THE CHANGE IN ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF THE BORDER MUNICIPALITIES OF BANAT (VOJVODINA, SERBIA)

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Abstract. Due to its peripheral position and underdeveloped economy, the politically unstable situation in the country, unemployment and other social problems have a negative effect on family planning and childbearing in the border municipalities of Serbian Banat. In this context, the change in number and spatial distribution of ethnic groups was inevitable. This article highlights these changes which take place in demographic structure of the border municipalities from 1971 to 2002, with a deeper analysis on the demographic factors.

Rezumat. Modificări în structura etnică a municipalităților din zona de frontieră a Banatului (Vojvodina, Serbia). Datorită poziției periferice și a economiei subdezvoltate, situația politică instabilă din țară, rata somajului și problemele sociale au avut o influență negativă asupra planificării familiale și a fertilității în comunele din zona de frontieră a Banatului Sârbesc. În acest context, schimbările în ponderea și distribuția spațială a grupurilor etnice au fost inevitabile. Acest articol evidențiază aceste schimbări în structura populației comunelor de frontieră din anul 1971 și până în 2002, cu o analiză detaliată a factorilor demografici.

Keywords: demography, transition, ethnic structure, Serbia
Cuvinte cheie: demografie, tranziție, structura etnică, Serbia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nine municipalities make up the border region of the Vojvodinian Banat, from NW to SE they are the following: Novi Kneževac, Čoka, Kikinda, Nova Crnja, Žitište, Sečanj, Plandište, Vršac and Bela Crkva. The total area of these municipalities bordering Romania is 4,265 km² or 43.3% of the Vojvodinian Banat and almost one fifth (19.8%) of the Province (map 1.). Vršac has the largest area, 800 km², Nova Crnja the smallest 273 km² (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2004, 15).

The municipalities lie in the easternmost part of Vojvodina, and after Romania entered the EU, they became more peripheral, so the location isn’t quite favorable. The visa regime had a negative effect on the crossborder migration, while the local population could purchase a visa only in Vršac or Belgrade. As of 2009 and the withdrawal of the visa obligation, the situation is much better. The municipalities are in the center of the Danube-Keres-Mures-Tisa (DKMT) euroregion (Todorović, Tošić, Stojanović, 2004) which could
be a straw for getting out of the current negative demographic and economic situation, through the stimulation of local development.

Throughout history Banat was very attractive for settling, because of the favorable natural conditions (Čurčić, 2004). The ruling nations, cultures and state forms changed in the course of history. Numerous steppe people lived in the region from the earliest period, pushing forward the Germanic and Slavic tribes (Group of authors, 1997).

After the Austro-Turkish war, 1716-1718, begins a more intense settling of Banat, when it became a province under direct jurisdiction of the Court Chamber, at the time of Prince Eugen of Savoy (Đurđev, 1995). Along with the economic development, the region was populated by Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Ruthenians, Bulgarians Armenians, Italians, French and Spaniards (Kicošev, Bubalo-Živković, Ivkov, 2006) who made a colorful ethnic mosaic beside the Serbs and Romanians.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article attempts to make a complex insight and analysis of the demographic picture of the chosen area, to stress the connections between the various factors, and find certain differences in order to get solutions for evident problems. Beside field-work, historical method (archive material, matriculas), analytic processing of the literature and other materials, statistical processing of the population Census data from 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2002, cartographic and graphic method, quantitative and qualitative analysis and the method of comparison was used.

Serbs were the most dominant ethnic group in this part of Banat in this period and during the whole 20th century (Đurđev, Ivkov-Džigurski, Dragin, 2009). (map 2)

![Map of the ethnic structure of Banat border municipalities]

Fig. 2 The share of Serbs in the total population of the border municipalities of Banat in 2002

Ponderea sârbilor din totalul populației comunelor de frontieră din Banat în 2002

In Novi Kneževac, the northernmost municipality of Banat, Serbs made an absolute majority in every census. Their share was in the range of 53,4% (1981.) and 59,5% (2002.). In the period 1971–1981. the absolute number of Serbs decreased by 1,183, from a share of 55,8% to 53,4%, due to a negative natural increase. The census data in 2002. showed a maximum share in the analysed period, 59,5%, due to emigration of the ethnic minorities, their assimilation, more negative natural increase, and the influx of refugees from the realms of former Yugoslavia hit by civil war(Djurdjev et al, 2009). The population declaring themselves as Yugoslavs had an increase in their share from 0,7% in 1971. to 4,7% in 1981. The Hungarians are the second largest ethnicity in the municipality Novi Kneževac, with their share decreasing from 40,6% (1971) to 29,8% (2002). The Roma population has a trend of increase in absolute numbers during the period, their share varies from 0,6% (1971) to 5,1% (2002). It is due to a higher natural increase of the Roma, rather then a rise of ethnic self-identity among them (Kovačević, Ivkov, Đurđev, 2005).

Being on the border with Romania, it is expected, that the Romanian population has a certain share in the municipality, but their number were 18 in 1971. and only 7 in 2002.
The change in ethnic structure in border municipalities of Banat

In the municipality Čoka Hungarians are the most populous ethnic group. Their number and share is decreasing in the period. In 1971, they made up almost two thirds of the population, while according to the last census their share is dropped to nearly above absolute majority (51.6%).

Fig. 3  The share of Hungarians in the population of the border municipalities of Banat in 2002

Ponderea maghiarilor din totalul populației comunelor de frontieră din Banat in 2002

In Čoka, the Serbs are the second most numerous ethnicity. Their population is in decreasing trend during 1971-1991, having a share around one third of the population. According to the last census in 2002, the number of Serbs increased by 200, which makes up a share of 37.6%. (figures 1 and 2).

The number of Roma has an increasing trend. Their share in the population has risen from 0.5% in 1971 to 2.4% in 2002. The population declared themselves as Yugoslavs has a very fluctuating number during this period, as well. Their share in the population of the municipality Čoka increased from 0.7% in 1971, to 1.7% in 2002. There are lesser Slovaks with every census. In 1971 there were 406 of them in Čoka (2.2%), their share dropped to 1.5% in 2002. The main reasons are the unfavorable age structure, assimilation into the Hungarian population and a negative natural increase. The number of Croats is small, but constant during the period. Their maximum number was recorded in 1971. (130).

In the municipality Kikinda the Serbs were the most numerous. According to the Census in 1971, their number was 52,148, which stands for 75.7% of the total population. In 1981. The number of Serbs dropped by 2,551. In the last census in 2002, their share was 76.5% (figure 3 and 4). Hungarians were the second most numerous ethnicity, their number had a decreasing trend during the period. In 1971, there were 13,116 Hungarians in the municipality Kikinda, or 19% of the total population. The Roma are the only ethnicity not affected by depopulation, as in Kikinda as in whole Vojvodina (Đurđev, 2006). Their
share in Kikinda increased from 1% in 1971. to 2.3% in 2002. The Yugoslavs had a notable rise in their share, from 1.5% in 1971. to 8.1% (5,655) in 1981. According to the last census in 2002, their number dropped to 1,670 in the municipality Kikinda.

![Fig. 3 The ethnic structure of the municipality Ćoka (1971)](structure-ethnic-a-comunea-cka-1971.png)

In the municipality **Nova Crnja**, Serbs had majority throughout the period. Their number and share decreased from 72.3% in 1971. to 66.1% in 1981. According to the last census, the share of Serbs increased to 70.3%. The Hungarians make up the second most numerous ethnicity in Nova Crnja. Their share decreases as well, from 23.5% (1971) to 18.6% (2002). The Roma population has only a positive trend (Bubalo-Živković, Đurđev, Dragin, 2008), increasing their share from 0.8% in 1971. to 6.8% in 2002. The Croats never had a significant share in Nova Crnja, their number dropped from in 1971. (0.6%) to 43 (0.3%) in 2002.

![Fig. 4 The ethnic structure of the municipality Ćoka (2002)](structure-ethnic-a-comunea-cka-1971.png)

The Serbs had majority in the municipality **Žitište** in the period 1971-2002. Their share slightly decreased from 1971. (54.1%) to 1981. (52.0%), but increased during the last two censuses, 54.2% to 61.9%. The number of Hungarians has a decreasing trend, from their share of 26.9% in 1971, to 19.7% in 2002. Romanians make a more significant share in the population, then in the municipalities analysed so far (Đurđev, Ivkov, 2008). Their
maximum share was in 1971. (13.8%), which decreased during the period to 9.0% in 2002. The Roma had only an increase throughout the period, their share rose from 1.8% in 1971, to 3.7% in 2002. The share of Croats in Žitište has a not notable range from 0.6% to 0.4%.

The ethnic structure of the municipality Kikinda in 1971
\[ \text{Structura etnică a municipalității Kikinda în 1971} \]

The ethnic structure of the municipality Secanj is very colorful. There were 15,374 Serbs in 1971, or 70.1%. Their number decreased by 2,898 in 1981 (64.0%). The decrease in number continued during the rest of the period, although their share rose to 71.0%. The share of Hungarians decreased during the three decades from 15.9% in 1971, to 12.6% in 2002. There were 1,055 Romanians in 1971, their number decreased to 642 in 2002 (3.9%). The share of Roma increased rapidly from 0.9% in 1971, to 5.3%, according to the 1991 Census. Their share dropped in the last census to 3.7%. The number of Croats is decreasing, from 355 in 1971 (1.6%), to 148 in 2002 (0.9%).

Serbs made up the majority in the municipality Plandište. Their maximum number was 9,278 in 1971 (51.9%). The biggest decrease happened in 1971-1981, when their number fell by 1,300. The depopulation of the Serbs in Plandište continued, until the period 1991-2002, when the number rose by 206, to a share of 56.4%. The number and share of
Hungarians is decreasing as well, from 2.856 (1971.) to 1.619 (2002.) or 16,0% (1971.) to 12,1% (2002.). Unlike the other analysed municipalities, the number of Macedonians is relatively high in Plandište. As the other ethnicities, Romanians had a decrease in number and share, but even more faster, from 2,199 (12.3%) in 1971 to 436 (7.2%) in 2002. In the period 1991-2002. the number Romanians decreased by a third. The Slovaks made up a more significant share, then in the other border municipalities, it varies between 5.9% and 5.3% during the period. Only the Roma have a constant increase from 0.1% to 2%

The municipality Vršac is one of the most significant municipalities in Banat, both by area and population. The Serbs made the majority throughout the period, with a share ranging from 65,4% to 72,5%. Their maximum number was in 1971, when it exceeded 40,000. The biggest decrease happened in the period 1981–1991. by 1.760. The next decade, on the other hand, provided an increase by 1,254, mainly due to the influx of refugees.

Romanians are the second most populous ethnicity in the municipality Vršac. There share and number is in constant decrease. Their number dropped around thousand every decade, the biggest fall was evidenced in the period 1991-2002, by 2,138. The share of Romanians decreased from 16.4% (1971) to 10.9% (2002). The Hungarians had their maximum number in 1971 (4,904), what made up a share of 8.1%, after which it had a downward trend. According to the 2002 census, their share was 4.8%. The Romi had an upward trend in the municipality Vršac, as well. Their share rose from 0.5% in 1971. to 2.2% in 2002.

The Macedonians had a lesser share in Vršac, ranging from 1.1% to 0.9%. The number of Croats has decreased in the period, from 615 (1971) to 276 (2002).

In the municipality Bela Crkva Serbs are majority throughout the period. Their maximum number, 19.548, was evidenced in 1971, a share of 76.8%. The number is in downturn the following decades, the decrease is by 1.674 in the period 1981-1991, and by 1.832 more in the next decade. The Romanians the second most numerous ethnicity. Their highest number was in 1971. (2.233), that is 8.8% of the population. Due to decrease, the share of Romanians is 5.4% according to the last census. The Hungarians also had a decrease in number and share in the analysed period. Their share ranges from 3.3% to 2.3%. The Roma population is in this municipality the only ethnicity with a constant rise in number and share, from 1.1% in 1971, to 3% in 2002.
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Fig. 8 The ethnic structure of the population in the municipality Vršac in 2002.
Structura etnică a populației municipalității Vršac în 2002

Fig. 9 The share of Romanians in the population of the border municipalities in Banat in 2002.
Ponderea românilor din populația totală a comunelor de frontieră din Banat în 2002

4. CONCLUSION

Banat is a multiethnic region, due to events and migration during the period from the 16th century on. The Serbs make the majority in most of the municipalities, the Hungarians are concentrated in the north of the region, the Romanians in the central and southern section of the border region. Analysing the period 1971-2002, we are witnessing a decrease in population in all border municipalities in Banat. The reasons are both demographic and economic. The majority of the ethnic groups is affected, some more, some less. The influx
of the refugees from the realm of the civil war during the 90s, moderated this process for a while within the Serb population. The Roma are the only one who have a constant increase in number, on the other hand the Romanians are the most affected by the depopulation, due to unfavorable age structure and partial assimilation. The DKMT euroregion didn’t fulfilled the expectations of the locals yet, a long-range economic and demographic strategy is needed to make the current population stay in their households and to attract migrants to this area. After Serbia enters the EU, this border region will definitely loose its peripheral status, it will be a bridge between Romania and Serbia.

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