

## Summary

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The scientific study titled *Vukovar-Srijem County: Demographic Challenges, Quality of Living and Development Perspective* is, in the sense of its theme and content, a continuation of the monograph *Vukovar-Srijem County: Space, People, Identity* (edited by D. Živić), which was jointly published in 2012 by the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar and the Vukovar-Srijem County. In an analytical and interpretative sense, however, the study relies on the results of an empirical (quantitative and qualitative) research of the quality of living, along with a statistical-demographic analysis of the relevant census, vital and migration statistics of the Vukovar-Srijem County, which was published in the first half of 2020.

The first part of this book is reserved for the „Editor’s foreword“. In this section, the topic, purpose, general and specific goals of the research, as well as the context of time and space are described, along with all relevant methodological elements, procedures, methods, and circumstances of the conducted research (survey, focus group, semi-structured interview) and demographic analysis. Following that, the book contains three main chapters, structured by specific project goals.

The chapter „Population of the Vukovar-Srijem County: Current Trends and Processes“ contains four scientific papers in which, based on relevant census, vital and migration statistics (Croatian Bureau of Statistics and EUROSTAT), the general demographic state is displayed and interpreted through a descriptive-comparative and GIS-cartographic analysis. The analyzed data also includes population movement and development factors, as well as current trends in the natural and mechanical population movement. Considering all this, the Vukovar-Srijem County was positioned in the European regional context, taking into account the current demographic relations and the county’s status as a NUTS-3 region.

The chapter titled „Quality of Living in the Vukovar-Srijem County: Analysis Of Empirical Indicators“ includes four scientific papers. In them, through complex mathematical calculations, the results of a survey research of the quality of living in the County were analyzed. The results were also analyzed in the context of social and personal determinants of life satisfaction and

happiness, the wellbeing of the society, local development planning, residential preference, and migration aspirations, as well as the situations, expectations and choices of the residents of the County.

The chapter titled „Vukovar-Srijem County: Between Challenges, Visions and Development“ consists of three scientific papers. They include an analysis and interpretation of results of qualitative research and a number of domestic and international development documents. Based on these documents, some insight was provided into social, political and economic determinants of the County's development strategy. Along with that, a broader social, cultural, historical and identity-related context of the development of the County is given, with particular attention devoted to the city of Vukovar and its significance as a sort of Croatian cultural center on the Danube. Another important topic here is transitional justice, which due to a number of reasons is greatly slowing down the post-war revitalization and restoration of a society that was heavily traumatized by war. This is also a very important determinant when it comes to the quality of living and development perspectives.

In the early 1990s, the Vukovar-Srijem County entered an era of general depopulation. The decline in population is merely the final aggregation of a long line of partial depopulation processes, particularly when it comes to bio-reproduction and migrations, which finally, and in synergy, led to significant demographic natural and mechanical loss. Relevant statistical-demographic indicators warn us that the Vukovar-Srijem County is in a state of a considerable population decline, that all settlements in the County are suffering from these negative demographic trends, and that measures are necessary to slow down the current downward demographic trends, to stabilize them and to eventually achieve demographic growth again.

The relative status of the Vukovar-Srijem County in the eyes of its population does not play a particularly relevant political role – the situation and perspective in the area are not marked as less favorable than in the rest of Croatia. The County's population shares a „subjective“ fate with the rest of Croatia, despite specific objective circumstances and status. The trust in institutions that contribute to the security of living and existence in a broad sense is eroding somewhat faster than in the rest of Croatia, while the trust in political institutions, which are responsible (also) for the shaping of people's futures, is not growing.

The inhabitants of the Vukovar-Srijem County feel relatively happy and content with their lives, to the same extent as the rest of Croatia. They are most

satisfied with their family lives and relationships with other people, and the least satisfied with their income and feeling secure about their future. It has been found that the various researched determinants of their satisfaction and happiness, both personal and social, are related to their wellbeing in such a way that the persons with a higher level of life satisfaction and happiness are typically younger individuals with higher income per household member, higher education and religiousness, more opportunity for sport and recreation, higher levels of trust in others, and higher perceived social support from various sources (family, friends and relatives, institutions), and lower feeling of social exclusion. Each of these determinants was also closely tied to the feeling of happiness and life satisfaction.

The inhabitants of the Vukovar-Srijem County are rather happy with their environment as a place for living, and they still perceive it as safe and comfortable. The most dissatisfaction is related to the economic aspect of life. The participants rated that they could not secure a comfortable life with their own work, and it is this circumstance that has once again been marked as the greatest barrier for development. When it comes to personal relationships, the level and character of personal interactions, and the level of inclusion in the local community, data suggests that in the County there is potential for collective action with the purpose of finding common goals and working on achieving them. This is a clear signal to public policy makers that have direct influence over the lives of local communities in the Vukovar-Srijem County that in searching for solutions they could find an interested partner in the local community itself. Through such a relationship, they could ensure that the local development becomes even more adapted to its real needs and potentials.

Among the inhabitants of the County, migration aspirations are most present with those who have no significant territorial preference on the level of the local community, or on the national and supranational level. Among those who would want to migrate away from the area, there are more who would like to emigrate abroad than those who would like to move to other Croatian counties or other settlements within the Vukovar-Srijem County.

In the past 30 years, the County has gone through a large number of socio-political and structural adaptations, under which it has been increasingly pressured by the dictatorship of the process of transitional justice. As part of all-encompassing social changes, which are generated by internationally sponsored projects of transitional justice, it can be concluded that the Vukovar-Srijem

County can indeed develop its own emancipation potential in the fight against the imperialistic colonization of remembrance culture, against the violent enforcement of law and militaristic privatization of human rights through democracy.

In the south of Croatia lies a Croatian, European and global cultural capital – Dubrovnik. Similarly, in the east of Croatia, defending the same values and culture in its epic resistance against the Serbian armed aggression of 1991, a city has risen that, by all standards, also deserves the status of a Croatian, European and global cultural capital on the Danube – Vukovar. With the Republic of Croatia joining the European Union and accepting its and other western political and defensive alliances, an overarching goal should now also be a wholesale economic, demographic, and cultural restoration of Vukovar and the Vukovar-Srijem County. By building the „cultural capital on the Danube“, the Republic of Croatia, European Union and countries of the same civilizational circle could pay back their debt to Vukovar and its defenders who, at a historic moment in time, resisted the enemy on their very own in an epic defense of the Republic of Croatia and its common values and culture.

Based on the analysis of opinions of the key stakeholders in creating the new development strategy of the Vukovar-Srijem County (for the time period between 2021 and 2027), key social, political, and economic determinants have been highlighted, and the perception of the most important developmental and strategic economic sectors in the near future has been analyzed. Furthermore, ideas about a potential reindustrialization were identified, and relevant information about the implementation of „EU-projects“ in the County was collected. The gathered data suggests a number of recommendations which, in the long-term, could improve the establishing of goals and contents of a development strategy for the County, meant for the start of the next decade.

- Through its institutions, the County can ensure (more) reliable statistical and informatic data, which can be used for the real-time tracking of key processes in the County. These are important in order to successfully identify the starting parameters for plans (from demography to tourist boarding);
- the trend of a „demographic collapse“ needs to be rationally analyzed by assessing the following: a) which types of currently ongoing or planned projects are most retaining the younger population in the County and thereby also influence the increase of birth rates, and b) how they can be combined with the active „immigration politics“ on the County level;

- there needs to be a social and political agreement on a mandatory supervision of all projects financed by state and EU funds, with clear standards for impact assessment and sanctions for projects that were not implemented as planned;
- When planning future goals and content of the new development strategy, there needs to be an effective demonstration of social and political agreement between both the leading and opposing parties, as well as the local state authorities and civil society. The local politics, with the support of local development stakeholders, needs to do everything in its power to make the planning of the development a topic that goes far beyond the level of politics.
- The County can also give a stronger push to planning the development on the level of Slavonia as a region, but only on condition that a clear analysis is conducted about what it is in this version of development planning that is a comparative benefit of Slavonia as a whole (and how this can be used), compared to competitive characteristics of a region which has yet to fight for its need of a mid-term development;
- the „political fight“ with the central state institutions for the developmental repositioning of Slavonia in a context of a new developmental and regional policy can only be started with strong arguments which: a) demonstrate the possible influence the much sought-after incentive tax politics could have on the local/regional development, and b) clearly show that today's standards for project financing on the state level favor the development of other parts of the country (and not Slavonia) and that they need to be changed;
- much like any other idea of reindustrialization, the local development politics, which leans on the available resources, needs to now, even more than before, be led by the principles of economic competitiveness with similar counties/regions – be it within the state or outside of it. In the long term, this will enable a better revalorization of the available natural and human resources;
- The long-term development of the wood industry presupposes that sustainable solutions can be found to ensure the materials for its development and a better management of companies in that sector. The entire political and intellectual capital of the County needs to be invested in the search after the solution for these issues.

- As soon as possible, the County needs to conduct a trusted analysis about the ownership models with the aim of increasing the agricultural production, look into the models of effective production, even on smaller agricultural areas, and see about the economic incentives for the assembly of small farmer holdings with the aim of higher forms of production and marketing cooperation.