

## Summary

### RURAL MUNICIPALITIES: TOMORROW Social re/construction in rural territories Maja Štambuk – Lynette Šikić-Mićanović (Eds.)

This book is the result of a project entitled *Social re/construction in rural territories: developmental sustainability (194-1941535-1509)* which was financed by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. This work includes the empirical research of social development problems as well as the consequences of Croatia's administrative-territorial division with a particular focus on rural areas of Croatian society. Conceptualisation of this project is based on a territorial approach because this provides a more complete understanding of modernisation processes in the rural world, since what is rural is more determined by the physical characteristics of the area than urban spaces. This study of rural areas of Croatia moves beyond the strategic documents related to development in that it contributes original scientific research on different issues and aspects related to developmental sustainability and social re/construction in rural territories. Research for this study was conducted in 32 municipalities in three adjacent counties: County of Krapina-Zagorje, County of Varaždin and County of Međimurje in the north western part of Croatia at the end of 2008. The municipalities in this study were chosen according to their population sizes (from largest to smallest) and distribution (coverage of the whole county) to obtain a more representative sample. The special value of this work lies in its multi-disciplinary approach that includes multiple perspectives: sociological, anthropological, demographic and administrative (normative and financial decentralisation). Through a multi-disciplinary approach and critical analyses the most important factors of socio-spatial development of rural territories in three Croatian counties have been compiled. Correspondingly, this book will be of interest to anyone interested in rural issues and will provide the reader with ways of dealing with current issues and challenges related to the dynamic phenomenon of rural development and all of its dimensions (social, economic, demographic, political, spatial, etc.).

In terms of content, the study covers the basic features of the existing organisation model of Croatian territory as well as the dominant social, demographic and development trends. The normative aspects and main effects of decentralisation, especially financial as well as a "close up" analysis of the financial situation and the importance of decentralisation for small rural local units are also covered. Special emphasis in this study is on the analysis of the situation, conditions and needs of women and men as well as children in the countryside. The importance of space and development in the planning of local

government units is also given special attention. The relevance of heterogenisation of rural social and economic structures as a prerequisite for sustainability is also highlighted. This is a starting point in the analysis of the administrative position of rural municipalities as a real framework for development processes. It is concluded that an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral approach as well as cooperation are indispensable in the preparation of development projects in rural areas.

This book includes seven chapters written by researchers from the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar as well as external collaborators who participated in the aforementioned project. The Introduction, written by the editors, Maja Štambuk and Lynette Šikić-Mićanović provides a basic conceptual framework of the project and an outline of the articles selected for this book. The first paper entitled “Developmental sustainability in rural territories”, by Maja Štambuk, supervisor of this research project, is about the current degradation processes of Croatian villages in demographic, economic, but also social and cultural terms. The author maintains a comparative perspective in that she positions the Croatian village in relation to European theoretical and practical experiences. One of the key problems according to Štambuk is definitely the hierarchisation of the Croatian settlement network which largely depends on balanced territorial development. In the chapter on methodology, the research theme, objectives and sample of this empirical study are described and analysed. It should be noted that the general hypothesis of this project is that institutional division of local units in Croatia into municipalities, small towns and rural networks influence the shaping of development capacities as well as the social and economic sustainability of local communities. The third chapter by Marijan Jukić entitled “Demographic resources of rural areas in the context of development sustainability” is based on data from the latest 2011 census, including comparisons with data from previous censuses. In this demographic analysis, the author analyses the total population, natural movement, the daily circulation of the population, indicators of biological composition as well as the economic structure of rural populations. He concludes that the geospace transformation of rural municipalities has consequences on socio-economic as well as demographic processes and characteristics. In the fourth chapter by Tereza Rogić Lugarić, entitled “Decentralisation in small local units: a closer look” the author addresses normative decentralisation, especially its financial aspects by presenting a number of interesting and useful analyses of indicators for the three selected counties. She draws attention to the very limited financial and administrative frameworks of small local units and the underdevelopment of local institutions that in turn do not contribute to the development of autonomous development capacity. The spatial aspect of rural areas is highlighted through the work of Jasenka Kranjčević and Marica Marinović Golubić in the fifth chapter entitled “Space as an element of rural reconstruction”. In this chapter, the authors note the importance of spatial planning and the systematic design of regional spatial identity. Starting with premise that space has the status of “a national asset”, the authors emphasise the importance of planning and

reconstruction of rural areas as a task that cannot be successfully resolved if the problem is not approached from the national level to the local level. The following chapter entitled “Would you live there? Social inclusion and rural municipalities” explores the differential vulnerability of different social groups to social exclusion and disadvantage. The author, Lynette Šikić-Mićanović presents findings based on interviews with municipality mayors regarding the state, conditions and needs of particular social groups such as children, youth, women and older people. The author analyses mayors’ perceptions of the most disadvantaged social groups in their municipalities and draws attention to how the municipality meets the needs of different individuals to maximise their social inclusion. Finally, the last chapter by Maja Štambuk entitled “The municipality as a space of development” recapitulates this analysis of rural areas. Specifically, this chapter offers a list of stimulating ideas as well as open questions regarding the possibilities of restructuring the administrative territorial system in the Republic of Croatia to find the most optimal model of rural territory and settlement development.