

**MOMIR SAMARDŽIĆ**

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History  
momir.samardzic@ff.uns.ac.rs

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND OPTIMUM IN SERBIA IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY\***

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**Abstract:** The paper analyzes the concept of minimal and optimal agricultural land in Serbia defined in legislative texts and its interpretation in Serbian historiography. The basic hypothesis we advocate in the paper is that, regardless of the normative frameworks that changed during the 19th century, the problem of land optimum should be analyzed with respect to regional specificities based on geographical and pedological characteristics of the land, as well as the structure of the family.

**Keywords:** Serbia, agriculture, 19th century, land ownership.

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One of the most significant results of the liberation process from the Ottoman rule in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the “Serbian Revolution”) was the creation of a free peasant estate, thus giving the process of liberation the dimension of a social revolution. The legal regulation of the inviolability of peasant ownership of land, in accordance with the Roman law, was completed by the *Law on the Return of the Land* from 1839 and its accompanying amendments, and finally by the provisions of the *Civil Code* from 1844, which stipulated that “all things, goods, and rights which belong to Serbs are their property or possession, which implies that every Serb is the perfect master of his goods and therefore has the right to dispose of them at his will and exclude everybody from that process” (Article 211).<sup>1</sup> Bearing in mind that during the 1820s and 1830s, the land policy of Prince Miloš Obrenović represented a continuity with the Ottoman period, i.e. that every peasant had the right to occupy as much arable land as he could farm,<sup>2</sup> and therefore, at the time of the implementation of the Roman law and the transfer of cultivated land into private ownership, farming land could not encompass large complexes of land, the new legislation represented the legitimization of the current state of ownership of small country estates.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Niketić 1922: 132.

<sup>2</sup> Prince Miloš ordered several times that land be confiscated if the peasant was not farming it and be given to peasants who did not have enough land, i.e. immigrants. Petrović 1930: 66-67.

<sup>3</sup> In the said period travel writers saw Serbia as “an essentially classless system” with “only one class, a highly undifferentiated peasantry.” Stokes 1989: 236-236.

However, the continuity of small estates, which marked the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> was not the result of the aforementioned laws. On the contrary, the *Civil Code* created the prerequisites for social stratification, thus institutionalizing the division of land into increasingly smaller plots in the process of disintegration of family cooperatives, with the underlying right of the peasant to freely dispose of his land, i.e. the right to sell it or mortgage it. In this sense, the Serbian legislation did not include provisions on the agricultural minimum which were present within the boundaries of the Military Border in the Habsburg Monarchy, which represented a role model to the lawmakers in Serbia, born north of the Sava and the Danube.<sup>5</sup>

In the long run, the consequence of these solutions should have been the pauperization of the peasantry and the emergence of large estates. On the contrary, the continuity of small estates was a consequence of the country's decades-long efforts to prevent the process of social redistribution by prohibiting the sale of that part of the property considered necessary for the survival of the peasant family, despite the existing legislation that gave the peasants the freedom of disposal of the land. Facing the problem of peasants' debt and the sale of property already in the 1830s, in 1836 Prince Miloš prohibited the sale of the house, *baština*, two oxen and a cow to pay off debt, whereby the '*baština*' implied a certain land minimum, not a hereditary family estate.<sup>6</sup> Although later the already mentioned legislation temporarily annulled Miloš's decree, it represented the beginning of a system of legal regulations that restricted the sale of agricultural land until 1929, the Serbian version of the Homestead Law.<sup>7</sup> Over the next decades, protective provisions were extended. Due to the turbulence caused by the introduction of commodity-money relations to Serbian villages, i.e. because of the peasantry increasingly borrowing from loan sharks, the preservation of the peasant estate became one of the most important topics in political life. In 1860 this first led to the introduction of the exemption of two oxen or draught horses, a plough and food for fifteen days from payment of the debt into the Civil court cases, and next year two days of ploughing of arable land<sup>8</sup> and harvest from it were added to the exemption. Since these provisions did not fulfill the legislator's intention to preserve the peasant land, because the peasants could sell it themselves if the court could not seize it, in the new political system after the 1869 Constitution, which institutionalized the importance of the National Assembly and peasantry as political factors, peasant MPs insisted on increasing the area of protected land from two to six days of ploughing, as well as on expanding protective mechanisms to prevent peasants from selling their land on their own. The "Law on Five Days of Ploughing"<sup>9</sup> or "The Law of Peoples Welfare" adopted by the

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<sup>4</sup> Sundhassen 1989: 223-230; a review of statistical data and analyses also in: Isić 1994: 101-104.

<sup>5</sup> Petrović 1930: 99-107; Milošević 2014: 69-74.

<sup>6</sup> Zbornik zakona, 1877: 119; Petrović 1930: 88-89.

<sup>7</sup> Petrović 1930: 87; Gnjatović 2014: 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Day of ploughing" is a measure for a surface that can be cultivated during one day using a wooden plough. It was the most common measure for surface in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia. In 1873 the National Assembly adopted the *Law on Measures*, according to which "one day of ploughing" was estimated to be 0.575 ha, so it was equated to Austrian cadastre *Joch*. Zbornik zakona 1874: 20.

<sup>9</sup> Petrović calls this law "The law of five days of ploughing", while different authors use different names. Slobodan Jovanović calls it "The law of six days of ploughing" (Jovanović 1990: 180), and Nedeljković "The law of five days of ploughing land" (Nedeljković 2008: 274).

National Assembly on 23 December 1873<sup>10</sup> implied the following: “A peasant will have one plough, one cart, two oxen or a draught horses, a hoe, an axe, a pickaxe, a scythe and as much food as he and the cattle need until the next harvest. In addition to every tax head (...) if the main occupation is only farming (...) five days of land, whereby one day is 1600 square fathoms,<sup>11</sup> whether the land is clean, or under shrubbery, an orchard or a vineyard, along with the unpicked fruit. The same is valid for the house with the surrounding buildings and a plot of land up to one day of ploughing.”<sup>12</sup> The 1873 statutory solution essentially defined the frame of protected land, which would survive the Principality and the Kingdom of Serbia.<sup>13</sup>

Analyzing the process of transformation of the Serbian economy, Marie-Janine Calic calls the provisions from Miloš's decree and the 1860s amendments an “agricultural existential minimum.”<sup>14</sup> Her conclusions are in accordance with the whole discourse connected with the question of peasant indebtedness in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, in the interwar period, when it represented one of the burning social issues that ended in the 1930s by writing off peasant debts.<sup>15</sup> Bogoljub Jovanović,<sup>16</sup> Milorad Nedeljković<sup>17</sup> and Jelenko Petrović,<sup>18</sup> even Slobodan Jovanović in the synthesis of the history of Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>19</sup> observed the entire system of legal norms as an attempt to preserve the agricultural minimum, i.e. the land necessary for the survival of a peasant family. On the other hand, by analyzing agriculture in the Principality, Bojana Miljković Katić was trying to look more closely at the protective legislation of the Serbian state, establishing the difference between the agricultural minimum and the agricultural optimum. In her opinion, when solving the question of the framework of the existential possibilities of land tenure in Serbia, the area of two days of ploughing defined by Miloš's decree of 1836 could be adopted as an agricultural minimum and on the basis of the parliamentary decisions of 1861 and 1873 the possession of six days of ploughing could be treated as an optimum land possession that met the existential needs of the Serbian peasant.<sup>20</sup>

In support of the conclusion on the six days of ploughing as the area that met the needs of peasants, regardless of whether we define the surface as a minimum or an optimum, speaks the fact that in 1871-1873 the peasants themselves, i.e. the peasant deputies during the session of the National Assembly, demanded the adoption of this decree on six days.<sup>21</sup> Supporting the importance of the mentioned parameters of two and six days, serving as a

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<sup>10</sup> All the dates in the text are given according to the Julian calendar.

<sup>11</sup> Square fathom, as a measure for a surface, was equal to 3.6 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Zbornik zakona, 26: 14.

<sup>13</sup> The additions from 1896, 1899 and 1907 were primarily intended to protect peasants from forceful taxation which was mainly directed at the confiscation of cattle, which was often necessary to do field work. Besides towing cattle and inventory, the farmhouse with the surrounding estate was protected to the extent of 20 acres. Petrović 1930: 115-132; Djordjević 1994: 115-116.

<sup>14</sup> Čalić 2004: 40.

<sup>15</sup> Mirković 1985: 261-268.

<sup>16</sup> Jovanović 1931: 157-178.

<sup>17</sup> Nedeljković 1907: 262-265.

<sup>18</sup> Petrović 1931: 87-99.

<sup>19</sup> Jovanović 1990: 181-183.

<sup>20</sup> Miljković Katić 2014: 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> Protokoli 1871: 442-448; Protokoli 1873: 214-217.

framework that was contemplated within the state administration, the *Regulation on the settlement of refugees from Turkey* dated 17 April 1861 stipulated that the families of the settlers were to be given *from two to six days of ploughing* (emphasized by M. S.), depending on the number of family members, but without specifying the ratio of the number of members and the size of the plot.<sup>22</sup>

If we use these parameters in the analysis of the size of the land tenure, as well as the provisions of the *Law on Measures* from 1873, the data collected (Table 1) indicate that 23.26% of peasant estates were below or at the boundary of existential minimum (two days of ploughing = 1.15 ha) and that more than half of the land (57.59%) did not have an area greater than six days of ploughing (3.45 ha), the size that was estimated as an optimum for ensuring livelihood. The situation would be somewhat better if we took five days of ploughing (2.88 ha) as a framework for calculating the optimum estate since in the legal provisions from 1873 one day of ploughing included the house and the surrounding land. It could, therefore, be concluded that the government considered that five days of arable land was an existential optimum, but such and similar plays on numbers did not change the essence of the figures – half of the peasant families had small estates with which they barely secured existence. And the situation elsewhere was not much better. According to the 1889 census, the estates of up to 5 ha constituted 73.41%, while the estates of up to 10 ha included 93.19%. In addition to the above summarized statistical estimates for the entire territory of Serbia, which pointed to the dominance of small-scale estates, regional differences are especially interesting, but they will be mentioned later in the context of pedological features of the land.

Surface of the estate in ha	0-1.50	0-3.50	3.51-5.00	5.01-10.00	over 10.00	total:
Districts: <sup>23</sup>						
Valjevo	17.40	43.02	14.63	25.12	17.23	100.00
Podrinje	14.12	39.13	15.15	28.57	17.15	100.00
Kragujevac	21.08	49.70	15.74	24.02	10.54	100.00
Kruševac	25.46	64.12	15.27	17.06	3.55	100.00
Morava	21.06	53.26	16.44	22.59	7.71	100.00
Podunavlje	12.93	38.14	16.87	30.41	14.58	100.00
Požarevac	16.50	48.18	18.41	26.16	7.25	100.00
Rudnik	29.97	65.58	14.49	16.10	3.83	100.00
Užice	39.11	77.18	10.73	9.60	2.49	100.00
Krajina	25.13	64.39	18.29	15.37	1.95	100.00
Timok	13.83	50.59	20.58	23.84	4.99	100.00
Crna Reka	17.49	52.73	19.32	23.03	4.92	100.00
Vranje	36.36	77.35	11.85	9.48	1.32	100.00
Pirot	30.00	72.29	13.93	11.62	2.16	100.00
Toplica	28.40	68.25	15.53	13.71	2.51	100.00
	23.26	57.59	15.82	19.78	6.81	100.00

Table 1: Land estates in Serbia according to the 1889 census – percentage<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jagodić 2004: 67-68.

<sup>23</sup> In English literature on the history of Serbia in the 19th century, there is no unique way of naming administrative areas – “okrug” and “srez”. Bearing in mind that it is common in contemporary Serbia to translate “okrug” as district, we used the same approach, while the smaller administrative unit “srez” was translated as “county”.

<sup>24</sup> Statistički godišnjak 1895: 182.

Already the *Decree on Settlement* from 1861 indicates the essential problem that every researcher faces when attempting to answer the question of the extent to which the legal provisions on the protection of land estate reflected the real minimum needs of the peasantry to ensure their existence only through agriculture, especially land cultivation. In our opinion, reducing the problem to the figure of two or six days of ploughing represented a necessary simplification of the acute social problem in order to resolve it with adequate legal measures. On the other hand, we believe that the issue of optimum agricultural estate is too complex for a single solution and that different regional specificities would necessarily reflect on the different size of the land necessary for securing the peasants' families. When assessing the necessary parameters, we consider as crucial the issues of family size, relief characteristics and the quality of cultivated land. It is only when we start from them that it is possible to look more closely at the significance of statistical data on the size of the peasant estate, such as those listed in the 1889 census.

The analysis of the size of the family household in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century conducted by Aleksandra Vuletić points to a temporal and spatial continuity. When it comes to temporal continuity, she noticed that in the period of 86 years (1834-1910) it is possible to speak about the continuity of average values of the size of the rural family household in different parts of Serbia (Table 2). Contrary to that, regional differences in the size of the household are notable not only between the districts, but also within the districts themselves, or between the counties as the basic framework of its analysis. "Despite the fact that the average values in each county changed over time, changes in the temporal perspective were not so pronounced so as to disturb the regional differences that were constant throughout the observed period (1834-1910 – *M. S.*)," concluded Vuletić.<sup>25</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the largest rural households in Serbia before the territorial enlargement of 1878 were located in the western regions, the smallest in the northeast, while the medium-sized households in the central parts of Serbia were in the middle between the west and the northeast. At the same time, districts adjoined in 1878, which had developed over the past decades in a different social context, had larger rural households from districts in the "old parts".<sup>26</sup>

Regarding agricultural peasant households – and they were located in all mentioned parts of Serbia with different regional representation – we believe that it is not necessary to particularly emphasize the link between higher yields for feeding a larger number of household members, especially bearing in mind the dominant existential level of land cultivation in Serbia, with the production limited mainly to the diet of family members. In addition, research by Aleksandra Vuletić has confirmed the attitudes of Serbian statistical experts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the size of the household in Serbia was within the European average,<sup>27</sup> that is, that the statistical indicators specify the continuity of the nuclear family versus the idea of the dominant family cooperative which was in the process of disintegration.<sup>28</sup> It could be said that the way in which the state, even the peasants

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<sup>25</sup> Vuletić 2012: 229.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Jovanović 1881: 23-25.

<sup>28</sup> Vuletić 2012: 241.

themselves defined the frameworks of the agricultural minimum, rested precisely on the awareness of the state and peasants that family households with a relatively small number of members were the dominant form of peasant households in agricultural areas.

	1834	1866	1874	1884	1900	1910
<b>Old districts</b>						
Šabac	6.7	7.4	6.4	6.9	7.4	7.3
Podrinje	6.0	6.9	6.9	7.0		
Valjevo	7.6	8.2	7.5	7.4	7.6	7.2
Užice	6.9	7.1	7.0	6.5	6.4	6.3
Beograd	7.0	6.6	6.3	6.3	7.0	6.8
Smederevo	6.1	6.0	6.2	6.2	6.5	6.6
Kragujevac	6.6	6.2	5.9	6.0	6.4	6.3
Rudnik	6.6	6.3	5.9	5.8	6.2	6.3
Čačak		5.5	5.7	5.5		5.9
Jagodina	6.2	5.2	5.5	5.7	6.1	6.2
Cuprija	6.1	6.2	5.7	5.7		
Kruševac	7.0	6.5	6.4	5.9	6.2	6.3
Požarevac	5.9	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.7
Krajina	5.4	5.4	5.0	5.0	5.3	5.5
Crna Reka	6.0	5.6	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.2
Knjaževac		7.4	6.8	6.5	6.4	6.1
Banja (Aleksinac)	6.7	6.4	6.5	6.3	6.8	6.5
<b>New districts</b>						
Vranje				6.5	6.8	6.9
Niš				7.3	7.1	6.9
Pirot				7.4	7.2	7.3
Toplica				7.2	7.0	6.9
<b>Old districts</b>	6.5	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.4	6.3
<b>New districts</b>				7.1	7.0	7.0
<b>Total</b>	6.5	6.3	6.1	6.2	6.5	6.4

Table 2: An average number of members of a rural household in Serbia<sup>29</sup>

However, a much more important parameter determining the surface of the agricultural minimum/optimum were the geographical characteristics of the terrain, i.e. the pedological composition of the cultivated land that determined the level of agrarian yields. The Dinaric mountain massif from the southwest, the Carpathians from the northeast, the Balkans from the east and the Rhodope mountains from the southeast intersected in the territory of Serbia giving it, as Vladimir Karić pointed out in the 1880s, “the appearance of a very stormy sea,” often preventing the emergence of a bigger valley due to mountain ranges gradually descending from south to north, where fertile river basins were located.<sup>30</sup> Šumadija and Mačva stood out as the areas with the land most suitable for intensive agricultural production, because they were dominantly covered by soil that does not require significant ameliorative works (vertisol, cambisol, lake sediments and alluvial coating,

<sup>29</sup> Table taken from: Vuletić 2012: 228.

<sup>30</sup> Karić 1887: 8-9.

lessive soil, meadow chernozem and alluvial soil...). The soil less suitable and inappropriate for farming (distric brown soil) is located on the southern boundaries of the mentioned areas with an increase in altitude (the Soko mountain, Rudnik and the Gledić mountains). In the Braničevo region, the land in the Velika Morava river valley, with cambisol (eutric brown soil) and chernozem in the vicinity of Požarevac, on the lower part of the Mlava River, in combination with Šumadija and Mačva comprised a whole which is the most fertile area in Serbia.<sup>31</sup>

The eastern parts of the Braničevo region and the western parts of the Timočka krajina (the region on the border with Bulgaria) belong to the Homolje mountains as a continuation of the Carpathian mountain massif with almost impassable mountain ridges, thus separating not only the climatic zones, but also the fertile land of the border regions of Serbia in the Timok basin.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in the south of the “pre-Berlin” Serbia, on the edges of the Dinaric mountain massif and the boundary reefs of Javor, Golija and Kopaonik, there were districts dominated by the agriculturally unfavourable distric brown soil, with smaller oases of fertile land. A characteristic example was the Užice District, with fertile land only in the small valleys of the Đetinja and the Moravica.<sup>33</sup> The ratio of the surface area and the fertility of the soil were also somewhat more favourable in the valley of the Morava River, which is covered with vertisol and cambisol with potentially fertile ground along the Južna and Velika Morava, adding it to the group of the most fertile areas in Serbia. The “New Territories,” areas merged in 1878, belonged to the Južna Morava basin, with the valleys of the Morava and its tributaries as the most fertile land. Penetrating the Grdelica Gorge (Vranje District) between the ends of the Dinaric and Rhodopean massifs, the Južna Morava merged on the border of the Niš district with the valleys of its tributaries, the Jablanica and the Veternica, rich in eutric brown soil, and went along the border of the Toplica District, the valleys of the river Toplica and the Pusta River, located between the mountain peaks of Jastrebac and Kopaonik in the north and northwest and Radan in the south constituted the smallest, most fertile part of the district rich in vertisol. In contrast to the fertile Morava plain, the eastern part of the Niš District and almost the entire Pirot District were covered by the mountain massifs of Suva and Stara planina, with fertile land in the valley of the Nišava.<sup>34</sup>

Starting from the view that “for the intensive production of field crops, arable land should be deep, homogeneous, with good internal drainage, capable of retaining a lot of moisture and with good water management (...), to contain an abundance of all nutrients in the form acceptable for plants, and to be suitable for mechanization (inclination, erosion),”<sup>35</sup> it could be said that, in whole, more than half of the territory of Serbia could be counted into soil of a high or satisfactory level of fertility, suitable for crops with the use of different levels and forms of amelioration. On the other hand, the edges of mountain massifs on the territory of Serbia are characterized by land unfit for agricultural production. At the same time, “the appearance of a stormy sea,” which Karić spoke of, has affected pedological

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<sup>31</sup> Škorić 1977: 115-125. The pedological map of Yugoslavia is located in the appendix at the end of the monograph.

<sup>32</sup> Milić 1988: 59.

<sup>33</sup> Savić 1989: 17-23.

<sup>34</sup> Škorić 1977: 115-125; Kostić 1983, 11-15,

<sup>35</sup> Škorić 1977: 124.

diversity or different levels of fertility of the soil within the relatively small areas characterized by the mountain or mountain-hill relief.

The data that were preserved as a result of ethnographic research of the students of Jovan Cvijić at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century precisely point to the stated dimension as essential for understanding the presupposition on the regional condition of the agricultural optimum. Investigating the environment of Belgrade<sup>36</sup> Rista T. Nikolić recorded data on the fertility of the land in the villages near the capital. He noted that in Žarkovo peasants had enough land for cultivation, as well as pastures, that the land was fertile and that “for moderate life one family needs 5-6 hectares of land and some common pasture.” In the neighbouring Železnik he noted that “for reasonable life a family of 5-10 souls needs 6-8 hectares of land, 2 oxen, 1 cow, 2 horses, 10 sheep, 5-10 pigs,” while in Vinča “the farming land is fertile: vertisol, clay, alluvial soil, montmorillonite clay, and least of all chernozem,” so “for a moderate life one family needs 8-10 hectares of land.” In Mali Požarevac, he estimated the land as very fertile so for modest life one family needs only 3-4 hectares. At the same time, for Senaja, whose land he assessed as “medium fertile,” he noted that for moderate life one family needs 5-6.5 hectares of land, at least two oxen and some other livestock.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, exploring the Lepenica region in the Kragujevac District,<sup>38</sup> Todor Radivojević noted that every village here had enough arable land,<sup>39</sup> that families had six members on average, and that the average size of the estate was 6.14 hectares (4.82 ha of fields and 1.32 ha of meadows), “which was sufficient enough for the household to be fed and live reasonably, since the soil is of good fertility (mostly of second and third class).”<sup>40</sup> According to Radivojević’s estimates, in the Lepenica valley vertisol was dominant and the size of the estate “with one hectare per head” (6.14 ha per average family of six members) was sufficient to secure yields enough for feeding the people. Not far from there, in the region around the village Ljubić, at the border of the Rudnik and Čačak districts, Radomir Ilić noted at the same time<sup>41</sup> that it was a “land of good fertility” and that “one family needs 6-8 ha of land, 2 oxen, 2 cows, 20-30 sheep and several pigs to live.”<sup>42</sup>

While exploring Kačer,<sup>43</sup> the area in the Rudnik District with the mountain-hill relief, river valleys covered with fields and meadows, i.e. the soil whose quality varied due to sudden changes in altitude, Milan T. Rakić wrote that “for moderate life one family in the villages near Rudnik needs about 12 hectares of arable land, in the villages of Kozeljica, Brezovica, Kriva and Boljkovačka River they need 7-8 ha, and for the family in the villages next to Kačer and closer to Ljig 4-6 ha is enough.” In addition, “for moderate life they need 10-15 sheep, 2 cows, 7-8 pigs,” and “good households are considered to be those that have 2 oxen in the yoke.” Unlike the previously mentioned regions, agriculture was not the

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<sup>36</sup> The research was done in 1897-1900.

<sup>37</sup> Nikolić 2011: 83, 98, 102, 168, 169.

<sup>38</sup> The research was done in 1898-1899.

<sup>39</sup> The research was done in the period 1898-1903.

<sup>40</sup> Radivojević 2010: 89.

<sup>41</sup> The text was first published in 1903.

<sup>42</sup> Ilić 2011: 404.

<sup>43</sup> The research was done in 1903-1904.

dominant economic branch here. Kačer was one of the most suitable areas for cattle breeding in Serbia due to high quality forest grazing, meadows and pastures, but the area that was sufficient to produce grains necessary for feeding the population and livestock depended on the characteristics of the terrain, i.e. the type of land.<sup>44</sup>

Neither the region around Lepenica nor Ljubić, and certainly not Kačer, were classified as the areas of the highest quality land, characteristic of the flat and wavy sub-basins of the Sava, Danube and Velika Morava, but the difference in comparison with the situation in Zaglavak was great. It was a mountainous, karst and hilly region, with a larger plain only in the valley of the Trgoviški Timok, where stockbreeding was an important economic branch in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century precisely because of the characteristics of the relief unfavourable for land cultivation. According to research by Marinko Stanojević, in some villages the land was so barren that “60 ards<sup>45</sup> of this land would not be enough”<sup>46</sup> to feed an average, ten-member family, while in villages where the land was more fertile than the average for the Zaglavak area it was estimated that “about 25 ards were enough.” However, despite the cultivation of a highly disadvantageous relief with smaller oases of fertile soil, Stanojević’s research shows that in most places land cultivation was equally present or more present than livestock breeding. Livestock breeding as the dominant economic activity was mentioned only when he discussed mountain villages with extremely infertile land, where 50, 60, 70 or 80 ards would have to be cultivated to feed a family. The reason for the absence of a more developed extensive livestock breeding was the insufficient grassland and Stanojević cites the examples of villages where livestock farming was less present although large-scale cultivation (he mentions the size of 40-50 ards) would be necessary to feed a family. On the other hand, in the villages where the land was the most fertile, people were also engaged in livestock breeding because only the maximum exploitation of modest natural resources provided hope for the survival of the family. Due to all this, peasants massively went abroad to work thus providing additional income necessary for family nutrition.<sup>47</sup>

These examples are not the only ones, but are sufficiently illustrative to confirm the previously stated hypothesis that the estimation of the agricultural minimum or optimum is an analytical problem in the consideration of which it is necessary to take into account several variables, ranging from the statistical parameters that apply not only to the cultivated surface, but also to the size of the family which determines the existential minimum, to the pedological characteristics of the land which influence the yields necessary for feeding a peasant family. These data allow a better analysis of the inventory of the size of the estate from 1889, i.e. to start with, the differences that can be seen between the Užice and Rudnik districts (where Kačer is located) on the one hand and the Crna Reka and Timok districts (where Zaglavak is located) on the other. In the context of the “pre-Berlin” Serbia, which we consider to be the most relevant parameter for comparison due to over half a century of sharing a life in one state, the Užice and Rudnik districts were the districts with the largest

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<sup>44</sup> Rakić 2010: 53-54, 60, 74, 77, 79.

<sup>45</sup> “One ard” is a measure for a surface that can be farmed during one day using an ard.

<sup>46</sup> Serbian statistics calculated one day of ard ploughing as half a day of ploughing with a wooden plough, so according to these criteria “one ard” would be half of one day of ploughing.

<sup>47</sup> Stanojević 2012: 256-345.

percentage of the property up to 3.50 ha (Užice 77.18%; Rudnik 65.58%). This was undoubtedly the consequence of the geographical characteristics of the terrain and barren land, which led to the continuity of the dominance of livestock breeding at the time when the rest of Serbia moved towards the process of transformation of the economic structure and the transition to land cultivation as the dominant branch of agriculture. The area of three to four hectares of district brown soil of low fertility was undoubtedly not sufficient for feeding a family in agricultural areas, especially larger families characteristic of mountain-hill areas, but, along with dominant animal breeding, small fields with crops provided enough for bread flour.

However, this process did not proceed in a similar way in mountainous areas of eastern Serbia due to the lack of the land necessary for the further rise of extensive livestock production, which would follow the demographic growth. As a result, the number of cultivated surfaces grew and, as Stanojević pointed out, “the most steep plots and mountain tops were ploughed.”<sup>48</sup> Barren land, which was increasingly cultivated because there was not enough space for cattle farming, is why in the census of 1889 the percentage of the estates up to 3.50 ha was considerably lower than in the Užice and Rudnik districts (Timok 50.59%, Crna Reka 52.73%) and among the lowest in Serbia. On the other hand, the census shows the largest percentage of estates from 3.50 to 4.00 ha (Timok 7.81%, Crna Reka 7.23%) and from 4 to 5 ha (Timok 12.77%; Crna Reka 12.09%), and one of the largest from 5 to 10 ha (Timok 23.84%, Crna Reka 23.03%) and 10-15 ha (Timok 3.82%; Crna Reka 3.86%).

If we compare this with the data at the state level, the smallest percentage of smaller estates was recorded in the north and northwestern districts with the highest quality land and the most developed agricultural production and farming. In contrast to the Valjevo, Podrinje (Podrinje and Šabac) and Podunavlje (Belgrade and Smederevo) districts, whose percentages of the estate below 3.50 ha (six days of ploughing) were about 40%, at the other end there were the mentioned southwestern districts, where the areas of up to 10 ha made up significantly more than 90% – in the Rudnik district 96.17%, and in the Užice 97.51%. The largest estates were also concentrated in the northwestern and northern districts – out of a total of 298 properties larger than 40 ha, there were 173 in the Valjevo and Podrinje districts, while in the Podunavlje there were 54 (76.17% in total), whereas in the rest of the “pre-Berlin” Serbia 71 estates larger than 40 ha were listed. However, we believe that large-scale estates in the northwest are less important for the analysis of the minimum or optimum land than the vast majority of estates that ranged several hectares above or below the estimated existential minimum/optimum.<sup>49</sup>

Everything that has been said points to an essential conclusion. All the variables that we have pointed out – from the normative framework of Serbian legislation and statistical data provided by the census from 1889 to the number of peasant household members and pedological characteristics of the land – point to the existential character of agriculture in

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<sup>48</sup> *Id.* 302.

<sup>49</sup> Besides their small number, the reason for that is the fact emphasized by Bojana Miljković Katić that the owners of great estates were rich town merchants, clerks and even craftsmen, so these estates were mainly located near towns and their owners lived on them. Miljković Katić 2014: 99.

Serbia, with regional specificities defining the scope of the effort peasants had to invest in achieving the desired goal – ensuring the survival of the peasant household. The size of the cultivated land in most parts of Serbia regardless of the size – from 4 ha to “60 ards of land” – was most often defined only by the mentioned parameter. Regardless of legal regulations and possibilities, the majority of peasant estates in Serbia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained within the scope necessary for securing existence. Its optimum size in different parts of Serbia was defined by the peasants themselves.

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## МОМИР САМАРЦИЋ

Универзитет у Новом Саду, Филозофски факултет, Одсек за историју

### ОПТИМАЛНИ ЗЕМЉИШНИ ПОСЕД У СРБИЈИ У XIX ВЕКУ

#### Резиме

У раду се анализира концепт минималног и оптималног земљорадничког земљишног поседа у Србији, дефинисан у законодавним текстовима, те његова интерпретација у српској историографији. Основна теза коју заступамо у раду је да, без обзира на нормативне оквире, који се мењају током XIX века, проблему оптималног земљишног поседа неопходно је приступити уз подразумевање регионалних специфичности. Све варијабле на које смо указали – од нормативног оквира српског законодавства и статистичких података које нам даје попис из 1889, до броја чланова сељачког домаћинства и педолошких карактеристика земљишта – упућују на егзистенцијални карактер земљорадње у Србији, при чему су регионалне специфичности дефинисале оквире напора који су сељаци морали да уложе да би постигли жељени циљ – обезбеђење егзистенције сељачког домаћинства. Величина обрађене површине у већем делу Србије, колика год она била – од 4 ha до „60 ралица земље“ – била је најчешће дефинисана само наведеним параметром. Без обзира на законску регулативу и начелне могућности, већински сељачки посед у Србији током XIX века остао је у оквиру површина неопходних за обезбеђење егзистенције. Његову оптималну величину у различитим деловима Србије дефинисали су сами сељаци.

**Кључне речи:** Србија, пољопривреда, XIX век, земљишни посед.

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