

RESIDENTS' VIEW ON RESETTLEMENT ISSUE OF VREOCI – SUSTAINABILITY OR PHRASES –

Jasna Petrić

Further expansion of Kolubara lignite basin indicates a necessity to limit future territorial encompass and spatial development of the present semi-urban settlement of Vreoci which is located some 50 km to the south from Belgrade. There is a part of Vreoci which has already been expropriated for the purposes of lignite exploitation, yet the possibility to resettle the town as a whole is still to be validated according to appropriate technical documentation and the feasibility study. Having that estimation of the total cost for such a venture so far showed to be unreliable, the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning professional team was engaged by the Electric Power of Serbia state company in order to prepare and conduct a questionnaire study on conditions for total resettlement of Vreoci. Before the actual fieldwork took place in June-July 2005, citizens of Vreoci were well informed on the questionnaire content and the interviewing period. The questionnaire was thus conducted through face-to-face interviews with one representative per household who could give all relevant information concerning this study. Though the questionnaire covered information on households as well as on their premises (general facts about constructions built on the household lots), this paper is focused on the first type of information and makes an emphasis on residents' opinion regarding viable/ sustainable options for their resettlement.

Key words: lignite exploitation, questionnaire study, household, opinion, resettlement.

INTRODUCTION

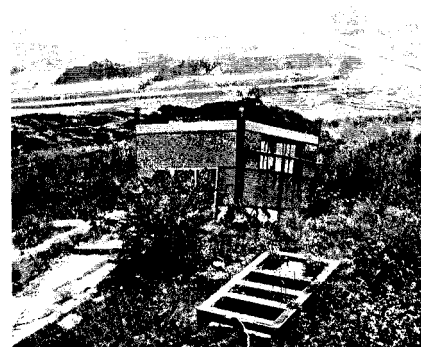
According to a number of findings, in the central zones of lignite exploitation, the initiation of a principle concentration of population, activity and territorial development happens mostly because of development of lignite mines, and the consequent provision of infrastructure and development of production plants (see: IAUS, 2005; Spasic, Jokic, 2004). This can also be inferred for Kolubara lignite basin, which stimulates urbanisation of settlements in the basin that accommodate plants for coal processing and refinement (e.g. Vreoci, V.Crljeni) as well as it induces development of surrounding towns, e.g. Lazarevac, Ub, Obrenovac, Lajkovac.

The "productive area" of Kolubara lignite basin, i.e. the area which contains lignite resources, covers up the territory of 520 km² whereas the

actual exploitation surface equals 130 km² according to the present estimation. Over time, an intensive utilization of lignite coal reserves has consequently produced the following outcomes: redirection of water courses, spatial relocation of infrastructure systems and relocation of certain parts or whole of settlements, which implies that residents have to resettle if their place of living is existentially threatened by such courses of action. One of the possible scenarios which Kolubara lignite basin exploitation may impose in the near future implies that the resettlement process¹ will only intensify, and in line with this proposal, the whole settlement of Vreoci may be expected to relocate.

¹ Resettlement is regarded as the entire process of relocation (moving people, assets and infrastructure) and rehabilitation caused by project related activities, i.e. lignite exploitation.

According to the last Census (2002), Vreoci had 3,210 inhabitants living in 1,088 households (Republički zavod za statistiku Srbije, 2004). The total area which is encompassed by this settlement equals 1,879 ha. It should be



Lignite exploitation field in the background of the already expropriated estates in Vreoci.

Source: Ines Urosevic (July 2005)

pointed out that there is a part of Vreoci which was already expropriated for the purposes of furthering the process of lignite exploitation ("Tamnava-istok", Field "D", industrial plants, etc.). Majority of REIS¹ plants (plants for coal refinement, thermal plant, plant for production of gasconcrete, etc.) is located at the territory of Vreoci. However, because of the already formed settlement structure as well as because of the planned expansion of lignite surface exploitation, these plants have had a limited chance to expand and develop, which would presume even further deterioration of hard environmental conditions in Vreoci.

Relocation of Vreoci would certainly represent a giant and complex task as well as it would be a delicate mission. Though the settlement (especially its cemetery) is situated right above important lignite reserves, justification for exploitation of these resources still has to be verified against the 'costs' of resettlement process so that final decision upon future status of Vreoci can be made. This decision is above all important for protection of Vreoci population in order to allow them to pursue their civil rights, i.e. right for subsistence – to enjoy a healthy environment; security; private property rights; etc. Even if the decision is made to keep Vreoci at its present location, nevertheless it is necessary to employ certain measures in order to mitigate present environmental degradation and to achieve certain level of the quality of life and living standards for Vreoci residents.

On the other hand, the issue of voluntary or involuntary resettlement needs to be dealt with at the onset, as it may also function as a potential red herring, or distraction. One position is that only cases where people wish to move can be regarded as successful (de Wet, 1999:3; Cernea and Guggenheim, 1993). However, involuntary resettlement can be conducted in such a way that people who had to leave their place of residence find themselves better off in almost all respects in their post-resettlement situation – except that they had a negative view on resettlement issue before the process took its place.

From the voluntary or involuntary resettlement perspective, prior to reaching the final decision

for Vreoci, it is interesting to observe whether its population consider the resettlement as sustainable (viable) solution and which modality of resettlement (if any) they are most likely to accept.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF VREOCI HOUSEHOLDS AND POPULATION STRUCTURE

The main features of Vreoci households are by and large those which characterise semi-urban settlements with mix of nucleus families (parents and children, a single parent with child/children) and extended, three-generation families. According to the data obtained from a selection of conducted questionnaires (in the sequel: questionnaire selection), which covered roughly 40% of the total number of Vreoci households that have been encompassed by the survey, the average number of members per household in Vreoci was 2.9, where 1/4 of the total number of households consisted of two or more families. Traditionally, there is a certain number of kinship households which tend to group in the same neighbourhoods.

People of Vreoci have entered the population aging phase. According to the questionnaire selection, there is slightly less younger people (19 years old and younger) which account for 19.6% in the total, in comparison to the old population (60 years and above), latter having the intake of 21.3%. In the questionnaire selection, which shows a large correspondence with the total population age structure, there is a significant proportion of Vreoci residents who are between 40 and 59 years old (32.4%), and they are followed by the age group of 20 to 39 year olds (26.7%). Regarding gender structure of Vreoci inhabitants, there has been slightly more women (51.7%) than men (48.3%).

The majority of Vreoci working population (87.6%) is engaged in the public sector activities, and the large number of such employees works in the Mining Company "Kolubara". The data confirms that there are almost two-thirds of Vreoci employees who have been working locally. In case of resettlement, the main cause of hardship may be loss of economic opportunities (Deruyterre, 1999:3). This situation would most likely require a sound concept of social program which could be offered to certain groups on the

one hand, and/or specific measures on the other hand, that would emanate the development of a private sector (IAUS, 2005:16). Regarding the primary sector activities, Vreoci households are partly engaged in agriculture production which, in most cases, is performed only for domestic use. A ratio of pensioners in the whole population of Vreoci was 17.6%. Regarding the number of schoolchildren and students, the survey showed there were 215 primary school pupils in the settlement, whilst 34 pupils attended primary schools outside Vreoci. Following this, there were 134 secondary school pupils and 88 college/ university students with home residence in Vreoci.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The main purpose for conducting a questionnaire study of Vreoci households was to recognise and comprehend their attitude towards potential mode of resettlement, in case this scenario is to be pursued. This questionnaire was to provide *first-hand information* which, if this project proved to be justified, would serve future development of detailed resettlement programs offering a choice of locations for organised resettlement of Vreoci households that opted for a collective move.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. First part covered the questions on households and conditions for Vreoci resettlement, and the second part referred to making a record of general information on Vreoci house lots and the household premises. Though the second part of the questionnaire was equally important (especially for generating estimated costs for a total resettlement of Vreoci), this paper has been restricted to analysis of data from the first part of questionnaire, which consisted of the three types of questions: 1) basic household information; 2) a choice of resettlement modality and potential location choices for a new settlement; and 3) relocation of Vreoci cemetery and registration of graves which are to be moved to the new cemetery location.

Explanation of the questionnaire procedure and criteria

Once the questionnaire content was accorded with local community representatives as well

¹ REIS – Mining-Energy-Industrial System

as with representatives from the Electric Power of Serbia state company (in the sequel: EPS), the actual fieldwork was started. People of Vreoci were informed well in advance about the content and the time-scale of the questionnaire survey. Additionally, principal explanations regarding aim and motives for conducting the questionnaire were stated at the front page of a questionnaire. However, in case of any other queries by Vreoci people, interviewers were prepared to clarify doubts and give accurate information. It was especially emphasized by the questionnaire that any given answer did not oblige household members to make an identical choice if the resettlement of Vreoci should actually happen. Also, it was decidedly stated that any given information in the questionnaire must not be used neither as the basis for expropriation nor for any reason other than aims of this study.

Response rate and refusals

Regarding actual fieldwork, the questionnaire on Vreoci households was efficiently conducted and generally was well accepted by the residents. In reference to the questionnaire selection results, out of 433 visited households, there were merely 8.3% that either refused to give information or were somehow prevented from responding to the questionnaire due to illness, permanent absence, temporary unavailability, etc.

It is important to stress that the majority of households which explicitly refused the questionnaire survey did not show any hostility towards interviewers. Sometimes they would gladly host the interviewers for an informal talk, but would refuse to participate in the questionnaire survey (e.g. to respond to all or some of the questions), hence such a decision was always respected. It is interesting to register some of the passing comments which came out of the informal talks with those residents of Vreoci.

First of all, there was a number of refusals that were motivated by resident's dissatisfaction with 'countless number of previous questionnaires that had circulated the settlement', which proved no benefit either for individuals or for the whole community of Vreoci. A few refusals were motivated by troublesome personal relationships between residents on the

one hand and the local community representatives on the other. Also, a significant number of citizens who rejected the questionnaire were resentful because of negative experience with some previous actions that accompanied similar resettlement plans in which affected population ended up as losers. These residents stated that head people of EPS have been the main culprits for trickery and deceit of population involved when the previous resettlement actions took place, e.g. affected residents received insufficient imbursement for the value of their expropriated assets. In addition to this, a group of resettling population in the past was a victim of false promises that EPS would have refunded lost land to the households by provision of jobs in "Kolubara" for their younger family members (IAUS, 2005:57). Such residents most commonly say that they believe no 'pie in the sky' and would only accept talk/negotiation with the 'real Komisija'* when it comes to evaluate their non-movable assets in Vreoci.

* 'Komisija' is the expression commonly used by the local residents of Vreoci to note a group of experts who, as a part of compensation process during the resettlement, would visit individual households in order to make detailed calculation of individual property value in monetary terms.

FINDINGS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

A typical attitude for the majority of Vreoci population was that it was high time to bring a final decision on destiny of this settlement in order to eliminate uncertainty in which citizens had been living for a number of years and

which had prevented them from planning and realisation of their needs, e.g. potential alterations to their present houses, development of new buildings, larger investment actions, etc. (IAUS, 2005:17).

The largest number of surveyed households called for acceleration of the decision-making process regarding potential resettlement of Vreoci, and they also asked for fixing up that period to 2 years at maximum. They discarded a long-term plan for Vreoci resettlement, e.g. the one which would realise within a 10 years' period, and they were against partial resettlement – the whole settlement of Vreoci should be encompassed by the process which would happen in one or two phases at most (IAUS, 2005:57).

Residents' attitude towards potential resettlement of Vreoci

It can be noticed that within surveyed population of Vreoci there have been various attitudes expressed regarding the resettlement issue. These attitudes could be linked to the residents' age, economic and educational status, and last but not least – environmental condition sufferings.

Apparently, those residents who were most directly affected by damaging environmental conditions caused by extreme pollutants, for example, people living in Gasbeton and Sušara's immediate surroundings where the real ecological catastrophe has been happening, expressed the strongest wish and demand to be resettled as soon as possible.



Three generations of Vreoci citizens.

Source: Ines Urosevic (June/ July 2005)



Vreoci people when asked about potential resettlement

Source: Ines Urosevic (June/ July 2005)

Though the whole settlement is affected by the factual pollution caused by general proximity of lignite exploitation fields and industrial plants, there were some Vreoci residents who denied this problem and its real consequences for public health, which have been epitomised in frequent asthma cases, chronic bronchitis, renal and malignant illnesses.

According to the sample data, younger Vreoci residents were more inclined to resettlement, and in most cases they emphasized they would prefer not to be limited by any 'imposed' choices. Those who opted for organised resettlement were inclined towards Belgrade, yet at the same time they were aware it would be difficult to obtain a location for the new settlement outside administrative territory of

Lazarevac municipality. Generally speaking, both younger and older population didn't see Lazarevac as the magnet, considering it to be 'a dead town, which after exhaustion of lignite exploitation, wouldn't have any major sources of income'.

Older Vreoci citizens were split in two in their attitude regarding the resettlement issue. For example, some of them were aware of already difficult living conditions in the settlement, and though not happily, they would accept to move. Another group of senior citizens completely declined a possibility to leave Vreoci. For example, they made comments such as: 'in case the resettlements would take place, in due time it is more likely that we (senior citizens of Vreoci) would move together with dead and not

with the living residents'. Generally observing, the main reason for negative attitude towards resettlement of the senior Vreoci citizens can be found in their old age and in a single household living. If these groups of citizens are to move, they are confronted with a difficulty to develop on their own a new house in a different environment. Therefore, some older and single households would prefer if EPS would build them the houses or provide them with flats in the place of organised move. There were some senior Vreoci citizens who would leave the decision on resettlement to the younger members of their family. They would prefer to move together with their children and grandchildren and to stay in multi-generation households. Beside family ties which may orient direction and resettlement mode for a number of Vreoci households, it is interesting to mention that certain neighbourhood/ territory groups opt for the same resettlement choice and the location which would allow them to stay physically close to each other in their new environment.

Resettlement modality

One of the key issues covered by this questionnaire survey related to modality of resettlement for Vreoci residents in case the whole place is to be relocated. Basically, the citizens were asked whether they would prefer to go for *individual relocation*, i.e. compensation as full payment for their property at cadastral territory of Vreoci, or they would rather opt for *organised resettlement*. This latter modality is defined in the questionnaire as follows: 'In case of organised resettlement, EPS would provide built-up land in order to form the new settlement. Citizens of Vreoci would be then offered one of either three types of parcels – urban type of parcel (0.06 to 0.07 ha); mixed-type of parcel (0.1 to 0.17 ha) and rural type of parcel (0.3 ha). Organised resettlement would also encompass the following obligations by EPS: land provision and its division on parcels, organisation and financing of regulatory plan preparation, investment and organisation of the communal, transportation and other infrastructure supply as well as the development of public buildings. EPS would finance provision of links to communal infrastructure at the new location which would be chosen for organised resettlement, whereas in the expropriation process the value of already provided links in



Senior Vreoci citizens

Source: Ines Urosevic and Tamara Maricic (July 2005)

Vreoci wouldn't be taken in account. (...) Built-up land (parcels) that are to be provided for the resettling households of Vreoci would be in their private property. Households are left to develop on their own any houses/ buildings on such a parcel. EPS is also committed to compensate difference in value between household's present parcel in Vreoci and the new parcel which would be provided for them in the newly organised settlement'.

Once again, during the interviewing process with Vreoci household representatives (conducted for the purposes of this questionnaire survey), it was stressed that by present choice of either of the two options for resettlement modality, households would not be obliged to make the identical choice should the resettlement process come to be realised one day. In this preparatory phase for reaching a decision, the issue is to recognise potential aspiration(s) for resettlement of Vreoci households, which would facilitate development of future generation of thoroughly elaborated and precise resettlement options.

In reference to the issue of resettlement modality, data which is obtained for the whole population of Vreoci provided the following information which is given in the Table 1.

Table 1: Resettlement modality for Vreoci households

RESETTLEMENT MODALITY	POPULATION (1,141 households.)*
Individual relocation	46.7%
Organised resettlement	29.8%
Other (refusals, unavailable, undecided, expropriated property)	23.5%

* Data for the total number of Vreoci households are the sum of results provided by all 5 teams from IAUS which were engaged in Vreoci survey, where each team consisted of 2 researchers. Source: IAUS (2005:52).

Figures from the table above show that almost half of Vreoci households (46.7%) would currently opt for an **individual** relocation. Whether they believe or not in fair compensation, that is another issue. When commenting their aspiration towards individual relocation, majority of these respondents stated they would prefer 'to get the cash and go as they please'. Thinking about their future prospects, some more affluent households of Vreoci have

already bought the property in another place, thus only considering the financial compensation from resettlement process.

On the other hand, one can notice in Table 1 that almost 30% of Vreoci population would currently decide on **organised** resettlement. In the questionnaire, people who opted for this type of resettlement modality were given a choice of 4 locations (Rasadnik, Crne medje, Petka, Šiljakovac), most of them at the territory of Lazarevac municipality, but these locations served only as an indication for possible organised resettlement options. Additionally, residents of Vreoci who would like to move in an organised manner and who preferred any other location apart from those 4 mentioned could name it in the free space by the question of concern.

As it can be observed from Table 2, the largest number of Vreoci households which opted for 'organised resettlement' (approximately 1/3 of them) would want to move to some place within Belgrade administrative territory - Železnik, Žarkovo, Čukarica, Petlovo brdo, Orlovača, Sremčica, to name a few. Most commonly, people who would like to move towards Belgrade explained that this opinion was motivated by the wish to avoid 'repeating a same mistake' which happened in the 1980s when people from nearby villages of Cvetovac and Medoševac were resettled to Vreoci, and in their belief, that was due to bad estimation and the lack of long-term strategy for lignite exploitation.

Among the locations that were listed in the questionnaire, Rasadnik takes a lead with approximately 20% of households which opted for organised resettlement. It is slightly more emphasized choice than Petka (rural type of location which attracted 11% of respondents) or Šiljakovac (greenfield site by the main road to Belgrade that represents a preference for 11% of Vreoci respondents). Finally, as a potential location listed for a resettlement, Crne medje attracted merely 3% of respondents.

Lazarevac which is the closest urban centre to Vreoci has been seen as an attractive place for resettlement by almost 9% of respondents. This percentage includes already mentioned vulnerable groups of residents (old and single households) who would prefer EPS to provide them with a flat in Lazarevac rather than any other option.

Table 2: Locations for a future settlement according to Vreoci households opting for a collective move

LOCATION	POPULATION (346 households.)*
Rasadnik	21.1%
Crne medje	3.0%
Petka	11.0%
Šiljakovac	11.0%
Belgrade territory (e.g. Železnik, Žarkovo, Čukarica, Petlovo brdo, Orlovača, Sremčica, etc.)	33.5%
Lazarevac (including requests for provision of flat in Lazarevac)	8.7%
Other (including undecided, majority decision followers, etc.)	11.6%

* Data for the total number of Vreoci households are the sum of results provided by all 5 teams from IAUS which were engaged in Vreoci survey, where each team consisted of 2 researchers. Source: IAUS (2005:52).

Last of all, almost 12% of Vreoci households that chose organised type of resettlement listed some other option apart from all previously mentioned. This group of respondents also includes people who would like to move in an organised way but are still undecided about potential location for such move, or they say they would follow the decision of majority in case the resettlement of Vreoci would happen.

Issue of Vreoci cemetery displacement

One of the most delicate issues covered by this questionnaire survey related to the local cemetery relocation. People who were responding to this question were only those who had their deceased relatives buried in Vreoci. From obvious sentimental reasons, certain respondents completely denied possibility to have their dead relocated to any other cemetery. They emphasized as an argument that Vreoci cemetery as a whole could not possibly be relocated at least for a while (10 years as a minimum according to the present law) because the dead had still been buried here, i.e. local funerals have not yet been proscribed. The factual problem is that present Vreoci cemetery is the first in danger-line because of spread of the lignite exploitation field "D". Because the lignite excavation already came so close to the

cemetery, people of Vreoci express their fear that the sliding of graves would soon start spontaneously.

Regarding potential new locations for Vreoci cemetery, there was a high level of accordance in this respect between families of deceased. Most of them (44% of respondents with deceased relatives in Vreoci) thought how at least the dead should 'remain together' when being moved, i.e. they opted for a new cemetery location to be in the place where the majority of Vreoci residents would resettle. Conversely to this opinion, 20% of respondents said they would like their dead to be moved from Vreoci cemetery to a cemetery of that place where the respondents would individually go. Other respondents (36%) named individual locations for the displacement of their dead, e.g. Petka, Šiljakovac, Lazarevac, Crne medje, Šopić, etc.

People of Vreoci were frequently saying that 'all this talk and business about resettlement has to do only with the necessity to displace Vreoci cemetery, which supposedly lies on top of major lignite resources, much richer than those lying underneath the rest of Vreoci'. Consequently, local community conditioned Vreoci cemetery relocation with synchronised and time-fixed resettlement of the whole town.

CONCLUSION

Involuntary resettlement can have a dramatic impact on the lives of people inhabiting the area of influence of large-scale development projects, e.g. lignite and energy production expansion territories. The resettlement process may represent a sudden break in social continuity and can result in impoverishment of the people who are to be relocated. It can

threaten people's cultural identity followed by disruption of social networks and diminishing of people's sense of control over their lives.

In defining options for Vreoci resettlement it should be borne in mind that a significant number of citizens is attached to the settlement and experience it as a natural habitat. With this in view, in case the resettlement of Vreoci is to be pursued, the whole process should be conducted in cooperation with the local residents so that their needs and preferences are met. Only in this way their relocation would become least painful and would allow continuity of neighbourhood social ties. Such a position is not simply unrealistic moral posturing, although it does take the moral standpoint that we must start from the assumption that constrained parties should be seen as potential beneficiaries, and that this should be built into the project planning and implementation process as a non-negotiable element, on a par with things such as construction schedules.

When regarding resettlement of Vreoci as an opportunity for true sustainable development, at minimum, it should provide full compensation for the loss of its residents' assets and income. Displaced people must not be made to subsidize the main project through unfair compensation, and should receive full replacement value for their assets.

A final point to be underlined is that resettlement of Vreoci must be understood as a process that has to be planned for and analysed over time so that its residents end up better-off than before the resettlement in a number of ways, which need to be sustainable over time. The process has started as soon as the people of Vreoci have been made aware

that they might be the subject of resettlement, and will continue long after completion of the project as it may take a long time for people to re-establish themselves in their new sites.

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