Global challenge on a local scene - the urban reality of Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century

With more than half of the world’s population living in cities, the 21st century is known as the urban century. However, in an urbanized world that goes hand in hand with a growing world population, a “silent” process of urban shrinkage has been taking place for some time. In the first decades after the Second World War, the decline of cities was initially limited to the old urbanized regions of the world. In the late 20th and early 21st century, it spread to developing countries and has become a global phenomenon. The Serbian urban population grew from the 1960s to the 1980s, while it stagnated in the 1990s. Complex spatial-demographic and socio-economic changes during the post-socialist transition have determined the demographic development of urban settlements in Serbia towards shrinkage. At the beginning of the 21st century, the urban population in Serbia has slightly increased, but the disproportions in population development between urban settlements have deepened, reinforcing the previously existing urban polarization. In the last decade a negative average annual rate of change of the urban population in Serbia was recorded. As a result, more than 80% of urban settlements in Serbia are affected by the process of urban shrinkage. Urban shrinkage is thus becoming a challenge at both global and local levels. The paper analyses the development of the total population in 167 urban settlements in Serbia in the period 1961-2022. The aim of paper is to determine the main urban trends in Serbia, focusing on the phenomenon of urban shrinkage.

**Keywords:** urban shrinkage, urban population, Serbia