

# TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA - POSSIBILITIES FOR REFORM

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## A B S T R A C T

Current territorial organisation in Serbia was basically set during the 1960s. Great demographic and economic changes were not reflected in changes of legislation on territorial organisation. Such territorial organisation is a basis for a single-level and almost completely monotype local self-government system. After providing a detailed overview of legislation on territorial organisation and local self-government in the previous two centuries, the authors analyse the current system and attempt to outline possible lines of reform of territorial organisation. These proposals are viewed as a part of efforts towards greater decentralisation and establishment of a multi-level and/or polytype local self-government.

## KEY WORDS

TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION  
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS  
MUNICIPALITIES  
TOWNS  
DECENTRALISATION

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

One of the significant issues which appeared during the work on the survey *European Mayors – Political Leaders in European Cities*, conducted in 2014<sup>1</sup> was the possibility of territorial changes, i.e. changes in the number of existing towns and municipalities, as well as strengthening inter-municipal cooperation. Since the problems of territorial organisation are in close relationship with the actual topic of decentralisation, this article focuses on them, while questions of inter-municipal cooperation are left for another appropriate occasion.

Namely, current territorial organisation (division of the territory of the Republic of Serbia to towns and municipalities<sup>2</sup>) was mostly fixed during the 1960s. In spite of considerable differences among them (in terms of size of territory, number of inhabitants, economic strength etc.), all municipalities and towns, with the exception of Belgrade, got the same competences, the same bodies and an identical position within the political system. Hence, the monotype principle of organisation has been applied, with all municipalities and towns as the first on only local government level (the single-level local self-government)<sup>3</sup>. During the last half a century differences in population, economic and other characteristics continued to intensify, while the whole local government system fell into a crisis which, *inter alia*, limits possibilities for further decentralisation.

Within the mentioned survey, most interviewees (mayors and municipality presidents) stated they do not believe that territorial changes in the form of amalgamation or establishing new municipalities would have an effective influence on better functioning of local communities and their administration, more efficient service provision or cost reduction<sup>4</sup>. It should be noted here that the survey did not include representatives of the smallest municipalities (with less than 10.000 inhabitants), which could partly justify such a position. However, it is likely that the genuine reasons lie in acquired habits and the fact that the interviewees do not notice the faults of the current territorial organisation.

Authors will offer arguments for a clearer identification of shortcomings and possible changes in the current territorial organisation. The first part of the text briefly presents trends in territorial organisation during the past two centuries and then analyses the current organisation. Next, there is a presentation of the main territorial changes during the period from 1963 and 2015, while the final part defines typical problems of the current territorial organisation and offers some proposals for their resolution.

## MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF SERBIAN TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION: CHANGES AND TRENDS

### Enlargement of municipalities

The small municipalities system was maintained in Serbia all through the 19th and first half of the 20th century, with the exception of those formed in bigger town settlements. Even then there were efforts to enlarge municipalities to an extent, but not to make them too large. In the beginning of the socialist period small municipalities also prevailed, but soon started a more decisive move towards their enlargement. That step was reasoned by the need to create a more significant local level of government, i.e. the need to strengthen the municipality and enable it to take over wider self-government and state administration functions (especially the latter). The enlargement process ended during the 1960s, so the number of municipalities only slightly changed since then.

During the 19th century there were several attempts to determine the legal criterion for organisation of somewhat larger municipalities<sup>5</sup>. First, in 1866 it was stipulated that “every town (varoš), small town (varošica) and village have to have its own municipality, either alone or together with other villages”, while a municipality cannot have less than 200 tax heads (i.e. tax payers). There was, however, an exception for settlements in mountain areas where a municipality could be formed with less tax heads. Some twenty years later (1884) the municipality was to have “at least 500 tax heads”, again with exceptions possible, while only five years later (1889) the old criterion was restored. With the enlargement of Serbian territory, the number of other territorial units – districts (okruzi) and counties (srezovi) – gradually increased. The number of districts went between 14 and 21 and the number of counties was 80. In 1899 there were a total of 3.204 villages, 24 towns and 57 small towns (there were 2.312.484 inhabitants).

Between 1921 to 1929 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was divided into 33 regions (oblasti) with a maximum 800.000 inhabitants each, 392 counties and 7.085 municipalities. In 1929 a new territorial division was introduced and Kingdom of Yugoslavia consisted of nine banovinas and the Administration of the Town of Belgrade. In 1932 there were 338 counties and in 1931 a total of 4.465 municipalities. The almost halved number of municipalities than a decade before was a result of the legal criterion of at least 3.000 inhabitants (unless “terrain conditions and other entirely justifiable reasons” demand that a municipality has less inhabitants).

A great number of local people's boards (mesni narodni odbori) – 11.556 in Yugoslavia in 1946 – was halved in 1951 (7.102 in total and 2.582 in Serbia). The boards were transformed into municipalities and their number in 1952 was 3.811 (2.206 in Serbia). The number of counties was also reduced from 327 to only 107 in 1955 (42 in Serbia). Rapid decrease in the number of municipalities continued: in 1995 there were 1.479 (737 in Serbia), as soon as 1958 a total of 1.135 and the year after only 836. This process was ended in 1966, when there was only 516 municipalities. Since then, the number has changed only slightly, so in 1986 there were 527 municipalities in Yugoslavia and 186 in Serbia. Average territory of the then Yugoslav municipality was 485,4 sq. km and the average population 42.557. That way, the municipality grew to the size of the former district. The number of municipalities in Serbia did not change significantly since then.

The tendency of enlarging municipalities was recorded in most European countries<sup>6</sup>. Only a few countries remained faithful to the small municipalities model or, by exception, went in the opposite direction – towards reducing the size of municipalities. The need for larger municipalities is regularly reasoned by wider competences demanding greater economic strength and other preconditions. The process of urbanisation also objectively influenced this need. However, a municipality which is too large, such as ours, creates some grave difficulties. In a large municipality direct relation between citizens and local authorities is lost, i.e. chances for citizen participation weakened. Even though elected by the citizens, local authorities distant themselves from the citizens and their interests, it is harder to control them and they function equally alienated from the citizens as state authorities. In a nutshell, all fundamental ideas of local self-government are lost.

Some see the solution in a two level local self-government (basic level, in the form of small municipalities, and the middle level, encompassing several municipalities and taking over a number of joint competences). As it is often emphasized, two local government levels are a prerequisite of a well-organised local government system and a natural consequence of decentralisation. Others are more prone to establishment of several types of local government units within the same level (big towns, smaller towns, rural areas etc.) One and/or the other model create a more functional system for management of local tasks, adapted to different types of local communities and their specific problems. Comparative experiences show that such approaches demand that local government be given more free space, to be able to choose among offered solutions in order to come to their own best decision.

## From a polytype to a monotype local government model

Differentiation of several types of local government units within the same level was a feature of the Serbian local government up until 1955. Then a transition between polytype to monotype organisation was made and that approach was never departed, except partially in respect of towns. While it existed, the differentiation was derived from the type of settlement and according to two criteria: (1) scope and type of tasks in local government competences (original or delegated) and/or (2) organisation of self-government bodies.

The polytype model is more often applied worldwide because it enables a more adequate framework for organisation and functioning of local communities, which are truly different. The only objection is that this leads to a complex system and can cause tension in relations of units of different type. However, the monotype model, like any other forced uniformity, creates much greater problems.

Issues which are supposed to be addressed by local governments, e.g. urban and rural ones, are never the same. A monotype system is never natural and it equally discriminates towards both small and large local communities. It also limits possibilities for decentralisation, because competences are transferred according to an average measure, which suits neither the ones below nor ones over the average.

Already in the first legal text on organisation of municipalities from 1839 we find a differentiation between three types, i.e. “three classes of municipalities”: Belgrade being the first, the second included district seats and other towns and the third – villages. The particular character of Belgrade was recognised in 1841, but only through separate police and administrative authorities (*Administration of the town of Belgrade, Uprava varoši Beograda*). In terms of status, Belgrade was later equalised to a district as a state administrative authority, while in the self-government sense it was equal to a municipality, with specific organisation of bodies. Differences between rural and urban municipalities were maintained and concerned in particular the composition of bodies and, to an extent, the competences. This was most fully implemented during the first Yugoslav state. The 1921 Constitution envisaged two types of municipalities – rural and urban, later regulated by two separate laws. Town municipalities (i.e. towns) had significantly more delegated tasks, while their original competences were slightly widened. There were some differences in their organisation, as well.

After the Second World War, the polytype system was maintained only for a decade, in a quite complicated form. There was a “large number of formally, organisationally and legally fixed forms of people’s boards”<sup>77</sup>, especially in towns. First, there were local people’s boards in smaller towns, at the rank of districts (bigger towns) and the ones in the district rank (the biggest towns). A 1949 law introduced a different typology: towns within counties, towns not in the composition of counties and capital towns of republics (which were not part of the county division). In both cases, differences were reflected in the scope of competences and vertical relations. Already in 1952 extracting towns from county organisation was abandoned, so all towns except the largest ones got the status of town municipalities within counties. A number of them were given wider competences. Until 1955 there were counties, towns, town municipalities and municipalities and after that only counties and municipalities. All counties had the same status, organisation and competences and the same monotype method was applied to municipalities. Rural and urban municipalities were equalised.

The 1963 constitutional system envisaged a possibility to establish more municipalities on the territory of big towns, which was applied in Belgrade. The town divided into municipalities and thus had two types of local government units: town was the primary unit and town municipalities secondary or derived units. However, this did not bring the town new competences: only competences determined for all municipalities were divided between it and the town municipalities. This model was maintained during the 1974 constitutional system, with a possibility to create town municipal associations, which was not utilised in Serbia. The 1990 Constitution enabled for some municipalities to get the status of towns, by law, provided it established two or more town municipalities. Until 2007 that was the case in four more towns (Kragujevac, Niš, Novi Sad and Priština). After the 2006 Constitution, town municipalities lost the status of local government units.

### From three to one level of local government

Two local government levels (municipality and county) were a constant until 1967. In 1974 there was an attempt to compensate for the second level through associations of municipalities, which will be abolished in 1991. Since then, the single level model with municipalities and towns as the only and basic local government level exists. Single-level local government in Serbia thus exists only from 1967 to 1974 and from 1991 to today. The third level in the form of counties or regions occasionally disappeared, but it was nevertheless maintained

until the beginning of 1950s when it finally disappeared. During Kingdom of Yugoslavia there was a period with even four levels of territorial units (regions and banovinas, districts, counties and municipalities) – two were types of local self-government, one with weak self-government elements and one without self-government characteristics. Besides that, for a while (e.g. until the creation of municipalities) village self-government existed. It will once more briefly appear as the initial level of self-government and then evolve into local communities (mesne zajednice), without the character of local government units.

Municipalities as the basic-level units have roots in village self-government. They are first mentioned and established as territorial units in the 1835 Constitution and legally regulated in 1839. Besides being a self-government authority, from the very beginning they performed certain state tasks («which the law destines»). And while their self-government competences always remained narrow in scope, their importance grew because of the widening share in performance of state administration tasks. Thus, until 1866, municipalities were primarily branches of state authority, when their self-government function started to strengthen. Municipal self-government gains importance from 1875 and especially after the 1888 Constitution. During the Kingdom of Yugoslavia independence of municipalities was reduced and during the socialist period it was increased, though through integration into the self-management system (samoupravni sistem) and single-party state authorities.

Counties were the middle, second level local government units, composed of several municipalities. They originated from former knežinas which had a certain self-government even under Turkish administration. In 1830 they were renamed offices (kapetanije) and the term counties (srezovi) settled from the 1835 Constitution on. Until the 1888 Constitution, counties had the status of administrative-territorial units in which there were no self-government bodies, but only state appointed bodies. Since then started the construction of the system of county self-government, with still a state appointed head of district. County bodies were given oversight functions over municipal self-government. The first law of counties is as old as the one on municipalities (1890). Dual nature of counties bodies was maintained during the first Yugoslav state, but only nominally, since they lost their self-government characteristics (with only deconcentrated state authorities in the county and some residues of self-government institutions). After the Second World War, until the 1963 SFRY Constitution, the county was an obligatory level of local self-government, more important than the municipality. After that it was left to the constitutions of the republics to decide whether to establish districts and after that they were abolished in all the republics (in Serbia in 1967).

Districts as the regional and the highest, third level of local self-government were first administrative-territorial units without self-government characteristics. They remained such up until the 1888 Constitution. They consisted of several counties and originated from the former nahijas, later renamed okružijas. During the 19th century there were more laws and bylaws on districts and counties than on the municipalities, because county and district state administration units were a significant element of the administrative system. After 1888, districts get clearer self-government characteristics (district self-government) and become the highest local government units. During Kingdom of Yugoslavia districts were transformed into a level of state administration, i.e. deconcentrated units of state administration. Instead of them, as, territorially larger regions (33) were formed as the highest local self-government units and instead of them banovinas (in 1929). After Second World War, during a shorter period, there were 46 districts (until 1946) and 20 regions until 1951.

Village self-government was a predecessor of municipal self-government and existed as early as the Serbian medieval state. It lasted all through the period of Ottoman administration and for a short period during the Principality of Serbia. Village was the basic territorial unit and several villages made up a knežina. Inhabitants of the village, gathered in village assemblies, elected village serfs and village principals (seoski kmetovi and seoski knez). However, Prince Miloš Obrenović started appointing village officials himself, practically abolishing village self-government. When municipalities were established, they generally included a village and so village self-government was transformed into municipal self-government. After the Second World War, something similar occurred with the transformation of village people's boards into local people's boards and the latter into municipalities. First, village and local boards were formed as a type of auxiliary municipal bodies. Since 1963 and, especially, since the 1974 SFRY Constitution, local community (mesna zajednica) becomes an important element of the political system, but does not acquire the status of a local self-government unit. Since 1990 their position changes and they are defined as a specific form of self-government (mesna samouprava), but with less significance and very modest legal regulation.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENT TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

According to the Law on territorial organisation of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on local self-government<sup>8</sup>, the territory for which a municipality is established is a natural and geographic entirety, an economically connected area, with a developed communication between settlements and a seat as



its gravitational centre. The municipality has to be able to perform, through its bodies, all rights and obligations in its competence and to have at least 10.000 inhabitants. Existing municipalities and, by exception, newly formed municipalities can have less than 10.000 inhabitants, when there are specific economic, geographical and historical reasons for that.

A town is determined as the economic, administrative, geographic, and cultural centre of a wider area, with more than 100.000 inhabitants, while, by exception, a territorial unit with less inhabitants can be established as town if there are specific economic, geographic or historical reasons. Similar to municipalities, town territory represents a natural geographical unit, an economically connected area with developed communication between settlements and a seat at a gravitational centre.

Legal definition of town as a local self-government unit, thus, differs from the usual notion of town in its linguistic and legal sense. In the latter sense, a town is an urban settlement, while a town as a local government unit includes not only urban settlements, but also its wider surroundings, i.e. all settlements in a wider area, with some (one or more) urban settlements and others of rural or suburban type. Practically, areas of former municipalities which had a larger population were determined as towns<sup>9</sup>.

Territory of autonomous provinces is determined by enumerating municipalities and towns in their composition and the territory of municipalities and towns by enumerating settlements and cadastral units in their areas. The law established 174 municipalities and towns (150 municipalities, 23 towns and the town of Belgrade).

Procedure of establishment, amalgamation and abolishment of municipalities, as well as changes in borders of existing municipalities, is regulated by the same law (Articles 12-15). It is possible to establish a new municipality by joining two or more municipalities or by extracting a part of the territory of one or more existing municipalities into a new municipality. A municipality can be abolished and its territory joined to one or more existing municipalities. By changes in the territory of a municipalities the law considers (1) extracting a settlement from the composition of one or joining it to another municipality and (2) changes in borders of cadastre municipalities which cover a settlement.

Out of the total 150 municipality, 83 are on the territory of central Serbia, 39 of the Autonomous Province (AP) of Vojvodina and 28 on the territory of AP Kosovo and Metohija. Out of 24 towns, 17 are in central Serbia, six in AP Vojvodina and one on the territory of AP Kosovo and Metohija. Total number of municipalities and towns (local self-government units) is 174.

Besides 174 municipalities and towns and two APs, there are 29 administrative districts and statistical territorial units (STU). Administrative districts and STU are not forms of territorial decentralisation, but administrative and special purpose spatial units. Also, town municipalities and local community units (*mesne zajednice*) are not territorial units or local self-government units. Statutes of Belgrade and five more towns established town municipalities. Their total number is 30, out of which 17 is in Belgrade, five in Niš and two each in Vranje, Novi Sad, Požarevac and Užice. *Mesne zajednice* exist in all municipalities and towns, except in Sremski Karlovci. Their total number in central Serbia and Vojvodina is 4.121, giving an average of 28,42 per local self-government unit.

The law does not determine the minimal size of territory of municipality or town as in the case of population size as criteria for their establishment.<sup>10</sup> Average territory of municipalities and towns in central Serbia and Vojvodina is 535 sq. km. That and the data on average population are often used in support of the position that our municipalities and towns are among the biggest basic local self-government units in Europe and the world.

In comparison to municipalities, towns have a larger territory, but the territory of individual municipalities or towns differs greatly. The smallest municipalities by territory are Sremski Karlovci (51 sq. km) and Lapovo (55 sq. km) and additional 79 municipalities have a territory below the average. On the other hand, the biggest municipalities are Pirot (1.232 sq. km), Knjaževac (1.202 sq. km), Ivanjica and Negotin (1.090 sq. km), Sjenica (1.059 sq. km), Kuršumljica (952 sq. km), Majdanpek (932 sq. km), Bor (856 sq. km), Gornji Milanovac (836 sq. km), Boljevac (828 sq. km), Prijepolje (827 sq. km), Vršac (800 sq. km) etc.

Since the territory of municipalities and towns varies significantly, the same applies to number of settlements. The data on number of settlements is not related to a smaller or a larger number of inhabitants. Rather, the number of settlements stands in relation to the size of territory and type of settlement (highlands, plain, settlements with or without streets etc.) According to data of the Statistical Office, total number of settlements in Serbia is 6.158, which makes 35,39

settlements per local government unit on average. In municipalities, the number of settlements goes from one (Sremski Karlovci) up to 107 (Prokuplje). There are 25 municipalities with less than ten settlements, while the biggest number of settlements are in Sjenica (101), Tutin (93), Kuršumlija (90), Knjaževac (86), Prijepolje (80), Pirot and Aleksinac (72 each), Gornji Milanovac (63), Raška (61), etc. Among towns, the biggest number of settlements is in Belgrade (157) and more than 100 settlements are found in Leskovac (144), Vranje (105) and Kruševac (101). The least settlements are in Pančevo (10), Novi Sad and Sombor (16) and Subotica (19).

According to 2013 estimates of the Statistical Office, there is a total 7.164.132 in central Serbia and Vojvodina. When that number is divided by number of municipalities and towns (145), the average population of municipalities and towns is 49.408. Excluding Belgrade, with 1.669.552 inhabitants, the remaining 144 municipalities and towns have 38.157 inhabitants on average. In 23 towns there is a total of 4.284.765 inhabitants. After Belgrade, the biggest population is in Novi Sad (346.163), Niš (259.125), Kragujevac (179.030) etc. Nine towns have less than 100.000 inhabitants (Valjevo 89.112, Sombor 84.187, Vranje 82.845, Sremska Mitrovica 78.776, Loznica 78.136, Užice 76.886, Požarevac 74.713, Jagodina 71.583 and Zaječar 58.183).

In 122 municipalities there is a total of 2.879.367 inhabitants, so average population in municipalities is 23.601. Below that average are 75 municipalities, out of which 12 have less than 10.000 inhabitants (Crna Trava, Trgovište, Lapovo, Medveđa, Golubac, Gadžin Han, Ražanj, Čičevac, Nova Crnja, Sremski Karlovci, Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad). Another 32 municipalities have between 10.000 and 15.000 inhabitants and 22 municipalities have between 15.000 and 20.000 inhabitants, while another nine are below the municipal average.

The remaining 47 municipalities have a population above the average, out of which 17 have less than 30.000 inhabitants. Between 30.000 and 40.000 inhabitants there are 11, and between 40.000 and 50.000 inhabitants another 10 municipalities. Eight municipalities have more than 50.000 inhabitants (Stara Pazova 65.513, Kikinda 58.099, Pirot 56.903, Bačka Palanka 54.631, Paraćin 53.327, Ruma 53.332, Vršac 51.330 and Aleksinac 50.543).

## CHANGES IN TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION FROM 1963 TO 2015

As mentioned, after the 1960s there were few changes in territorial organisation. Since 1961/63 until today, only two new municipality were formed in central Serbia and Vojvodina (Lapovo in 1991 and Sremski Karlovci in 1989)<sup>11</sup>, as well as ten municipalities in AP Kosovo and Metohija (Mališevo in 1985, Zubin Potok in 1987, Kosovo Polje, Štimlje, Štrpce, Novo Brdo and Obilić in 1988, Gora, Opolje and Zvečan in 1990, while Mališevo was abolished in 1991 and Opolje in 1992). Also, a number of town municipalities was established, the first being Rakovica in Belgrade (1974), and during 1979/80 seven town municipalities in Novi Sad, which were abolished as soon as 1989, while Sremski Karlovci got the status of a separate municipality. After 2000, Surčin was formed within Belgrade (2004), five town municipalities in Niš (Niška Banja in 2000 and Medijana, Palilula, Pantelej and Crveni Krst in 2004), towns municipalities Požarevac and Kostolac (2010), Vranje and Vranjska Banja (2011), Novi Sad and Petrovaradin (2011) and Užice and Sevojno (2014).

Besides Belgrade, Novi Sad, Priština, Kragujevac and Niš, 19 former municipalities got the status of towns in the end of 2007: Valjevo, Vranje, Zaječar, Zrenjanin, Jagodina, Kraljevo, Kruševac, Leskovac, Loznica, Novi Pazar, Pančevo, Požarevac, Smederevo, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica, Subotica, Užice, Čačak and Šabac. This change in status can be marked as the biggest change in territorial organisation after the 2006 Constitution.

On the other hand, the number of abolished municipalities in this period significantly exceeds the number of newly formed ones. The biggest number of municipalities were abolished between 1961 and 1971, more precisely from 1963 to 1967. The total number of municipalities in SFRY were then reduced from 782 to 500 and in Serbia 61 municipalities were abolished (42 in central Serbia, 13 in Vojvodina and six in Kosovo and Metohija). During the decade which followed no municipalities were abolished, while in the end of 1980s and 1990s, three municipalities in Kosovo were abolished, as well as town municipalities in Novi Sad.

Certainly the biggest change in territorial organisation during the last half a century was the mentioned abolishment of counties in 1967 and then the introduction of inter-municipal regional associations.

As a sui generis replacement of the middle level of government, but this time as a form of deconcentration, administrative districts were introduced in 1992 (first they were named “counties”). There is 29 of them and they encompass the territory of three to 12 municipalities and towns (excluding the area of the town of Belgrade for which there is not a county). The territories of administrative districts coincide with the territories of statistical regions (at NUTS3 level), so there are 30 of these regions (i.e. 29 counties plus the Belgrade region).

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Territorial organisation of Serbia is founded upon municipalities, towns and the town of Belgrade which function within a single-level system of local self-government. Besides that, the present system is established as monotypic, since municipalities, towns and the town of Belgrade have in essence the same status, same bodies and competences. Differences in organisation of bodies are reflected only in their names and number of elected representatives (assembly and municipal or town council) and differences in competences are minimal and concern the possibility to entrust towns with a wider circle of delegated tasks and their right to organise communal police, as well as three additional competences for the town of Belgrade.

The majority of municipalities and towns in Serbia have for decades (i.e. mostly before, and partly after 1967) functioned in fixed territorial frames and that changes of their boundaries more often happened as exceptions than as widely accepted practice. Relatively few changes occurred as corrections of boundaries of existing municipalities (by extracting some settlements from one municipality in order to be joined with another).

On the other hand, during the last five decades, very big changes occurred in the territorial distribution of the population, conditioned primarily by migrations from rural and agricultural areas to towns. To illustrate those changes, Figure 1 provides an overview of natural population trends by municipalities of central Serbia and Vojvodina from 1963 to 2013<sup>12</sup>.

Data in Figure 1 testify to three types of phenomena: 1) an expected rise in population of some municipalities and towns; 2) municipalities and towns which have the same or similar population as in 1961; and 3) municipalities and towns with evident decrease in population. Another significant fact can be noticed: the census which showed a noticeable decrease in population is the one in 2001, i.e. the decrease most often occurred during the 1990s and after that.

MUNICIPALITY/ TOWN	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2012	2013
BELGRADE	942.190	1.209.360	1.470.073	1.602.126	1.635.333	1.664.218	1.669.552
APATIN	34.836	34.279	33.843	32.999	33.971	28.627	28.315
KULA	46.062	48.727	49.898	49.311	49.511	42.621	42.110
ODŽACI	42.242	39.585	37.967	37.501	36.725	29.813	29.355
SOMBOR	96.191	98.080	99.168	97.852	99.600	85.127	84.187
ALIBUNAR	32.932	31.833	29.383	26.535	25.603	19.923	19.678
BELA CRKVA	26.726	25.450	25.690	23.707	22.984	17.216	17.034
VRŠAC	61.284	60.528	61.005	58.228	58.529	51.685	51.330
KOVACICA	34.654	33.489	32.798	30.469	29.104	25.056	24.864
KOVIN	39.994	39.808	38.843	39.263	39.018	33.399	33.130
OPOVO	11.848	11.515	11.541	11.384	11.292	10.326	10.247
PANCEVO	93.744	110.780	123.791	125.261	131.331	122.916	122.492
PLANDIŠTE	19.455	17.882	16.138	14.581	14.456	11.165	10.991
BAC	22.262	19.348	18.243	17.249	17.154	14.251	14.097
BAČKA PALANKA	52.199	54.410	58.155	58.835	61.827	55.106	54.631
BAČKI PETROVAC	16.865	16.042	16.095	15.662	15.298	13.329	13.222
BEOČIN	11.881	13.216	14.126	15.848	16.301	15.655	15.551
BEČEJ	44.585	44.976	44.243	42.685	42.050	37.020	36.663
VRBAS	42.853	43.490	45.756	46.405	46.470	41.730	41.378
ŽABALJ	25.300	25.372	26.219	25.823	28.148	26.004	25.873
NOVI SAD	155.685	206.821	250.138	265.464	302.593	343.648	346.163
SRBOBRAN	20.414	19.594	18.573	17.365	18.074	16.196	16.073
SREMSKI KARLOVCI	6.390	7.040	7.547	7.534	8.921	8.700	8.645
TEMERIN	18.336	19.643	22.557	24.939	28.842	28.926	28.244
TITEL	16.103	16.131	16.364	16.218	17.474	15.680	15.571
ADA	22.234	22.611	22.408	21.506	19.927	16.877	16.715
KANJIŽA	34.960	33.817	32.709	30.668	28.689	25.080	24.833
KIKINDA	68.569	68.915	69.864	69.743	68.393	58.824	59.099
NOVI KNEŽEVAC	17.831	16.509	15.026	13.816	13.388	11.121	11.011
SENTA	31.081	31.416	30.519	28.779	26.653	23.125	22.903
ČOKA	19.482	18.364	16.653	15.271	14.168	11.247	11.081
BAČKA TOPOLA	44.466	43.508	41.889	40.473	39.174	33.028	32.689
MALI IĐOŠ	17.144	15.651	14.975	14.394	13.997	11.947	11.844
SUBOTICA	136.782	146.770	154.611	150.534	152.119	140.847	140.223
ŽITIŠTE	33.514	29.684	25.579	22.811	21.641	16.600	16.295
ZRENJANIN	115.692	129.837	139.300	136.778	135.503	122.508	121.683
NOVA CRNJA	21.580	18.298	16.270	14.538	13.071	10.126	9.978
NOVI BEČEJ	33.507	31.729	30.312	28.788	27.572	23.712	23.512
SECANJ	25.519	21.938	19.501	18.438	17.214	13.067	12.843
INDIJA	36.484	40.530	44.151	44.185	50.740	47.235	47.046
IRIG	14.709	13.678	12.413	11.696	12.598	10.764	10.626
PECINCI	19.289	18.490	19.284	20.077	21.714	19.711	19.679
RUMA	47.671	52.156	55.083	55.087	61.920	53.828	53.332
SR. MITROVICA	63.634	78.391	85.129	85.328	88.344	79.385	78.776
STARA PAZOVA	41.036	43.477	52.566	57.291	69.064	65.618	65.513
ŠID	37.403	38.752	37.459	36.317	39.897	33.877	33.540
ARILJE	20.001	19.581	20.111	20.335	20.005	18.765	18.642
BAJINA BAŠTA	34.067	31.387	30.860	29.747	29.929	25.793	25.491
KOŠJERIC	17.898	16.582	16.157	15.478	14.370	11.922	11.740
NOVA VAROŠ	24.770	22.740	22.523	21.812	20.300	16.349	16.035
POŽEGA	32.382	33.804	34.100	33.578	32.789	29.361	29.050
PRİBOJ	26.147	32.548	35.200	35.951	33.866	26.770	26.386
PRIJEPOLJE	38.925	44.022	46.902	46.525	45.749	36.767	36.464
SJENICA	36.950	36.622	35.570	33.681	33.761	26.329	26.259
UŽICE	57.062	67.555	77.049	82.723	83.962	77.528	76.886
CAJETINA	20.716	19.224	17.098	15.966	15.786	14.632	14.552
VALJEVO	81.173	88.267	95.449	98.226	99.119	89.762	89.112
LAKOVAC	18.985	18.270	17.950	17.716	17.488	15.398	15.281
LJIG	19.662	18.549	17.620	15.912	15.186	12.549	12.298
MIONICA	22.359	20.560	19.297	17.368	16.873	14.176	14.001
OSECINA	21.803	19.832	18.519	16.745	15.636	12.371	12.162
UB	38.648	37.512	36.259	34.593	33.863	28.852	28.612
BOGATIC	37.141	35.882	35.256	34.438	34.784	28.558	28.209
VLADIMIRCI	28.281	26.729	25.281	23.335	22.309	17.269	17.038
KOCELJEVA	19.982	19.143	18.367	17.064	16.674	12.951	12.723
KRUPANJ	24.520	23.529	22.530	21.879	20.743	17.046	17.038
LOZNICA	70.534	78.228	84.180	86.875	91.344	78.758	78.136
LJUBOVIJA	25.009	21.689	19.890	18.391	17.406	14.252	14.015
MALI ZVORNIK	11.583	12.084	13.074	14.029	14.644	12.335	12.169
SABAC	94.866	107.143	119.669	123.633	128.331	115.287	114.548
GORNJI MILANOVAC	47.894	48.420	50.651	50.087	48.595	43.990	43.533
IVANJICA	40.526	39.233	37.877	36.686	35.912	31.658	31.347
LUCANI	33.336	31.646	29.708	27.167	25.225	20.631	20.344
CACAK	85.439	97.924	110.801	116.808	119.144	114.763	114.141

MUNICIPALITY/ TOWN	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2012	2013
DESPOTOVAC	38.389	36.553	35.690	33.869	32.947	22.855	22.473
JAGODINA	62.950	68.910	76.460	77.266	76.312	71.793	71.583
PARACIN	59.957	63.097	64.718	64.119	63.847	53.801	53.327
REKOVAC	25.520	22.710	19.877	17.011	14.968	10.792	10.525
SVILAJNAC	33.677	34.256	34.888	33.136	33.101	23.262	22.940
CUPRIJA	34.028	36.529	38.841	38.747	38.668	30.305	29.947
ALEKSANDROVAC	34.540	33.798	33.887	33.215	31.509	26.218	25.903
BRUS	25.606	24.581	22.679	21.331	19.766	16.128	15.916
VARVARIN	26.423	26.143	25.779	23.821	23.371	17.790	17.582
KRUŠEVAC	103.190	118.016	132.972	138.111	137.586	127.892	126.900
TRSTENIK	49.107	50.624	53.570	54.873	52.193	42.475	41.939
CICEVAC	12.709	12.359	12.568	11.757	11.234	9.363	9.252
VRNJACKA BANJA	18.820	21.940	24.768	25.875	27.436	27.329	27.141
KRALJEVO	91.579	106.153	121.622	125.772	126.310	124.679	123.724
NOVI PAZAR	58.777	64.326	74.000	85.249	95.259	101.098	102.122
RASKA	29.856	29.367	29.475	28.747	27.878	24.448	24.198
TUTIN	29.959	29.444	32.779	36.631	36.201	31.163	31.201
ARANDELOVAC	38.562	42.122	46.803	47.618	49.852	45.904	45.493
BATOČINA	12.455	12.459	13.452	13.459	13.244	11.639	11.525
KNIC	25.599	23.192	20.965	18.724	16.656	14.063	13.877
KRAGUJEVAC	105.711	130.551	164.823	180.084	180.731	179.274	179.030
LAPOVO	8.850	9.156	9.631	9.480	9.144	7.738	7.650
RACA	18.010	16.542	16.262	15.216	14.128	11.352	11.188
TOPOLA	31.860	30.322	29.418	27.579	26.642	22.065	21.778
BOR	43.448	52.849	56.846	59.900	57.391	48.294	47.911
KLADOVO	28.217	33.173	33.376	31.881	31.292	20.416	20.136
MAJDANPEK	23.022	26.120	26.628	27.378	25.095	18.454	18.127
NEGOTIN	65.409	63.706	63.973	59.559	57.577	36.452	35.735
VELIKO GRADIŠTE	27.819	28.019	27.929	27.174	26.419	17.395	17.165
GOLUBAC	15.320	14.178	13.541	12.513	12.115	8.210	8.091
ŽABARI	25.144	23.298	21.819	19.347	18.340	11.159	10.906
ŽAGUBICA	22.602	21.055	20.275	17.777	16.972	12.525	12.292
KUCEVO	30.452	29.095	28.429	25.649	24.946	15.201	14.852
MALO CRNICE	24.347	23.169	21.953	19.940	18.888	11.269	11.054
PETR. NA MLAVI	51.613	50.433	48.608	46.414	45.770	30.853	30.378
POŽAREVAC	66.047	73.768	81.123	84.678	83.241	75.054	74.713
BOLJEVAC	26.277	23.335	21.818	19.384	17.532	12.720	12.468
ZAJECAR	68.616	73.147	76.681	72.763	69.624	58.856	58.183
KNJAŽEVAC	59.445	52.010	48.789	44.036	33.589	31.042	30.490
SOKOBANJA	24.285	23.932	23.394	21.948	19.676	15.783	15.524
BOJNIK	20.838	18.801	16.246	14.498	13.587	10.990	10.851
VLASOTINCE	35.625	36.002	35.863	34.302	33.758	29.594	29.526
LEBANE	27.579	28.228	27.836	27.068	25.700	21.612	21.290
LESKOVAC	134.250	147.487	159.001	161.986	161.168	143.023	141.719
MEDVEDA	24.244	20.792	17.219	13.368	11.574	7.357	7.235
CRNATRAVA	12.319	9.672	6.366	3.789	2.699	1.608	1.539
NIS	148.354	195.362	232.563	248.086	255.646	259.790	259.125
ALEKSINAC	67.200	66.082	67.286	63.844	60.389	51.215	50.543
GADŽIN HAN	23.965	19.974	16.281	12.990	10.872	8.202	7.990
DOLJEVAC	19.860	20.228	20.633	20.662	20.068	18.376	18.319
MEROŠINA	18.889	18.028	17.849	16.139	15.381	13.848	13.721
RAZANJ	18.829	17.113	15.586	13.582	12.031	8.958	8.767
SVRLJIG	30.260	25.505	24.242	20.740	17.919	13.982	13.755
BABUŠNICA	34.316	29.033	23.872	19.333	16.120	12.025	11.734
BELA PALANKA	24.982	21.325	18.744	16.447	14.654	11.909	11.725
DIMITROVGRAD	18.418	16.365	15.158	13.488	12.038	9.984	9.854
PIROT	68.073	69.285	69.653	67.658	64.922	57.440	56.903
VELIKA PLANA	47.388	48.894	52.619	51.150	49.943	40.510	40.052
SMEDEREVO	77.682	90.650	107.366	115.617	116.741	107.652	107.048
SMED. PALANKA	55.488	58.112	60.945	59.822	58.737	49.801	49.185
BOSTILEGRAD	18.368	17.306	14.196	11.644	10.259	7.998	7.886
BUJANOVAC	39.064	43.522	46.689	49.238	53.099	38.214*	38.132*
VLADICIN HAN	26.074	25.231	25.441	25.255	24.273	20.587	20.281
VRANJE	65.367	72.208	82.527	86.518	89.312	83.241	82.845
PREŠEVO	26.738	30.056	33.948	38.943	46.868	27.179*	27.254*
SURDULICA	32.505	29.494	27.029	24.785	23.655	20.109	19.873
TRGOVIŠTE	14.404	12.556	8.923	7.146	6.466	5.000	4.906
BLACE	22.099	19.331	17.338	15.709	14.431	11.557	11.370
ŽITORADJA	22.071	21.244	20.710	19.545	18.870	16.201	15.999
KURŠUMLIJA	36.896	31.672	27.629	23.590	22.051	18.963	18.694
PROKUPLJE	60.075	57.315	56.256	52.926	50.456	43.986	43.511

\*) Estimated population.

Figure 1. Natural population trends in central Serbia and Vojvodina by municipality (1961-2013)

Among those with the greatest rise in population, the frontrunners are Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Niš, Kragujevac and some others, to a lesser extent. Municipalities with a larger percentage increase in population are e.g. Temerin, Stara Pazova, Indija, Vrnjačka Banja and some others. Some municipalities and towns maintained the same or similar number of inhabitants as in 1961 (e.g. Subotica, Bačka Palanka, Žabalj, Titel, Priboj, Arandjelovac, Doljevac). Basically, in these cases there is an absence of increase in population. In the majority of municipalities, there was a decrease in population. In some cases, the decrease is more than 50% or somewhat below that percentage, e.g. in Babušnica, Bela Palanka, Dimitrovgrad, Bosilegrad, Blace, Žabari, Kučevo, Malo Crniće, Boljevac, Knjaževac, Bojnik, Medveđa, Crna Trava, Gadžin Han, Ražanj, Svrljig, Koceljeva, Ljubovija, Rekovac, Knić, Mionica, Osečina, Žitište, Nova Crnja, Sečanj, Plandište, and some others. Among towns, the population of Sombor and Zaječar was smaller in 2013 than in 1961.

Since the described changes were without influence on territorial structure of local self-government, one can ask him/herself about its further sustainability, that is if possible changes in the current territorial division to municipalities and towns would contribute to a more efficient system of local self-government and thus a more advanced decentralisation model. Size of population is not and should not be the only criterion for assessment of functionality in local governments (but an assessment of all capacities for performing functions and other relevant criteria). However, it is a fact that municipalities with less than ten or fifteen thousand inhabitants can hardly perform the uniformly set functions of local self-government units alone, and without cooperation with others. As it is a fact that towns with several hundred thousands of inhabitants can hardly be a local self-government in which citizens truly decide, a government close to citizens.

In principle, there are three directions of possible improvement of the system: 1) further enlargement of municipalities (with or without other changes in the local self-government system are indicated in the following two points); 2) introduction of a two-level local self-government (creation of a middle level, existing alongside the current or possibly smaller municipalities); and 3) introduction of a polytypic model of local self-government (by differentiating the organisation and competences among smaller and bigger municipalities, or municipalities and towns, or according to a different criterion). The polytypic model could be based on existing municipalities and an increase in the number of towns (e.g. ones over 50.000 inhabitants), followed by widening of towns' competences; on the introduction of two levels of local self-government in bigger towns, i.e. recognition of town municipalities as derived local self-government units or on a different model.



## NOTES

- N.B. The article was produced within the project *Serbian Mayors – a survey into the position of the executive within the local government system in Serbia* of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, supported by Balkan Trust for Democracy.
- 1 Results of the survey published in: *Istraživanje: evropski gradonačelnici – politički lider u evropskim gradovima* (Belgrade: Stalna konferencija gradova i opština, 2015).
- 2 Besides municipalities and towns, territorial organisation of the Republic of Serbia consists of two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija, as separate territorial units.
- 3 On differentiation between single and multi-level local self-government and between monotype and polytype system of local self-government e.g. M., Jovičić, *Lokalna samouprava* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2006), 22-65. For a detailed presentation of the current local self-government system see: B. Milosavljević, *Sistem lokalne samouprave u Srbiji* (Beograd: Stalna konferencija gradova i opština, 2009).
- 4 See answers to question 35 and the following questions in the published survey (p. 43 etc.)
- 5 In more detail B. Milosavljević, *Dva veka lokalne samouprave u Srbiji: razvoj zakonodavstva 1804-2014* (Beograd: Stalna konferencija gradova i opština, 2015).
- 6 See e.g. CEMR, *Decentralisation at a crossroads – Territorial reforms in Europe in times of crisis*, 2013.
- 7 E. Pusić, *Upravni sistemi II* (Zagreb, 1985), 119.
- 8 Both laws were adopted in 2007. Official gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 129/07.
- 9 Difference between a urban settlement and town as a local self-governmen unit, to which it is pointed here is evident from the fact that there are 193 urban settlements only 24 towns. On the territory of Belgrade there are 16 urban settlements, i.e. Belgrade and 15 smaller towns.
- 10 In the former organisation of municipalities, besides population, other criteria were the size of the territory and distance of a settlement to the seat of the municipality. This was abandoned after the reform of the municipal system in the second half of the 18th century, when ideas of bigger municipalities appeared and the criterion of size was defined according to the number of tax heads, i.e. later according to number of inhabitants.
- 11 Sremski Karlovci had the status of a municipality until 1963.
- 12 Data according to: *Prirodno kretanje stanovništva u Republici Srbiji 1961-2010: podaci po opštinama* (Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku, 2012); „Vitalni događaji u Republici Srbiji 2012“, Saopštenje broj 197 (Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku, 2012) (17.7.2012); „Vitalni događaji u Republici Srbiji 2013“, Saopštenje broj 163 (Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku, 2013) (30.6.2013).

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