

THE SCHOOL BUILDING IN FUNCTION OF A RURAL SETTLEMENT LIVING

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ABSTRACT

Unbalanced spatial and demographic development in Croatia, as well as non complementary relationship between urban and rural areas, represents destabilizing factor for social and economic development of the state, especially for its equal regional development. Modern development concepts are oriented toward reversible population and urban trends which would reestablish interest in living in small towns and villages, especially for young people, educated and economically active. Improved living and working conditions in such environment is possible by introduction of intermediate stimulating measures, i.e. by construction of social standard service network. Towards enhancing the competitive capacity of rural areas and integrated approach of solving development problems, it is necessary to reconstruct and modernize school institutions network in line with new processes and trends in education. It is necessary to affirm the typology of schools of small capacity, and promote the concepts of school in function of development and life in a community. The focus is to establish a typology of the elementary school building which through increased autonomy, decentralization and flexibility of the school system responds to the needs of local community and contributes to the quality of its educational, social and cultural infrastructure. Partnership established between this institution and other public or private organizations as well as various interest groups could increase the scope of curricular and extra-curricular content as well as maximum utilization of school space, its infrastructure and equipment. New school typology could provide a significant improvement in standard of living in small towns and villages in the educational, cultural and social terms. Such typology implementation in school network could equalize the equipping the entire Croatian area by institutional standards, and mitigate the dichotomy of life quality and accessibility to formal and informal forms of education in urban centers and the settlement.

KEYWORDS: *primary school, network of primary schools, small school building, rural areas.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Space and time cannot be understood independently of social activity. Each new set of innovations is commuting space, initiating changes in its organization and formation of new urban processes.

Urban dynamics is generated by the superimposing of interdependent social, cultural, economic and infrastructure networks and through their incessant thickening active urban environment can be accomplished.

The processes of spatial dispersion and global integration are taking place simultaneously. New interconnections in space are established and one of the most important development goal is to create an optimally structured polycentric network of cities as well as to reduce differences in the degree of development of different regions.

Croatian area is characterized by uneven regional development with significant inequalities between urban and rural areas¹. Development strategies are focused on a more even distribution of demographic, economic, cultural and communal elements necessary for the social integration of residents, balanced economic development and prosperity of the country. Utmost importance in these processes have a network of public institutions, especially elementary school network.

UNESCO and OECD point out the relationship between school buildings and all domains of social life of a community, and the importance of a network of elementary schools for the environment in which it operates, its production, social and cultural policy.

2.0 SEVERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CROATIAN RURAL AREA

Oligarch-centered type of development of Croatian area promoted the growth of several major urban canters, while the smaller, within the large rural areas lagged behind and lost power for autonomous development. These small canters of urbanity are no longer support to its rural, dispersed populated area with a large number of smaller settlements.² The number of their population constantly and significantly reduces under the pressures of many years of spatial uncontrolled

¹ The rural area point to the entire area outside the cities.

² Out of 6,500 settlements in Croatia, more than one third i.e. 37% are small villages with less than 100 residents, and ca. 30% of villages have 101 out of 300 residents. Hodži, A. (2005) : 518; Župančić, M. (2005) : 621

processes of depopulation, reduction of agriculture development and deruralization.³ The consequences have been uneven and unbalanced spatial development of the Croatian territory, unfavourable structure of the population and its deposition, which is destabilizing and limiting factor for social and economic development.

Towards enhancing balanced urban development it is necessary to strengthen the network structure of small cities through initiation of developing concepts based on population and its steady deployment in the area.⁴ The goal is to stop and correct the negative demographic trends and establish reversible population and urban trends, and also to promote interest in living in small cities, towns and villages for young, educated and economically active people.

2.1 Quality of Everyday Life in Croatian Rural Areas

One of the ground presumption of progress is evenly developed basic quality of everyday life in the area.⁵

Numerous studies have analyzed inhabiting characteristics of rural areas in Croatia, such as institutions and facilities of social and technical infrastructure network development level i.e. social and utility standard, as well as the availability of different contents.

The conclusion is that in a hierarchically organized settlements network, rural settlements are placed very low (measured by function and importance). They are poorly equipped with the social and technical infrastructure and significantly dependent on the degree of accessibility to settlements positioned higher in the hierarchical network.⁶

Through analysis of a quantity, but also a quality of Croatian villages and rural canters equipment, Župančić found a distinct lack of institutions of social standards, especially health, educational and social welfare institutions (Table 1).

³ Nearly 80% of small villages are losing their population, while 10% is about to disappear.

⁴ Nejašmić, I. (1991), Rogić, I; Štambuk, M. (), Čaldarević, O. (1999)

⁵ Seferagić, D., 1993

⁶ Petak, A. (2005); Rogić, Štambuk, M. (1998); Seferagić, D. (1993); Štambuk, M.; Mišetić, A. (2002); Župančić, M. (2005);

Table 1: Equipment of rural settlements with activities of social standards
(developed by Bertina M, according to M. Župančić M. 2005.)

Equipment with:	none	weak	medium
educational institutions	45,8%	54,22%	
health institutions	75%	19,4%	5,6%
social welfare institutions	87,5%	12,5%	
cultural institutions and facilities	70,8%	25,2%	4,2%
entertainment buildings and facilities	47,2%	45,8%	6,9%

“Institutional insufficiency” of Croatian rural areas pointed out by Štambuk and Mišetić refer to the fact that only 27% of villages have elementary schools, 11.5% of villages have medical dispensaries and only 6.5% have dental clinics.

Meeting the everyday needs it is very difficult. Only a small number of rural settlements have important institutions such as elementary schools, medical clinics, cultural institutions, post offices, while slightly better condition we can find in terms of service workshops, utility equipment and sports facilities.

As long as the degree of equipment of small villages and centers is insufficient, inaccessible and of a low quality, the structure of everyday life is severely compromised, and negative ‘migration’ syndrome could not be prevented by any policy. Such settlements are sentenced to stagnation or “slow death”, and rural area to further deterioration.

2.2 Constructions of Social Standard Services Structure in Croatian Rural Areas

If we want to make Croatian rural area existentially appealing, it is necessary to furnish it with the elements of the institutional and utility standards that will enable quality of daily life through the ability to meet most needs of living in a fast and convenient way.

The question is how to improve the quality of numerous and sparse network of settlements, weak population base⁷. It is unrealistic and irrational to expect that all the settlements can achieve full infrastructure

⁷ Large dispersed population makes it difficult for physical planning and urban transformation since it raises the costs of infrastructure construction, transport connections to the larger centers, which prevents the rapid development of many villages and rural regions. Pokos, N. (2002) Methodology of allocation of the rural population, its layout and listing changes. 1953.-2001. – In: Štambuk, M.; Rogić, I.; Mišetić, The area behind: how modernization changes the Croatian village., Zagreb: Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, : pp. 31-56.

equipment, however, it is important for them to be covered by a network of institutions that can provide special services.

Planning and structuring of optimal network of settlements and institutions should be aimed at revitalizing the potential “focal points of development” for which there is clear public interest, because of their possible role in balanced spatial development and reduced urbanization differences.

It is possible to extract 600-700 such settlements in Croatia⁸, of which 70% have less than 2000 inhabitants.⁹ A separate structural problem and obstacle for reduction of isolated spatial enclaves to an acceptable size are represented by settlements with complete rural character (46% of all settlements in Croatia).

The process of their transformation into contemporary forms of settlements with more “urbanized content”¹⁰ can be achieved by encouraging indirect simulative measurements, i.e. by construction of services of social standards.

Social activities are a superstructure of certain area and are aimed at raising standards and quality of life of their residents, their educational and cultural levels, health and social care, and access to sports activities, recreation and technical culture.

The structuring of the network of institutions of social standards in terms of weakened and dispersed population base is not possible through standard spatial parameters implementation based on congruency with the network of users. It is necessary to find a new development model structure that will reconcile the dichotomous demographic and economic factors on the issues of rationality and profitability of the system, and which will also take into account development plans and also specific and planned needs of concerned gravitational area.

Diffusion of elementary schools and their relatively good equipment¹¹

⁸ Program for physical planning will determine the framework for functional and hierarchical network of central settlements with about 650-750 cities and major rural centers. Of these, 550-650 villages in rural areas.

The Župančić study highlighted 425 rural municipal centers as potential development centers. Župančić, M. (2005)

¹⁰ The concept of urbanization has been used in terms of lifestyle.

¹¹ Župančić found (analyzing the degree of equipment of educational institutions in 107 Croatian villages) that 67.3% of them has a elementary schools, while the results of Štambuk and Mišetić research showed that only 27% of villages have elementary schools. But regardless of the mismatch of these results, elementary school is still one of the most common institution of social standard in Croatian rural areas.

impose need for the affirmation of the concept of school as a function of development and community life, and also optimal solutions that includes expansion of school activities as a local center of a broader range of social activities.

3.0 SCHOOL IN A FUNCTION OF RURAL AREA LIFE

In order to achieve equivalence for educational availability it is necessary to provide conditions where each person can accomplish its educational maximum. Elementary school is the first and fundamental link to that, so it is crucial to bring learning places closer to student's places of living.¹²

This request should be especially highlighted in rural areas where schools, except for primary education, adopt multiple and for the community crucial roles.¹³

Vicinity of schools directly affects the choice and duration of education, family standards, the decision whether to stay in the family's place of residence or to migrate to the centers which provide education to their children.¹⁴

Realizing the function of upbringing and education, but also formal and informal adult education, elementary school situated in the community meets the motive for the personal development of members of the community, and thus essentially determines the quality of human potential, contributing to social development and improving the quality of life.¹⁵

The school has a strategic role in developing the identity of local communities and initiating local integration processes. We can say that is a constitutive element of the development of rural settlements.

The concept of schools as social institutions in Croatia experimentally started in late 50-ies of the last century and was legalized in 1959 by the Law on Elementary School. The idea of schools as cultural and educational centers with rich pedagogical structure, animated teachers and attempt to engage all types of residents, started only ten years later.

¹² Educational level is lower with greater distance from the center. Basic, K. (1994): 35

¹³ Hobs, D. (1995); Miller, B.A. (1995); Dewees, S. (1999)

¹⁴ Seferagić, D. (1993)

¹⁵ Sirgy, M.J. (1986) A quality of life theory derived from Maslows developmental perspective: Qualiiti is related to progressive satisfaction of a hierarchy of needs, lower order and higher. *The American Jurnal of Economics and Sociology*, br.45, str. 329-342.

Cultural and public engagement of schools was encouraged and also work with parents.¹⁶

This kind of school concept sought significant physical capacity to undertake widespread pedagogical activities which resulted in their concentration in large central schools and gradual (absurd) subtraction of revived or potential focuses/centers of sociability and everyday cultural life in small rural communities, or their small local schools.

The school is centralized, relocated from smaller settlements and in most cases indifferent to the environment in which it is located. A large number of small schools in rural areas has been closed.

That elementary schools are key to social and cultural life of rural communities, Šušvar recognized it in the 70-ties, arguing that every rural settlements should have a multifunctional rural elementary school as basic cultural place.¹⁷

Toward enhancing the competitive capacity of rural areas and integrated approach to solve development problems, it is necessary to reconstruct and modernize school institution network by means of reaffirmation of typology of small capacity schools. The focus is on establishing a typology of the elementary school which through increase in autonomy, decentralization and flexibility of the school system responds to the needs of local communities and contributes to the quality of its educational, social and cultural infrastructure.

3.1 Basic Characteristic of School Network in Croatian Rural Areas

Croatian school network structuring under different administrative-territorial units is conducted from the year 1774.¹⁸

The precondition of their formation and development is the existence of the territorial frame (determinate by legislation), as well as central and autonomous legislative regulations which are also crucial for network structuring. These are a unified school system, certain age school children obligation and spatial parameters, or otherwise defined legality of establishing a network of schools and its congruency with the network of school tributaries.

¹⁶ Puževski, V. (2003) Croatian elementary schools since 1945. until 1990, Analysis of the History of Education, 2, pp 87-105

¹⁷ Šušvar, S (1976) School as a House of Culture, architecture, 158-159, pp :12-13

¹⁸ Adoption of the first regulations on development of education in the Habsburg Monarchy "General School Order for the German normal, major and trivial schools" from 1774.

Space implementation was affected by a number of factors such as socio-political and economic development, social topography, demographics, personnel and educational needs, regional configurations, transport links etc.

Significant factor of the qualitative and quantitative improvement of school networks were projects of typed school buildings.

School network density enhancement has allowed the gradual penetration of schools as an institutions in rural areas. The school became one of the constituent elements of rural development, it encouraged social mobility of rural population and their integration into the wider social environment.

The issue of school networks due the course of time generated into the complex pedagogical, social, economic and political issues that can be analyzed only in the context of overall socio-economic trends. Their construction is directly influenced by the regional area changes to its economic, cultural, ethnic, national and social development.

Processes of depopulation, reduced agricultural and rural development in Croatian rural areas in the second half of the 20th century greatly influenced changes in the structure and function of the school network. Interactional effects of reducing the number of inhabitants and gradual closure of small dispersed schools could not be stopped by powerful local interests or legal requirements that demanded acknowledgment and retention of small local school function. Further consolidation of the school network and its economic rationalization contributed to the fact that large number of rural settlements lost elementary school as the only public institution important for the development.

When making optimization decisions, the elementary school network in rural areas should not be viewed as irrational dispersion of educational points. With respect to demographic, geographic, cultural and educational facts, its structuring requires also alignment with the interests of the social environment for balanced spatial development.¹⁹ Therefore, thickening of school network should be congruent with the network of potential rural development focuses, and its construction and financing should not be left to local opportunities, but placed under the jurisdiction of central authorities.²⁰

¹⁹ Z.Ferge highlighted that it was not enough to create a larger number of schools, but to create schools that will contribute solving social needs. ; Ferge, Z (1987) School systems and school reforms, the contradiction of modern education, RK SSOH, Zagreb:80

²⁰ Elementary education represents general and national value and thus should be evaluated, rather than to be left to local opportunities.; Ratković, M. (1987) : 195

Towards enhancing optimal rationality and the availability of school network, it is desirable to make link between school and other vital functions in the local community. This kind of integration would contribute to the structuring of the network with multi-purpose focal range of activities that correspond to the needs articulated in the community with the aim of raising living standards in rural areas of Croatia.

3.2 School Buildings as Institutional Centers of Social Activity

Elementary schools in Croatian rural areas are planned, programmed and designed mainly as mono functional objects for educational purposes with the possibility of using individual school premises in the function of cultural life and recreational needs of local community.

By the middle of last century a large percentage of small class type of school buildings were applied. They simplified the process of preparing construction documentation, provided profitability of the whole process and compliance with legal regulations related to the spatial-functional and hygienic and technical standards. Using this typology, rural areas were equipped with school buildings of high quality standards but weak flexibility and adaptation to local conditions and needs.

Existence of elementary schools and other social and cultural institutions in rural depopulation environment is severely threatened. Their integration within the same architectural complex would provide a rational diffusion of the basic elements of social standards in rural area, and thus significantly improve the quality of life.

School buildings with their architectural characteristics of space at the disposal represents ideal material basis for meeting most of the current social needs.²¹ Therefore, new design strategies should include small schools, sharing the space capacity and adaptable resources.

Elementary schools of small capacity are compatible with the needs of local rural communities in terms of pedagogical and economical sense.²² Numerous research studies conducted in different countries, urban, suburban and rural areas, reveled advantages of small schools in an educational – pedagogical but also economic sense if we

²¹ Bajbutović, Z. (1981) :284

²² Work of Monk and Haller's point to the relativism of optimal size. In the last few decades, research has shown that the determination of the optimal size was naive and missed. The most appropriate size of schools varies from place to place.

consider costs of education of students who complete their education. Small schools provide higher level of education, better motivation of students, more cooperative attitude of parents and better relationship with the community which it serves. Developed informative and telecommunication networks have allowed a better distribution of knowledge and a broader range of courses which reduced the superiority of central schools that could provide a more varied curriculum.

New typology of small schools should provide a spatial structure whose potential allows functional alignment and complementary activities of the majority of social and cultural needs arising from the specificity and identity of rural areas, and planned development dynamics. Spatial programs should be harmonized with local conditions, development plans, adopted and appropriate standards for each institution, including the size and needs of the gravitational area. They would serve as a basis for creating dynamic models of pedagogical, social, cultural and recreational activities that take place in the same space, and sometimes at the same time.

Physical resources of the school building with its flexibility and adaptability should provide a common framework for all planned activities, and enable the gradual spatial transformations that correspond to the dynamic changes in the local community. At a time when "critical mass" of population is formed in the gravitational area, sufficient enough for developmentally-stimulating endogenous dynamics and acceleration of the process of spatial independence of the institutions, the educational function can occupy the entire area of the elementary school building.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Unbalanced spatial and demographic development in Croatia, as well as non complementary relationship between urban and rural areas, represents destabilizing factor for social and economic development of the state, especially for its equal regional development.

Modern development concepts are oriented toward reversible population and urban trends which would re-establish interest in living in small cities, towns and villages, especially for young people, educated and economically active. Improved living and working conditions in such environment is possible by introduction of intermediate stimulating measures, i.e. by construction of social standard service network.

Towards enhancing the competitive capacity of rural areas and integrated approach of solving development problems, it is necessary to reconstruct and modernize elementary school institution network, congruent and compatible with the network of settlements as potential local developing focuses. It is necessary to affirm the typology of schools of small capacity, and promote the concepts of school in function of development and life in a community.

The focus is to establish a typology of the elementary school building which through increased autonomy, decentralization and flexibility of the school system responds to the needs of local community and contributes to the quality of its pedagogical, educational, social and cultural infrastructure.

Their program structure should be based on the identification of overall social needs in relation to specific forms of public interests and complementary social functions. Partnership established between this institution and other public or private organizations, as well as various interest groups, could increase the scope of curricular and extra-curricular content as well as maximum utilization of school space, its infrastructure and equipment.

This kind of school typology would provide a significant improvement of the quality of life in small cities, towns and villages of Croatian rural area, in the educational, cultural and social terms. Their rational implementation in school network could uniform equipping with institutional standards of the entire Croatian area, which would indirectly facilitate the strengthening of demographic vitality and renovation of Croatian rural areas, social integration of population and strengthening of settlement structure in function of balanced development of the entire space of Croatia.

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