

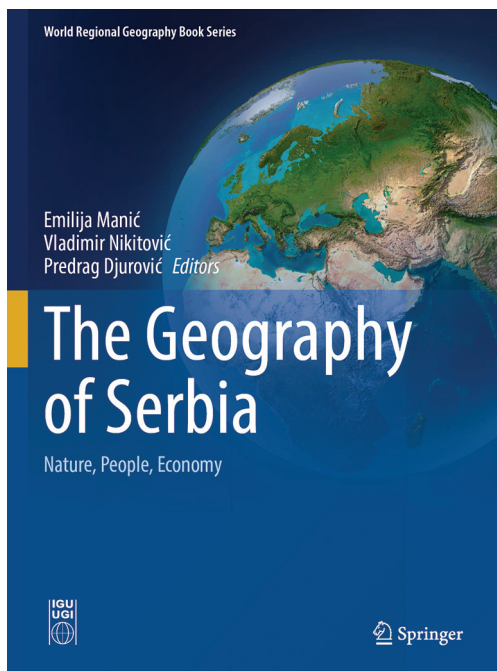
Manić, E., Nikitović, V. and Djurović, P. (eds.): *The Geography of Serbia: Nature, People, Economy*. Cham, Springer, 2022. 317 p.

The geography of Serbia, a colourful volume full of maps and diagrams and illustrated with photos of excellent quality, was published in the “World Regional Geography Book Series” of Springer in 2022, similarly to the edited volume on Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gekić, H. *et al.* 2022), which has already been introduced and reviewed in the current issue of the Hungarian Geographical Bulletin (Kószegi, M. 2024). Despite the numerous similarities, the structure of the volumes in the series is not strictly pre-defined. Therefore, in this review, we also address the series’ consistency by comparing the two volumes.

As the editors Emilija Manić, Vladimir Nikitović, and Predrag Djurović write, they had two options to present the geography of Serbia – either to limit the number of contributors to have a coherent text that would reflect the concept of a few experts or to involve the best specialists for each chapter to deepen the analytical character of the text. The editors deliberately chose the second option. Hence, the content moved from subjective synthesis to analysis. The 23 chapters were written by 44 scholars, but this was not a wrong decision. This method allowed the editors to avoid fluctuations in the quality of the chapters,

whereas target readers could browse, combine, and evaluate information. Most of the chapters are deep and well-written, as I can judge them by academic experience in history, human geography, and physical geography. My only critique involves the structural composition and limited interconnectedness between chapters in some cases where a process-oriented approach could have been applied. (That concerns chapters beginning with the historical past vs. chapters focusing on the present situation.) Most of the chapters – considering them as standing alone – are of good quality. That is even true for the chapter on archaeology (Dušan Mihailović, Dragana Antonović, and Aleksandar Kapuran). The text is not dull at all, and, thanks to its approach with a clear focus on novelties and good illustrations, it brings the history of consecutive and parallel ancient cultures closer to the unskilled reader. The chapter generally tries to put Serbia into an international context, interpreting events in a broader context. That is also true for the chapters on history (Radmila Pejić, Sofija Petković, and Dejan Radićević), and the comparative approach, in addition to the analysis of temporal trends, is also abundant in the geographical chapters. Hence, the reader can also make spatiotemporal comparisons.

However, a professional historian should mention some minor but typical mistakes here. The “Serbs settled in present-day Serbia” (p. 21) in the first sentence of the chapter is a biased term, as Serb is a modern ethnolinguistic category—it is better to talk about “Serb tribes” or “Slavic tribes as the predecessors of the modern Serbian nation,” for instance. In Chapter 3.3, we read that “The Serbs sided with the Austrian army in the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) only to experience disappointment after the Austrian defeat” (p. 31). That is another typical mistake highlighting the volume’s Serb-centric concept of history. First, to be correct, it was not the Austrian, but rather the Habsburg (international) army. Second, the sentence suggests that the Habsburgs lost the war of 1683–1699, which is not true – although they failed to liberate the Balkans after encouraging the Serbs under Ottoman rule to revolt. Still, the sentence talks about a defeat in general and not in connection with the Serbs. We may also read (as another infiltration of Serbian views on history) that Serbia was “disappointed by Russia’s championing of Greater Bulgaria even at the expense of ethnically Serbian lands” (p. 34). The authors fail to specify these “ethnically Serbian lands” accurately. The Slavs of Macedonia deliberately took sides with Bulgaria then. Thus, they cannot be considered Serbs. Bosnia was occupied by Austria-Hungary (with Russian consent). The third possible region is Kosovo-Metohija. Figure 3.3 gives an excellent example that Bulgaria,



Montenegro, and Northern Macedonia vindicate a part of Serbian history for themselves, the reverse of which is also true, and it explains some of the tensions between these Slavic successor states of the Ottoman Empire. Also, many interpretations in Bulgaria claim precisely the opposite of the views of this chapter's authors, i.e., that Russia supported Greater Serbia at the expense of ethnically Bulgarian lands.

The chapter on engineering geo(morpho)logy (risk maps of natural hazards) is good, and the text and illustrations are helpful (Ivan NOVKOVIĆ, Slavoljub DRAGIĆEVIĆ, and Mirela DJUROVIĆ). Though it is far from my research field, I greatly enjoyed the biogeography chapter (Vladimir B. STEVANOVIĆ). Illustrations are adequate; even the grid cells' resolution seems optimal for such a volume and page setting. As for the chapter on hydrology, some more graphs could have helped internalize the text better (Marko UROŠEV, Ana MILANOVIĆ PEŠIĆ, Jelena KOVAČEVIĆ-MAJKIĆ, and Dragoljub ŠTRBAC) – especially compared to the chapters on demography and economics, which are rich in charts. I also miss diagrams on the monthly distribution of precipitation and temperature average from different scenes from the climate chapter (Chapter 5 by Boško MILOVANOVIĆ, Gorica STANOJEVIĆ, and Milan RADOVANOVIĆ). The sub-chapter on tourism (or rather cultural heritage, which dominates the text instead of a statistical analysis of the main destinations) is especially good thanks to the excellent photo material (Svetlana POPOVIĆ, Dragan STOJKOVIĆ, and Radmila JOVANOVIĆ). The editors' decision to treat it separately from the chapter on historical background and merge it with the chapter on finances and trade is a bit strange. However, it can be justified by the fact that the authors of the two chapters quite differ.

The volume objectively and adequately addresses the Kosovo problem. Its discussion (that appears in several chapters, including administration, history, and demography) is balanced, as it includes ethnic, historical, and legal argumentation, and it is not overheated. Likewise, the evaluation of the latest political events between 1990 and 2010 (including the NATO bombing) remains moderate. The authors draw interesting parallels between the 1940s and the 1990s: "the history of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, as well as on the territory of Serbia, was, to a large extent, the chronicle of a complex civil war in a country divided along ethnic, religious, and ideological lines" (p. 37).

What I miss from the volume is an investigation of the social background/tensions of the recent civil war (as the authors and editors labelled the wars) and a regional economic geographical analysis of the two Yugoslavia – i.e., a comparative approach to what was resolved and what problems persisted. For example, what would have happened if Nazi Germany had not attacked Yugoslavia? Could ethnic tensions have been overcome, or the state would have faced the same fate as in the 1990s or as a consequence of the Nazi occupation?

In connection with economic geography, the volume focuses on post-1990 dynamics (see, for example, the FDI data series), which is justifiable as the collapse of the communist regime put an end to a supranational entity and central economic planning. However, the volume could include more maps of main industrial centres from the 1930s and 1970s to track the changes. Regional internal disparities of the 1930s (see BÍRÓ, L. 2010 on the Yugoslavian state in Hungarian, for example) remain underrepresented compared to the evaluation of the situation in the 1970s in Part IV (by Đorđe MITROVIĆ).

Part III. *Demography* and Part IV. *Economy* are the helpful and well-established core of the volume. Daniela ARSENOVIĆ and Vladimir NIKITOVIĆ, then Mirjana RAŠEVIĆ and Marko GALJAK, focus on the temporal dynamics and spatial patterns of topics like below-replacement fertility, postponement of childbearing, birth control, life expectancy, premature mortality, health conditions, and avoidable deaths. Vesna LUKIĆ analyses migration processes, including the latest global migration events. Žaklina STOJANOVIĆ wrote the chapter on agriculture and sustainability, Emilija MANIĆ and Milena LUTOVAC on natural resources and manufacturing, Ivan RATKAJ on transportation, trans-European transport network, and transport investments. The keywords are usually well-selected and help identify topics and contents. The chapter on regional depopulation by Vladimir NIKITOVIĆ addresses the question of peripheralisation from the dimension of depopulation. Chapter 22 (*Rural Areas and Rural Economy in Serbia* written by Marija DROBNJAKOVIĆ, Žaklina STOJANOVIĆ, and Sonja JOSIPOVIĆ) also maps peripheral rural regions (Figure 22.4) from a different perspective. Chapters on environmental pollution and nature conservation and urban problems also meet high standards (Vladimir STOJANOVIĆ, Milana PANTELIĆ, and Stevan SAVIĆ/Nikola KRUNIĆ, Aleksandra GAJIĆ, and Dragan TOŠIĆ). The chapter on regional disparities (Dejan MOLNAR) uses several indicators for 5-6 regions to illustrate inequalities without going into more profound calculations of the Gini- or Hoover index.

Maps, diagrams, and statistics are integral to a work focusing on geographical features. This volume offers a great variety of maps, most of which adequately illustrate the phenomena they are meant to visualize. Both the colour schemes and the depicted indicators are appropriate. However, some topics illustrated on maps would deserve more attention. Figure 5.1 (temperatures) seems to be a weaker solution, especially compared to other figures in the same chapter (or Figure 5.4. in the volume on the regional geography of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which looks way better with its continuous scaling). Some maps (9.2–9.3–9.4 hazard risk maps) are too small; they could have covered a whole page. In the case of geomorphology, I could even imagine a map of dou-

ble page size. On the other hand, some of the larger maps are pretty empty (like the administrative map of Serbia, Figure 4.3, which should have been filled with more content).

I generally miss a map on the geology of Serbia, and geology could have been worth a small chapter (especially compared to the volume on Bosnia and Herzegovina, which contains a more extensive chapter and ten maps on the geological background). At least some pages should have written about the genesis of rocks and landforms, mainly because the text – correctly – emphasizes Serbia's geomorphological diversity. Rocks and formations are mentioned among geoheritage sites (Chapter 9.2.1.) without giving any details on them either there or elsewhere. Given that morphology is determined by the classical triad of material, landform, and process (I used to add time as a fourth dimension), the relative insignificance of geology in this volume is unreasonable. A geological chapter could have contributed to a better balance between the physical geographical, social geographical, and regional geographical chapters. Figure 9.6. could have been larger, and in this case, the name of geoheritage sites could have been inserted. These names might be evident for Serbian readers, but the book is written for foreign readers, even though some typos and terms reveal that an originally Serbian text was translated into English. A map similar to topographic maps of atlases illustrating mountain ranges and significant physical geographical or cultural-ethnographical landscapes (like in the volume on Bosnia and Herzegovina) would also be helpful. I really miss a chapter on electoral geography and its connection with socio-economic features. (The volume on Bosnia and Herzegovina includes several maps illustrating recent outcomes of elections.)

Overall, despite these minor deficiencies, the volume is essential for all geographers, economists, and historians who are dealing with the problems of present-day Serbia or the Balkans, including political isolation, demographic decline, internal democratic deficits, and unilateral dependence on Chinese capital and Russian raw materials.

GÁBOR DEMETER¹

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¹ HUN-REN Research Centre for Humanities, Institute of History, Budapest, Hungary.
E-mail: demeter.gabor@abtk.hu