

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF COLONIZATION IN NORTH BACKA REGION, SERBIA AFTER FIRST WORLD WAR

[1]Rastislav Stojsavljevic

[1] University in Novi Sad, Faculty of Science, Serbia

[1] Email: rastislav.stojsavljevic@dgt.uns.ac.rs

Abstract

On the territory of today's Serbia, in 1918, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created. Territory includes today North Backa region in northern part of Serbia was a part of Austria – Hungarian Empire. After Paris Peace Conference this region became a part of the new Kingdom. From 1921 until the end of the decade mostly Serbian population migrated from other parts of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to researched area. Tens of thousands of people migrated from today Croatia (regions Dalmatia and Lika), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. A total of 92 settlements were built by colonists in today Vojvodina region, 18 of them in North Backa. Migrations had the character of planned colonization with all challenges and problems. Immigrants were people from mountainous (Dinaric) regions the west of Balkan peninsula. Their habits and way of life were different from domicile population. This paper will investigate historical context and characteristics of this colonization, how difficult was to colonists to adapt on the new environment and what the situation is today with these colonist settlements.

Index Terms: Serbia, colonization, First World War, North Backa.

Introduction

Since the migration under command of Serbia Patriarchs Charnojevic and Shakabenta, Serbian population has migrated from today Central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija across the Danube and Sava to the north, mostly to St. Andrew town in Hungary, Olomouc, Czech republic Krakow, Poland and Novoserbia in today's Ukraine. The reasons for migration were numerous: wars, famines, natural disasters, reprisals by foreign (Turkish) authorities.

Just as the Serbs from Medieval Serbia left their homes at the end of the 17th century, so the colonists from western parts of Balkan peninsula migrated to lowland tame regions.

With the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Royal authorities began in the early 1920s with the allocation of land to the population from the so-called passive parts of Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Lika, Montenegro to Vojvodina plain.

N. Gacesa [1] was mostly involved in research of agrarian reform and colonization in Bačka between World Wars. The following researchers should also be mentioned: J. Demeterović [2] , M. Erić [3] , V. Jojkić [4] etc. Among the newer researchers who dealt with the issue of the first agrarian reform and immigration of the population to Vojvodina between the two world wars is certainly M. Micic [5], [6], [7], [8]. R. Stojsavljević did researches about the most significant characteristics of colonization in Backa region [9], [10], [11].

Historical context and characteristics of colonization

Since the Serbs lived in the territory of the North Backa district even before the 20th century, the first major colonisations of this area occurred after the First World War during the first agrarian reform. The state (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) gained this place as loot from the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The properties were privately owned and

owned by cadastral municipalities. Landed properties were nationalized and given to volunteers, colonists and optants for use. Each colonist with his family was given the opportunity to process 8 cadastral acres of land on which he could build his estate, a house with a garden. The agrarian reform began in 1921 and lasted practically until the Second World War. Until 1923, the colonization was carried out by the County Agrarian Office in Novi Sad, and later by the agricultural department of the Administration of the Danube Banovina in Novi Sad. Volunteers and colonists came to this area in a few waves. Each optant built a house on his cadastral land, and the plots of the then municipalities were filled with numerous farms. It was only in the early 1930's that these farms joined and bought state land for the construction of settlements. During the later years, such colonial settlements were increasing. The inhabitants themselves implemented street lighting and electricity and dug rural wells in the 1950s.



Figure 1. North Bačka region on the map of Serbia

The North Bačka district had the opportunity to be expanded after the First World War. Until the signing of the Trianon Treaty in 1920 and the definitive demarcation between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Hungary, parts of the civil authority of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were located in the counties Bacalmaski and Bajski. They started implementing the agricultural reform in the spring of 1919. It is quite certain that in these counties the land was given to the interested persons exclusively of Serbian and Croatian nationalities. When it was certain that these regions would belong to Hungary, the agrarian reform was stopped and no new registration of optants was allowed.

Here we can refer to an example of the settlement Kolonija (later called Sveticevo) which was formed in 1933. The name of the settlement was given by Sava Radosević, a Serbian volunteer and bearer of Karadjordje's star from the United States. A similar example was the settlement Karkatur (today's Micunovo), which is now practically connected to Bačka Topola.

Municipality in time of establishing	Today's Municipality	Name of settlement	Number of immigrants
Stara Moravica	Bačka Topola	Bački Sokolac	779
Stara Moravica	Bačka Topola	Gornja Rogatica	678
Subotica	Bačka Topola	Karadordevo	633
Bačka Topola	Bačka Topola	Karkatur (Mićunovo)	146
Subotica	Bačka Topola	Mali Beograd	167
Mol	Bačka Topola	Njegoševo	282
Ada	Bačka Topola	Kolonija (Svetičevo)	684
Bajša	Bačka Topola	Srednji Salaš	234
Bajša	Bačka Topola	Tomislavci	658
Feketić	Mali Idoš	Crno Brdo (Feketić)	137
Bajmok	Subotica	Bajmočka Rata (Bajmok)	495
Čantavir	Subotica	Žednik	729
Bajmok	Subotica	Mišičevo	999
Subotica	Subotica	Hajdukovo	643
Total			7264

Figure 2. Number of settlers in the colonial settlements of the North Bačka district during the first agrarian reform

Figure 2 shows that after the first agrarian reform 14 colonial settlements were created or the entire population was moved into already existing settlements. What is important to note is that these settlements at the time of establishment were in other municipalities. The number of immigrants into the North Backa district was 7264. The problems that colonists faced when gaining the land were of administrative nature. The newly created courts and state authorities had a lot of laws and mistakes, and sometimes one parcel was accidentally given to two different owners. These situations were rare, but caused litigation procedures, which could last for a long time. When the colonists received the land, they had to process it regularly and pay the state tax. If one of these two conditions were not fulfilled, the state could take the land away from the owner and give it to new owner. It also happened that the optant who received the land sold it to other colonists, which was not allowed. Those optants who lost the land, mostly returned to the regions from which they came. It happened that land parcels were split and very distant, causing that the colonists complained asking for their parcels to be connected. Such complaints were generally adopted.

The agrarian reform was carried out on the property of private persons, political municipalities, church properties, state property and the property of urban communities. Volunteers and optants were given the land of the municipalities of Bajmok, Mali Idjos and the city of Subotica. Also, the land of the following state property was allocated: Karadjordjevo and Bajsa.

Region from immigrants arrive	County	Today's Municipality	Settlement	Number of immigrants
Bosna and Hercegovina	Bačka Topola	Bačka Topola	Bačka Topola	124
Bosna and Hercegovina	Bačka Topola	Mali Idoš	Sekić *	58
Bosna and Hercegovina	Bačka Topola	Mali Idoš	Feketić	19
Bosna and Hercegovina	Subotica	Subotica	Bajmok	4
Croatia	Subotica	Subotica	Bajmok	1915
Montenegro	Bačka Topola	Mali Idoš	Sekić	4812
Montenegro	Bačka Topola	Mali Idoš	Feketić	858
Montenegro	Subotica	Subotica	Bajmok	11
Total				7801

Figure 3. Number of settlers in the colonial settlements of the North Bačka district during the second agrarian reform

Figure 3 shows that 7801 settlers came to 8 settlements in the North Bačka district during the second agrarian reform from the region of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kupres, Glamoč, Livno, Travnik and others), Croatia (Ogulin) and Montenegro (Cetinje, Bar, Herceg Novi, Kotor and others). These were mainly settlements that, before the Second World War, were settled by the German and Hungarian population. A part of the refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina came to these settlements during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and thereafter in the 1990s.

Problems and challenges of colonization

Agrarian reform and colonization in Backa region (since 1921) were accompanied by numerous irregularities and abuses: political and personal gain, a large number of unfinished laws; irregularities around the expropriation of feudal estates and allotments; lenient attitude towards landlords; there was no adequate state control, reforms to protect national interests; significant influence of the ruling political parties; abuses related to the issuance of voluntary certificates; indefiniteness of the character of the agrarian reform of colonization, etc. Due to difficult financial situation, the colonists often leased their acquired land or left the acquired land and returned to their homeland. Numerous landowners and other interested parties, who did not have the right to land, used every opportunity and, thanks to the vagueness of regulations, bought such colonial estates [12].

All this problems influenced that another colonization was not declared until the end of World War II. And further, there were a number of problems with the completion of agrarian reform and settlement in territory of North Backa region, although both agrarian reform and colonization lived officially completed [13]. North Bačka was the first goal of colonization, primarily because of its creation national buffer zone towards the Hungarian state to eradicate the influence of the Hungarians national elements and interests, which remained active after its completion World War I. However, given that the German national minority in Vojvodina was the one who bought the most properties, in order to complete its property national and property interests, a plan to colonize only the northern part of Vojvodina was insufficient (both from the spatial and from the aspect of population density of national minority, because it did not include areas with the German national minority). New colonization of the Serbian and other South Slavic populations that lived in accordance with the national interests of the colonization of the time as very dangerous.

Conclusion

We live in a year when a century of colonization is being marked in North Backa region. Those migrations were planned but with many administrative and legal (law) problems. In the last decade, a large number of land holdings have been returned to descendants of legal owners whose properties were taken after World War I. Some of them were given monetary compensation. The newer migrations of people during 1990s from war-affected areas of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to North Backa region did not have the scale, proportion and intensity as one after World War. The settlers in this new colonization were mostly Serbs. However, all this migrations

and colonizations in XX century changed ethnic and religious structure of population in North Backa region. According to the last official census in 2011, 40% of population in North Backa region are Hungarians, 27% are Serbs, 8% Croats, 8% Bunjevci. Other nationalities are Slovak, Romanian and Roma people. New generations, descendants of the colonists, adopted new customs and way of life in the plains. But they never forgot where their roots come from.

References

- [1] N. Gacesa, "Agrarian reform and colonization in Backa 1981-1941", Novi Sad, Matica srpska, pp. 25-38, 1968.
- [2] J. Demetrovic, "Agrarian reform in Yugoslavia", Belgrade. 1933.
- [3] M. Eric, "Agrarian reform in Yugoslavia 1918-1941", Sarajevo, 1958.
- [4] V. Jojkic, "Nationalization of Backa and Banat", Novi Sad, 1931.
- [5] M. Micic, "Colonist settlements 1920-1941 – Backa, Banat i Srem", Novo Milosevo, Banatski kulturni centar, 2021.
- [6] M. Micic, "House and bread – colonist family in Banat, Backa and Srem, (1920-1941)", Novo Milosevo, Banatski kulturni centar, 2021.
- [7] M. Micic, "The Serbian volunteer question in the Great War (1914-1918)", Novo Milosevo, Banatski kulturni centar, 2014.
- [8] M. Micic, "Americans, Serbian volunteers from USA (1914-1918)", Novo Milosevo, Banatski kulturni centar, 2014.
- [9] R. Stojsavljević, M. Pantelić, "The influence of the Refugees on Age Structure in Immigration Municipalities in Vojvodina (Serbia)", Novi Sad, Geographica Pannonica Vol 17, issue 1, pp. 26-31. 2013.
- [10] R., Stojsavljević, et al., "Etnographic Characteristics of Serbian Orthodox Peasants at the Beginning of the 20th Century from Vrlika Region, North Dalmatia, Croatia", European Researcher Vol 39, issue 1-2, pp. 118-127. 2013.
- [11] R., Stojsavljević, "Serbs in colonial settlements in the North Bačka district at the beginning of the 21st century", Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad, pp. 1-8, 2018.
- [12] T. Iskruljev, "About Vojvodina and its colonization", Novi Sad: Zastava, 1925.
- [13] B. Lekić, "Agrarian reform in Yugoslavia 1918-1941", Belgrade: Službeni list, 2002.