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URBAN SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF MIGRATION - CASE STUDY: CITY OF LESKOVAC, SERBIA

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Abstract: Sustainable spatial transformation, urban governance, and the constraints of urban-rural development can be traced through migration. In the Republic of Serbia, after the rapid increase in the number of people living in urban areas due to internal migration, structural changes in settlements have begun with natural decline and emigration. However, the far-reaching effects of migration on shrinkage have received little attention in policy or practice. To shed light on and predict possible future patterns, this paper looks at the attitudes and intentions of the population towards migration and identifies determinants that influence migration plans for possible future flows inside and from the Republic of Serbia. The paper is based on data from a survey and interviews conducted in the area of the City of Leskovac (N = 1124) with the population 20 + years, local authorities, civil society and the private sector, i.e. those who play a central role in addressing the challenges and optimizing the opportunities created by the growing trend of migration. The survey results show that most respondents support the emigration process, which is mainly influenced by economic factors. In this context, the trend of emigration is expected to continue in the future, and it is perceived as an obstacle to achieving sustainability goals and rarely as an opportunity.

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Introduction

Migration is one of the defining features of the 21st century and can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by supporting all aspects of economic and social development worldwide. For this reason, a better understanding of the relationship between migration and key development issues, such as urbanization, is needed. (Lucci et al., 2016). The linkages between migration and urbanization are complex, with numerous multidirectional and multidimensional interreactions that influence each other. Despite all this, migration and urbanism are treated as two separate discourses. However, some recent research (Dines, 2022) has highlighted the "local turn" in migration policy research with debates on the current urbanization process. Urban population growth is driven in part by the arrival of people seeking to overcome poverty, escape conflict, or cope with economic and environmental risks. According to some authors (Klopp and Petretta, 2017; Sampson, 2017; Seto et al., 2017), urban sustainability focuses on the life experiences and well-being of new immigrants.

Recent demographic trends such as population decline and ageing, especially in developed countries, pose new challenges for restructuring and redesigning existing urban structures and creating sustainable communities (UPD, 2015). Under these new conditions, the phenomenon of shrinking cities has emerged, facing long-term population loss. As a result, urban shrinkage becomes an interplay of national demographic trends and uneven regional development. The effects of urban shrinkage include declining tax revenues, rising unemployment, out-migration of the working-age population, surplus land and buildings, and oversized physical infrastructure (UNECE and HABITAT III, 2016: p.19).

Today, many cities in the world are experiencing the process of urban transformation. This can also be observed in a large group of post-industrial cities in Central and Eastern Europe. Due to the decline in birth rate, depopulation and aging of the society, the maintenance of urban functions has become a problem and one of the most important challenges of urban policy in Serbia.

This paper aims to show the influence of migration trends in the post-industrial city of Leskovac in southern Serbia, as well as the intentions and aspirations of the population living in urban and rural areas of this municipality (City of Leskovac[1]), as they are highly interconnected. In the past, the urban area of Leskovac grew due to immigration from rural areas, which led to a high concentration of newcomers. The main pull factors were higher income, more jobs and other opportunities for

[1] According to the Law on Territorial Organization of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 129/2007, 18/2016, 47/2018, and 9/2020 - other laws), the territorial organization of the Republic of Serbia consists of NUTS1 regions (Serbia North and Serbia South), NUTS2 (5 regions) and NUTS 3 (20 areas), which are composed of several municipalities or Cities. The difference between municipalities and Cities lies in the fact that Cities consist of more than one town or city (urban settlement) together with rural settlements, while other municipalities have only one town or a city with rural settlements.

personal success in urban center, which were severely limited in rural areas. Since migration is one of the key factors of population dynamics, this paper deals with the desires and potential of people from the City of Leskovac in terms of migration - towards the main urban settlement, other regional centers or abroad. The entire municipality (with 144 settlements) is one of the largest in Serbia and consists of a city, 3 towns and 140 rural settlements, with population gravitating towards the largest urban area. This paper examines how internal migration redistributes population across an extensive region dominated by Leskovac, and analyses the centrifugal population movements that have emanated from this city in recent decades. Leskovac today records a negative balance of internal migration and has done so since 2011.

According to the Ordinance on the Establishment of a Unified Directory of the Development of Regions and Local Communities ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 104/2014), the City of Leskovac is at third category of underdeveloped local communities (development level 60-80% of the national average). The socio-economic changes that have taken place in recent decades have affected both the decline of rural areas from 1960s, as well as urban areas and the entire municipality in 21st century. It is obvious that migration has contributed to the limitation of human capital, and for this reason, the processes of reindustrialization and revitalization of what was once the largest center of southern Serbia have been hindered.

The aim of this paper is to answer the following questions: How does the population perceive the phenomenon of migration? Who is planning to migrate? What are the determinants of leaving/staying? And how does it reflect on overall development of local community and its population?

Theoretical framework

The consideration of future migration trends based on the population attitudes and intentions occupies an important place in the migration literature. The consequences of the migration process, both internal and international, have led researchers to thoroughly examine the attitudes of the local population (especially in traditional emigration countries) toward leaving or staying, as well as the determinants that influence them, in order to gain a clearer picture of future migration. Knowledge of future migration flows can be of great importance to policymakers in taking appropriate measures to adequately manage a migration flow in a given area. However, in many countries, official data on migration are not available or are incomplete, so predicting future migration flows is not a simple task (MDP, 2020). A qualitative study can be crucial in this context to obtain appropriate data, especially at the level of smaller territorial units.

Given the findings of some studies (Tjaden et al., 2019; Wanner, 2020) indicating a particularly strong correlation between population intentions toward

migration and their realization, this question becomes more important. Thus, the first step in determining future migration flows is a person's intention and decision to migrate from a given area. The decision to emigrate is associated with various types of deep considerations that a person makes in the course of his or her deliberations. The decision to leave the place of birth is made at important crossroads in life (Czaika et al., 2021), often under conditions that differ significantly from idealized assumptions and various models (Baláž, et al., 2014). There are also opinions that the decision to leave should be seen in the context of implementing smaller decisions that gradually lead to final emigration (Tabor et al., 2015).

Castelli (2018) divides migration factors into three groups: Macro, Meso, and Micro. Unfavorable economic development, various demographic and social factors, warlike conflicts, and specific political ideologies are the main macro factors that influence the decision to migrate. Among the meso factors, communication technology and in-country and out-of-country migration networks play an important role. The media are particularly important in this context, as they influence awareness of better living conditions in larger cities or more developed countries and often present a one-sided picture. Among micro factors, the following are most important: education, religion, marital status, and personal attitudes toward migration, which can play an important role in the final decision. Tartakovsky and Schwartz (2001) identified three different groups of factors that motivate people to migrate: physical, social, and psychological security; personal development-acquisition of knowledge and skills; and financial well-being. Hagen-Zanker (2010) states that the family has a special influence on the migration decision so the implementation of the intention to migrate is the result of calculating the costs and benefits of migration.

Today, it is clear that economic factors dominate decisions to leave the place of birth and that populations migrate mainly to areas with better economic opportunities (Thet, 2014; Wester, 2017; Dennison, 2022). Also low incomes and high unemployment rates are the main push factors that influence high migration potential. Other factors affecting emigration include the impossibility of career advancement and fewer opportunities for alternative sources of income, which is especially true for rural areas. On the other hand, opportunities to find a better job and more favorable working conditions are the main pull factors (Thet, 2014). Consistent with these statements are the projections that indicate that the volume of internal and international migration will increase in the coming decades because the drivers of migration (primarily economic and demographic) will intensify at all territorial levels (National Intelligence Council, 2021).

Demographic Characteristics of the City of Leskovac

The demographic development of the City of Leskovac at the beginning of the 21st century is characterized by population decrease, caused by unfavorable trends in

birth and death rates and various types of migration processes. Since the middle of the 20th century, this territory has experienced a change in the overall development, which is reflected in the variability of socio-economic conditions and political events that have a direct impact on population development. The processes of industrialization and urbanization in the 1960s and 1970s are related with the positive demographic trends of city of Leskovac. Due to the intensive economic development, the center of the municipality became one of the most important industrial areas in southern Serbia, which influenced population increase and the spatial redistribution of population through rural-urban migration. The need for labor force led to intensive migration towards the urban center, which became a place of favorable demographic and socio-economic development, while in the rural areas the process of deagrarization and gradual economic stagnation took place at the same time. Since most of the reproductively capable population participated in mobility, this pattern promoted certain changes in demographic patterns (Spasovski and Šantić, 2016).

Table 1. Population dynamic of the City of Leskovac, 1961-2022*

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2011	2022
Population no.	134.250	147.487	159.001	161.986	156.252	144.206	126.571

*Fist but not the final results of the Census 2022

Source: Statistical Office of RS

The most dynamic population growth was recorded in the period 1961-1981 when the number of people increased by 15.6%. The positive population trends continued until 1991 when the peak in the number of people was reached (Table 1). However, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and some specific socio-economic conditions in the 1990s steered the demographic development of the city and the whole area in the opposite direction. The factories were closed due to the unprofitability especially in textile industry which was the basis for strong economic development (Ilić, 2019), encouraged emigration. The decrease in the number of live births and the increase in deaths have led to a decrease in population since 1996. The gap between the city of Leskovac and the other settlements deepened, as the population growth in the urban settlement continued until 2002, which was not the case in the other settlements. Today, the City of Leskovac faces a significant population decline (from 144,206 in 2011 to 124,889 in 2022) due to natural decline and net out-migration. The crucial social aspects of urban sustainability are dramatically undermined by the question of a city's future development.

The continuity of unfavorable demographic trends has been intensified in the 21st century. According to the preliminary results of the 2022 census, the population of the City of Leskovac is 126,571, which represents a decrease of

about 12.3% compared to the 2011 census. This makes Leskovac one of the Cities/municipalities in Serbia that lost the most inhabitants in the period between the last two censuses. Internal migration toward regional centers as well as outward migration and natural decrease affected the changes in the age structure and contributed to demographic aging. The percentage of the elderly population (65+) increased from 10.6% (1991) to 17.6% (2011) in only two decades. The intensive depopulation observed in the area since the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century will continue in the future. The forecasts of the Statistical Office indicate a further decrease in the number of inhabitants, and it is expected that the City of Leskovac will have 115,457 inhabitants in 2041 according to the middle variant.

In recent years, however, the city experienced a kind of soft reindustrialization due to foreign investment, which encouraged the daily migration from rural settlements to the city. The opening of new factories (Jura, Falke, Autostop) reduced the unemployment rate. However, the positive steps forward to comprehensively transform this region require greater effort and a systematic approach.

Methodology

This paper is based on the results of the research project "Population attitudes and intentions towards migration and determination of the impact of migration on demographic ageing in local communities with the aim to formulate recommendations for the population policy". The research was conducted for the Cabinet of the Minister without a portfolio responsible for demography and population policy, while the researchers were from the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Geography. The project was conducted in April and May 2019 in the City of Leskovac.

The reason for selecting this area is conditioned by the fact that it is characterized by different types of migration, focusing on the intensive internal and (recently) international migration flows (Todorović et al., 2020). The questionnaire contained 39 closed-ended questions divided into the following groups: socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, the general quality of life, attitudes toward migration, intentions toward migration, and the role of local self-government in migration governance and management. A special set of 10 questions targeted rural residents. Respondents were offered multiple answers to specific questions and had the opportunity to select one or more of them. The data obtained from the survey were processed through the ESPAI web platform, which allows a statistical analysis of a large amount of data. As the system was based on a complex algorithm, the quantitative part of the analysis was carried out based on cross-referencing between the data on respondents' attitudes and intentions

regarding migration, on the one hand, and their socio-demographic characteristics, on the other hand. (Šantić et al., 2019).

The research was supplemented with qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is based on a series of prepared open-ended questions and, if necessary, some additional questions that were not predetermined. This ensures that respondents' attitudes are identified and taken into account in detail. A total of 41 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with young couples with children (12), young (single) people between 20 and 35 (11), decision-makers (11), and people aged 65 + (7).

In analyzing the interviews, respondents' answers were sorted by thematic units and by similarities and differences.

- How does the population perceive the migration phenomenon? - This research question examines the attitude toward migration, i.e., whether the population views migration as a threat or an opportunity for development, and to what extent the population supports or does not support emigration.
- Who plans to emigrate? - This question is about determining the migration intentions of the respondents according to their socio-demographic characteristics. The analysis is also based on respondents' answers in terms of place of residence - urban/rural areas.
- What are the determinants of leaving/staying? - The third part of the research aims to identify the factors (push / pull) that influence the decision of respondents to emigrate/stay in the place of origin, focusing on the differences between certain categories of the population in terms of their basic structural characteristics.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the target group include the analysis of gender, age, and education, as well as marriage status and household composition. The survey included 1124 respondents who were born and lived in the territory of the City of Leskovac (both rural and urban) at the time of the survey. The data on gender structure shows that the total sample is dominated by women (54.4%). As for the age structure, the majority of respondents belong to the category of mature (48.8%) and young population (42.6%), while the smallest number of respondents belongs to the group of people 60 + aged (8.6%). More than half of the respondents (59.2%) have a university degree; slightly more than one third completed secondary school, while the percentage of those who have completed elementary school is insignificant (2.5%). The majority of respondents live in a marriage/partnership (65%). Looking at the household structure, those who live with a partner and children dominate among the respondents (44.8), while those who live with children only (5.6%) are the least represented (Table 1).

Table 1– Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics of the respondents		N	%
Type of settlement	Urban	770	68.5
	Rural	354	31.5
Sex structure	Male	509	45.6
	Female	607	54.4
Age structure	Youth (20-40)	475	42.6
	Adults (40-60)	545	48.8
	Seniors (60+)	96	8.6
Educational structure	Primary education	28	2.5
	Secondary education	426	38.3
	Tertiary education	659	59.2
Marital status structure	Unmarried	390	35
	Married /in civil partnership	724	65
Family structure	Single	70	6.5
	Living with partner and no children	94	8.6
	Living with partner and children	491	44.8
	Living with parents	266	24.3
	Living with children	62	5.6
	Living with parents and children	112	10.2

The analysis of respondents' attitudes towards migration shows that more than half of the sample (56.8%) considers emigration (both internal and international) as a threat for development. Migration as an opportunity for development is perceived mostly by the population aged 20-29, male respondents, those with a university degree, those still living with their parents, and the unemployed. The results of the survey show that older people view outward migration primarily through the prism of demographic loss, and most of them believe that remittances from abroad cannot bring about long-term changes in development.

"There is nothing positive about people leaving. Migration is a negative process, viewed from all angles. The birth rate has dropped; there are fewer and fewer children. When I went to school there were several departments, now there is barely one. Our nation/state/society is disappearing" (Female, 35)

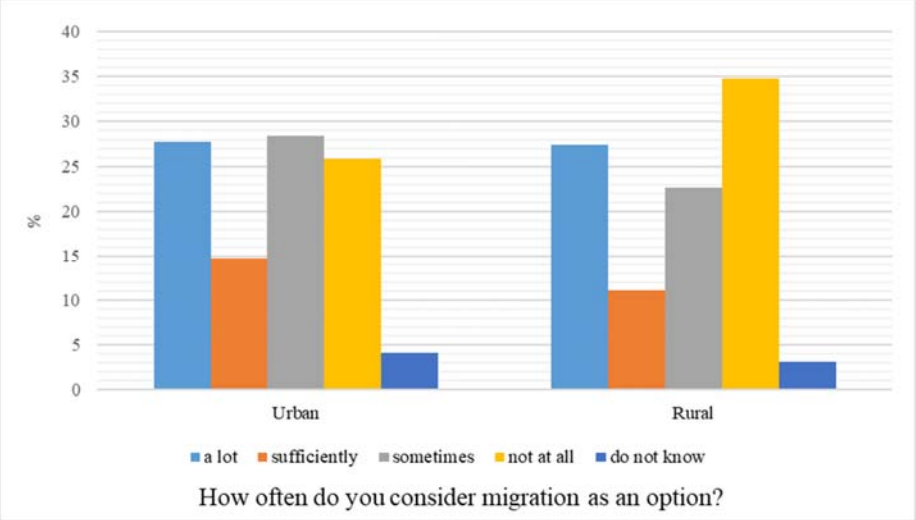
The largest number of respondents (80%) sees emigration as a process that takes place more intensively today than 10 years ago. As one of the main reasons for this is the unfavorable economic situation, but also the fact that the opportunities for emigration are better today than in the past. The majority of respondents state that the population leave mainly abroad (Germany, Austria, France), and a smaller number of people choose one of the regional centers in Serbia (Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad) as well as city of Leksovac. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (70%) believe that mainly the young and well-educated people

participates in migration and that the emigration trends will continue in the future. These observations are based on the assumption that the possible Government and local government actions in the coming period will not have a significant impact on the retention of the population in the area.

The results of the survey show that 40.2% of respondents support the emigration. According to the gender structure, almost equal numbers of men and women support emigration, mainly in age 30-34. Leaving local community is strongly supported by respondents who have not yet resolved issues with housing or are still living with their parents, as well as people who are employed in the private sector. Differences were found between people from urban and rural areas, namely 42.9% of the population in urban areas and 34.8% in rural areas favour emigration.

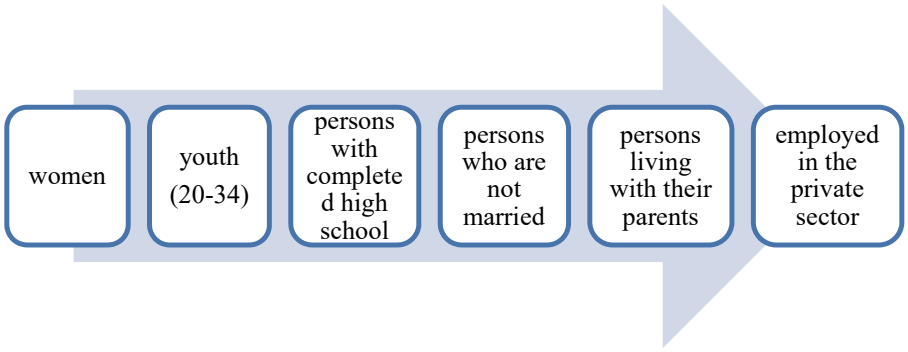
The data on the intention to migrate show that a significant proportion of respondents think about or frequently think about leaving (40.3%) (Chart 1). This is related to the general attitude towards migration, which is in many cases is positive. The percentage of the urban population thinking about moving or thinking about it frequently is almost half of the surveyed sample (41.8%).

Graph 1. Migration intentions



The survey showed that women and the population aged 20-34, as well as respondents with a university degree, unmarried, those living with parents, and those employed in the private sector, are considering moving to a greater extent (Scheme 1).

Scheme 1. Emigration potential of the City of Leskovac



Every fourth inhabitant of the City of Leskovac has expressed the possibility of emigrating in the next year. Depending on the settlement category, about one-fifth of respondents (19.9%) from urban settlements (Leskovac, Grdelica and Vučje) think that the chances for emigrating next year are high or very high, while 24.7% from rural areas think the same. A high or very high possibility of emigration is seen among the unmarried, younger population aged 20-34 with a high school degree, living with their parents, and employed mainly in the private sector. Data on potential destinations show that a large number of respondents plan to continue living abroad (44.2%), while 9.2% of respondents would like to immigrate to the capital city of Serbia - Belgrade. As potential emigration countries, young people generally choose countries with favorable climate together with better economic standard then in Serbia (Spain, Italy). On the other hand, the respondents who are married and have children choose countries that are economically stable and where they have a relative or friend (Germany, Austria, USA).

Table 2. Determinants of migration/stay

Push factors	%	*Place attachment*	%
Critical economic situation	18.3	Attachment to family and friends	29.7
Low incomes	17.1	Resolved housing issue	21.6
Inability to find a job	10.4	Patriotism and sense of belonging/good job	10.8

The main reasons for leaving the territory of the City of Leskovac are the economic situation, low incomes, and the inability to find a job (Table 2). A significant number of respondents are dissatisfied with the level of income in Serbia, indicating that it does not allow them to meet all of their family's needs. It was found that in most cases the dissatisfied respondents intended to emigrate together with family members.

"I would emigrate because of better salaries abroad." For my family of five, the income that my husband and I have is too low... However, I would never go alone, but only with my family". (Female, 27)

The results of the survey indicate a high level of dissatisfaction, which in this context can be seen as potentially determining a decision to emigrate. The analysis of the self-assessment of the current situation revealed that almost one third of young people (32.2%) aged 20-24 consider the situation in the City of Leskovac to be (very) bad, and that those who work in the private sector are particularly dissatisfied (29.1%). The same percentage of respondents (29.1%) aged 45-49 are dissatisfied with their own lives, with the highest percentage of respondents with a college degree (46.8%). Respondents had the opportunity to evaluate the degree of improvement (deterioration) in the quality of life in recent years, and in this case those who were employed in the private sector were the least satisfied. Thus, 28.4% of respondents in this category indicated that their life is worse today than in the past years. In terms of future expectations regarding the improvement (worsening) of the standard of living, it was found that 29.4% of respondents from the private sector and 22.3% from the public sector believe that the standard will worsen.

The research shows that the respondents' migration plans are influenced by various external factors. For example, a small number of respondents remain in their place of residence because their partners and other family members do not want to move away. It was also confirmed that a small number of respondents were about to migrate, but due to the aggravating circumstances of the visa regime, they could not fulfill their migration plans.

On the other hand, among the factors influencing the decision to stay in the place of residence, the attachment to family and friends can be highlighted (29.7%). Some respondents pointed out that they chose to stay despite the possibility of emigration precisely because of the proximity to family and friends. A small number of respondents stated that they chose to stay in their place of residence because of their attachment to the surrounding area, as well as because of all that they have achieved so far in Serbia.

"I stayed because of my family, but there are other things that tie me to Leskovac - friends, work... I know that there are better salaries abroad and that it would probably be better for my children to move out because of better conditions." But my whole life is here... My roots are here. It's hard to make a decision and just leave everything you've been creating for years" (Female, 53)

On the list of factors that induce people to stay, the housing issue ranks second, while patriotism and a sense of belonging, and a good job rank third (Table 2). Among the other factors for staying are lifestyle (7.8%), satisfaction with the quality of life (5.2%), and desire to support local community development (2.3%). There are some differences between men and women in this regard, as men cite patriotism, lifestyle, and desire to contribute to community development as the

main factors for staying, while for women it is attachment to family and friends. Respondents aged 50-54 and the highly educated cited a resolved housing issue as the main factor for staying, while respondents aged 30-34 cited a good job and satisfaction with the quality of life.

Conclusion

Urban shrinkage is one of the biggest challenges in many European countries, and Serbia is no exception in this regard. The City of Leskovac is affected by this phenomenon. Since the current depopulation process and related to that, demographic projections indicate that urban shrinkage will continue, it is necessary to develop a plan for long-term mitigation, based on a study of future migration flows into and out of the city, as well as other patterns of demographic development. The size and structure of the city should be subject of creating sustainable areas (Runge et al., 2018).

The paper examines the potential of migration flows in the City of Leskovac with the aim of determining the impact of migration on the process of (future) urban decline. The paper focuses on analyzing the attitudes and intentions towards migration and determining the factors that influence the decision of respondents to migrate. Since it is not possible to take into account certain social, political, demographic, economic and environmental determinants by applying various models to predict future migration trends (Szczepanikova and Van Criekinge, 2018), the paper relies on the data obtained through field research.

Although migrations played a key role in the process of demographic decline in the rural areas of the City of Leskovac in the 20th century, their influence on the demographic development of the urban area spread at the beginning of the 21st century. The demographic development shaped by migration directly influenced the process of urban decline. The results of the research show that the positive attitude of the population towards migration is the result of years of socio-economic challenges in this area. It is evident that these circumstances influenced the population's dissatisfaction with living conditions and shaped their intentions to migrate.

Finally, the research confirmed that the future demographic and socio-economic development is threatened by the pronounced potential for out-migration, which undoubtedly characterizes the whole teritory. The situation becomes even more unfavorable when considering that one in four respondents believed that they were very likely to emigrate in the next year. Contrary to previous trends, the population of urban settlement will participate more in the migration. Considering the data of the last census in 2022, as well as the fact that the survey was conducted in 2019, it is clear that the migration intentions (of the majority) of respondents came true. From the data presented, it can be concluded that the trend of migration from this area will continue in the future. Consequently, the deepening of the process of urban decline in the coming period is inevitable.

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URBANA ODRŽIVOST POSMATRANA U SVETLU MIGRACIJA - STUDIJA SLUČAJA: GRAD LESKOVAC, SRBIJA

Apstrakt: Održiva prostorna transformacija, urbano upravljanje i ograničenja urbano-ruralnog razvoja mogu se pratiti kroz migraciju. U Republici Srbiji, nakon naglog povećanja broja stanovnika koji žive u urbanim sredinama usled unutrašnjih migracija, počele su strukturne promene u naseljima prirodnim opadanjem stanovništva i iseljavanjem. Međutim, dalekosežnim efektima migracije na ovo smanjenje pridaje se malo pažnje u politici ili praksi. Da bi se rasvetlili i predvideli mogući budući obrasci, u ovom radu se sagledavaju stavovi i namere stanovništva prema migracijama i identifikuju se determinante koje utiču na planove migracija za moguće buduće tokove unutar i iz Republike Srbije. Rad je zasnovan na podacima iz ankete i intervjua sprovedenih na području grada Leskovca (N=1124) sa stanovništvom od 20+ godina, lokalnim vlastima, civilnim društvom i privatnim sektorom, odnosno onima koji imaju centralnu ulogu u suočavanju sa izazovima i optimizaciji prilika koje stvara rastući trend migracija. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da većina ispitanika podržava proces emigracije, na koji uglavnom utiču ekonomski faktori. U tom kontekstu, očekuje se da će se trend emigracije nastaviti iu budućnosti, i to se doživljava kao prepreka za postizanje ciljeva održivosti i retko kao prilika.

Ključne reči: urbanizacija, migracije, stavovi, namere, Srbija, Grad Leskovac, održivi razvoj

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