

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS BELOW 500 INHABITANTS IN A SREM DISTRICT CASE STUDY (NORTHERN SERBIA)**

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In recent decades, younger generations have rapidly been leaving the countryside and agriculture, reflecting the demographic and sociological processes of contemporary society. In addition to depopulation, as the process of emptying the rural areas, one of the most significant structural changes in the rural population is deagrarianization, the abandonment of agriculture as a main occupation. After the 1991 Census, later than most European countries, the globalization of society and the growth of non-agricultural professions put the Republic of Serbia in place with a majority of the urban population (about 51%), and further declining trend of rural inhabitants. Regardless of the positive geographical location, the process of negative demographic conditions did not bypass the Srem district. Of the total number of rural settlements, 46% have fewer than 1,000 while 18 settlements have fewer than 500 inhabitants, and the population is mostly elderly with an average age of 48.66 years (Republic of Serbia, 42.2). This imposes the task of the research, as a theoretical basis for the necessary development of agriculture and rural areas (agrarian and rural development), whose foundations lie in demographic development, with a complex population policy of returning to the countryside and finding hidden potential within the settlements as adequate secondary activities in the economic market. The paper covers a comparative analysis of municipal data in the Srem district in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Northern Serbia). Many changes have taken place on the socio-political stage since the late 20th century, which have manifested on the demographic scene, and the topic follows the period of the past few decades. The survey methodology is based on the demographic and statistical analysis of the 1971 to 2011 Censuses, shown by municipal results.