

**PERSPECTIVES OF RURAL AREAS IN SERBIA**

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**Abstract**

There are one million of unemployed persons in Serbia nowadays. At the same time, every fourth village, of 4,600 villages or 1,200 of them in Serbia is on the way to disappear. One and a half decade from now, only monuments are to stay, as a testimony of their recent existence. And while people are without jobs and villages are disappearing, opportunities for reducing negative trends in Serbian villages and development in rural areas are not exploited. More than half workers, who lost their jobs, could be employed in rural areas in Serbia. And, not only the workers, who lost their jobs due to structural unsuitableness of production, years of sanctions and transition crisis, but the workers who lost their jobs in companies in which they worked before NATO bombardment. All these results lie in the fact that workers are still with one foot in the peasant footwear *Opanak* and the other in a modern shoe. However, the return to rural areas of the country doesn't imply returning to hoes and tractors, but employing workers for agricultural and similar jobs in: forestry, water management, service activities, handcrafting, household industry, infrastructural, small and medium enterprises (there are 220,000 of SMEs, and the aim is 400,000), not harming ecological counterbalance.

**Keywords:** village, soil, deagrarianization, lack of perspectives

**The fastest deagrarianization in the world**

Yugoslavia had the fastest deagrarianization in the world. For the last 50 years of the XX century eight million people have moved from rural areas to cities. The process like this lasted near 150 years in the world. The exodus was continued in the last decade of the XX century when the war broke out and persuaded near 400,000 from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and Metohia to move to Serbia. Upon the WWII there had happened huge changes in the rural areas. These changes are an integrated part of the universal global process of modernization of a society, its industrialization and urbanization. These changes also implied the ruling ideological paradigm of the then system being erected on that paradigm on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

Today Serbia tries to find a new identity, a new paradigm of a social development, and this is the reason why we should not forget the rural areas and agriculture. As many times in history, even at the time being, the village and agriculture were two main pillars providing security and survival. Whenever it is difficult in Serbia people return to rural areas. The authorities consider that villages and recruiting people to do business there will get Serbia out of the crisis. However, it requires radically new relations of a society towards it, because there is nothing to do in towns, while in rural areas there is nobody to do that job!

Instead of being taken as the producers of cheap food, the agriculture and rural areas should be seen as an opportunity for the creation of demographic, natural, economic and socio-economic potentials. The main feature of a village today is a negative demographic trend. The birth rate is rapidly falling down. Therefore, this picture is the result of depopulation and social devastation of a numerous of areas in Serbia. The huge changes have appeared in the economic life of a Serbian village, which are not sufficiently examined and explained

although they have big social and economic consequences. In XX century a household in rural areas was defined by an ideological category of a maximum, which turned out to be an irrational issue. There is no such maximum today, but there is a few people having their big households going up to several thousands of hectares. An average field in Serbia amounts to three hectare and it is an additional income to the people living in the rural areas. In XX century the industrialization and urbanization produced 'civilization revolution'. It changed the picture of the world with the people living in rural areas, their values and morality, culture and life aspirations.

### **Traditional way of living**

Up to the WWII Yugoslavia was an agrarian and traditional country. Over 80 percent of its population lived in rural areas. Their entire world was focused on their land, household and family. After the WWII, under the pressure of the global processes there was created a new vision of a society, there was industrial revolution bringing changes. The industrialized households increased the goods, became market-oriented, and changed its opinion on the future of agribusiness. They have far more capital, knowledge and strength in comparison to traditional households. The industrialization reduced manual job, then the number of uneducated people and the employed with the combines had the features of industrial workers. It resulted in the increase of the number of inhabitants in urban areas from 21 to 50 percent for the last half of a century!

The latest data reveal that the Republic of Serbia currently has 5,113,000 hectares of agricultural areas or 0.68 hectare per capita. Out of that 4,252,000 hectare is arable land or 0.57 hectare per capita. According to the census from 2012 the agricultural households currently cultivate 3,355,859 hectares. In Serbia there are 908,990 beef, 3.4 million pigs, 1.73 million sheep, 235,576 goats, 26.6 million poultry and there are 673,651 associations keeping bees. When it comes to the mechanization there are 408,734 tractors and near 25,000 combines. The mechanization in Serbia is near 25 years old. Up to the transition, near 85 percent of the property was privately-owned, whereas all areas in Serbia are privatized (it is taken that around 400,000 hectares are state-owned). According to the census of the agriculture in 2012 Serbia totally has 631,122 agricultural households. Out of that 628,555 are agricultural and 2,567 (or 0.42 percent) are the privately-owned households, while two million people in Serbia are dealing with food production.

### **An agrarian country**

Today Serbia is considered to be a poor agrarian country. The agriculture with following activities makes up near 40 percent of the GDP. It could be proved by data saying that one man produces food enough for 15 people, while in Germany even 152 persons, in France 77, Austria 56, Slovenia 25, whereas the average in the EU is between 50 and 80 inhabitants. The production of food in Serbia is far below the food production in the EU. In Serbia annual consumption of pork meat amounts to 15.4 kilograms (in the EU this figure is 32 kilograms). The consumption of beef in Serbia is 4.4 kilograms, in the EU 15 kilograms. In Serbia annual consumption of milk per capita is 56 liters, while in the EU it is 100 liters. The greatest difference is in the butter, the consumption in Serbia is 200 grams, and in the EU it is 4-5 kilograms! The share of food expenditure in an individual consumption in Serbia amounts even to 42.9 percent, which puts Serbia among the worst in the EU. It is the picture of poverty in general.

A family living in a village in Serbia is a kind of a social ruin, which its today's charm owns to the old social architecture. In the post war period the size of an agrarian family was shrunken, but it is still greater than a family living in a town. A family living in a rural area

today has two old persons and children. Lately, the number of members within a family has changed. The grown-up children separate from their parents and make their own families. The older people love where they are, while their children long for modernization. Thus the civilization has entered a village. The share of agrarian people in the total population of Yugoslavia has reduced from 73 percent in 1948 to 19 percent in 1981. On the other hand, the USA and Switzerland needed 90 years for this, France near 100 years, Japan 73, and Denmark 130 years. The data show that in Serbia the number of agrarian population amounts to 9.4 percent. Out of this number even 50 percent are people over 60 years, while only 11.5 percent are the young under the age of 20 (less than 62,000).

The economic-social institution 'rural development' is a relatively new developing theory. It is mostly connected with the countries of the so-called 'third world', at the time of big problems in relation to food-poverty-population. It brings us to a conclusion that the beginnings of rural development are connected with agribusiness. Whenever someone mentions rural development it is known that poor areas are in questions. It is the reason why an integral rural development as the youngest branch of the developing theory is treated as an engine of the economic and social progress. To find a more efficient solution to numerous problems appearing in these regions, it is needed the adequate proportion of three things: knowledge, technical and natural resources and capital.

#### **Returning to a village does not mean becoming a farmer**

Everything that was happening in this territory left big consequences on the Serbian village too. A Serbian village depicts a gloomy picture. For example, in Serbia there are 4,600 villages, and in a decade every fourth village or 1,200 of them will disappear from the map. The 86 percent of villages recorded the reduction of the number of inhabitants, and only 12 percent of them recorded a growth. In addition, in 986 villages have less than 100 people. In Serbia 2,000 villages do not have the post office, the road - as the connection with the world - is missing at the 500 villages, and some 400 of them do not have any store. In Serbia today there are over 200 villages without any person younger than 20 years, and more than a half of population lives in rural areas. In addition to this, in 230 villages there are no elementary schools, and in 2,760 of them there do not exist kindergarten, which indicates the greatest number of population living in villages throughout Serbia is missing a lot. Describing a Serbian village today, we should point out that two thirds of them do not have veterinary station although the agriculture is the main activity.

In Serbia around 40,000 people die more than they have been born every year. Serbia is in danger to become an agrarian country without villages and people living and working there. A Serbian village is specific for poverty of old people living there. These old people will die and villages in Serbia will remain empty. In Serbian villages the only lots getting enlarged are unfortunately cemeteries. Throughout Serbia a total of 40,000 houses are empty, and on 145,000 of them is written temporary empty. One of the main structural problems of Serbian society is the fast reduction of people living in rural areas (depopulation of rural areas) which exceeds the pace of decrease of agricultural population (deagrarianization). In 60 percent of rural areas has been reduced by moving and going for a better life.

Therefore, hard living conditions, the distance from urban areas, bad road network and low income are the main reasons for the reduction of the number of people living in rural areas. The rural areas in Serbia are neglected. The villages in Serbia do not serve for the food production only, but their inhabitants have to live a decent life. Therefore, a village needs to have an ambulance, a hairdresser, a pharmacy, a mechanic shop, a store and a cinema. Stagnation and demographic devastation of villages in Serbia could be stopped by the development policy of rural areas. Since the most of the people living in villages is dealing with agriculture (over 60 percent), the depopulation manifests itself as devastation of agriculture and all rural areas being too far from the towns and without industrial plants,

communal and social infrastructure and development perspectives. The population policy should be founded on relevant economic, agrarian, regional, developing and cultural policy, which is different from the existing one. In that sense, it is of great importance to improve unfavourable position of agriculture in relation to industry, to subject to decentralized model of industrialization and urbanization, to invest more in transport and communal infrastructure in rural areas, to ensure social insurance and to provide cultural education of agrarian people. This program would stop deagrarianization and depopulation.

#### **Old fellows and empty schools**

The surveys show that in Serbian villages there are near 260,000 bachelors and 100,000 spinsters. The reasons are numerous and consequences are catastrophic. It was embarrassing to be married to a farmer and to live in a village, so girls rather moved to towns and get married to doorkeepers working in factories and lived poorer. If every of these bachelors would have had a wife and a child, there would have been new 500,000 people, which is important for biological, demographic and economic reproduction of a village and society on the whole.

Too many people living in towns without job turned out to be bad situation at the time of transit. At that time many factories were closed and people were left in the streets. Out of ten workers being without job more than a half could work in rural areas of Serbia. It refers not only to those who are left without job due to the structural changes of production, years-long sanction and transit crisis, but to those being left without companies they were employed with before the NATO bombing in 1999. However, returning to rural areas does not mean returning to hoe and tractors, but it means dealing with agriculture, forestry, water management and various crafts activities. Namely, Serbia has 220,000 small and medium-sized enterprises. Every political party in its election campaign makes a promise that it will increase this number to 400,000 and open a million of new working places. These are only promises for now. The concept of an integral rural development, as a part of regional development policy, is antipode to ordinary industrialization and is based on overall development of rural areas where almost a half of population of Serbia lives in. The policy being founded on agribusiness and rural economy on the whole should be in function of the permanent orientation of the state and economic development policy being based on decentralization and balanced economic development. It is of particular importance today when Serbia has near million of the unemployed and restructuring of big companies leaving workers without job. The majority of them come from rural areas; some of them return to villages and try to start up a new life. In this way two problems should be solved: Serbian villages would be recovered, and people would be employed. The state should support this new development concept and finance it in the beginning, if necessary, and would take care of the balanced development of the country and the creation of equal conditions for all stakeholders in the market game. The concept of rural economy, as a part of the regional development policy, should directly involve the joint and non-agricultural households having arable land. It should be pointed out that the production at the households in rural areas is not market-oriented.

#### **European experiences**

In the last 25 years the European Union is increasingly getting to be focused on its rural areas and the policy of rural development. At the Second Conference that took place in Salzburg in 2003 it was brought conclusion that the assets from the European Agrarian Fund for the support of the rural development will be higher. The goal is to support the financing policy, rural and sustainable development.

In addition that the rural areas provide markets with agricultural and food products, they also could be good places for relaxation, tourism and healthy life. These advantages of rural areas are becoming more and more visible and significant. The EU Commission recognizes the need for new investments in the creation of rural development. Besides the primary agricultural production whose importance in the rural economy is increasingly falling down, there are new opportunities. Perhaps, people will start moving to rural areas in the future.

The EU projections say that there are many possibilities in rural areas: to organize varied types of production, to reside permanently and to enjoy in the nature and landscape. These are the main trends of the rural development of Europe in the years to come. The EU member states being less developed and the countries tending to join the EU are not able to carry out the activities in every rural area and to solve all possible problems there.

In Serbia there are near 2,000 different manifestations every year. Serbia does not have a sea, but its chance lies in the development of agriculture and rural areas. If a household would have had double-bed room and rent it to foreign guests for 20 euro 200 days in a year, it would have made up the revenues of 16,000 euro annually. If only 10 percent of the population in Serbia would have dealt with tourism, Serbia would have had the income of 1.6 billion euro annually, (the income from tourism in 2012 was one billion euro). The agro-economic and rural-social researches and projections of the international institutions show that the European agriculture in the years to come expects: the changes in the size and number of farms, the reforms in households and land quality, the higher utilization of biological, information technology, equal regional development, the raise of the food quality and standards, the meeting of the requirements of consumers, commercialization and vertical integration of farms, various public investments and greater support to agriculture and development of rural areas.

If every country wants to increase its national income, it needs macroeconomic and political stability, the increase of productivity through new technology, growth of real income in non-agricultural sector and more stimulation to the production. In that sense, there is a question whether the agriculture could be an engine of rural development, could smaller farms survive and could the rural non-agricultural economy contribute to the development of rural areas. In order to prevent any negative trend, Serbia should equalize the number of people living in rural areas, improve the transport and telecommunication infrastructure, raise the health care system, culture and education level, enable the employment in other sectors, increase the income resources from non-agricultural sectors and organize small farms in agricultural cooperatives. According to it there are five principles of rural development. They say that possibilities of rural development should be recognized, then the reduction of poverty should be carried out, the decentralization process should be accelerated, the role and responsibility of local self-government should be strengthened and the productive sector in rural development that will contribute to the growth of economy and the reduction of poverty should be built.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion is that Serbian villages are at the point of surviving and disappearing. The devastating process of rural areas is too intensified and it appears in many different forms. In order to stop all negative trends, it should be created a new policy of rural development. Farms are not only areas for production, but the places for relaxation and enjoyment. The European experiences should serve us as examples in the creation of our policy of rural development that have to be adjusted to local resources and initiatives.

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