# SUMMARY

## THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE
### Demographic changes in the City of Vukovar before, during and after the Homeland War

The city of Vukovar and the wider Vukovar region are characterised by a long and rich historical and cultural heritage, dynamic demographic change and complex socio-economic development. Amid a tangle of diverse geographical, geopolitical, social, military, cultural-civilisational and other forces, demographic processes of varying intensity and direction have unfolded over the past centuries. Periods of demographic and developmental rise and decline have followed one another in succession, mainly linked to dramatic social, political and territorial changes, of which there have been several even in the modern period. In addition, demographic change has been particularly strongly influenced by migration, including both the exodus of the domicile population and immigration, and even the colonisation of new populations. These were among the most important reasons for the emergence of a complex demographic picture, particularly in the ethnic, linguistic and religious mosaic of the population. At the end of the 20th century, the demographic, social and economic development of the City of Vukovar was dominated by events linked to the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, the establishment of an independent, democratic and sovereign Croatian state, and Serbian armed aggression and territorial expansion led by the JNA, Serbian military and paramilitary units, and the Belgrade regime embodied in the person of Slobodan Milošević. The armed aggression against the City of Vukovar in 1991 and its prolonged occupation caused great human suffering and demographic losses, as well as complete material war destruction. These were direct factors in a radical change in demographic dynamics and the development of population structures,

with far-reaching consequences that are difficult to mitigate, let alone reverse in a positive direction.

Given that the contemporary demographic issues of the City of Vukovar are both socially and scientifically highly relevant as a research topic, this book analyses the fundamental demographic processes, trends, relationships and structures before, during and after the Homeland War. In this context, the basic processes in total, natural, mechanical and overall population movement, as well as in the development of selected demographic structures (age, gender, ethnic, educational and economic), were examined. The aim of the research was to determine the extent of demographic transformation in the City of Vukovar, that is, the magnitude, direction and trend of demographic change as a prerequisite for its sustainable demographic and overall development.

The demographic analysis of selected indicators of demographic dynamics and structural-demographic development has clearly shown that the City of Vukovar is in a demographic crisis, whose main feature is depopulation, both overall and in terms of natural and mechanical population movement. The City of Vukovar has undergone a significant demographic transformation from an area predominantly characterised by immigration to one with dominant emigration, accompanied by demographic emptying, which can be monitored using formal indicators of demographic dynamics for more than three decades. Alongside changes in demographic dynamics, the analysis also identified changes in the development of population structures, among which the accelerated demographic ageing process stands out as an important unfavourable factor for future demographic trends. Another important structural-demographic change relates to the ethnic composition of the population, for which a process of homogenisation has been identified, that is, an increase in the Croatian ethnic component in the total population. Although the Croatian population of the City of Vukovar had (at least) a relative majority in the total population throughout the 20th century, this majority became absolute after the Homeland War.

Although the weakening of positive and the strengthening of negative demographic trends have long been possible to monitor, thanks primarily to census, vital and migration statistics, the 1990s are still regarded as the decisive dividing line between demographic expansion and demographic regression (extinction). This period was marked by war and occupation, that is, by heavy demographic and migration losses, as well as material devastation, which made return and post-war reconstruction difficult and had adverse implications for sustainable demographic and socio-economic development that continue to this day. The city of Vukovar is still experiencing depopulation after the last census in 2021, which means that deaths still outnumber births and emigration still exceeds

immigration. At the root of these negative trends are not only the general patterns of demographic development, but also lagging socio-economic development, which is partly a consequence of severe war damage and partly the result of an inadequately designed strategy for post-war reconstruction, return and development at both national and local levels.

The response to recent demographic challenges must be comprehensive, long-term and aligned at national, regional and local levels. The application of demographic revitalisation, migration, redistribution and combined models must create conditions not only for demographic sustainability but also for overall sustainability. The city of Vukovar and its people should be given the opportunity for a better and higher quality life and future.

*Keywords:* Vukovar, Homeland War, demography