

Village – Free Choice or Destiny for the Rural Youth (a study on the rural community of Vođinci)

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ABSTRACT The paper presents the results of a survey carried out in the Slavonian village of Vođinci in 2006. The survey focused on the young people's opinion about the quality of life and disadvantages of living in a rural area, and on their intention to stay in or leave the village. The results indicate that the main drawbacks for the young living in the village are poor working conditions (including unemployment and lack of prospect in agriculture), unavailability of social and cultural amenities, and neglected public areas. The young prefer living in the village and working in a city. They feel socially excluded and remain passive in taking initiative and creating their own future in the village they live in. Women, the young under 20–24 years of age, those from workers' and farming and large families, those who prefer the city to live and work in, those who believe unemployment is the major problem facing rural communities, and finally those who are not satisfied with their life in the country are the least spatially stable members of the community.

Key words: rural society, rural youth, migratibility, social inclusion.

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1. Introduction

Recent demographic, sociological and related analyses indicate that the Croatian village has experienced an actual “demographic breakdown” during the last decades, which has directly endangered its social texture, and cultural and economic basis. The tendency of deagrarianisation and strong urbanization due to industrial development, and rural exodus of the population, mainly the young, resulted in depopulation of entire rural areas with extraordinary comparative potential for

agricultural production, in aging population, loss of critical mass of innovative and entrepreneurial population (“brain drain” from rural communities and the related loss of development potential/resources), transformation of a number of Croatian areas into so-called areas with dying out population (Brkić and Žutinić, 2001; Pokos, 2002; Štambuk, 2002; Pejnović, 2004)¹.

Because of the various threats the rural communities are exposed to, numerous programs for revival of rural communities (villages) in western European countries already begun in the middle of 20th century. In Croatia, implementation of these kinds of programs is in an initial stage. The Croatian village is in the recomposition phase (Štambuk, 2002)², concerning various development stages (from vanishing, survival, decomposition, recomposition and development). The village also depends on region it belongs to, level of heterogeneity of social and economic structure, local culture, different reactions to transition and globalisation (Seferagić, 2002). The prevailing number of Croatian rural communities, particularly those outside of urban zones and those seriously affected by the war, have indubitably been “crying out” for demographic revitalization and economic revival. If revitalization were interpreted as an “overall revival of economic, land-use, biologically vital, cultural and other functions of a certain area” (Nejašmić, 1991), the role of human factor, more specifically of the young, in this process is particularly important for the Croatian rural areas. In fact, in countries in transition such as Croatia, the young have become the main development accelerator because economic and political changes have opened them new and different perspectives. However, they also became exposed to completely new and greater risks (UNICEF, 2000; Ilišin and Radin, 2002)³.

Facing the difficult life and lack of prospective for the young living in the rural communities, since 1990, Western Europe started implementation of rural policies through programs which take into consideration multidimensionally unprivileged life of the young in rural areas. Implementation of the policies has been accompanied by scientific research aimed at gathering information about their specific and complex social position. It was timely to indicate through empirical study the

¹ Eighty-five (85%) percent of rural communities have been affected by the process of depopulation. Considering geographical regions, the most intensive depopulation has been recorded in Gorska Hrvatska (Highland Croatia) (Pokos, 2002).

² In the description of transformation of the Croatian rural communities, the rural sociologist Maja Štambuk assumed Kayser's concept of decomposition and recomposition of village.

³ The UNICEF study has pointed out that socialisation of young population in transitional countries developed under the conditions when institutions, processes and social norms, which used to make the process and transfer into the world of grown-ups easier, actually weakened in the process of transition, became disabled or have still been in the process of transformation, left young population exposed to some additional risks. The Croatian youth shares experiences and problems of their counterparts in other transitional countries, but they were additionally hard-hit by war during their growing up and have been faced with other serious and numerous problems. (Ilišin and Radin, 2002).

futility of trying to understand young people through focusing on one aspect of their complex lives. Transitions into the labour market, household formation, housing, career and family formation interact with one another (Jones, 1992). Status and perspective of rural youth can be studied through terms of one's own sense of belonging in society which depends on four systems of social inclusion: *civic integration* (being an equal, empowered citizen in a democratic system, with a sense of access to policymakers and centres of political power), *economic integration* (having a job, having a valued economic function, and being able to make your own money), *social integration* (being able to access the social services provided by the state, without stigma) and *interpersonal integration* (having family and friends, neighbours and social networks to provide care, companionship and moral support when these are needed) (Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2004). Consequently, life chances of rural youth could be structured within four systems – state, market, civil society and social networks. Some of these issues ensuing from this concept are attractiveness of rural areas for rural youth, life quality and contentment with living rural, as well as development obstacles of rural areas which make a framework for this paper.

Unlike those from the Western Europe, the young living in the Croatia rural areas have not been recognized as a group that demands programs for development and improvement in quality of life specially tailored to them. Additionally, the research interest in problems of the rural youth has been negligible during the (post)transitional period. They are not subjects of scientific research projects, and rural policy implementation programs and the youth policy do not single out the rural youth as a group with specific problems and needs⁴.

The life experience of young rural population has been shaped under the influence of numerous factors (positive and negative) from their immediate environment, family and local community, as well as of those from the broader and even global society. Under these influences they form an attitude about a village as an (un)desirable frame and place for the realization of their own tendencies and interests, which they as individuals crave to fulfil for themselves. Some earlier research studies conducted in Croatia have indicated that socialization of the young rural population (in their own family, local community, school, influence of media, and the like) was negative in relation to village and agriculture (Stojanov, 1988; Brkić

⁴ The National Action Program for the Young adopted in 2004 registered a lack of cultural amenities in rural communities and towns. The action plan of this Program envisages proactive encouragement of initiatives of the young aimed at more intensive social integration of the young living in the war-affected and rural areas, on islands and in towns, by joint activities and education highlighting respect of differences, multicultural approach, tolerance, non-violent resolution of conflicts, and participation of the young in decision-making processes (The National Action Program for the Young, 2004: page 43). Although the Action Program envisages giving of support to the young for civic, economic, social and interpersonal integration, no “visible” results have been achieved at the operational level because of insufficient financial resources.

and Kušan, 1988; Žutinić, 1999). These influences most frequently resulted in decision of the youth to leave their villages, which blew up the migration process to tremendous proportions. A minority that decided to stay, made such a decision because of their “psychological attachment to village” (Dilić, 1989; Defillipis, 1986) or “essential need”, since they had no other choice in life (Hodžić, 2002). Recent studies on rural youth showed that village becomes more and more preferable for its ecological features while their intentions to leave are most often related to scarcity of cultural amenities in the village (Babić and Lajić, 2001) and inability to realize their professional careers (Šundalić, 2006).

It is obvious that the present economic crisis has slowed down the mechanisms for the exodus of the youth from the Croatian rural areas. It is, however, uncertain whether this is a new chance for shaping of a new and vital rural society? Have the changes the village has been exposed to, due to the influences coming from the urban communities and modernization, actually broadened the social area and economic grounds for young people, and do they really feel satisfied to live in the villages? And finally, is village still a “destiny” or has it become a choice for the rural youth?

2. Subject and methods of research

This section describes some fragmented results from a study conducted among the youth in the village of Vođinci⁵. We focused on their attitudes and opinions on the quality of life and development difficulties of the village they live in is facing, their opinion on advantages and disadvantages of life in the village, their aspirations and motives that drive them either to stay or migrate from their village. The idea was triggered by an attempt to establish or at least recognise some circumstances, based on life experience of the young from Vođinci, that more or less determine the preferences in deciding to stay, and live and work in the village. And finally, to establish on a descriptive level whether different socio-demographic and professional characteristics, and partly psychological factors, discriminate young persons in fulfilling their wish to either stay or leave the village. The research started from the assumption that young people who plan to leave more adversely assess the life quality in the village than those who intend to stay. The analysis is based on a survey conducted in 2006, using a sample of 100 respondents, which was reduced to 98 respondents after weighing. In the research ‘face to face’ survey was used. The young from 15 to 29 years of age were interviewed⁶ taking into account all

⁵ The study was an introduction to the project “Interest of the Village Youth in Family Farming” structured and designed in several thematic groups and conducted in four representatively selected rural communities in Croatia.

⁶ This age limit was selected for practical reasons, because it relates to the previously conducted researches. No sociological or psychological definitions of youth were used which cover different demographic age groups from 14–24, from 15–27, even from 15–30 years of age.

age groups equally represented. A questionnaire was used with a combination of questions of open and closed type (which were phrased as nominal and interval scales). In this paper, several sets of questions are used. The data were processed by standard statistical techniques for analysis of frequency distributions, percentages and average values.

2.1. Research results

2.1.1. Sample description

The sample comprised nearly 23% of the young of Vodinci belonging to the age group of 15–29 years.⁷ Their basic social and demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. Marital status was recorded for the “older” youth population, the number of unemployed women and men is equal, they are 20 to 29 years of age, and all have secondary school education and prevailing number of them live in households on family farms.

Table 1.
Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic indicator		f	%
Sex:	Male	50	51.0
	Female	48	49.0
Age:	15–19 years of age	37	37.8
	20–24 years of age	40	49.8
	25–29 years of age	21	21.4
Marital status:	Single	78	79.6
	Married	20	20.4
Socio-professional status:	Employed*	42	42.8
	Unemployed	15	15.3
	Pupils and students	41	41.9
Education level of employed and unemployed (N=57)	Elementary school	4	7.0
	Trade school and apprenticeship	35	61.4
	Secondary school with vocational training programs and grammar school	16	28.1
	Higher school, faculty (graduate school)	2	3.5

⁷ According to the population census data from the year 2001, the village had 2,113 villagers and 614 households. There were 448 villagers or 22.8% of the total population in the 15–29 age group.

Socio-demographic indicator		f	%
Father's education level ⁸	Uncompleted elementary school	11	11.2
	Elementary school	31	31.6
	Trade school and apprenticeship	42	42.8
	Secondary school with vocational training programs and grammar school	9	9.2
	Higher school, faculty	5	5.2
Mother's education level	Uncompleted elementary school	13	13.3
	Elementary school	40	40.8
	Trade school and apprenticeship	20	20.3
	Secondary school with vocational training programs and a grammar school	22	22.4
	Higher school, faculty	3	3.0
Households according to a land ownership	Farm-owned land	66	67.3
	Leasehold farm	5	5.1
	No land	27	27.6
Household type according to the source of income	Agricultural	2	2.0
	Part-time	50	51.0
	Non-agricultural	46	47.0

* farmers included

In contemporary generation of the rural youth, the young persons who chose of their own will to work exclusively on a farm are rare, as was confirmed by our research. In a subgroup of employed, only one farmer works on his own farm⁹, all the others found employment in a nearby cities, mostly as workers in private companies, service industry, or as civil servants. Most young (79.6%) live in the same household with their parents, but it is very indicative that two thirds of them are employed¹⁰.

⁸ According to Population census 2001 in Vodinci there were 24.3% of men and 30.7% of women without and uncompleted elementary school.

⁹ Although the mentioned data considerably deviate from the share of farmers on the settlement level it seems only logical, since the young are always pioneers of changes in professional differentiation of village.

¹⁰ In Croatia, it is very common for young people and even for young couples to live with their parents. The recent studies on the representative sample of the Croatian youth have shown that 76.6% of young persons aged 15–29 live with their parents (Ilišin, Radin, 2002).

3. Youth and rural community

Village, as a natural, residential, working, cultural and in other words social environment, represents along with a family a secondary framework in a network of social relations, and the place for fulfilment of the necessities of life and activities of the youth. Attitude of the youth regarding village as a desirable place for settling down and work is closely related with their own sense of achieved progress, which they compare with the life of their parents, fellow farmers, their counterparts living in urban areas, their perceptions of both positive and negative aspects of life in rural areas, possibilities for articulation of their personal interests, and the like.

In the sections below, several questions were used in attempt to perceive at least some circumstances that more or less determine the subjective experience of the young that the village is an attractive place to live and work.

3.1. *Living conditions and satisfaction with life in village*

Lack of social and utility infrastructure which directly determine the group of general conditions affecting quality of life are highlighted as the most common reason for perceiving that the rural population, and particularly the young, are deprived of the quality living¹¹. Inadequate amenities are the most commonly mentioned reason for dissatisfaction of young population and an additional reason for their exodus. In order to obtain a more clear and precise picture of living conditions of the young in the village of Vodinci, some other “conditions” (working conditions, relations among neighbours, economic circumstances and family standard of living, etc.) that contribute to the overall quality of life were checked in addition to the available infrastructure (the infrastructure which determines the lower limit of availability).

The Table 2. shows that the young of Vodinci estimate the interpersonal and neighbourly relations, conditions for education of their children, and supply of goods in shops as exceptionally good. The commuting infrastructure and utilities, appearance of buildings (houses), and farm buildings, medical services and postal service were also given high scores. The economic conditions of proper families and other villagers, landscape and cleanness of public areas has been graded as fairly low.

High grades given to neighbourly relations point out that these relations are a backbone of local integration, although the impression the youth has of the closeness of neighbours is rather surprising, since Vodinci is a relatively large rural com-

¹¹ According to the results of research conducted by Štambuk and Mišetić, the majority of the Croatian rural communities suffer obvious shortage of social and technical infrastructure. As example, only 27.8% of villages have elementary schools, general practitioners are available in only 11.5%, and dentists in only 6.1% of villages (Štambuk and Mišetić, 2002).

munity, in which it is not easy to achieve physical contacts among all villagers, and the settlement is heterogeneous in its social and educational structure, interests, and economic conditions.

Table 2.
Estimation of quality of life in the village*

Modality of answers	Very good and good %	Bad and extremely bad %	Average score (Mean)
Daily provision of groceries	90.8	4.1	4.34
Conditions and possibilities for education of children (school)	92.9	2.0	4.28
Neighborly relations, getting to know co-villagers	76.5	2.0	4.01
Roads, public transport services within municipality and nearby settlements	79.6	7.1	3.94
Utility services (water supply, gas, telephone, etc.)	68.3	5.1	3.78
Health service	65.3	9.2	3.74
Postal services	70.4	13.3	3.70
Appearance of buildings (family houses) yards	58.1	7.1	3.60
Availability of spare time	39.8	13.3	3.42
Equipment on farms and maintenance of farm buildings (stables and similar)	38.7	16.3	3.29
Economic circumstances and standard of living of your family	69.4	2.0	3.07
Economic circumstances and standard of living of villagers in your village	20.4	8.2	3.03
Cleanliness and landscaping public areas	35.7	30.6	2.99
Cultural events in the village, possibilities for entertainment and recreation	21.5	45.9	2.67
Working conditions in the village	8.1	70.4	2.23

* score range 1 to 5, 1 = extremely bad; 2 = bad; 3 = neither good or bad; 4 = good and 5 = very good

The young have an extremely low opinion of working conditions in a rural community. This could be linked directly with “shortage” of non-farming jobs which mostly affects the young unemployed population, and also with a deeply rooted perception that working in the cities is easier and less demanding. The overall opinion of the village youth is that their workload is much higher compared to their counterparts in the cities, particularly due to their obligation to work on family farms. In our sample, the unemployed respondents and the young participating in farm work on a daily basis estimate the working conditions in a rural area as bad and extremely bad.

Also, the young scored accessibility of cultural and leisure amenities and events in the village very low. According to their answers, they have more than enough spare time. In Vođinci, there are few coffee shops (pubs) frequented by the young in their spare time. The individual interviews revealed that several attempts of the young to organize some events and social gathering of the young people in their village failed, because “they (local politicians in power) had never had enough financial resources and no premises have ever been available to organize events especially for the young”.

Although this is only a sketch of conditions that contribute to the quality of life, distribution of scores given by the young actually highlights the crucial shortcomings. These shortcomings are also suggested in the analyses below.

What do the respondents perceive as the major village problems? From their answers, three groups of main obstacles were generated which have almost explicitly been singled out as priorities to be resolved. The key issue facing the village is “unemployment” referred to by most of the respondents (71.1%), although it was prevalently highlighted by the young, both unemployed and employed. The former because of the fact that in the village and its narrow area there are presently no vacancies available, and they do not perceive their future in participating in farm-related work (although they all live on farms, only two of our respondents will stay on the farm in case they fail to find a job)¹². The latter because, even though they have found employment, most of them have not been employed in working places they have been educated and trained for, their wages are low, and they are faced with the problem of unemployment of their parents (all registered unemployed fathers or mothers of our respondents belong to that subgroup).

According to the statements of the young, the second key issue in the village is “absence of any social and cultural events in the village” (answer: “no premises available for organizing any kind of entertainment”; “shortage of cultural events”; “no space/premises for our spare time activities”; “absence of any kind of social events”; “there is a need for more entertainment for the young”, etc.). Absence of entertainment as an outstanding problem for the young has also been confirmed by previous studies (Dilić, 1989; Ivić, 2001). Among our respondents, this issue was more frequently pointed out by the younger age groups, namely pupils and students. The absence of mentioned events and possibilities for the young results in their inability to shape adequate cultural patterns and individual life styles.

As the third problem underscored by the young respondents is “neglected public areas, garbage, sewerage” we ourselves witnessed during our field trip. However,

¹² An unemployed young man described lack of perspective in agriculture in a nutshell: “Unemployment is a crucial problem since a large number of persons live on farming which is a hard life”.

they do not realize that it is partly them who live in the village that contribute to such a situation.

The exodus of the young from the rural areas has contributed to the general opinion that the young persons who did not leave the village are unsatisfied with their life (Ivić, 2001). Taking the aforementioned problems into consideration (unemployment, unavailability of social and cultural events, comparatively low rating of the family standard of living), we expected that prevailing number of the young respondents in Vođinci shall express their dissatisfaction with their life in the village. However, the results of our analyses indicated to the contrary, i.e. 16.3% of the young in Vođinci said they are “quite satisfied” and 45.9% “mostly satisfied” with their life in the village. The satisfaction with life in the village expressed by a comparatively large number of the respondents could probably be attributed to the factor of “subjective (psychological) attachment to the village”, which has also been determined by previous studies¹³, but the background for such an attitude is still somewhat different. “Psychological attachment” to a village of the young in the past reflected “particular” socialization and growing up in a patriarchal community, manifested in a specific attitude towards land as dominant value. Nowadays, there are no signs of emotional and psychological attachment and identification of the young with land. It is more probable that their expression of satisfaction with and attachment to the rural life is only a reflection of the village geographical location (ecological environment), as well as of the social crisis which makes the urban communities less appealing and unattractive to live in, which was confirmed by the following results of our study.

Our hypothetical question was: If you could choose, where would you want to live and work? The answer of 48.0% of respondents was that their choice of place to live was village. The city is however a favourable place to work: 56.1% would prefer to work in a town and 29.6% in a city. Being practical, the young try to reconcile advantages of both types of communities. This opting in principle for village as the place to live rather than the place to work was tested through questions on general “advantages” and “disadvantages” of life in village (Table 3.).

To summarize, the primary appeal of the village life are its spatial and environmental features. It is understandable, since today the “return-to-nature” is a broadly accepted general trend, as is strong resistance to artificial products offered on the market, and greater concern for quality of living environment.

¹³ Already mentioned research conducted thirty years ago came to a conclusion that “the young are mostly subjectively attached to the village and that the psychological attachment is one of the basic motives of their attitude towards their own milieu” (Dilić, 1971:172). In late eighties, the same was confirmed by some partial researches conducted in former Yugoslavia (see: Korać, 1988).

Table 3.
Degree of acceptance of advantages and disadvantages of life in village (in %)

Good sides/advantages	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Less crowded, more open space	42.8	54.1	3.1	–	–	4.40
Natural amenities, co-life with nature	38.8	52.0	6.1	–	3.1	4.23
Less pollution (Reduced environmental pollution)	33.7	53.1	13.2	–	–	4.20
More humane living space	27.6	60.2	11.2	1.0	–	4.14
Attitude towards tradition	38.8	41.8	13.3	5.1	1.0	4.12
Neighborly contacts among people in rural areas, knowing your neighbors	31.6	50.0	17.3	–	1.0	4.11
Attitude towards religious life and religion as a whole	43.9	31.6	8.2	16.3	–	4.11
Healthier diet	27.6	51.1	12.2	3.1	–	4.09
Stronger family bonds	20.4	60.2	14.3	2.0	3.1	3.93
Exposure to stress minimal	9.2	45.9	28.6	10.2	6.1	3.42
Greater personal safety of people in rural area	15.3	40.8	35.7	5.1	3.1	3.60
Shortcomings/Disadvantages						
Employment prospects for young rural population	70.4	20.4	7.2	2.0	–	4.59
Absence of entertainment and cultural events	43.9	35.7	13.3	6.1	1.0	4.15
Reduced possibilities for education and additional training	21.4	57.1	13.3	3.1	5.1	3.87
Obsolete attitudes and conservative views of the older population	51.1	21.4	22.4	2.0	3.1	3.85
It is harder to work in a village, more physical work	18.4	42.9	26.5	6.1	6.1	3.61
Reduced access to the mass communication	15.3	46.9	21.4	8.2	8.2	3.53

The list of shortcomings of life in rural communities once again confirms and repeats previously presented list of the main local shortcomings and fundamental reasons of deprivation of the village youth. It is obvious that vicinity of cities cannot make up for the said shortcomings.

3.2. Influence of the young people on village affairs

The village youth, particularly the better-educated ones, are undoubtedly an important group of actors, the development carriers in the village. They need to be considered separately from the young who stay in the village because they have no other options (Seferagić, 2002). After the initial period of enthusiasm, numerous attempts of the young to organize themselves and contribute to the local community with new ideas simply fail or vanish because of the lack of financial support or premises for gathering, and because of the lack of trust of the community. The general impression is that the youth in Vodinci, under the pressure of general social conditions, have found themselves in the state of lethargy, and without any desire to improve the situation in the village. The results reveal persistent discrepancy between the rather high degree of satisfaction with life in the village and perception of their influence on it. General satisfaction with rural life, despite narrow living options, is clearly one of the factors causing inactivity of the young when they are expected to invest their social energy into the life of their rural community.

One quarter of the young (24.5%) are indifferent (they simply do not care) to their influence in the local community, and 46.9% see it as very low.

Lack of pro-active attitude of the young does not only reflect in their transfer of responsibility to the local self-government, but also in a general impression that they have been “left to themselves and their destiny” (as pointed out by 81.7% of respondents). Consequently, they do not consider that facing the existing problems (circumstances) in their village is worth their effort and aspirations, so they rather accept the situation as it is¹⁴. Finally, the background of the lethargy of young population of Vodinci is detected from their two attitudes. The statement from our survey that “our society does nearly nothing to support rural development” was confirmed by nearly 80.7% of respondents. Further, half of them perceives the rural youth in Croatia as a socially isolated and/or marginal group. Under such social circumstances which offer no encouragement and in which the lack of trust in social institutions is evident, it is illusory to expect from this generation to be the carriers of the demographic transformation of village and the accelerator of its changes.

3.3. Deciding to stay or leave

By examining the aspirations of the young with regard to their village of Vodinci, we asked them: “Do you intend to leave your village in the near future?”. Answers to that question are encouraging, since most of them (55.1%) intend to stay, slightly more than one fourth (26.5%) plans to leave but does not know where to, 16.3%

¹⁴ Resolving of the problem of unemployment is certainly not to be addressed by the young only, and it strongly depends on the initiative of the local administration and broader society.

intend to move into the cities in their county, or somewhere else in Croatia and two persons intend to emigrate abroad.

A group of respondents planning to leave their village have given the explanations that mostly fall into two categories: (a) answers such as: “better economic perspective”, “better chances to find employment”, “employment”, “better life for my children”, “better living conditions”, “village has no future”, “the village is underdeveloped” and similar answers, and (b): answers such as “getting married”; “education”, and similar reasons. Only one respondent from this subgroup answered that the reason for leaving is “confrontation with the local community”. If the answers of young rural population are correlated with the results that indicates that the village is a desirable place to live and work, it is obvious that decision of the young to leave the village is not based on their infatuation with the city, but rather on lack of chance for them to realize their professional ambitions and ensure better living conditions¹⁵.

The decision-making process of the young to stay or leave their village is burdened with numerous factors. Our analysis, however on a descriptive level, singles out some features which determine their intention to leave or to stay in village. At the level of total sample, analysis showed that older respondents (25–29 years) and those unemployed are more frequent in the group which intend to leave the village in foreseeable future. In that age group 52.4% of youth express the intention to leave the village, comparing to 47.6% of youth that intend to stay. In the group of unemployed two thirds (66.7%) plan to leave the village. Detailed insight to basic socio-demographic characteristics in relation to intention to leave/stay in the village can be read in Table 4.

Furthermore, young who intend to leave, comparing to those who intend to stay, estimate living conditions in Vodinci relatively worse. The higher discrepancy regards to evaluation of life quality indicators as ‘availability of spare time’, ‘neighbourly relations’ and ‘working conditions’¹⁶. This group is more dissatisfied with living conditions and they don’t share general experience of advantages of rural living with other respondents.

Women, youth 20–24 years old, not married and those living on the family farms are more frequent within the (sub)group of young who intend to leave the village

¹⁵ Puljiz writes that one of the main factors for abandoning villages and agriculture in the seventies and eighties was opening of transfer channels and communications between urban and rural communities, what enabled particularly the younger population to see the advantages of industrial civilisation. This caused “psychological deagrarisation” which caused almost pathological turning back on all that was related to their rural origins and mythologizing of all that was urban or industrial (Puljiz, 1988).

¹⁶ Average score (mean) for those who intend to leave, comparing to those intend to stay, is lower; for example, ‘availability of spare time’ (3.07 comparing to 3.70; ‘neighbourly relations’ 3.80 comparing to 4.19; ‘working conditions’ 2.07 comparing to 2.37).

(see Table 4.). It is indicative that none of them live in the households with only agricultural income.

Table 4.

Sociodemographic differences between respondents according to intention to stay/to leave the village

Socio-demographic indicator		Intend to stay (N=54)		Intend to leave (N=44)	
		f	%	f	%
Sex	Male	29	53.7	21	47.7
	Female	25	46.3	23	52.3
Age	15–19 years of age	22	40.7	15	34.1
	20–24 years of age	22	40.7	18	40.9
	25–29 years of age	10	18.6	11	25.0
Marital status:	Single	41	75.9	37	84.1
	Married	13	24.1	7	15.9
Socio-professional status:	Employed*	25	46.3	17	38.6
	Unemployed	5	9.3	10	22.8
	Pupils and students	24	44.4	17	38.6
Households according to a land ownership	Farm-owned land	35	65.9	31	70.5
	Leasehold farm	2	3.6	3	6.8
	No land	17	31.5	10	22.7
Household type according to the source of income	Agricultural	2	3.7	–	–
	Part-time	25	46.3	25	56.8
	Non-agricultural	27	50.0	19	43.3

* *famers included*

Further detailed analyses should indicate to which degree their intentions are a reflection of the local living conditions and to which degree they are influenced by them. Also, it should indicate what can be attributed to the influence of individual, group and global social changes.

4. Conclusion

When analysing young rural population in their intentions to leave the village, the level of development of a studied local community (village) has to be taken into consideration. The village from our study has characteristics that differs it from an

average Croatian village¹⁷, so the results should be analyzed within this context. Nevertheless, the results do not allow generalizations or any future forecast that the attitude of the young in Croatia towards a village as the place for living and working has radically changed.

We consider as the most valuable finding the fact that the young from this village, compared to the results of earlier studies, demonstrated a more expressed affinity to stay in their village (55.1%). The young in this village find the city attractive for work and the village for living. Unemployment and difficult/poor working conditions are the main reasons for “driving out” the young of Vodinci from their village. Although most of them come from family farms, they do not see their future in agriculture. The other major problem is lack of social and cultural amenities. The young feel forgotten and neglected by the society, and that is the essential cause of their passive behavior and lack of desire to take initiative for creation of their perspectives and finding options to create better quality of living in their village.

Not only the state and local government, but social networks and interpersonal relations as well, are insufficiently open, encouraging and supportive for the young and their perspective initiatives. In an unsupportive social ambient (primarily at the local level), which discourages any attempt to introduce new activities into community, a potential social energy becomes and continues to be unused and socially restrained. Rural youth should be more included in social initiatives, programmes and activities in the local community. Social policy should consider opinions and experiences of young people, as well as implementation of the existing strategy for the youth. Furthermore, according to the western European countries’ strategies, programmes, especially for rural youth, should be created and performed.

Our results indicate that all four social systems of social integration show a lack/unavailability of the basic conditions each of them requires. According to that it is concluded that the young we have researched have the right to feel socially excluded because they actually are. However, the reasons the young give for leaving the village are a landmark that should be respected by development actors of social, civic and economic integration (i.e. state and local government) in taking actions for decreasing exodus of the young and, consequently, revitalization of the Croatian rural society.

It is difficult to assess whether the greater aspirations of the young to stay in the village from this study, is only a current status or a step towards new vitality of the

¹⁷ The village of Vodinci is one of rare rural settlements which registered a population growth in the interval between two censuses (1991–2001). According to the number of villagers, it is considerably larger than an average village in Croatia. Unlike the majority of Croatian villages Vodinci has a basic social infrastructure (school, a church, local medical clinic, post office, fire station and a library).

Croatian rural community particularly since, at least for the time being, the socio-political environment is still not capable of supporting them with its institutional mechanisms.

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Selo – slobodan izbor ili sudbina mladih na selu (studija o seoskoj zajednici Vođinci)

Sažetak

U članku se iznose rezultati istraživanja provedenoga metodom ankete 2006. godine u slavonskom selu Vođinci. U središtu pozornosti su mišljenja mladih ljudi o kvaliteti života i nedostacima u selu, te njihove namjere o ostanku/napuštanju sela. Rezultati pokazuju da su u životu mladih u ovom selu najveći nedostaci loši radni uvjeti (uključujući nezaposlenost, pri čemu ne vide svoju budućnost u poljoprivredi), nepostojanje društvenih i kulturnih sadržaja i neuređenost javnih površina. Mladi imaju veće preferencije prema životu u selu, te prema radu u gradu. Oni se osjećaju socijalno isključenima od društva, a istovremeno su pasivni u preuzimanju inicijative i stvaranju vlastite perspektive u selu u kojem žive. U grupi koja kani napustiti selo više je žena, mladih od 20–24 godine, nezaposlenih, onih koji preferiraju grad kao mjesto života i rada, onih koji smatraju nezaposlenost najvećim problemom u selu te onih najnezadovoljnijih svojim životom u selu.

Ključne riječi: ruralno društvo, mladi na selu, socijalna uključenost, migratibilnost.

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