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Education of Rural Youth as the Factor of Exodus or Professionalization of Farming

Introduction

The process of abandoning agriculture as a primary activity exists to a greater or lesser extent in most countries throughout the world. Scientists agree that this is an objective socio-economic process. When no other indicators are available, the share of farmers in the total population could be used to show the level of development of a particular country or region. A particular place in the process is reserved for the young, as was noticed in the thirteenth century by the Arabian philosopher, Ibn Haldun. The better and more comfortable urban living is related not only to the level of development of the division of labour in a society, but also to cultural and social needs. Haldun says that the rural population lives in a milieu where moral and common norms are preserved at the expense of individual freedom, while the urban population is free in its selection of those with whom they associate and the objectives they strive to achieve. Urban freedom is more attractive for the young rural generations which constitute the majority of those "escaping" into the city; thus, the urban population gets younger and rural settlements face the problem of an aging population (acc. to Đurić, 1974).

Rural sociologists, agrarian economists, demographers, historians, geographers and other researchers have long studied the transfer of farmers to non-farming activities and their desertion of rural regions in favour of urban ones. The scientific debate on this issue started in Croatia in the early sixties (Stipetić, 1961), the seventies were a period of particularly intensive activity (Starc, 1973; Brkić, 1971; Dilić, 1971; Puljiz 1977), which subdued in the eighties (Stipetić, 1981; Brkić, 1987), and almost disappeared in the nineties. It seems that the fluctuation in interest of the researchers in the topic was directly related to the process of "deagrarization" in Croatia, as shown in Fig. 1 (decrease in agrarian population) and Fig. 2 (trends in rural

and urban population). During the last fifty odd years, Croatian agriculture was abandoned by over 2.2 million persons. According to the last census in 1991, 410,000 persons lived from agriculture or more precisely 265,000 of those employed in agriculture were 13 per cent of the total working population. One farmer produced a quantity of food sufficient for 20 persons, which is two to three times less than in highly developed countries but four times more than the world average. The process of "deagrarization" in Croatia (and former Yugoslavia) was shorter and thus faster than in the developed countries. Research conducted by Brkić *et al.* (1987) has shown that among some twenty countries in the world, which had the same percentage of farming population in the early sixties, Croatia (i.e. former Yugoslavia) was among the three countries, along with Algeria and Romania, which twenty years later had the highest farming population decrease rate. Its farming population halved within ten years (1971–1981).

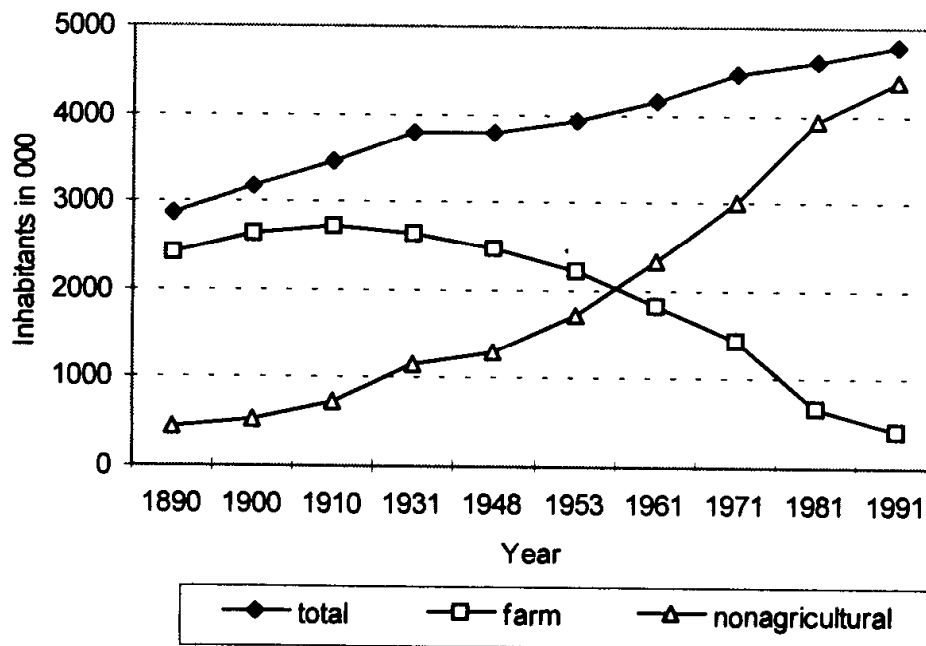


Figure 1. Changes in nonagricultural and farm population (1890/1991)

The labour exodus from agriculture definitively resolved the problem of agrarian overpopulation, preconditions were set up for changes in agrarian structure, and production rates increased not only in agriculture but in the entire economy. In addition to these beneficial effects, "deagrarization" caused the disappearance of a significant number of farms with a senior population, numerous problems among the aging population, and threats to social reproduction in family farming. Over nine tenths of rural settlements are exposed to depopulation which particularly affected the traditionally underdeveloped regions, with the additional contribution of labour emigra-

tion abroad. The Croatian depopulation has all the characteristics of a socially detrimental process (Nejašmić, 1992) because of the unfavourable structure of the rural population, a comparatively high illiterate population in depopulated settlements (over 10%) and over two thirds of the population below primary education level.

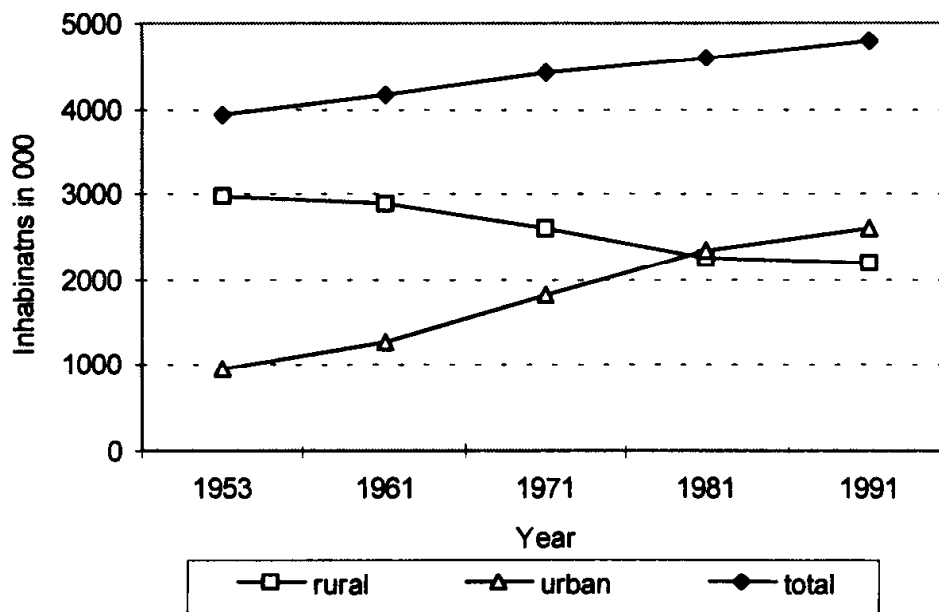


Figure 2. Changes in the rural and urban population (1953/1991)

The major avenue of “deagrarization” and migrations of rural population in Croatia was the education of rural children, as elaborated by numerous authors (Dilić, 1971; Dilić, 1977; Petak, 1975; Puljiz 1977; Šuvar, 1988; Petak, 1989; Brkić and Žutinić, 1994; and others). The introduction of compulsory primary education in the early fifties was an important momentum which initiated the mass education of rural children in primary and subsequently in secondary and higher educational institutions. Only ninety years earlier, four fifths of Croatia’s population were illiterate, at the beginning of the twentieth century over half of the population was illiterate, the majority being women. The situation between the two world wars did not change much. In 1931, 26.6 per cent of the population aged 7 and over in Savska Province¹ were illiterate, while 12 per cent of the urban population were illiterate (Dubić, 1941: 262).

¹ The data on Savska Province (Banate) which had 2.7 million inhabitants at that time. The data on Baranja, Istria and Dalmatia is not available so the presented data does not reflect the situation in the entire Croatia within its present borders.

Table 1

Education levels of population aged 15 and over (%)

School	Year			
	1961	1971	1981	1991
No formal education*	23.7	17.6	14.2	10.1
4–7 grades of primary school	53.3	43.6	31.9	21.2
Primary school	8.6	14.8	19.2	23.4
Vocational schools, qualified and highly qualified level	8.5	12.9	14.5	12.7
Vocational secondary and grammar schools	4.1	7.5	13.8	23.3
Non-university college	0.6	1.4	2.8	4.0
University colleges and academies	1.2	2.2	3.6	5.3
Total	100.0 (N = 3.027.029)	100.0 (N = 3.423.733)	100.0 (N = 3.637.769)	100.0 (N = 3.858.086)

* This category includes persons with no formal education, with 1–3 grades of primary school, and those with no evidence on education. In 1991, 5.3 per cent had no formal education, 3.3 per cent had 1–3 grades of primary school, and 1.5 per cent have no schooling record. Source: Statistical Yearbook 1996, State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, 1996.

Table 1 shows changes in the educational structure of the population aged 15 and over for the period 1961–1991.² Based on the data presented below, we have calculated that the average period of education of the Croatian population has increased during the three decades by 3.381 years, or 1.13 years per decade, which is much above the European average (0.5 to 0.8 years of education according to Antun Mijatović). Still, the average education in Croatia in 1991 lagged behind the European average by 2.9 years (Mijatović, 1995: 281). However, the difference in the education level between the rural and urban population has constantly been on the increase. Thus, in 1991, the education of 45.8 per cent of the rural and 18.8 per cent of the urban population was below primary level, and the difference was significant between graduates from non-university and university colleges — 2.9 per cent from rural and 14.9 per cent from urban areas.

The education ratio between the farming and non-farming population is still not favourable. The differences are particularly noticeable between particular age groups. The young farming population (15 to 24 years of age) includes only 8.1 per cent of those who have not completed primary educa-

² This data corresponds with our research conducted in four villages for the generations born in the periods 1943–1952, 1953–1962, 1963–1972 and 1973–1982, but we have limited ourselves to the demographic cohort of 10 years only.

tion, 0.5 per cent of the illiterate, 2.7 per cent of those who had 1–3 grades and 4.9 per cent of those who had 4–7 grades of primary school. When analysing the total farming population aged 15 and over, the education level of 63.7 per cent of them is below primary. For that reason, our research focused on that generation of the young rural population and their vocational orientation, particularly their role in mobilizing farming labour.

Problem and Research Objective

Although the socio-economic conditions in which a generation grows are very important in shaping its entire behaviour, in this research we have taken a different approach.³ We have focused on the vocational orientation of rural youth as a consequence of numerous circumstances they are exposed to in their education and employment when “choosing” their profession, field of activity, where they live and work. We have been particularly interested in their professional conduct as regards their inclination towards agriculture and the rural environment, or off-farm activities. In our research, the “vocational orientation” was actually a dependent variable, reflection of the situation the rural youth face in their choice of vocation.⁴ When leaving the rural environment for schooling, the young look for a way of leaving their parents’ farm and thus education has become the major form of abandoning agriculture (Puljiz, 1977).

This paper follows the education of the young from four selected Croatian villages from the mid-sixties to the late nineties, and encompasses all those born there during the period 1943–1982. They were observed from the age of fifteen to twenty-four,⁵ and the basic data on their vocational orientation is presented in this paper.

Method

In order to observe the process of vocational orientation of the rural youth, we selected a group aged between 15 and 24. Such an approach was

³ In his portrait of three generations of rural youth born in Germany between 1926 and 1962, Planck takes the socio-economic and political situation as the baseline. Therefore, he referred to the first generation as the pre-war (1926–1937), the second as the war, and the third as the post-war generation. When the research took place, the youngest of the generation were 18 years old (Planck, 1987: 12–22).

⁴ The notion of vocational orientation used in this paper must neither be identified with the professional direction as educational influence and support to an individual in his/her preparation for adequate selection of profession, nor with vocational guidance (see Brkić, 1971; Palošević, 1985).

⁵ The researches observed the first, second and third generation to their full professional maturity, when they were at least 25 and at most 34 years old.

taken because, on the one hand, it was suited to the handling of statistical information and, on the other, this is the period in life when almost the entire process of vocational orientation evolves in close relation with the schooling process. The process of vocational orientation starts when a student of the final grade of primary school decides about further education and subsequently, after graduating from secondary school, when a decision is made on the non-university or university college where the student will study. We did not take the sociological and psychological definitions of the youth that encompasses different demographic groups (14–24, 15–25, 15–27, or 15–30 years of age) as our baseline.

The research included four generations of young people: the first, those born in 1943–1952, the second in 1953–1962, the third in 1963–1972, and the fourth generation born in 1973–1982. These four generations were studied systematically in 1968, 1978, 1988 and 1998. Conditionally speaking, they currently represent 60 per cent of the total population in the four villages, although most of them live outside their place of birth that has been the basic principle for selection of our respondents. The birth registers (and the citizen registers) were only used to copy their names and surnames, name of father and permanent address. In two villages we had some problems. In Babin Potok (Lika region), the registers were destroyed during the Second World War so the complete evidence and the citizenship register were reconstructed later, usually when the data were necessary for enrolling at a school, marriages etc. Another problem was encountered in Vodinci (Slavonia region). During the war and immediately after, a number of German families⁶ who collaborated with the occupation forces left the village. They took their children born in the period 1943–1945 with them, so it was impossible to establish the necessary data for this part of the population. Additionally, the basic data group did not comprise the data on males and females who married into these villages although they belonged to the discussed generation.

For each respondent personal details were determined such as the date of birth, marital status, permanent residence, education, current employment and profession, their participation in farm activities and data on their parents' education and profession. The paper will analyse some of the data directly related to the subject of our research.

⁶ We have encountered some fifteen surnames of German families which lived in the village: Stutz, Plac, Kigler, Urlich, Fischer, Brettragen, Heinz, Mechtel, Reimann, Reinhardt, Barth, Schweirnljen, Reiningger, Leinert, Norman and the like, and they completely disappeared from the records once the families moved to Germany.

Some Information on the Researched Villages

The selected four villages differ due to their natural, socio-economic, historical and cultural development conditions and somehow present the four major agricultural regions of Croatia — Vođinci village near Vinkovci in the Slavonia region, Kućan near Varaždin in Central Croatia, Babin Potok near Vrhovine in Lika and Gorski Kotar regions and Sv. Filip i Jakov near Biograd is representative of Dalmatia and Istria.

Babin Potok (Gornji and Donji) is a mountain village in Lika, only several kilometres from the Plitvice Lakes National Park. The climate enables the growth of oats, rye, potatoes, fodder and the breeding of cows, cattle, horses and sheep. In the mid-nineteenth century the village had over a thousand inhabitants, and according to the last 1991 Census its population is only 391 in 141 households. The village earlier had a saw-mill and a farmers' cooperative which have been closed down. As early as 1880, the village had a primary school which was closed in 1961 because of the low number of enrolled children. After the war operation called "Storm" in early August 1995, the village was left by the Serbian population representing 98 per cent of the total village population. At the moment, the village is almost empty because only a small number of families have returned.

The Dalmatian village Sv. Filip i Jakov is four to five kilometres from the town of Biograd, located on both sides of the Adriatic arterial. The part of the village built along the coast has numerous urban characteristics. Data from the last census shows that it had 1,644 inhabitants in 416 households. The development of the village is connected with the Farmers' Cooperative which once employed 200 workers. Due to its activity in tourism, the village saw the growth of tertiary industry, it has fully developed municipal services, shops, restaurants, a hotel and holiday resort, a campsite and holiday houses, a primary school, church, kindergarten, cinema, fruit and vegetable market etc. The climate is favourable for growing early vegetables, flowers, grapes and olives. Tourism stagnated during the last decade because of the war, but its revival has been noticed in the last year or two.

Kućan is a suburban settlement, 5 km from the city of Varaždin. It is divided into Gornji Kućan, Donji Kućan and Kućan Marof; they all had under three thousand inhabitants in 940 households. Although agriculture is the secondary activity, corn, fodder and vegetables are grown very intensively, while cattle, pigs and poultry are bred to cover household needs. The working population is employed in the Varaždin textile, footwear and furniture industries and in numerous tertiary industry and crafts workshops in the village. The village has a primary school, church, kindergarten, fire station, and it has become attractive for new residents because of Varaždin's vicinity.

The village of Vođinci lies 16 km west of the town of Vinkovci, connected to the town by asphalt road and railway. It has about two thousand

inhabitants in 647 households. Conditions are favourable for growing field crops, vegetables and fruit, and breeding pigs and cattle. There are no production facilities in the village, just some tertiary industry. The working population has traditionally worked for the railroad, woodworking industry and agriculture, and a large number of its inhabitants work abroad. The village once had a very successful cooperative. The village has a school, church, post office, fire station, library etc.

The basic socio-demographic characteristics of the researched villages are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Some socio-demographic characteristics
of the researched villages (1991)

Characteristic	Babin Potok	Sv. Filip i Jakov	Kučan	Vođinci	Total for all four villages	Croatia
Population trends index 1857–1991 (1,000 = 1857)	0.362	4.434	5.877	2.413	2.512	2.193
Population working abroad (% of total)	6.5	6.5	3.7	12.3	6.8	5.9
% farming population	12.0	7.4	2.1	15.1	7.3	9.1
% active agricultural population	23.3	10.0	2.7	20.3	9.1	13.0

Source: 1991 Census, Documentation 886, State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, 1994 and M. Korenčić *Settlements and Population of Croatia 1857–1971*, Zagreb, 1979.

With the exception of Babin Potok, the population in all the settlements increased, particularly in Kučan and Sv. Filip i Jakov where it multiplied over five times. The share of the rural population and farming workforce in these villages is the smallest, but the share of population working abroad is on average higher than the national average, particularly when it comes to the village of Vođinci.

Research Results

The research involved nearly four thousand young people, aged from fifteen to twenty four. With the exception of the second generation of which 1099 persons were registered, others had a rather uniform number of respondents with minor differences in their sex structure.

Table 3

Respondents breakdown according to sex

Generation	Total number	Share	
		Male	Female
1943–1952	931	52.0	48.0
1953–1962	1.099	50.2	49.8
1963–1972	934	51.2	48.8
1973–1982	979	49.7	50.3
Total	3.943	50.8 (N = 2002)	49.2 (N = 1941)

The number of respondents from the villages included in the research has decreased almost four times for Babin Potok, while it significantly increased for the most developed village of Kućan (from 240 to 414). Two other settlements underwent no significant changes, with the exception of Vođinci during the second research, which could be explained by cyclic immigration from neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina and earlier from the underdeveloped parts of Croatia.

“Vocational Orientation” of the Rural Young

In 1991, Croatia had 646,000 inhabitants aged 15–24, or 13.5 per cent of the total population. The farming population of that age included 41,000 persons, i.e. 10.1 per cent of the total farming population or 6.3 per cent of the total Croatian population of that age. At the same time, the age category 15–24 included 20,000 working farmers, i.e. 7.7 per cent of the working farm population or 7.4 per cent of the total Croatian working population. The changes that happened during the thirty-year period are shown in the table below.

Table 4

Share of young farmers (aged 15–24) in total workforce

Year	% active farmers aged 15–24	
	in total active population	in total active farming population
1961	43.1	18.0
1971	30.0	14.8
1981	8.2	6.6
1991	7.4	7.7

Source: Croatian Statistical Yearbooks 1968–1991, State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb.

The changes in the researched villages point to the thorough transformation of Croatian rural areas and agriculture. In the fifties, the Croatian village still had the characteristics of a rural society. However, the changes and most of all intensive and forced industrialization caused the dissolution of the village while the transformed village is still in search of its identity (Brkić and Žutinić, 1993).

Table 5

Changes in percentage of farming population
in the researched villages in the period 1960–1991

Village	% farming population	
	1960	1991
Babin Potok	52.6	12.0
Sv. Filip i Jakov	36.4	7.4
Kučan	23.8	2.1
Vođinci	40.6	15.1
All four villages	35.2	7.3
Croatia	43.9	9.1

Source: 1960 Agricultural Census, Volume I, Federal Bureau of Statistics, Belgrade, 1964, 1991 Census, Documentation 882, Croatian Statistical Yearbooks 1968–1991, State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb, 1992

When the data we obtained concerning the “vocational orientation” of the young from the above villages is considered having the above trends in mind, it is clear that the data on the young from the researched generations is considerably different from the average data, particularly for the first two generations. This seems entirely logical, since the young have always been pioneers of change. The share of farmers in particular generations are tabulated below:

Generation	1943–1952	16.7%
	1953–1962	10.1%
	1963–1972	3.1%
	1973–1982	0.4%

The data only encompasses young farmers who worked on their family farms. Some of them had fulltime employment as farm workers or experts in factory complexes and cooperatives. Thus, 3.7 per cent of the working youth from the 1943–1952 generation worked as farmers outside the family farms. The most recent research shows that this segment of the farm working population has decreased, and only 1.2 per cent of working persons from the 1973–1982 generation were employed by factory complexes and

cooperatives. If we were to observe their employment according to sector rather than profession, the picture would be completely different.⁷

Abandoning Agriculture as a Function of Education of the Young

As in other countries some changes were smooth, started earlier and lasted longer, while the process of transformation of traditional, natural to market-oriented agriculture is still under way in Croatia. Luis Mallasis (1977) refers to this type of agriculture as undergoing commercialization; in such a situation, different forms of education might considerably contribute to improvement of living conditions, nutritional habits, hygiene, health, standard of housing etc. A hundred years ago, Karl Kautsky warned that agriculture was becoming more complex and demanding and that work methods in this sector require an intelligent workforce; however, such a workforce is abandoning agriculture for urban life and industrial employment (Kautsky, 1953).

The commercialization of agriculture occurs parallel with a comparative decrease in the farming population and an increase in food demand from an ever increasing non-farming population. Under such conditions, professional education and professionalization of agriculture become essential, since modern development of agriculture requires qualified specialists, which is one of the methods of stopping the negative selection in workforce reproduction in family farming⁸ where only those who had no other option remained (Brkić, 1971; Dilić, 1971; Starc, 1984). Thus, as regards Croatia, Luis Malassis' warning is still topical: "agriculture will not attract talented persons unless they are given a chance to detect the possibility of their individual professional prosperity", which demands a radical change in technical, economic and social conditions in agricultural production (Malassis, 1977: 92).

⁷ At that time, the cooperative in Sv. Filip i Jakov alone employed 200 workers, predominantly young. The similar situation was in Vođinci where the facilities of an agricultural complex from Vinkovci operated. It should be noted that the Croatian complexes and cooperatives were almost completely dissolved during the last ten years of transition.

⁸ One of the forms of such a negative selection of the workforce shows in education of the rural youth. In his research into professional aspiration of the students of the final grade of primary school, S. Brkić determined that 1.7 per cent of respondents wanted to be farmers. Two years later, the author checked whether the students' wishes were fulfilled and he found out that almost all of highly motivated students succeeded in the realization of their aspirations by enrolling in wanted schools, while every third student from the group of students with low motivation remained on the farm waiting for some other way or a new chance of abandoning agriculture.

At present, the situation in professional education is improving. The qualification structure in large agricultural companies is almost identical to the situation in the non-agricultural sector, which differs from the general agricultural framework. In Croatia professionalization only occurred in this segment of agriculture. The situation on family farms is very unfavourable, since small family farms (average surface area 2.8 ha) cannot offer full employment and farmers are earning their income outside such farms.

The vocational orientation and education of the rural youth is directly or indirectly affected by the above described circumstances. Only a small number of rural children attended vocational (agricultural) schools, non-university or university colleges (Gredelj and Hošek, 1975; Žutinić, 1996). The young followed a general trend, an increased interest in education, since that was their strongest argument for searching employment outside the farm. Everybody is aware of the situation, particularly on family farms where the entire family heartily supports the education of mostly female children, respecting the commonly accepted attitude that estate fragmentation and division is to be avoided. Patricia O'Hara illustrates this point on an Irish case and logically explains it while referring to Hannan (1979) who talks of education as of an "efficient system of escape" for farmers. Rural girls thus desert rural areas and avoid the pressure of patriarchal establishment on family farms (O'Hara, 1998). Thus, as elaborated in a study from the mid-seventies, there is not even a hypothetical possibility of educated youth returning to rural areas and farming (Gredelj and Hošek, 1975: 60). In another research conducted in the late eighties, the question of the ways of making the young stay on farms was answered by the farmers, as if they found the ultimate solution, that the young should not be sent to school (Brkić and Kušan, 1988: 291). All these are examples of the "suitable" atmosphere that motivates the rural youth for schooling. As Ulrich Planck says: "the rural young have very good graduation results compared with the state average" (1983: 196). Graduation from schools opens doors towards employment, profession and promotion, and therefore for "economic independence and change in their inferior position in their families, farm and household" (Brkić and Kušan, 1988: 291).

Considering the Croatian population aged 15–24 born during the period 1943–1952, according to our estimates 61.1 per cent of that generation finished primary, 36.7 per cent secondary, and 10.2 per cent non-university or university college education. Based on the data for the entire country, primary education was finished by 76.4 per cent, secondary by 68.4 per cent and university education by 19.4 per cent of the most recently observed generation from 1973–1982.

As regards the young generation in the observed four villages, there is a significant increase in average duration of education that has grown 0.6 to 0.7 year in each decade. This is within the European average and below the Croatian average.

The education index for all generations in the observed four villages is:

1943–1952	8.974
1953–1962	9.550
1963–1972	10.405
1973–1982	10.868

The differences between the observed villages are interesting, since the lowest education index is not that of the least developed village Babin Potok (10.864) but of a typical agrarian Slavonian village Vođinci (10.453). The comparison of the education level between the sexes reveals two different situations — in the first generation (1943–1952), men had more years of education than women, while the most recent research (generation 1973–1982) indicates that the women's education level was higher than the men's.

	Education index	
	Male	Female
Generation 1943–1952	9,125	8,970
Generation 1973–1982	10,409	10,678

Finally, we shall compare the average years of schooling of the working population in the first and the last research for all the villages. The differences between the villages diminished in comparison with the previous period, and the average years of education during each decade increased by more than 0.8 years, which is above average. This is the result of smaller participation of farmers in the working population, and their education level is considerably lagging behind that of the non-farming population whose average education duration grew twice as slowly compared with the remaining working population.

Table 6

Education index as per village

Village	1943–1952	1973–1982
Babin Potok	8.891	10.652
Sv. Filip i Jakov	8.272	11.246
Kučan	9.278	11.486
Vođinci	7.950	10.322
Total	8.561	11.021

Conclusion

The primary role of education of rural youth observed in four generations in four Croatian villages was to offer them the knowledge that would provide possibilities of non-farm employment. The education level meas-

ured by number of years of schooling has grown significantly, although somewhat slower than the average for the entire country. The level of general education of the working farm population has also increased, but the increase was almost twice slower than among the non-farming population. The share of young farmers in the working population of the analysed generations in the observed villages dropped from 16.7 per cent for the first group of respondents to a symbolical 0.4 per cent for the fourth generation. This marks the end of an autarchic rural agriculture, but finding the solution for the present situation will demand a lot of wisdom and visionary knowledge embedded in rational and composed support of the society to the new development.

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