, 1979; Kojić B, 1985; Simonović Đ, 1985).

Morphological and other characteristics of rural settlements

In Serbia there are rural settlements with tens of people and those with thousands of people. Small rural settlements are in the mountains. Middle-sized settlements occupy the greatest part of central Serbia and big rural settlements are in Vojvodina and in the valleys of the biggest rivers of central Serbia. The average population density is 94 per 1 km² in Vojvodina, 104 in central Serbia and 180 in Kosovo and Metohija. The settlements that occupy the biggest area are in Vojvodina, 46 km², central Serbia 13 km², and in Kosovo and Metohija only 7km² (RZS, 1996).

There are a few agricultural regions in Serbia. Plain region of Vojvodina is the most fertile region with 88% of land under cultivation in total agricultural area. The population of these settlements is in agricultural productions. Mountain region of central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija has characteristics of fruit growing and forming regions. High mountain region is a region of extensive cattle raising. Half of the agricultural area is the land under cultivation and 40% of area are meadows and pastures (Belić J, 1985, RZS, 1996).

The conditions of development of rural settlements in Serbia were not identical in all regions during the same period. Planned rural settlements developed during the first half of the 18th century in Vojvodina. In this region rural area was divided symmetrically and the same happened to rural settlements. Planned rural settlements in Vojvodina were the model for rural settlements with straight streets in the northwestern part of central Serbia. In the other parts of Serbia rural settlements developed spontaneously, elemental

and they started forming in the time of Nemanja's State in the 12th century (Ribar M, 1995).

On Serbian territory there are many types of rural settlements according to morphological structure (density of population, size, structure; Cvijić J, 1987). In the mountain region of central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija settlements are dispersed. There are also small settlements with houses that belong to one family (Kosovo and Metohija). In the east part of central Serbia there are compact settlements with houses close one another by the narrow winding streets. Settlements in Vojvodina are square with straight streets. There are many settlements that went into great expense because people started setting by traffic arteries in order to be close to towns. This process is especially characteristic for central Serbia. Today the most vital settlements in Serbia are near the cities, then the rural settlements with 1000 and more people, which lie by the important traffic arteries. The process of transformation of rural settlements close to towns was very intensive and the result was the growth of population and nonagricultural activities, urbanization and in higher phase -building of smaller economic objects (Tošić Branka, 1996)

The important differences of rural areas in macroregions of Serbia

Rural settlements in Vojvodina have the lowest degree of transformation. Rarely system of bigger settlements in this northern macroregion of Serbia has constant population without clear tendency to migration to towns. The strong process of decrease of rural population in the macroregion is explained by forming mixed households in which people do agricultural activities in rural settlements and nonagricultural in town. In favour of this intensive decrease of rural population is the census of active population according to place of living not the place of working. This area has the most symmetrical system of rural settlements and high concentration of population in them has positive influence on rational building. Among the rural settlements vertical hierarchy is not characteristic in consideration of their similar equipment. Rural settlements in Vojvodina with negative natural increase of population are the immigration area for people from other parts of Serbia and for other refugees from the territories of ex-Yugoslavia, under the influence of war. According to the census in 1994, in Vojvodina one person in a group of eight is a refugee (Tošić Branka, Djordjević Jasmina, 1997). These ethnically heterogeneous settlements belong to one of the most developed areas in Serbia. Intensive transformation of the rural settlements in central Serbia came as a result of closeness to towns, position of the traffic arteries

and morphology of the terrain. The greatest process of depopulation started in this area, especially in its eastern parts. Rural settlements of 200 people are deserted. Those settlements are over 600m high above sea level, but they are also in valleys (Boreli R, 1985). Decrease of ethnically homogeneous rural population is not only the result of redistribution of the population -moving to cities, suburbs, towns that lie by important traffic arteries, but it is also a result of low or negative natural increase of population. Small rural settlements are not suitable for building public facilities and in scattered rural settlements in the mountain region it is very expensive to form infrastructure. All the rural settlements in central Serbia have the problem of depopulation except those, which are close to cities, important traffic arteries, spas and tourist resorts.

Intensive growth of population in the rural settlements in Kosovo and Metohija is caused by the politics of demographic growth of Albanian population in ex-Yugoslavia (the natural increase of population is four times higher than in central Serbia and almost 9 times higher than in Vojvodina). Because of these conditions in this macroregion of Serbia the Serbs are not in majority (71% of the population in Kosovo and Metohija are the Albanians, 1981). All the changes in settlements, especially urban settlements, are caused by investments of the Republic of Serbia, that is to say, by investing money in the development of this least developed macroregion of Serbia. The process of growth is present even in the furthest mountain rural settlements, which are isolated, and people in them are in primitive economy. The population of the rural settlements in valleys develops services rather than production.

Planned actions with the aim to develop rural areas in macroregions of Serbia.

Previous action of rural development in Serbia was mostly spontaneous and if there were some planning documents they were not completely realized.

On the basis of some research of rural areas in territory of Serbia it is assumed that in future the process of deagrarianization will stop and there will be new ruralization with the growth of mixed (agrarian or not agrarian) activities in rural settlements. Small rural settlements will be deserted and about 400 rural settlements will stay as suburban settlements. Rural settlements of Kosovo and Metohija and big rural settlements in central Serbia will grow while the population of rural settlements in Vojvodina will stagnate. Population will concentrate in bigger settlements.

To solve the existing problems in rural areas of Serbia it is necessary to accomplish many

aims and some of them are defined in Spatial Plan of The Republic of Serbia (PPRS, 1996):

1) solving the demographic problems by the politics of expansive population in central Serbia and restrictive politics in Kosovo and Metohija;

2) realization of well-balanced proportion in urban development concentration as well as in dispersion in hierarchical network of rural settlements;

3) reducing the differences between cities and rural settlements by improving the life conditions in rural settlements (introducing equipment and infrastructure);

4) promoting and attaching importance to some rural settlements to centers;

5) reaching the higher level of employment of rural population (in cities or in other rural facilities in agriculture);

6) activating local natural resources with the protection of the terrain;

7) improving the conditions of agrarian production (tax laws, prices);

8) rational planning and using of rural area (by redistribution of land, planning of rural area).

All these measures will help to reduce the process of depopulation in rural settlements and at the same time reaching the more even regional development in all the areas of The Republic of Serbia.

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