ABSTRACT: According to the results from the 2011 Census, in Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (hereinafter referred to as ’Vojvodina’) there were 1,815 Slovenians, or 45% of the total number of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia. Slovenians make up only 0.09% of the total population in Vojvodina. All demographic indicators show a profound demographic decline in the population based on biological depopulation that began in the late 1960s. Furthermore, a negative trend in natural increase was further strengthened by inverse migrations that started several years after they had colonized Vojvodina, especially south Banat. Slovenians in Vojvodina, at an average age of 52.1 years, were ranked second place in the rank of ethnicity by age, which clearly indicates to intense process of population ageing and inability to achieve positive effects of natural movement. Although this population is statistically small in number, this paper clarifies the underlying causes of extremely unfavorable demographic trends that characterized Slovenian population in Vojvodina over the last several decades.

KEYWORDS: Slovenians, Vojvodina, biological depopulation, demographic ageing, migrations.

INTRODUCTION

A differential demographic change according to ethnicity has been the focus of demographic research for a long time. Remarkable historical and political events during the XX century significantly changed the political and physical map of the South-Slavic area by creating new political and territorial units which became independent states at the end of XX century. Considering the fact that, starting from 1918, all South-Slavic countries were ethnically heterogeneous, in contemporary political-geographical circumstances, a number of ethnic communities remained beyond their current state borders. According to legal regulations, they became national minorities or ethnic groups. This led to an increasing interest in the study of ethno-demographic processes and phenomena in the newly created countries.
The ethnic structure of population in Autonomous Province Vojvodina (hereinafter referred to as 'Vojvodina') shows its multinational character that has been formed under the influence of many factors that can be classified into: demographic (changes in the ethnic structure due to differential ethnic population growth), and non-demographic (change in attitude to national declaration in censuses, and changes in methodological solutions of censuses). As a result of these factors, over the time, certain ethnic communities increased their total number of population and their share in total population, while others experienced negative trends in population dynamics which had direct impact on ethnic structure. This type of ethnic heterogeneity was shown in the results of the 2011 Census when Serbs had a share of 66.8%, and 20 national and ethnic minorities had a share of 33.2% in the total population. According to the same results, the overall number of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia (excluding the data for Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija) was 4,033 or approximately 0.06% of the total population. Out of the total number of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia, 45% of them live in Vojvodina, and 55% live in central Serbia (approximately 69.4% in Belgrade). The share of Slovenians in the total population of Vojvodina is only 0.09% and all demographic indicators point to a profound demographic decline based on biological depopulation that began in the late 1960s. When observing the regions, more than a half (55%) of Slovenians in Vojvodina live in South Bačka and South Banat. When observing municipalities and cities, the highest number of Slovenians is recorded in the city of Novi Sad (412) or 22.7% of the total number of Slovenians in Vojvodina. Slovenians also live in the municipalities of Subotica (9.3%), Vršac (8%), Pančevo (6.6%), Zrenjanin (5.2%), and in the municipalities of Beočin, Sombor, Irig, Sremska Mitrovica, Plandište, Bačka Topola, Vrbas and Kula, which number ranges from 1–5% of the total number of Slovenians in Vojvodina.

So far, no special scientific interests have been generated in demographic research on Slovenians in Vojvodina, since they were usually observed only partially within studies on the total population of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia. However, a remarkable contribution to the study of the Slovenian population in Vojvodina was made by professor Mirko Pak in his work entitled 'The colonization of Slovenians in Banat' (1963) in which he presented basic demographic characteristics of the post-war Slovenian colonists in five settlements in South Banat (Vršac, Gudurica, Velika Greda, Banatsko Plandište and Dužine).

Although there are no reliable data on Slovenians in Vojvodina before 1921, we discovered that Slovenians had lived in Vojvodina in the late XIX century, precisely in 1880, when they were mentioned as miners in Vrdnik and some settlements in Fruška Gora, all in relation to economic migration and seasonal jobs.

The first significant migrations of Slovenians to Vojvodina began in the period between two world wars. The next wave of immigration was after the World War II, during the 'agrarian colonization'. In the period between 1945 and 1946, an overall number of 801 Slovenian families moved to five villages
in South Banat, and 30.8% of colonists came from Ljubljana and Celje [Pak 1963: 404]. This process of immigration to Banat was completed by the end of 1946 and it was the last wave of migration because in the second half of the XX century there were no significant immigration waves of Slovenians to Vojvodina.

Nowadays, although small in number, Slovenian population is specific in many ways, and very interesting for demographic studies. An average age of 52.1 years places Slovenians in Vojvodina on the top rankings of nationality by age, but also according to other indicators of demographic ageing they are faced with serious biological depopulation.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF ETHNO-STATISTICAL AND ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON THE SLOVENIAN POPULATION IN VOJVODINA

Although the main focus of this paper is current demographic characteristics of Slovenians in Vojvodina, we are not able to arrive at correct conclusions without referring to long-term trends in the population dynamics. Demographic research in Vojvodina has been possible since the organization of regular statistical surveys of the population, first of all, censuses and vital statistics. However, until the 1948 Census, data on ethnic structure could only be obtained indirectly, through questions about mother tongue and religion. Ethno-statistical data about population of Vojvodina, which were obtained from the Austro-Hungarian census before the World War II and two censuses conducted in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1921 and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1931, are included in the very important statistical database, but they are also scarce and have limited distribution. Methodological solutions for collecting information about ethnic features, uneven time periods of censuses, as well as different socio-political circumstances under which censuses were conducted, led to the fact that results varied in degree of reliability, inability to compare data and lack of uniformity of population features, which substantially complicates demographic research [Radovanović 2005: 38].

The focus of censuses conducted in 1921 and 1931 were questions about mother tongue and religion, and the information about ethnic structure was obtained indirectly. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, without Slovenia with Prekomurje, in 1921, 39,775 inhabitants with Slovenian mother tongue were recorded, out of which 8,916 or 22.4% were registered in Vojvodina [preliminary results of the census in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on January 31, 1921, 1924: 30–31, 34–36]. The results obtained from census in 1931 showed that the 55,805 inhabitants of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, without the Drava Banovina, declared Slovenian as their mother tongue, out of which 5,896 were from Belgrade and Pančevo, and 3,745 lived in Danube Banovina [Kržišnik-Bukić 1992: 178].

Direct data on the national structure of population in Vojvodina can be obtained from all eight censuses which were conducted after the World War II.
The data about nationality were collected in terms of constitutional principles that guaranteed full freedom of national declaration to all citizens of Serbia using the 'subjective declaration criteria'. Therefore, when we discuss current national structure of population in Vojvodina we should keep in mind that we use only the number of 'nationally declared population', which may not always coincide with their ethnic origin [Knežević 2011: 132]. According to the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for Censuses of Population and Housing of the United Nations, questions about ethnicity, religion and mother tongue belong to the group of the so-called 'complementary features' and, in some western European countries, they are considered as personal or private matters [Raduški 2006: 181]. It is important to mention that in the former Yugoslavia, ethnic features were regarded as essential, during the entire period of its existence, especially in difficult socio-economic and political circumstances.

Besides characteristics regarding the nationality, mother tongue was also important for ethno-demographic research. The question about language was less influenced by subjective criteria, and it was included in all census questionnaires in Serbia (excluding 1948).

Vital statistics (statistics on natural movement – birth, death, marriage and divorce) represent a very important source of information for analytical and ethno-demographic research. The first data on the number of births of Slovenians in Vojvodina were published in 1957, when 110 births were registered. Methodology of vital statistics was also changed, especially from 1965 to 1970, when collecting and publishing data on vital records of ethnicity were stopped, and made ethno-demographic research more difficult. This was very important for the research on Slovenians in Vojvodina who had negative rate of natural increase in that period. Also in the period from 1991–2002, Slovenians in Serbia were not in narrow statistical classification of nationalities which have their data on vital statistics continuously and fully published [Knežević 2012: 175].

However, it should be noted that the lack of current methodology in registration of vital records of nationality leads to the fact that data about births are collected based on mother’s nationality, which may not reflect the real ethnic origin of a child.

THE NUMBER OF SLOVENIANS IN VOJVODINA DURING THE XX AND EARLY XXI CENTURY

Not all ethnic communities participated at the same time, with the same proportion and intensity, in the increase of total population of Vojvodina. Slovenians, as well as Czechs and Russians are characterized by continual and linear decline in number throughout the entire post-war period, while the Serbs, Croats, Hungarians and Slovaks are characterized by decline in intensity of growth at first, and then decline in the population until the end of this period [Knežević 2011: 139–140].
Data on population of Slovenians in Vojvodina in the period 1948-2011 shows that their number decreased approximately four times, and the first significant decline was recorded in the first inter-census period (Table 1, Graph 1).

### Table 1. The number of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia (1948 to 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERBIA</td>
<td>20,998</td>
<td>20,717</td>
<td>19,957</td>
<td>15,957</td>
<td>12,006</td>
<td>8,261</td>
<td>5,104</td>
<td>4,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Serbia</td>
<td>13,492</td>
<td>14,281</td>
<td>13,814</td>
<td>10,926</td>
<td>8,207</td>
<td>5,271</td>
<td>3,099</td>
<td>2,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vojvodina</td>
<td>7,223</td>
<td>6,025</td>
<td>5,633</td>
<td>4,639</td>
<td>3,456</td>
<td>2,730</td>
<td>2,005</td>
<td>1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo and Met.</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: For 2002 and 2011, without data on Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija


![Figure 1. The number of Slovenians in Vojvodina (1948–2011)](image)

According to the 1948 Census data, approximately 2/3 of Slovenians (64%) lived in Central Serbia (mostly in Belgrade), and 34% were registered in Vojvodina. It is also evident that the decline in the number of Slovenians was higher in Vojvodina than in Central Serbia. Change in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina in the period from 1948 to 2011 shows a constant trend of decline which was particularly marked until the 1980s (Table 2). The decline in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina coincides with the period when their negative natural increase began, which is still evident. It should also be noted that the process of colonization of Vojvodina was completed in the 1950s. Since that time, there have been no significant migrations of Slovenians to Serbia, but in the 1960s slow process of inverse migrations, mainly to Slovenia, started.
Table 2. *Indicators of increase/decline in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina (1948–2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>absolute growth</strong></td>
<td>-1198</td>
<td>-392</td>
<td>-994</td>
<td>-1183</td>
<td>-726</td>
<td>-725</td>
<td>-190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>average annual growth</strong></td>
<td>-240</td>
<td>-49</td>
<td>-99</td>
<td>-118</td>
<td>-73</td>
<td>-66</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>average annual growth rate</strong></td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>index of growth</strong></td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Calculation is based on the results of censuses in Serbia (1948–2011)*

Data presented in Table 2 show that in the period from 1948–2011 increase in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina had negative values, and in this regard the biggest change occurred during the 1970s. Besides Slovenians in Vojvodina, the decline in population during the entire observation period was also recorded for the ethnic communities of Czechs and Russians. It is also evident that there were no significant fluctuations in the declining trend which indicates clear demographic explanation of the cause, and also that the influence of subjective criteria in declaring of nationality, as well as the changes of the census methods were not relevant to the population dynamics of Slovenians in Vojvodina.

**THE NATURAL MOVEMENT AND INDICATORS OF DEMOGRAPHIC AGING OF SLOVENIANS IN VOJVODINA**

Slovenian population in Vojvodina is faced with long-term changes in fertility due to low birth rates which are below the replacement level, and the vital statistics data has recorded biological depopulation of Slovenians in Vojvodina since the 1960s (Table 3, Graph 2).

Negative value of natural increase of Slovenians in Vojvodina was first recorded in 1972, which coincided with a significant decline in the number of Slovenians during the seventies, when the average annual growth rate was -2.9‰. There are several reasons for early biological depopulation. The first reason is related to inverse migrations of Slovenians that were colonized in Vojvodina just after the World War II. Many of them soon returned to Slovenia, but selectivity of migrants by age directly influenced the age structure and reproductive potential of the remaining population. In fact, as defined by previously applicable laws, houses and farming land that had been given to colonists in Vojvodina could not be sold in the following ten years, which resulted with the return of primarily young Slovenians to Slovenia, while their parents mostly stayed to save properties which they could sell later [Pak 1962: 417].

Absolute decline in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina during the period 1971–1981 amounted to 1,183 residents (Table 2), while the natural increase during the same period amounted to -36 residents. In the period 1981–1991, the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina declined for 726 residents, and natural increase during the same period amounted to -193 residents. It means that the
share of net migration in the absolute decline in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina during the seventies amounted to 97%, while in the eighties it was 73.4%. It is interesting that according to the census results from 2011, in the South Banat region, 358 Slovenians were recorded, and only 175 in the municipalities of Vršac and Plandište which also includes five settlements that were colonized by the Slovenian population after the World War II (Vršac, Gudurica, Velika Greda, Banatsko Plandište and Dužine).

Figure 2. *Trends in fertility and mortality of Slovenians in Vojvodina (1957–2011)*

Table 3. *Crude birth rate (n), Crude death rate (m) and the Rate of natural increase (j) of Slovenians in Vojvodina (1961–2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-13.5</td>
<td>-10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>-8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
1 The calculation according to vital statistics from 1990;  
2 Crude death rate of Slovenians in the Republic of Serbia, without data for the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija  

Source: Calculations are based on data from vital statistics and censuses (1961–2011), FSO and RSO, Belgrade.
Reasons for the decline in the births of Slovenians in Vojvodina may be found in their spatial distribution and large share in urban population (in 2011, 72.2% of Slovenians lived in urban areas). It should be noted that the Slovenians, Hungarians and Romanians in Vojvodina previously had a reproduction model which was characterized by low birth and low mortality rates [Rašević, 2006, 67].

The long-term trend of negative natural increase and negative values of net migration, especially of young population, have resulted in extremely unfavorable indicators of demographic aging, which suggests that the Slovenians in Vojvodina have been continuously exposed to an intense process of aging over a longer period (Table 4).

Table 4. Indicators of demographic aging of Slovenians in Vojvodina (2002 and 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>average age</th>
<th>share of large age groups (%)</th>
<th>aging index 65+/0–15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0–15</td>
<td>20–64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The average age of the population in Vojvodina in 2011 was 41.8 years. With an average age of 52.1 years, the Slovenians took the second place in the rank of nationality by average age in Vojvodina (the average age of the Germans in Vojvodina was 53 years). Compared to census data from 2002, the average age of Slovenians in 2011 was increased for 3 years. Although indicators of demographic aging of Slovenians in Vojvodina are somewhat better than those living in Central Serbia (particularly in relation to Belgrade, where the average age of Slovenians in 2011 was 63.7 years, and the aging index amounted to 3.1 years), they still clearly show the consequences caused by emigration processes and long-term trend of negative natural increase.

CONCLUSION

Proximate ethno-statistical data about Slovenians in Vojvodina, which allow continuous ethno-demographic research, are available in census statistics from 1948, while data on vital statistics are available from 1957, but there was no regular collection and publishing of certain data in the periods from 1965–1970 and 1991–2001. Dynamics in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina does not differ from the trends of continuous decline that was recorded for most of the nationalities. Decline in the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina is almost linear and without oscillations, but slower in comparison to that in Central Serbia. In the period from 1948–2011, the number of Slovenians in Vojvodina declined for about four times, and most significant decrease was during the 1970s. Natural increase of Slovenians in Serbia shows negative trend from the
1970s, and it caused extremely negative indicators of demographic aging; it also shows that the Slovenian population in Vojvodina is faced with pronounced biological depopulation and profound demographic aging. In the period from 1948 until today there have been no significant immigration waves of Slovenians to Vojvodina, although there have been several waves of emigrations of Slovenians (since the 1960s) characterized by selectivity of migrants by age due to emigration of young reproductive and working-age population. Unfavorable indicators of natural movement in combination with prominent emigration from 1948 onwards gives clear explanation of present demographic situation relating to Slovenians in Vojvodina, and the average age of 52.1 years in 2011 (which ranked the Slovenians at the top three national or ethnic communities based on average age in Vojvodina) best describes the demographic potential of this population.

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ДЕМОГРАФСКЕ КАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ СЛОВЕНАЦА У ВОЈВОДИНИ НА ПОЧЕТКУ XXI ВЕКА

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САЖЕТАК: Иако малобројна, популација Словенаца у Војводини је по много чему специфична и врло интересантна за демографска проучавања. Према резултатима Пописа становништва из 2011. године број Словенаца у Војводини је износио 1.815, или 0,09% од укупног броја становника Војводине, односно 45% од укупног броја Словенаца у Републици Србији. Сви демографски показатељи указују на дубоку демографску ерозију ове популације, у чијој основи се налазе негативни трендови природне и миграционе компоненте популационе динамике. У периоду 1948–2011. број Словенаца у Војводини је опао за приближно 4 пута, при чему је најинтензивнији пад забележен током седамдесетих година XX века. Вишеодесети-седамдесети рок је уочен великој губитку природног прираштаја, низ једнодесети и дванаестог рата, али је овај тренд у 1948–2011. постале високо репродуктивних показатеља демографског старења на основу којих можемо закључити да је словеначко становништво у Војводини сачинено изразитом биолошком депопулацијом, дубоком демографском старењу и великом губитком репродуктивног потенцијала. Са просечном старошћу од 52.1 године, уделом младог становништва од свега 7% и индексом старења од 4.4, не постоји ни теоријска могућност рехабилитације фертилитета који би обезбеђивао просту замену генерација Словенаца у Војводини, али ни демографски потенцијал који би био неопходан за њихов биолошки опстанак.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Словенци, Војводина, биолошка депопулација, демографско старење, миграције