ABSTRACT: Long-term marginalization of villages has caused negative demographic trends in rural areas of Serbia, primarily through forceful depopulation, unfavorable demographic structures and other structural problems. The term “extinction” is the most often related to the recent appearance of demographic shrinkage and economic decline of villages. According to the last population census (2011), 13 settlements without permanent inhabitants have been recorded. The fact that about 1/3 of all settlements in rural Serbia is sparsely inhabited (less than 20 inh/km²) indicates that scales of demographic decline impacts are yet to be seen. The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (2010) advocates polycentric and balanced regional development. Creation of adequate instruments to mitigate demographic decline in rural areas requires clear definition of regional territorial units. Are they going to be NUTS 3 level, or functional urban areas, as spatially and functionally integrated areas which represent more suitable choice for addressing the issue of demographic and economic decline, or should concrete answers be looked for at the level of identified rural
regions [Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia, 2010; National Program for Rural Development, 2011]? This paper will research these issues in the District of Zaječar with a good practice in Germany.

KEYWORDS: demographic decline, regional level, rural areas, spatial organization, public services

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CHOICE OF THE CASE STUDY

District of Zaječar is located in East Serbia. It spreads over 3,623 km² and it has 119,976 inhabitants (in rural areas 50,932) with average age of 46.7 (in rural areas 51.5), and it has 33 inh/km². Based on NUTS 3, the District of Zaječar also comprises four municipalities that have 173 settlements (out of which 168 are rural). District of Zaječar is one of the most vulnerable areas of the Republic of Serbia, not only from an economic point of view but also in terms of the development of the population. The centuries-old influence of a variety of factors led to the formation of unfavorable demographic trends. One of the first recently demographically extinct settlements in Serbia occurred in this region. The last resident of the settlement Repušnica moved out in 1999. On the other hand, District of Zaječar has high share of uncultivated agricultural land (21.7%) and that is one of the consequences of demographic change. This paper emphasizes the methods for combating demographic decline in rural areas of District of Zaječar.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASE STUDY
– THE DISTRICT OF ZAJEČAR

Demography

During the period 1981–2011, the population of the District of Zaječar continuously decreased, from 170,682 to 119,967 inhabitants (Table 1). The population of the district decreased by nearly 30% in the past 30 years. The most intensive population reduction was observed in the last intercensal period, when, in just nine and a half years, the population of the district declined by 17,594 inhabitants, or 12.8%.

Table 1. Population change in the District of Zaječar, 1981–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Population17</th>
<th>Average annual growth rate (per 1000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boljevac</td>
<td>21818</td>
<td>18424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaječar</td>
<td>76681</td>
<td>71076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knjaževac</td>
<td>48789</td>
<td>43551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokobanja</td>
<td>23394</td>
<td>21125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Zaječar</td>
<td>170682</td>
<td>154176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2 In the 1981 Census, the total population of a certain place included persons who resided in that place permanently, regardless of whether they were in that place at the
With respect to the district, all municipalities were engulfed in the negative demographic trends, but of different intensity. Until the analyzed period, the City of Zaječar had a population increase, but after 1981, there was a trend of population decrease that had already taken hold over other municipalities of the district. During the three intercensal periods, the municipalities of Knjaževac and Zaječar lost more than 17,000 inhabitants each. The largest loss was observed in the municipality of Boljevac – which is the municipality with the lowest number of inhabitants – which population decreased by over 40% in 30 years. Apart from having the lowest number of residents, the municipality of Boljevac also has the smallest number of settlements in the district. On the other hand, the municipality of Knjaževac includes half of all the settlements, i.e. 86 out of 173. Large number of settlements of different structures initiated different population flows during the analyzed period. During the first intercensal period (1981–1991), apart from municipal centers, another two settlements experienced a population growth: Trgovište in the municipality of Knjaževac, and Rtanj in the municipality of Boljevac, but two other settlements suffered a loss of more than 500 people: Lukovo (municipality of Boljevac) and Jošanica (municipality of Sokobanja). In the following period (1991–2002), two municipal centers maintained a population increase (Zaječar and Sokobanja), which also happened in Zvezdan and Gamzigrad settlements of Boljevac and Zaječar municipalities. Between 1991 and 2002, all settlements of Knjaževac municipality suffered a decrease in population, while the three settlements in municipality of Zaječar (Rgotina, Lubnica and Grlište) recorded the largest decrease in population. The last intercensal period brought significant changes in population trends at the level of settlements. The only settlement that had a population growth in the period between 2002 and 2011 was Ćuštica in the municipality of Knjaževac. On the other hand, community centers Knjaževac and Zaječar lost the greatest number of inhabitants during this period.

The age structure of the District of Zaječar is significantly different from the Republic’s average. This particularly depopulating area, due to the effects of spatial, historical and socio-economic factors, has a very unfavorable age structure (Figure 1). The share of young people, i.e. the population from 0-19 years old, is 3.5% lower (16.36%) than the Republic’s average, while the percentage of people over 65 years of age is higher by almost 7% (24.17%). Average age of the population in the studies area, according to the 2011 Census, is 46.7 years, and at the national level the average age is 42.2 years. The age structure of urban areas in the District of Zaječar is at the same level as the Republic average age,
while in rural areas, the population is in the phase of severe demographic ageing. The share of young population is only 13.4%, while the share of the elderly in rural areas of the District of Zaječar is almost two times higher than the national average. The average age of the rural population has increased from 50.3 to 51.5 years. The most unfavorable situation is in the rural areas of Knjaževac where the number of the elderly is even four times higher than the number of the young population and in some settlements the average age is over 70 years.

Figure 1. *Share of young population (0–19) and the elderly (over 65) in the District of Zaječar, 2011*

![Figure 1](image)


Settlement Structure and Public Infrastructure

Settlement network consists of all types of settlements on the particular territory, and it is hierarchically organized, functionally related and chronologically dynamic with regard to demography, morphology and functions [Stamenković and Bačević [1992]]. Therefore, fluctuation in settlement structure actually indicates political and socio-economic changes incurred in Serbia.

The settlement network in the District of Zaječar consists of 173 settlements out of which five settlements are urban and 168 are rural (in statistics they are called “other settlements”). The average population size of the settlements has been decreasing continuously since 1981: from 986 inhabitants to 693 in 2011 [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), 2014]. The change has been more extreme in rural settlements: from 605 to 294. The average size of settlements is 20.9 km², with 4.8 settlements/100km² density (average in the Republic is 6.1 settlements/100km²). The misbalance indicates non-polycentric settlement network and unbalanced urban settlement system
– the consequence of urbanization not timely conducted. Regionally, the settlement network is unbalanced regarding demographic and functional changes between center and periphery, municipal centers and rural settlements. As the result, rural areas are becoming demographically extinct, the number of small settlements continuously increases, and, at the national level, incoherence and asymmetries of the urban system increase, too [Tošić and Krunić 2005].

The settlement network of the District of Zaječar is markedly fragmented. Most of the settlements (83%) belong to a group of small settlements (up to 500 inhabitants). The number of these settlements has been continuously increasing since 1981 when there were 86 settlements, then 113 in 1991, 131 in 2002 and 143 in 2011 [SORS, 2014]. In addition, number of larger settlements (over 1,000 inhabitants) has been decreasing, from 32 to 14 respectively. Two largest obstacles towards polycentric settlement network are the so called “dwarf” settlements (up to 20 inhabitants), which are practically already extinct, and extreme demographic extinction in rural areas. There was only one “dwarf” settlement in 1981, but 13 in 2011. With regard to the demographic tendencies and population age structure in rural areas, additional 38 settlements can be joined to the group at the risk of extinction. If trend of the last intercensus period (2002–2011) continues, the calculations by mathematical projection indicate that there will be 10–20 extinct settlements in 2020, and about a half settlements less in 2050 than those which are currently in the District of Zaječar.

The organization of settlement network in Serbia is based on the concept of decentralized concentration where secondary centers, the centers of settlement communities, and micro-development nucleuses are of the utmost importance [Tošić 1999]. In the District of Zaječar, the settlements are grouped in several hierarchical levels (Map 1): (1) regional center – Zaječar, (2) sub-regional center – Knjaževac, (3) municipal centers – Sokobanja and Boljevac, (4) micro-development centers – centers of settlement communities and secondary centers, and (5) other rural settlements.

Peripheral rural areas in Serbia face heterogenized quality of facilities and accessibility to public services. These matters are arranged by legislation, but in spite of it, due to the terrain configuration, infrastructure marginalization and demographic decline, some areas are still troubled with time-consuming accessibility as a consequence of spatially unbalanced distribution of public services. Accessibility of public services is expected to be equal for all users because it represents fundamental human right (education and health care), and public services are financed by taxes from all citizens.

District of Zaječar is prevailingly mountainous, with poor infrastructure and accessibility; therefore, its rural population faces the problems in particular. There is one regional center – Zaječar, and three smaller urban centers – Knjaževac, Boljevac and Sokobanja, where majority of primary and secondary public services and facilities are provided. Its villages, except few secondary centers, are poorly endowed or in a great number of cases completely endowed with buildings for public services; therefore, their inhabitants need to travel in order to meet their primary needs. The terrain configuration and absence of public transportation are common causes which deprive the population from
services which are considered to be fundamental human right (primary health care and primary school).

Map 1. *Network of settlements and public services in District of Zaječar*

Source: Elaborated by authors

The population in urban center Zaječar, the largest center in the area covered by the case study, has access to the following services of the highest rank: secondary education, faculties, specialized health care, care centers for persons with specific needs (children with mental disabilities, retirement home, etc.), center of culture, museum, theatre; therefore, the gravitation zone of Zaječar covers even the other three municipalities. The other municipal urban centers ensure the fundamental rights of their citizens with regard to education (primary and secondary) and health care. In addition, Sokobanja has specific functions (tourism and spa). Their gravitation zones cover territories of the municipalities they belong to.
POTENTIAL LEVELS FOR REGIONAL GOVERNING

Rural Regions

Defining rurality is a complex task for which indicators are often statistically immeasurable. Due to the character of rural areas, it is necessary to include a whole set of indicators to define them. The most often indicators are: population density, share of population employed in agriculture, heritage of an area, dependence and distance from cities and market, public services, land-use, functions, etc. [Vasilevska 2006; Lukić 2010; Radovanović 2010].

One of the most common rurality indicators in the EU is defined by the OECD, according to which rural areas are considered those areas with population density below 150 inh/km². Based on the OECD classification, 4,175 (90%) settlements in Serbia were rural in 2011. Therefore, it appears more suitable to use the threshold of 100 inh/km² in case of Serbia, as assigned by the Agenda 2000, as a starting criterion for defining rural areas in the EU. In this case, 85% of the territory of Serbia is rural or 3,954 settlements.

Successful and applicative policy on rural areas also depends on the creation of evaluation indicators and their monitoring [Bogdanov and Stojanović, 2006]. Respecting heterogeneity of the space, over 40 indicators (e.g. age and education structure, employment, activities, land-use, infrastructure) have been used in a cluster analysis, finally bringing several types of rural regions as the output. Aiming at life quality improvement and regional differences’ decrease, the document clarified 65,952 km² or 3,904 settlements with 4.3 million inhabitants as rural area of Serbia, recognizing following types [National Rural Development Program, 2009]: region of high-intensity agricultural production and integrated economy; region of small urban economies and intensive agriculture; mountainous region with economy based on natural resources – eastern and south-eastern Serbia; region of high potential in tourism with small agricultural production – part of western and south-western Serbia.

According to this typology, the District of Zaječar belongs to the Mountainous region, which is the largest of all rural regions (29% of Serbia and 34% of rural Serbia) and the sparsest populated (43 inh/km²). It is prevailingly hilly and mountainous, containing about 40% of rural settlements in Serbia, but populated with only 23% of rural population. Severe depopulation, highest aging index and low education level, as well as absence of infrastructure and product market, make this region scarce in labor and socio-economically the weakest among all rural regions in Serbia.

Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics level 3 (NUTS 3)

A NUTS 3 is one of the levels defined by Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. They are used for collection of statistical indicators established by the European Union [EU], to secure territorial units comparability regarding statistical data, and for making decisions on socio-economic development for EU budget distribution. NUTS levels differentiate in population size: NUTS 1 should embrace above 3,000,000, NUTS 2 between 800,000–
3,000,000, and NUTS 3 between 150,000–800,000 inhabitants [European Commission (EC), 2012]. The NUTS 2 represents base for application of regional policy and measures on territorial cohesion, while NUTS 3 represents small regions with specific characteristics and identity.

As an EU candidate country, Serbia has got the precondition to adjust its statistical and developing territorial units accordingly to NUTS system. According to Regulation of Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics [2009; 2010], NUTS is a set of terms, names and symbols that describe a set of territorial units with levels of grouping. They can be viewed as one of the instruments of regional development, considering that collection of data, information and indicators of performance measures of regional development will be carried out at the NUTS levels (Regulation of NUTS, Article 2, 2009/2010). Therefore, Serbia is divided into two functional territorial units NUTS 1 level, five functional units NUTS 2 level, and 30 areas NUTS 3 level, which are equated with administrative districts.

Serbia can use funds within Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance [IPA], distributing it within the NUTS levels. The distribution of funds is based on the values of set indicators of the NUTS 2 level, but regional developmental agencies are in charge of choosing development projects and control use of the resource. Until now, 13 regional development offices had been established in Serbia.

The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia from 2010 (SPRS) is another document tackling the role of NUTS levels. Here, NUTS 2 is acknowledged as a region, while NUTS 3 is defined as a region with unique geographic characteristics, natural potentials and cultural-historical heritage. They are (NUTS 3) also equalized with existing administrative districts. In relation to this, the SPRS proclaims establishment of regional development councils, composed of representatives from local self-governances, districts and civil-sector. These have not been organized yet. Besides regional development and decentralization tools, the SPRS relates NUTS 3 also to the concept of functional urban areas [FUA], where networking and establishment of functional relationships are expected to help strengthening of counties’ capacities.

Functional Urban Areas [FUA]

FUA, according to ESPON 1.1.2. (2006), consist of an urban center, i.e. nucleus, and the area around it, which are economically integrated and which represent the commuting area (rural-urban), and the local labor market. This labor market is its main indicator. Therefore, a prerequisite for defining the FUA is the existence of data on commuting.

In smaller countries, such as Serbia, FUA is defined in the following manner: urban core must have at least 15,000 residents but the whole area has to have more than 0.5% of the national population, and it has to gather the functions of economic and regional importance. To determine the FUA on the territory of Serbia, the following indicators were taken into account: number of inhabitants, share of urban and rural population in total (the degree of urbanity),
commuting working population with respect to the total number of persons involved in business activities and contributing to gross domestic product. FUA of Zaječar is classified in the category of national importance.

Daily urban system consists of the city and that part of its environment with which there is interaction exhibited by migration of the workforce and residents who commute daily so as to meet their needs of social, economic and cultural character. It is an area in which there is intensive population mobility between places of residence and places of performing other social-geographic functions [Goodal 1987].

Map 2. *Daily urban system of Zaječar in the District of Zaječar, 2002*

*Source: Elaborated by the authors*

The model of spatial-functional manifestation of daily urban systems based on the function of work [Tošić 1999] lists five zones of the work center influence. The zones of influence are divided on the basis of the proportion of
employees who commute to the work center daily: (1) intense impact zone (70%), (2) strong impact zone (50–70%), (3) medium impact zone (30–50%), (4) lesser impact areas (20–30%, 10–20% and 5–10%), (5) periphery of the daily urban system (less than 5%).

Zaječar is the center of the FUA, which includes a network of settlements belonging to municipalities of Zaječar, Boljevac, Knjaževac and Sokobanja. According to the 2002 Census\(^3\), 8,092 commuters listed Zaječar as their center of work. Most of the commuters, 4,895 of them, i.e. 60% of the total number of commuters who work in Zaječar, are located on the periphery of the daily urban system, and 21% in the zone of strong impact. Other zones are represented with a significantly smaller share. The territorial distribution of commuters has a special form: the largest number of commuters are from the territory of Zaječar (mostly from the following settlements: Veliki Izvor, Grljan and Zvezdan), a smaller number from the settlements in the municipalities of Knjaževac, Negotin and Bor, while the settlements from the municipality of Sokobanja are not present in the daily urban system of Zaječar (Map 2).

GOOD SPATIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC PRACTICE IN GERMANY

The aspect of regional development and the problem of demographically endangered rural areas have been the subject of a considerable body of previous and contemporary scientific research in Serbia. Regional imbalance, as a spatial problem, on the one hand, assumes socio-economic and demographic polarization in a significantly smaller area, mostly limited to the urban environment, and on the other hand, it assumes demographically extinct and economically marginalized rural and peripheral areas, unbalanced urban network, etc.

Based on the Christaller’s Central Place Theory, Federal Republic of Germany developed a new spatial concept in the 1960s of the 20\(^{th}\) century, particularly taking into account the settlement network, i.e. population distribution, availability of public services and road infrastructure between them. The goal was to establish territorial balance and to minimize regional differences by providing guaranteed approximately equal infrastructural conditions and accessibility to public services for all citizens in the state [Domhardt and Troeger-Weiβ 2009].

The idea was to define obligatory conditions in distribution of services for each settlement at national level. Population increase at the time had allowed ambitious planning of public services distribution where each settlement, including rural, was provided with high accessibility. The settlements were ranked according to (1) population size, (2) existing functions and (2) position in space (30 minutes isochrones) [EC, 1999].

However, depopulation has induced adaptation of the concept to new situation, still reflected today in the Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany (2006). The document consists, among other, of three

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\(^3\) Last available data about commuters at settlement level. For 2011, this data will not be processed and published at settlement level.
maps which are based on (1) demographic indicators (size of city, regional population density, population projection for 2050), (2) road network and (3) land use. The analysis of indicators shows that the three maps represent three separate concepts: (1) growth and innovation, (2) securing services of public interest (health care, education, public transport, etc.) and (3) conservation of resources and shaping of cultural landscape.

The growth and innovation concept resembles the FUA developed in SPRS (2010). Both approaches are showing network of urban centers, their gravitation zones and smaller centers outside the zones (in Germany called the stabilization areas). The concept of securing services of public interest shows areas with demographic increase, areas with demographic increase and stable areas, together with centers of high and medium rank – stable and those under the demographic extinction risk. Hence, the settlements are ranked according to their demographic size (therefore, economic influence, too) and public services which are assigned based on settlement’s rank. The map also indicates areas that need improvement of accessibility to high rank road infrastructure (e.g. highway and inter-regional railway) and urban centers which can stay highly ranked (primary centers) only if connected in an urban network, e.g. Dresden, Leipzig and Chemnitz. The obligatory networking between urban centers is intended for the depopulation areas that still preserve development potentials of the cities, but are demographically weakened in rural areas. This decision is embedded in the fact that strengthening of centers of higher rank (at regional level) induces strengthening of smaller settlements in its vicinity, too.

The second concept foresees strengthening of crucial infrastructural systems in depopulated, rural and structurally weak areas – particularly road infrastructure. This is aimed at improving accessibility to public services in higher ranked centers for the citizens inhabiting the structurally weak areas. The aim is to decrease travel costs and travel time to the higher rank centers in the entire territory of Germany, and to make guaranteed public services accessible in 30 minutes in the middle ranked centers.

The third concept implies land-use which is generalized to both urban and rural areas. Some of the rural areas are assigned different types of agriculture, others have gone through transformation from surface mining basins into tourism areas (turning mine pits into water accumulations), and finally, areas next to the state border are assigned to cross-border cooperation.

Generally speaking, there are three pillars in the new approach to demographic extinction and territorial imbalance in Germany: (1) transfer of unsustainable functions from the smallest settlements to the higher rank centers, (2) obligation of each municipality to design its own development strategy and (3) intensification of local and regional cooperation [Domhardt and Troeger-Weiß 2009]. When compared to the German concept, the SPRS (2010) also recommends distribution of public services according to settlement hierarchy, but it is not quite clear which type of center is the first and which centers follow it in this hierarchy. Another parallel between Germany and Serbia is the adoption of local development strategies and establishment of road infrastructure.
Regarding regional transport infrastructure, the SPRS puts the District of Zaječar into the group of “far below the average” regions, simultaneously valuing regional transport infrastructure as one of the inevitable preconditions for mitigation of demographic extinction and development. In addition, the SPRS advocates strengthening of urban and regional centers and redistribution of social services in order to empower hindered rural areas, similarly to German development concepts. Therefore, distribution of social services, transport infrastructure and regionalization are the elements which strongly influence the demographic structures and should be, therefore, analyzed and improved in the regions which are below average, such as the District of Zaječar.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE
Demographic Decline in Rural Areas

In order to emphasize the methods of improvement of mitigation measures for demographic decline in rural areas of District of Zaječar, specifically based on the analyses presented in this paper, the following paragraphs shortly explain the comparison between regional governance levels.

The rural area typology previously presented is based on regional development priorities dividing Serbia in large territorial units. Regarding the heterogeneity of these regions, main guidelines to the regional development can be only general in their nature, but not specific. This is particularly the case in the eastern and southern parts of Serbia that represent natural, demographic and socio-economic mosaic, and as such they need specific priorities and measures for the future development and mitigation of depopulated rural areas. Therefore, rural regions can serve for giving main guidelines on the national level, but in order to implement specific development and demographic measures it is necessary to treat geographically smaller units, so as not to neglect their identity and diversity.

The other analyzed regional governance level is Zaječar FUA. The idea of the concept is applicable in mitigating regional imbalance, but in the case of Zaječar FUA its gravitation zone is significantly limited to the vicinity of Zaječar – the City of Zaječar and few settlements in neighboring municipalities. Peripheral position of this regional center hindered functional relationships with marginal parts of the District, particularly with the settlements located away from the main roads. The SPRS (2010) plans broadening of the gravitation zone in some settlements in Knjaževac and Boljevac municipalities until 2050, while the settlements in Sokobanja municipality are expected to remain out of its functional influence. For this reason, FUA does not seem to be suitable for the establishment of regional governance body in the District of Zaječar.

Finally, the NUTS 3 remains the most suitable choice with regard to its functions and size. Namely, its territory entirely matches the administrative district of Zaječar (the same case with other districts) and it also matches European systems of demographic data collection and regional development financing. This way the whole district would be covered, taking governance role
in decision-making and application of demographic policy in spite of its spatial disintegration in rural areas.

Based on the aforementioned, the recommendation for mitigation of demographic decline in rural areas is development of a new model of spatial organization of settlement network and public services. This requires the following:

- **Decentralized concentration and micro-regional nucleuses**: functional and infrastructural strengthening of rural centers as a counterweight to the urban ones;
- **Public services organization** according to SPRS (2010): accessibility to primary services (30 minutes isochrones) and high rank services (45–60 minutes isochrones). The rural settlements where population travels 45–60 minutes to the nearest urban center for the primary services (e.g. school, ambulance) are suggested to have stimulation for teachers, doctors and others who work in isolated settlements and deprived areas. The other suggestion is enlargement of gravitation zones of public services by providing complementary activities (student’s dormitory, day care centers for children and seniors, etc.) and provision of mobile services.
- The concepts of *Growth and innovation* and *Securing services of public interest* from the Guidelines for Spatial Development of Germany [2006] emphasize the idea of settlement networking in rural areas.

Following the recommendations and combining the models of demographic-spatial development of Germany and Serbia, improvement of functional relationships within the settlement network as well as improvement in public service organization can be expected. This should reflect in functional and infrastructural strengthening of micro-development centers and consequently in the mitigation of demographic decline in rural areas. General guidelines should be given at the national level, similar to the rural areas in the National Rural Development Program [2009]. Following the guidelines, a regional governance body, established at the NUTS 3 level, should be responsible for creation of a regional concept founding it on its own ideas, region’s identity and population needs. The body would consist of representatives from local communities belonging to the area. Besides local cooperation, the region should practice inter-regional and trans-border cooperation in accordance with EU goals and funding system, which can be particularly beneficial for border regions such as District of Zaječar. Besides maximal use of IPA funds, and later other structural funds too, following the recommendations can help regions to spatially integrate, overcome existing FUA inconsistencies and finally mitigate serious demographic decline in rural areas.

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РЕГИОНАЛНИ НИВО У ФУНКЦИЈИ УБЛАЖАВАЊА НЕГАТИВНИХ 
ДЕМОГРАФСКИХ ТРЕНДОВА У РУРАЛНИМ ПОДРУЧЈИМА: 
СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА ЗАЈЕЧАРСКИ ОКРУГ

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РЕЗИМЕ: Дугорочна маргинализација села довела је до негативних демографских трендова у руралним подручјима Србије, превасходно кроз интензивну депопулацију, неповољну демографску структуру и друге структурне проблеме. Фокус овог рада је анализа различитих облика управљања на регионалном нивоу, а у циљу препознавања најприкладније форме по питању ублажавања неповољних демографских трендова и структура. Анализа је прилагођена простору Зајечарског округа, који је одабран за студију случаја на основу опште демографске угрожености овог простора. Овај рад на почетку приказује стање демографских токова, насеобинске и јавно-социјалне организације простора Зајечарског округа. У даљој анализи нагласак је стављен на избор регионалног нивоа управљања у циљу ублажавања или евентуалног превазилажења поменутих проблема кроз компарацију различитих регионалних нивоа: руралних региона, НСТЈ 3 просторних јединица и функционално-урбаног подручја и примера добре праксе забележене у Немачкој, која је према мишљењу аутора, најпримеренији модел просторне организације, уз уважавање регионалних специфичности. Напослетку су дате препоруке на тему ублажавања процеса депопулације и њених последица у руралним подручјима.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: демографски пад, регионални ниво, рурална подручја, просторна организација, јавне службе