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## URBAN POPULATION IN SERBIA IN 1900: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

**Abstract:** The paper discusses some of the key demographic characteristics of the urban population in Serbia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Emphasizing factors such as sex and age distribution, marital pattern, household composition, dwelling ownership, engagement in agriculture, and literacy, the study relies on the official data from the 1900 census. The analysis presents aggregated data for both urban and rural settlements, providing a nuanced understanding of their differences and similarities. Additionally, the paper extracts and highlights specific data for the three largest urban centres – Belgrade, Niš and Kragujevac, offering deeper insight into their dynamics.

**Keywords:** population, urban population, urban settlements, demographic characteristics, Serbia, 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Urban Development in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Serbia

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, only 14% of Serbia's population lived in urban areas. In contrast to more industrially developed European nations, where the late 1800s and early 1900s witnessed substantial urban migration fuelled by industrialization, Serbia's migration patterns in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were significantly shaped by political events. Prior to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, urban settlements in Serbia were predominantly inhabited by the Turkish/Muslim population. However, the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) marked a transformative

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period as the Turkish/Muslim population vacated, making way for a predominantly Serbian population to move in. Following the upheaval of the Uprising, the expelled Turks/Muslim residents, along with individuals from other nationalities such as Greeks, Cincars, Jews, etc., who had previously inhabited major urban centres, began returning to urban settlements. The attainment of political autonomy (1829–1834) and the initiation of the construction of the Serbian national state further catalysed immigration, drawing Serbian and other non-Muslim populations to Serbia, largely from neighbouring regions of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Conversely, the Turkish/Muslim population experienced a gradual decline, until 1867 when it entirely left the country.

After gaining autonomy, the first population census took place in Serbia (1834). The urban population was relatively modest at that time, with the most prominent urban settlements situated in the northern part of the country, near or along the border with the Habsburg Monarchy. The largest among these were Belgrade (7,033 inhabitants), Šabac (2,018), Smederevo (2,450), and Požarevac (2,033).<sup>1</sup> Over the ensuing decades, there was a gradual increase in the Serbian and other non-Muslim populations within urban settlements. Up until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a notable influx of immigrants to urban areas, originating from the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. In the latter half of the century, however, the demographic landscape shifted, with immigrants from rural areas of Serbia assuming the predominant role in shaping the urban populace.

With the territorial expansion into four southern districts in 1878, Serbia's network of urban settlements underwent significant growth. The newly annexed areas exhibited a higher proportion of urban dwellers compared to the pre-existing regions of Serbia. In 1879, the urban population's share in the new districts reached 14.2%, marking a 7% increase compared to the urban population share within the old borders of Serbia, as recorded in 1874 census. Notably, urban settlements in the southern part of the country boasted a larger average population size than settlements in the old regions. Following its incorporation in Serbia, Niš, the largest urban centre in the newly acquired regions, ascended to become the second-largest settlement in the country in terms of population size.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leposava Cvijetić, "Popis stanovništva i imovine u Srbiji 1834. godine", *Mešovita građa (Miscellanea)* XIII (1984) 9–118. The Turkish/Muslim population, residing in six designated imperial cities (until 1867), was excluded from the census as it fell outside the jurisdiction of Serbian authorities. According to unofficial data about the Turkish population in Belgrade in the mid-1830s, there were 1.338 married men, 1.322 unmarried men (including children) and 1.104 members of military units, in: Aleksandra Vuletić, Nino Delić, "Population of Belgrade as a Focus of Political and Administrative Interest in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century", in: *Belgrade 1521–1867*, ed. Dragana Amedoski, Belgrade 2018, 336.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandra Vuletić, "Demografske karakteristike stanovništva novih okruga u vreme prisajedinjenja Kneževini Srbiji", in: *Od turske kasabe do modernog grada preko Berlina i Versaja*, ur. Miloš Jagodić, Pirot 2018, 129–140.

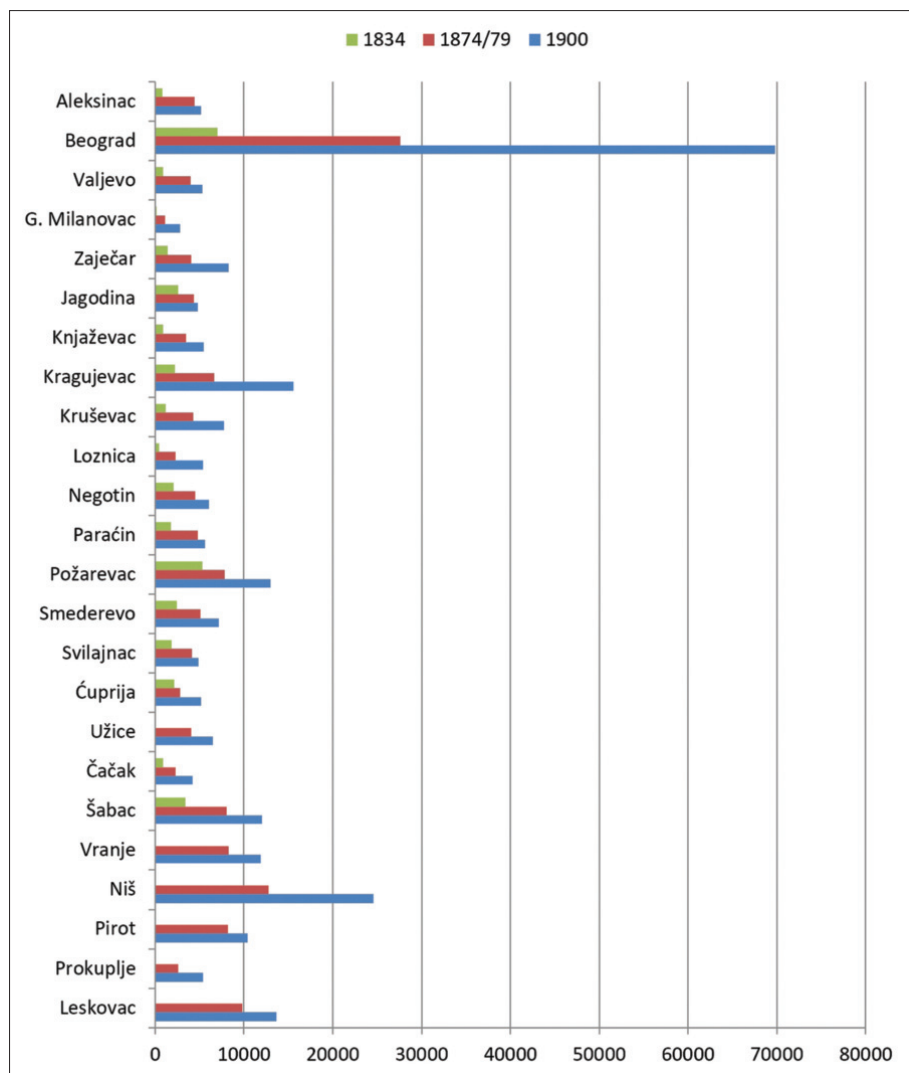
The initial official classification of inhabited places occurred in 1866, where all settlements underwent categorisation into *towns*, *small towns* and *villages*. The status of town was granted to Belgrade and district seats, determined by the administrative function of the settlement. Conversely, small town status was primarily contingent on the economic functions of the settlement, with crafts and trade serving as predominant activities for the population. The administrative division of settlements revealed a total of 39 urban settlements – comprising 17 towns and 21 small towns. As time progressed, the number of urban settlements expanded, mainly due to the rise in small towns. These settlements, originally mostly rural, saw the prevalence of urban economic activities such as trade and crafts over rural pursuits like agriculture, earning them the classification of small towns. In the subsequent decades, the town status was exclusively reserved for district seats, and the increase in their number was primarily closely tied to adjustments in territorial administration. In 1889, the two largest urban centres, Belgrade and Niš, were bestowed with the status of special administrations, prompting a more frequent designation of *cities* for these urban areas.<sup>3</sup>

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, the count of urban settlements increased to 81, encompassing 24 towns and 57 small towns.<sup>4</sup> The accompanying chart illustrates the population growth of towns in Serbia from 1834 to 1900, focusing on settlements that held that status in the year 1900. Notably, the last five among them became part of Serbia in 1878.

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on the systematisation of urban settlements: Bojana Miljković-Katić, *Struktura gradskog stanovništva Srbije sredinom XIX veka*, Beograd 2002, 62–84.

<sup>4</sup> *Statistički godišnjak [SG] V* (1900), Beograd 1904, 33–36; *Statistika Kraljevine Srbije [SKS] XXIV* (1905), Beograd 1906, p. LXX.



**Chart 1:** Urban population in 1834, 1874/1879 and 1900  
(in absolute numbers)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sources of data for 1834 and 1874/1879: Vladimir Jovanović, Aleksandra Vuletić, Momir Samardžić, *Naličja modernizacije. Srpska država i društvo u vreme sticanja nezavisnosti*, Beograd 2017, 233; za 1900: "Popis stanovništva u Kraljevini Srbiji 31. decembra 1900. godine", in: *SKS XXIII* (1903), Beograd 1904, 9–686. Column 1874/1879: data for 1879 relate to the last five settlements in the chart.

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a mere eight urban settlements in Serbia boasted populations exceeding 10,000 inhabitants (Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac, Leskovac, Požarevac, Šabac, Vranje and Pirot), while the majority had fewer than 5,000 residents. The average population of urban settlements stood at 4,334.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, during this period, many villages still surpassed certain urban settlements in population size. For instance, the village of Azanja, with 7,426 inhabitants in 1900, exceeded the population of 12 towns, including Smederevo, the administrative centre of the district where Azanja was situated. In comparison to many European countries, the growth of the urban population in Serbia throughout the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was notably slow. The primary hindrance to its expansion was attributed to the absence, or rather the slow development of industry.<sup>7</sup>

### Methodological Considerations

Despite the relatively modest proportion of the urban population within the overall demographic landscape of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia, and the circumstance that many urban settlements had fewer inhabitants than their rural counterparts, the urban population exhibited distinct demographic characteristics setting it apart from the rural populace. This study aims to illuminate several pivotal features: sex distribution, age composition, marriage patterns, household structure, dwelling ownership, engagement in agriculture, and literacy.<sup>8</sup> These demographic attributes are derived from the findings of the 1900 census and other relevant statistical data of that era. To enhance clarity, the data are presented aggregately for both, urban and rural settlements, facilitating the examination of disparities or resemblances between them. Moreover, data for the three largest urban centres – Belgrade, Niš and Kragujevac – have been isolated from the aggregated urban dataset for a more in-depth analysis. We consider these city centres representative due to their substantial population sizes and unique characteristics, which we will briefly outline.

From the very inception of the modern Serbian state, Belgrade held the status of a primate city. Although formally declared as the capital of Serbia only in 1841, Belgrade had already solidified its position as the paramount city in preceding decades. Its significance was deeply rooted in its geostrategic location, positioned along the border with the Habsburg Monarchy, granting it exceptional political,

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<sup>6</sup> SKS XXIV (1905), p. LXXI. About the development of urban centres in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also see: Nino Delić, "Urbanizacija naroda? Demografski razvoj srpske gradske populacije u drugoj polovini 19. veka – statistički pregled", in: *Urbanizacija u istočnoj i jugoistočnoj Evropi*, ed. Srđan Rudić, Aleksej Gordin, Beograd 2019, 167–196.

<sup>7</sup> The increase in the urban population in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was attributed to administrative changes – the proclamation of certain rural settlements as urban – rather than to the growth of the population in them, SKS XXIV (1905), p. LXX.

<sup>8</sup> Due to the limited scope of the work, data on the national and religious affiliation of the population have been omitted. They will be the subject of a separate paper.

economic, and cultural importance. Belgrade served as the primary conduit for trade with the neighbouring Monarchy, facilitating the influx of European cultural influences into the city and subsequently permeating throughout the country. By the year 1900, boasting population of almost 70,000 residents, Belgrade stood as a city nearly three times larger than Niš and four and a half times larger than Kragujevac.<sup>9</sup>

Kragujevac, a settlement located in central Serbia, held the distinction of being the inaugural capital of the modern Serbian state. Its selection as the capital in 1818 was driven by political and strategic considerations. However, with the waning relevance of these factors following the attainment of autonomy, the capital was subsequently relocated to Belgrade in 1841. Notably, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Kragujevac witnessed the establishment of its first industrial plants, marking the inception of its transformation into the industrial hub of Serbia. During its tenure as the capital, Kragujevac experienced a slower population growth compared to Belgrade and other northern towns. Nevertheless, in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, propelled by industrial development, Kragujevac demonstrated higher rates of population growth. Consequently, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it emerged as the third-largest urban settlement in Serbia.<sup>10</sup>

Niš, the largest urban settlement in southern Serbia, became part of the country in 1878. Given its political significance for the Serbian state, Niš earned the title of the second capital of Serbia in the 1880s and 1890s. Throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Niš underwent development under distinct political and economic conditions in comparison to urban settlements in the older districts of Serbia. These conditions gave rise to specific demographic characteristics, which, along with other urban centres in the south, set it apart at the time of its integration into Serbian state. Noteworthy among the distinctive features of urban centres in the southern region were their larger population size compared to the cities in the older areas, a higher proportion of women in the total population, and a lower number of literate residents.<sup>11</sup>

When applicable, data are differentiated for the male and female population. The results of the 1900 census provided information on both the factual and legal population, and for the purposes of this paper, data pertaining to the factual population have been utilized.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Vuletić, N. Delić, *Population of Belgrade*, 327–346.

<sup>10</sup> At the time when there were still tensions between representatives of the Serbian and Ottoman administrations, the position of Kragujevac in the interior of the country, outside the main lines of communication and without the presence of the Turkish military and civilian population, played a decisive role in its selection as the capital, see: Aleksandra Vuletić, "Demografski kapaciteti Kragujevca kao prestone varoši", in: *Kragujevac prva prestonica moderne Srbije 1818–1841*, ed. Predrag Ilić, Kragujevac 2019, 11–29.

<sup>11</sup> A. Vuletić, "Od turske kasabe do evropskog grada", 129–140.

### Sex and Age Distribution

Throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, the male population in Serbia consistently outnumbered the female population. The gender disparity was most pronounced in the mid-first half of the century, gradually diminishing thereafter, but still evident in the late 1800s. This demographic phenomenon is primarily attributed to immigration, as during this period, more people migrated into Serbia than departed from it. Given that men are more actively involved in migration processes, immigration tended to skew the population towards a higher proportion of males. The distribution of the population by sex in urban and rural areas, along with the largest urban centres in Serbia in 1900, is represented in the accompanying chart.<sup>12</sup>

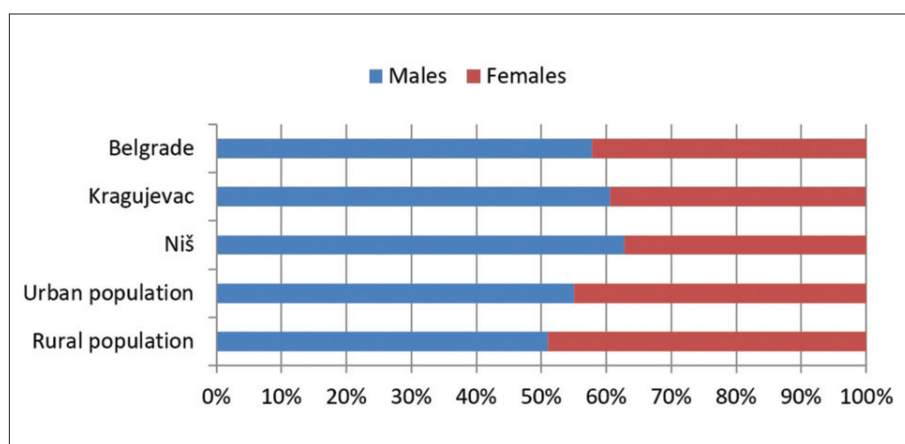


Chart 2: Population by sex in 1900<sup>13</sup>

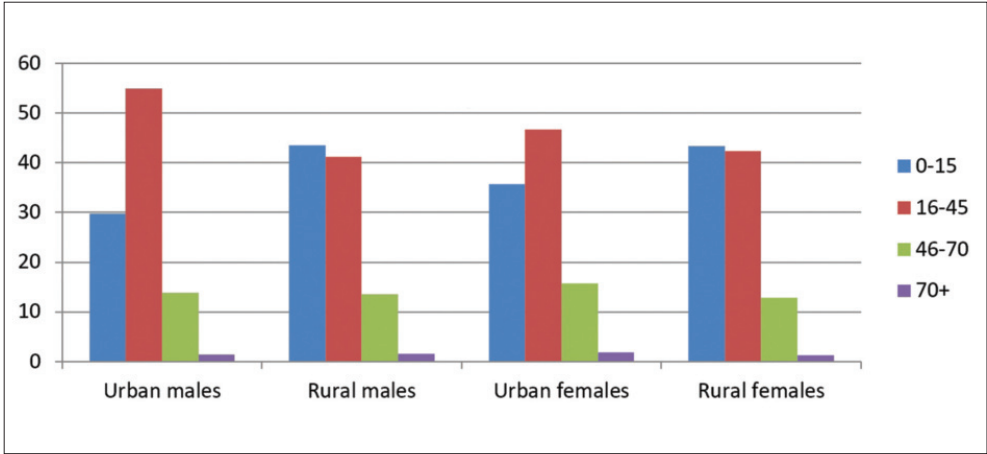
The prevalence of men in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia exhibited a more marked disparity in urban areas, constituting 55% of the population, compared to rural areas, where the proportion of men was only marginally higher than that of women (51%). This gender disparity was more pronounced in the largest city centres, primarily attributable to the presence of military personnel, gendarmerie members, and to a lesser extent, convicts. In Belgrade, these three groups collectively constituted 16% of the male population, nearly a fifth in Kragujevac, and as much as a third in Niš. If we exclude the aforementioned groups and focus solely on the civilian population, Niš and Belgrade, with 53% and 53.5% of the male population, respectively, would exhibit a slightly lower proportion of men compared to the urban settlement average; meanwhile, Kragujevac, with 55.4% male residents, would slightly exceed the average for urban areas.

<sup>12</sup> V. Jovanović, A. Vuletić, M. Samardžić, *Naličja modernizacije*, 202–234.

<sup>13</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–8, 158–163, 314–319, 746–751.

At the time of incorporation into the Serbian state, the gender disparity in Niš and other urban settlements in the southern regions was less pronounced compared to urban areas in older regions of Serbia. However, by the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these differences in population structure according to gender had nearly vanished. This convergence was influenced by two main factors: a more substantial increase in the female population in urban settlements of the older regions, and the presence of military and gendarmerie units in urban areas in the southern part of the country.<sup>14</sup>

The age structure of the urban and rural population, categorized by sex and distributed across five age groups (0–15, 16–45, 46–70, 70+), is depicted in the chart below:



**Chart 3:** Age structure of urban and rural population in 1900<sup>15</sup>

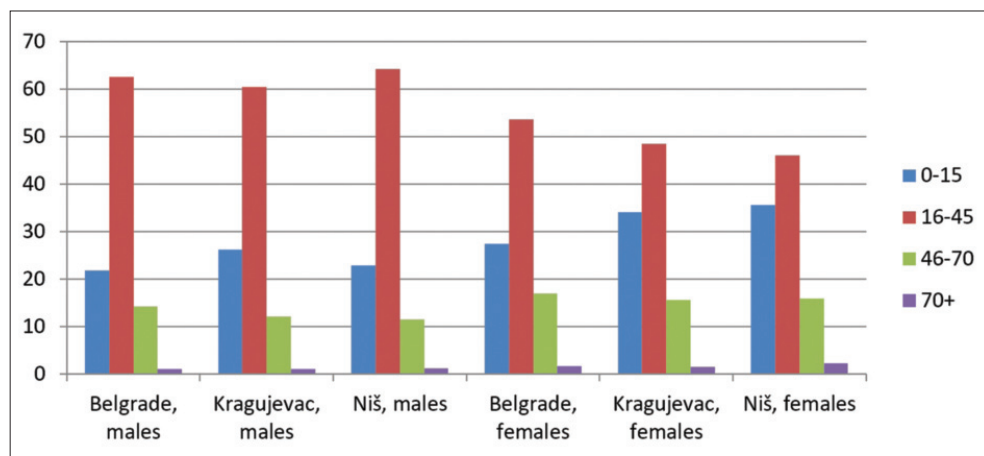
Among the aforementioned population groups, the most notable disparity in age structure existed between the male populations in urban and rural areas. In urban settlements, the age group of 16–45, representing the most work-capable segment of the male population, was the most prevalent, while in rural areas, the largest contingent comprised the young population not yet fit for work. Discrepancies in age structure between urban and rural settings were also evident in the female population, albeit to a lesser extent. In towns, men aged 16–45 constituted 55% of the male population, whereas women in the same age group accounted for 47%. These

<sup>14</sup> The numerical superiority of men is considered a characteristic of all cities in the territory of the former Ottoman Empire, in which only men had an active working role, in contrast to Western European cities, where women were already part of the labour force in the economic system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so they often had a larger share in the city population than men, Vladimir Jakšić, “Číslo i pokret ljudstva glavnog grada Beograda”, *Glasnik Društva srpske slovesnosti* IV (1852) 252.

<sup>15</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 746–748.



variations can be attributed to a higher influx of men aged 16–45 through urban immigration and a greater male presence in the economic activities of urban settlements. In the category of the population aged 45 and above, the distinctions between men in urban and rural areas were marginal, while there was a higher proportion of elderly women in urban settlements. We posit that these differences may be linked to more favourable living conditions for women in urban areas, coupled with their reduced exposure to physical labour compared to their rural counterparts.<sup>16</sup>



**Chart 3a:** Age structure of urban population in 1900<sup>17</sup>

All three major urban centres exhibited a higher proportion of male population aged 16–45 compared to the average for urban settlements. We assume that the heightened presence of the army and gendarmerie members in these major urban centres contributed to this overrepresentation. Notably, Niš had the highest proportional number of army and gendarmerie members, consequently resulting in the largest share of men within 16–45 age group. In contrast, in the female segment of the population, Belgrade recorded the highest proportion within the 16–45 age group. This could be attributed to a potentially greater influx of female immigrants from the neighbouring Habsburg Monarchy, distinguishing the capital city from other urban centres.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the mortality rates in Serbia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the average age of the population see: Aleksandra Vuletić, "Mortalitet muškaraca i žena u Srbiji 1862–1910. godine", *Istorijski časopis LXXI* (2022) 411–431.

<sup>17</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–4, 158–160, 314–316.

Marriage Pattern

Early marriage, a low number of unmarried individuals, and a high degree of household complexity are fundamental characteristics often associated with the marriage model in 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian society.<sup>18</sup> As the rural population constituted the overwhelming majority of Serbia’s demographic composition, it exerted a profound influence on the average values of demographic features for the entire country. By examining the data on the marital status of the Serbian population in 1900, our aim is to ascertain whether the imperative of marriage, prevalent in rural society, also extended to urban areas.

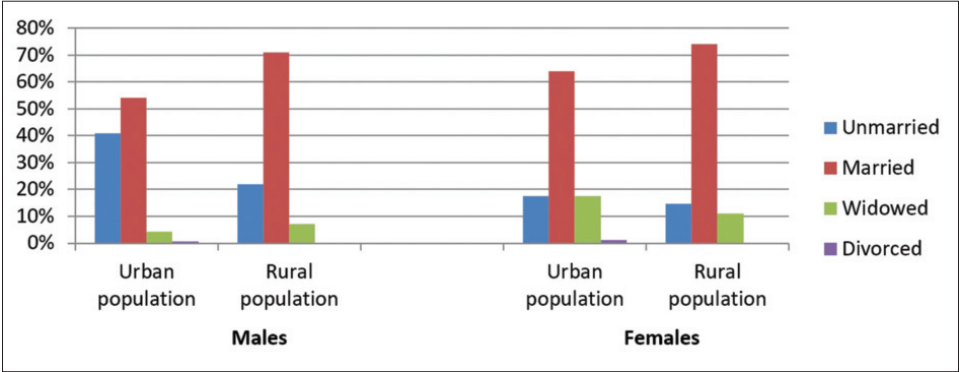


Chart 4: Population aged 15+ by marital status in 1900<sup>19</sup>

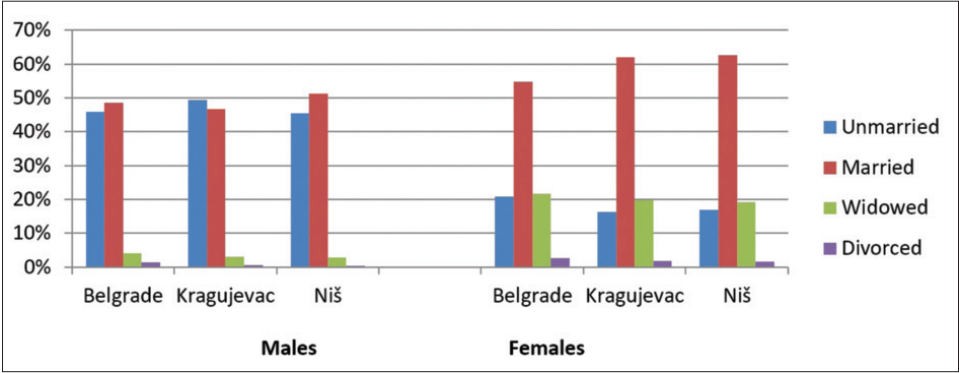


Chart 4a: Population aged 15+ by marital status in 1900<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> A classical paper on marriage patterns that sparked a plethora of scholarly writings on this topic: John Hajnal, “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective”, in: *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D. Glass and D. Eversley, Chicago: Aldine, 1965, 101–143. About the literature concerning the Serbian family in the past see: Aleksandra Vuletić, *Porodica u Srbiji sredinom 19. veka*, Beograd 2002.

<sup>19</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 746–751.

<sup>20</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–8, 158–163, 314–319.

Divergent marriage patterns were observed between urban and rural populations. The prevalence of unmarried individuals was significantly higher in urban areas, particularly among males. The percentage of unmarried men aged 15 and above was nearly double in urban areas compared to rural ones, standing at 41% and 22%, respectively. The highest concentration of unmarried men was found in the largest urban centres; in Kragujevac, nearly half of men aged 15 and above were unmarried. Conversely, the proportion of unmarried individuals was notably lower in the female urban population, at 17%, only 2% higher than their rural counterparts.

Another aspect worth exploring involves comparing the absolute numbers of married men and women in both urban and rural areas. In towns, the number of married men exceeded that of married women (75,927 vs. 61,876), whereas in rural areas, the trend reversed, with the number of married women surpassing that of married men (444,734 vs. 432,696). These disparities can be attributed to migration patterns. A portion of married men relocated from rural to urban settings, either temporarily or permanently, without their spouses, who, in turn, either temporarily or permanently remained in their native areas. In the overall count of married residents in Serbia, the number of married men exceeded that of married women by 2,013. We posit that a significant portion of this “surplus” can be associated with immigrants from abroad – specifically from the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires – who arrived in Serbia without their spouses.

We posit that the disparities in marriage patterns between urban and rural populations can largely be ascribed to the distinct economic systems in these areas and the differing roles of women within them. In rural economies, entering into marriage served as a necessary precondition not only for the biological reproduction of the family but also for the economic reproduction of the domestic household. In contrast, urban economies, where women typically played a less active role, required a material foundation established by men as a prerequisite for marriage, aimed at supporting future families. Consequently, men in urban centres tended to marry at a later stage than their rural counterparts, with some remaining unmarried throughout their lives. Conversely, economically dependent women in urban settings often married at an earlier age. This dynamic contributed to a notable age difference between husbands and wives, particularly pronounced in urban areas. We posit that this discrepancy is a contributing factor to the significantly higher number of widows compared to widowers in urban settings.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In 1900, the average age at marriage for men in urban areas was 27.7 years, and for women 23.2 (in rural areas, men got married at an average age of 23.2, and women at 21), SG IV (1900), p. 112. One of the reasons for the significantly higher number of widows in urban areas compared to the number of widowers could also be the trend of widowers remarrying more often. Most often, widowed persons entered into marriages with widowed persons, and in marriages between widowed persons and unmarried persons, the number of marriages between widowed men and girls was much higher than between widowed women and young men.

The distinctiveness of Belgrade, when compared to other urban areas, lies in the higher proportion of unmarried women aged 15 and above within the female population. This demographic characteristic can be linked to the unique features of the economic system in the capital city and migration processes. While the overall participation of women in the urban economic system was limited, it was more prominent in Belgrade than in other urban centres. The majority of employed women in the capital held positions as auxiliary workers, such as cooks and laundresses. Engaging in these occupations was deemed unsuitable for female members of the local population, leading them to be predominantly undertaken by women, often unmarried, who migrated to Belgrade from the Habsburg Monarchy.

Household Composition

The distinctive feature of Serbian society in the past that has garnered significant attention in global academic discourse is the complexity of family households. Similar to the examination of marriage patterns, scholarly investigations have predominantly focused on the rural population, with the structure of rural households being assumed as representative of the entire Serbian society.<sup>22</sup> The following chart will shed light on whether and to what extent differences existed in household structure between rural and urban settlements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

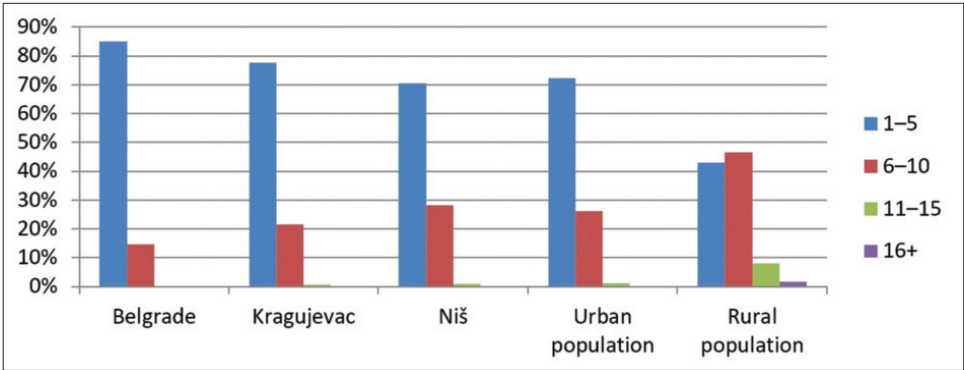


Chart 5: Population by household composition in 1900<sup>23</sup>

Households in rural areas tended to have a larger number of members compared to those in urban areas, mainly due to the distinct organisation of life and work. Unlike in villages, where economic activities occurred within the family household, urban

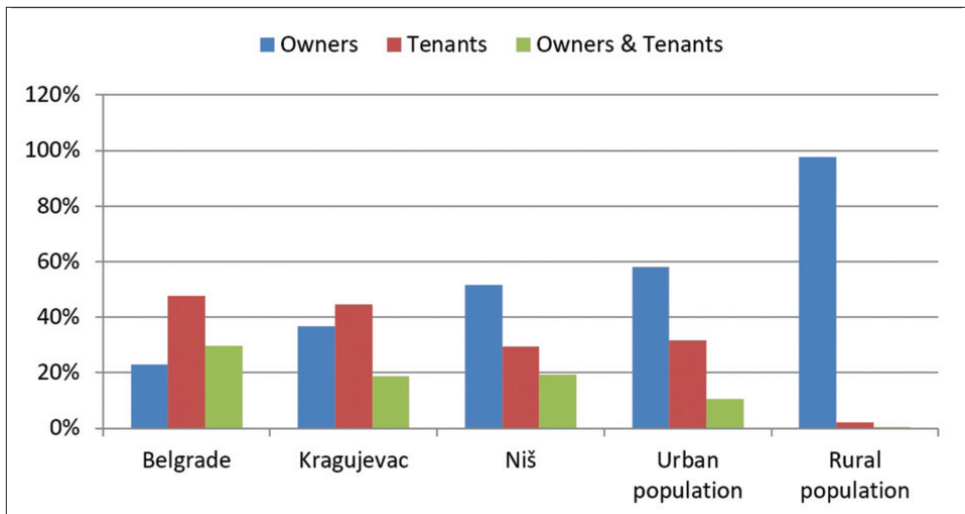
<sup>22</sup> For more information see: Aleksandra Vuletić, “Koliko duša živi u jednoj kući? Broj članova seoskog domaćinstva u Srbiji 1834–1910“, *Srpske studije* 3 (2012) 219–244.

<sup>23</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–8, 158–163, 314–319, 746–751.

economies (centred around trade and crafts) operated outside the family structure. Additionally, a significant portion of the population in urban environments consisted of migrants, among whom a notable portion were younger unmarried men in search of employment. Consequently, urban areas exhibited a higher prevalence of single households compared to rural regions. As mentioned earlier, in urban settings, the initiation of marriage required financial resources to sustain the future family, whereas in rural areas, the dynamic was reversed, with marriage being essential for both biological and economic household reproduction. It is noteworthy that Belgrade exhibited the least household complexity, while in Niš, the complexity surpassed the urban average. We propose that this specific characteristic of Niš may be linked to its development within the Ottoman Empire until 1878 and a lower level of immigration compared to Belgrade and Kragujevac.

### Households by Dwelling Ownership

Urban and rural settlements also varied in terms of the predominant ownership type of the houses/apartments in which the population resided.



**Chart 6:** Distribution of households by dwelling ownership in 1900<sup>24</sup>

In rural settlements, the majority of the population resided in their own homes. In urban areas, population fluctuations were significantly higher than in the countryside, resulting in a considerable number of residents living in rented houses and apartments. Belgrade had the lowest percentage of residents who owned their

<sup>24</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–8, 158–163, 314–319, 746–751.

homes; the prevalent housing arrangement in the capital involved a combination of landlords and tenants within the same residential building. This indicates a higher frequency of population turnover and greater availability of rental housing spaces. We hypothesize that the higher number of homeowners in Niš, compared to Belgrade and Kragujevac, can be attributed once again to a lower level of immigration and a longer, uninterrupted tradition of civic life in the city.

Engagement in Agriculture

The primary economic sectors in urban settlements throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century were trade and craftsmanship. Industry was in its early stages, and only a few urban areas had industrial plants. Throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, a portion of the urban residents remained engaged in agriculture as the main economic activity. The chart below illustrates their percentage in the urban population as of 1900.

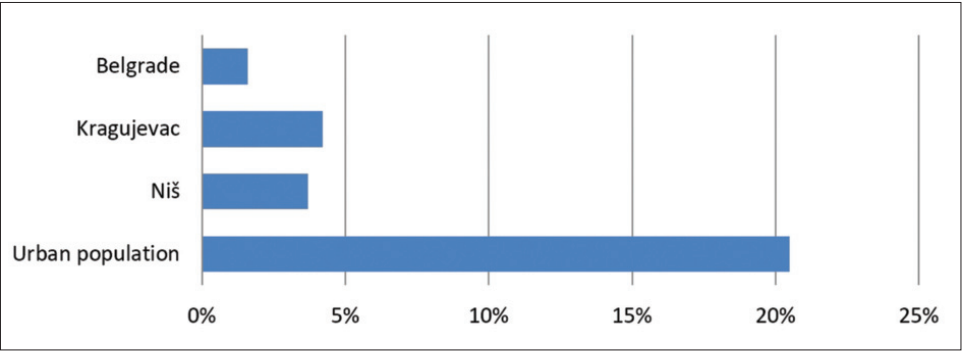


Chart 7: Share of the population engaged in agriculture in 1900<sup>25</sup>

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a fifth of the population residing within urban boundaries was still engaged in agriculture.<sup>26</sup> As expected, Belgrade had the smallest percentage of individuals involved in agricultural activities – 1.6% of the total population, along with Niš and Kragujevac, both of which also had significantly fewer people engaged in agriculture than the urban average. Most of the inhabitants engaged in agricultural activities were registered in the urban settlements of the Požarevac district, as well as in certain parts of eastern Serbia. Požarevac, the fourth-

<sup>25</sup> SKS XXIII (1903), 2–8, 158–163, 314–319, 746–751.

<sup>26</sup> Some urban municipalities included one or two rural settlements that were clearly separated in the census, but when calculating the average values, their population was also included in the urban population. For this reason, the stated data on the number of farmers in urban settlements are somewhat higher than was the case in reality.

largest urban settlement in Serbia with slightly fewer than 13,000 inhabitants, and without a single rural settlement within administrative boundaries, had as many as a quarter of its residents engaged in agriculture.<sup>27</sup> The substantial involvement of the urban population in agriculture during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with significant variations between individual urban settlements, might be associated with the slow and uneven development of the urban economic system.

### Literacy

Literacy among the population stands as a fundamental indicator of the level of social development. The shift from restricted to mass literacy, witnessed in European countries during the early modern period, exerted a profound impact on social development in the 1800s.<sup>28</sup> In Serbia, the transition to mass literacy commenced in the middle of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but was not fully realized by the late 1800s. As expected, this transformation unfolded more rapidly in urban areas. The proportions of the literate population aged six and above in urban and rural areas by 1900 are illustrated in the following chart. The literacy data for the residents of Kragujevac and Niš are not presented, as there are no separate statistics available for the population of these cities in the considered age category.

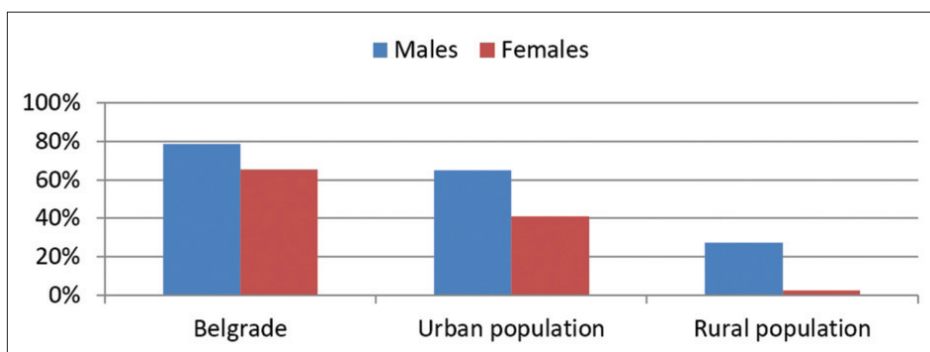


Chart 8: Population aged 6+ by literacy in 1900<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In Šabac, the next largest urban settlement, in the northwest of Serbia, 8% of the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, in Zaječar, in the east of the country – 21%, and in Vranje, in the south – 9%. These figures do not include the population of rural settlements located within the borders of the municipalities of Šabac and Vranje.

<sup>28</sup> About the importance of literacy in promoting social and demographic change, see: John C. Caldwell, "Mass Education as a Determinant of the Timing of Fertility Decline", *Population and Development Review* 6 (1980) 225–255.

<sup>29</sup> SKS XXIV (1905), p. CXXIX. There is no separate data available for the literacy rates of residents in Kragujevac and Niš for the population aged six and above.

The literacy rate among the male population in urban areas was twice as high as in rural areas, while among the female population, this disparity was much more pronounced – female literacy in towns was even twenty times higher than in rural settlements. The largest proportion of the literate population resided in Belgrade, where almost 80% of males and 66% of females had mastered the skill of reading and writing.

An additional intriguing facet involves comparing the literacy levels of the population in the old and new regions. When the four southern districts were incorporated into Serbia in 1878, a notable discrepancy existed in the literacy levels between the population previously under Ottoman rule and those who had lived in the autonomous Serbian state for almost half a century. By 1884, the literacy rate among the urban population in the old regions was 41%, whereas only 25% of the urban population in the new regions was literate. The literacy rate grew more rapidly in the subsequent two decades in the new regions. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it still remained lower than in the old regions of Serbia. According to the 1900 census, 46.6% of the urban population (aged 6 and above) in the new regions were literate, while the literacy rate of the urban population in the old regions was 57.5%.<sup>30</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 14% of Serbia's population lived in 81 urban settlements. Belgrade, which had the status of a primate city with c. 70,000 residents, Niš with c. 25,000 and Kragujevac with 15,000 inhabitants were the largest urban settlements, while the majority of urban areas had fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. Since industrial production was still at the outset, trade and craftsmanship dominated the urban economic system. One of the indicators of the underdevelopment of the urban economy was the relatively high percentage of the urban population engaged in agriculture. Given that the vast majority of the population of Serbia consisted of rural inhabitants, they had a dominant influence on the average values of demographic features of the Serbian population as a whole. Although it was small in number and did not have a significant impact on the average values of demographic features, the urban population, when considered separately, exhibited demographic specificities compared to the rural population. These specificities are even more pronounced when features for the largest and most developed urban centres are singled out and examined separately.

The urban population had a specific age-sex structure. While both urban and rural areas showed a higher share of men in their populations, the predominance of men was more pronounced in towns. Unlike rural areas, where the population under the age of 15 was the most prevalent, urban areas were dominated by individuals aged 16–45. This dominance was particularly noticeable among the male population. The demographic peculiarity of a higher proportion of men in young adulthood could be

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<sup>30</sup> *Državopis Srbije* XVI, Beograd 1889, p. XXXV; *SKS* XXIV (1905), p. CXXIII.



attributed to immigration processes in urban environments, wherein this demographic group was most actively involved. Additionally, this phenomenon served as an indicator of economic trends, as the economic activity of men in urban areas significantly surpassed that of women. This was especially evident among men aged 16–45, who constituted the most productive segment of the population. The predominance of men was intricately linked to the cause-and-effect relationship with the social organisation and public sphere of action in urban areas where men held dominance.

The urban population exhibited distinct characteristics in terms of marriage patterns and household complexity. Urban areas, particularly among the male populace, had a significantly higher percentage of unmarried inhabitants. We posit that this demographic specificity is closely intertwined with the urban economic system. In contrast to the rural economic system, where marriage is deemed essential for both biological and economic reproduction of the family household, the urban economy necessitates an economic foundation for marriage. As men in urban environments were actively engaged in economic pursuits and responsible for establishing the material prerequisites for family formation, there was a propensity to delay marriage. The lower household complexity in urban areas can be attributed, in part, to migration, a primary factor driving urban population growth, with individuals participating more extensively than families. This phenomenon was also associated with the urban economy, which operated distinctively from the family-centred structure found in rural areas. An individual in the urban environment experienced less dependence on the family. Furthermore, the greater literacy levels of the urban population positively contributed to individualisation and implied reduced reliance on family communities.

The demographic characteristics of the urban population underscore that the prevailing socio-economic conditions in urban areas shaped demographic patterns distinct from those dominant in rural regions. Demographic patterns in rural environments, such as marriage models and household complexity, were intricately linked in a cause-and-effect relationship with the rural economy. Due to the longevity of this economic model over centuries, these patterns remained stagnant or “petrified”, for an extended period. Over time, these patterns began to be perceived as culturally conditioned, reflecting the specificities of Serbian society and culture. We observe that these demographic patterns adapted relatively swiftly to the social and economic circumstances in urban areas. The question that persists is whether the close connection between the demographic and economic regime in rural areas, perceived as a distinctive cultural model, acted as a hindrance to the faster and more substantial migration of the rural population to urban environments and its greater individuation. It remains the open question to what extent the dominant rural household family model not only resisted state management policies intended to facilitate rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and social modernisation but may have also negatively influenced them. This may explain why, even seven decades after gaining political autonomy and initiating the construction of a modern state, the majority of Serbia’s population still lived in rural areas.

**Александра Вулетич**

**НАСЕЛЕНИЕ ГОРОДОВ В СЕРБИИ В 1900 ГОДУ:  
ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ**

**Резюме**

В конце 19 и начале 20 века в городских поселениях – городах и малых городах – жило 14% населения Сербии. Самым крупным городским центром был Белград, в котором проживало около 70 000 жителей, затем Ниш с 25 000 и Крагуевац с 15 000 жителей. Большинство городских поселений имело менее 5 000 жителей. Хотя городское население было малочисленным и не оказывало существенного влияния на средние значения демографических параметров всей страны, оно имело особые демографические характеристики в отношении половой и возрастной структуры, образцов заключения браков, сложности семейного хозяйства, жилищных аранжировок и грамотности. В городских средах доля мужского населения была выше, чем в сельских; в них наиболее широко представлено было молодое взрослое население, наиболее трудоспособное, в возрасте от 16 до 45 лет, в то время как на селе доминировало население моложе 15 лет. Большее количество молодых мужчин было следствием иммиграции, в которой эта категория населения принимала наибольшее участие. Это было также индикатором экономических движений, поскольку экономическая активность мужчин в городских средах значительно превышала экономическую активность женщин, особенно мужчин в возрасте от 16 до 45 лет, которые составляли экономически наиболее продуктивное население. Доля холостых мужчин была намного выше в городских поселениях, а среднее количество членов семейного хозяйства в них было меньше, чем в сельских средах. В городском способе хозяйствования для заключения брака требовалась экономическая основа; поскольку мужчины были ответственны за создание материальных условий для формирования семьи, они проявляли тенденцию к более позднему вступлению в брак. Меньшая сложность семейного хозяйства также связана с иммиграцией, в которой в большей мере участвуют отдельные лица, и с городской экономикой, которая не функционирует в рамках семейного хозяйства, как это происходит на селе. Грамотность также благоприятно влияла на индивидуализацию и меньшую зависимость индивида от семейного коллектива, и она также в большей мере характеризовала городское население.

Решающими факторами в формировании специфических демографических особенностей городского населения были миграционные процессы и особенности городского способа хозяйствования. Формы демографического поведения, которые преобладали на селе, относительно быстро менялись и приспособливались к социально-экономическим условиям в городских средах. Остается открытым вопрос о том, насколько и в какой степени взаимосвязь и

тесная связь демографического режима на селе и сельского способа хозяйствования, воспринимаемая как особая культурная модель, являлись препятствием для более быстрого и значительного оттока сельского населения в городские среды и его большей индивидуализации.

**Александра Вулетић**

## **ГРАДСКО СТАНОВНИШТВО У СРБИЈИ 1900. ГОДИНЕ: ДЕМОГРАФСKE КАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ**

### **Резиме**

Крајем 19. и почетком 20. века у градским насељима – варошима и варошицама, живело је 14% становништва Србије. Највеће градско средиште био је Београд, у којем је живело око 70.000 становника, а потом Ниш са 25.000 и Крагујевац са 15.000 житеља. Већина градских насеља имала је мање од 5.000 становника. Иако је било малобројно и није имало значајнији утицај на просечне вредности демографских параметара за целу земљу, градско становништво је имало особене демографске карактеристике у погледу полне и старосне структуре, обрасца склапања брака, сложености породичног домаћинства, стамбених аранжмана и писмености. У градским срединама удео мушког становништва био је већи него у сеоским; у њима је било најзаступљеније млађе одрасло, за рад најспособније становништво, узраста 16–45 година, док је на селу доминантно било становништво млађе од 15 година. Већа заступљеност мушкараца у млађем одраслом добу била је последица имиграције, у којој је ова категорија становништва највише учествовала. Она је била показатељ и економских кретања, с обзиром на то да је економска активност мушкараца у градским срединама била знатно већа од економске активности жена, нарочито мушкараца узраста 16–45 година који су били економски најпродуктивније становништво. Удео нежењених мушкараца био је много већи у градским насељима, а просечан број чланова домаћинства у њима био је мањи него у сеоским срединама. У градском начину привређивања, за ступање у брак била је неопходна економска подлога; с обзиром на то да су мушкарци били одговорни за стварање материјалних предуслова за формирање породице, показивали су тенденцију каснијег ступања у брак. Мања сложеност породичног домаћинства такође је повезана са имиграцијом, у којој у већој мери учествују појединци, и градском привредом, која се не одвија у оквиру породичног домаћинства као што је то случај на селу. На индивидуацију и мању зависност појединца од породичног колектива позитивно је деловала и писменост, која је такође у већој мери одликовала градско становништво.

Пресудни чиниоци у обликовању специфичних демографских одлика градског становништва били су миграциони процеси и особености градског начина привређивања. Облици демографског понашања који су преовладавали на селу релативно су се брзо мењали и прилагођавали друштвено-економским околностима у градским срединама. Остаје отворено питање да ли је, и у којој мери, међусобна испреплетаност и чврста повезаност демографског режима на селу и сеоског начина привређивања, чија се симбиоза перцепира и као особени културни модел, представљала кочницу бржем и већем одливу сеоског становништва у урбане средине и његовој већој индивидуацији.