

# Geographic transformation of the Ibarski Kolašin in the XX century

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**Abstract:** Development of human activities and social needs inevitably imply a transformation of the geographic environment as well. Exploitation of minerals or some other natural resources may lead to sudden and very damaging distortion of the natural environment - formation of overburdens, dumpsites and the like. Rare are the cases when, seemingly, a common human activity brings a true revival of an area.

The Ibarski or Stari (Old) Kolašin is a micro-region in the northwestern part of Kosovo and Metohija, in the middle part of the Ibar River course. In the past, this area had been unjustly neglected. For many reasons, the Ibarski Kolašin has been at the periphery and in complete isolation for decades. The population lived very hard of agriculture, but only for their own needs with a very small surplus of products, which was being brought with great difficulty, due to bad roads, to the markets of the closest cities - Kosovska Mitrovica and Novi Pazar. Anonymity and isolation lasted until the construction of the land part of the Adriatic Highway (route E65). Construction of the modern road, in 1968, has contributed to the Ibarski Kolašin to become a very important transit area. Another important event, which has brought negative, but also positive consequences, was the construction of the "Gazivode" reservoir within a huge hydrosystem "Ibar-Lepenac". The reservoir has remarkably fitted into the environment, thus creating the perfect predisposition for the overall economic development, but particularly the development of tourism and related activities.

**Keywords:** Isolation, geographic transformation, resources, the Ibarski Kolašin

## 1. Introduction

The Ibarski Kolašin has had a very turbulent past due to its important geographical and geopolitical location. The region was marauded by numerous armies and looters. Prominent people were exiled, murdered and pillaged and

the villages were burned down. On many occasions, the residents of the Ibarski Kolašin stayed without their possessions. Very bad routes did not connect this region to the world, so it was condemned to isolation. This isolation from the other parts of Serbia took a very long time which resulted in the exodus of the population, mostly young people. Depopulation threatened the Ibarski Kolašin. Isolation continued for the next twenty years after the World War II. While all other main parts of Serbia were rapidly developing, the Ibarski Kolašin remained in the background.

In 1968, the Ibarski Kolašin finally gets a modern road and it is the first construction built by the state in this area. This led the Ibarski Kolašin out of the centuries of isolation and enabled better employment opportunities and better traffic connection. Another event influenced not only the geographical, but also overall transformation of the Ibarski Kolašin. Construction of the "Gazivode" reservoir completely changed the appearance of the area. Much disputed, it nevertheless provides remarkable opportunities for the economic, and above all, tourism development.

## **2. Geographical location, borders and size of the Ibarski Kolašin**

The Ibarski or also called Stari (Old) Kolašin is a mountainous micro-region in the northwestern part of Kosovo and Metohija. More specifically, it includes the valley of the middle course of the Ibar River, from the Ribarička gorge in the west to the village of Zupča near Kosovska Mitrovica in the east, as well as the parts of the mountains Rogozna in the north and Mokra Gora in the south. The exact borders of the Ibarski Kolašin are difficult to determine because they often changed in the course of history. According to popular opinion, the Kolašin begins from the Ribarička gorge and ends with the last Serbian houses in the village of Zupča, including also all Serbian villages between Rogozna and Mokra Gora (Stojanović, 2009). More precisely, the border in the west is the river gorge of the Crna reka to Ribarić, it comes down by the course of the Ibar River to the Crnovrška reka, goes by the watershed of the Ibar River and Raška on Rogozna (northern border), then by the valley of the Jagnjenička reka to the village of Zupča on the Ibar River. The border then goes by the Zupčanski potok (stream), enters the basin of the Beli Drim (upper course of the Klina River) to the stream of Dubočak (eastern border), and then by the ridge of Suva and Mokra Gora to the Crna reka (southern border) (Ivanović, 1991). However, in a broader sense, the Ibarski Kolašin also

includes the villages directly by this border: Mojstir, Crna Rijeka, Zlatare, Žarevo, Ribarić and several villages in its surrounding area, Donji Strmac in the valley of the Klina River and the village of Čabra in the valley of the Ibar River (Stojanović, 2009). In administrative terms, the territory of the Ibarski Kolašin is mostly located in the Municipality of Zubin Potok, and a significantly smaller number of villages belong to the municipalities of Tutin, Novi Pazar, Zvečan, Istok and Srbica.

The territory of the Ibarski Kolašin is of an irregular shape: the length of about 30 km, the width of about 16 km, which makes it an area of approximately 335 km<sup>2</sup>. It has 63 villages and the administrative centre of Zubin Potok.

In geopolitical terms, the territory of the Ibarski Kolašin has always been considered very important. All important events of the Serbian history have taken place on this territory. Population of the Ibarski Kolašin is Orthodox, Serbian, and placed between the Islamic population in the west and in the north (the region of Raška - Sandžak and Gornje Polimlje), mostly the Albanian population in Metohija and Drenica in the south and the mixed population in Kosovska Mitrovica in the east. Thus, it is a solid and great oasis of the Serbian population surrounded by the Islamic population.

### **3. The Ibarski Kolašin in the period before the World War II**

In the early 20th century, life in the Ibarski Kolašin was very difficult. Numerous incursions of the Arbanasi in the Ibarski Kolašin villages were everyday occurrences. Murders, rapes, lootings and burning of villages had only one goal – the persecution of Serbs from these regions. Population of the Ibarski Kolašin was forced to arm up and in that way protect bare life and property. In order to achieve this goal easier, the prominent Serbs were expatriated (Archpriest Vukajlo Božović). This situation lasted until the liberation in 1912. After the liberation from the Turks, six municipalities were formed - Brnjak, Lučka reka, Rujiš, Radič polje, Ribarić and Crepulja. Besides Ribarić, which belonged to the county of Štavić in the district of Raška, other municipalities belonged to the county of Mitrovica in the district of Zvečan. According to the census, 7,496 inhabitants lived in this area in 1914 (Virijević, 2012).

The main economic activity in the period before the World War II, was the extensive agriculture: crop and fruit growing in the valley and hilly areas

and cattle breeding in the mountains. Production of agricultural products was mainly for the own needs, while very little remained for the market. Dairy products, leather, wool and livestock were mostly traded, and Rogozna was recognizable by its potatoes. There was quite a little wheat and corn was mainly cultivated. Of cattle, mostly goats were bred on Rogozna and sheep on Mokra Gora. Also, workhorses were bred, but only in well-off households which used them in hired labour to transfer various goods to the market. In this region, several larger hired labour holders were known. Radovan Milosavljević from Kozarevo, a wealthy householder, held up to 20 horses. He transported tobacco, salt, sugar and other goods from Skoplje to Pljevlja and a Kolašin Duke, Nedeljko Nešo Božović from Pridvorice, used to go even to Thessaloniki, Shkodra, Dubrovnik and Sarajevo with his caravans (Luković, 2009).

The Ibarski Kolašin also nurtured crafts, the so-called household industry. The Ibarski Kolašin is abundant in quality forest, so the carpenter's and barrel manufacture crafts developed. It was specially developed and known in the villages on Mokra Gora. The products were sold mainly in Metohija. The village of Bube was known by its potters and Crepulja by its scales manufacturers. Plenty of streams and small rivers that flow into the Ibar River from Rogozna and Mokra Gora caused the work of many water mills and roller mills. There were more than 20 mills and roller mills only on the Čečevska reka (Lutovac, 1954). The roller manufacturers of the Ibarski Kolašin used the cloth for processing what was brought in from more distant areas - Metohija, Tutin, Drenica and the region of Novi Pazar.

The main problem with placing goods on the markets of the surrounding cities represented bad roads. The main means of transport were horse-drawn carts and more often horse-drawn caravans. The main road went along the Ibar River and it was written that the road was in very poor condition, and according to some writings, it was built yet in 1873. Before that, there were no roads (Luković M., 2009). From this road, several transversal roads separated over the saddle of Rogozna and Mokra Gora. The roads on Rogozna mainly led towards the most famous and oldest transport route of the region. By the eastern periphery of the Ibarski Kolašin goes the famous Bosnian Road or "stara džada" as called in the Ibarski Kolašin. This is the road that leads from Sarajevo, via Pešter, Novi Pazar, Rogozna to Kosovska Mitrovica and continues to Priština and Skoplje to Thessaloniki. What was the condition of this so important transport route, described Jovan Cvijić: "among the traffic

connections of the greater importance on the Balkan Peninsula, this is one of the most difficult and worst ..... this is a bad road; the road sides are only covered by soil in such order to let the chariots pass besides the ravines and chasms; the brooks have no bridges, people must walk over them. This is mainly a caravan route" (Cvijić, 1996).

Along these roads, another economic activity has developed. The inns were built with the aim to allow travelers and traders with their caravans to spend the night and rest and also gave food for the horses. The inns were usually built in places where the roads intersected or where the bridges across the Ibar River were placed. There were six inns only in the village of Pridvorica. Most of them were by the longitudinal road from Mitrovica to Ribarić, but there were inns at cross roads, especially on the "stara džada" and the roads leading towards it.

Another occupation was also interesting. The villagers of the upstream villages: Mojstir, Jezgović, Gazivoda and others, earned additional income by rafting down the Ibar River. Logs from the forests of Mojstir were sliding down the Ibar River to Mitrovica and Zvečan. Later, instead of individual logs, the rafts were built that skilled rafters tracked to Mitrovica. It is registered that, at the medium and high water levels, a distance from Ribarić to Mitrovica can be passed over in the daytime and at low water level, one can barely reach the Radič polje (Virijević, 2012).

In 1921, in Kosovska Mitrovica, the sawmill of the Draga family began to work using logs that were transported by the Ibar River. The sawmill operated successfully until 1928. In Kosovska Mitrovica, another sawmill owned by an industrialist Lazar Žarković began to work in 1930, and after a series of difficulties in the business, a joint stock company "Ibar" was established. Of course, the raw material base represented the forests of Ibarski Kolašin (Group of authors, 1979).

In 1930, Lazar Žarković built the hydropower plant of 432 KW in the village of Čečevo, at the Čečevska reka, for the needs of Kosovska Mitrovica. It was the only industrial facility in the Ibarski Kolašin before the World War II. The hydropower plant was very important for this region because it employed a dozen of workers from the immediate surrounding areas. That is why the locals lovingly called it "centrala (headquarters)".

A significant contribution to economic conditions of the Ibarski Kolašin is the start of the first operational plants of "Trepča" in Kosovska Mitrovica. However, the limiting factor for prosperity was, as always, a bad

connection to the surrounding areas and the closest center - Kosovska Mitrovica.

#### **4. The Ibarski Kolašin in the period after the World War II**

The World War II brought new sufferings to this region. The territory of the Ibarski Kolašin was divided into two zones of occupation - German in the north and Italian in the south. The border was the Ibar River. The Italian part of the Kolašin was very quickly added to the so-called "Great Albania" which was the signal for the start of a new pogrom of the Serbian population. During the occupation, 256 Serbs were killed, 2,907 were tortured in a various manner, 1,730 buildings were burnt down and over 87,000 pieces of cattle were looted (Rastović, 2012).

In the postwar period, isolation of the Ibarski Kolašin continued. Young people began to emigrate from the Ibarski Kolašin massively, usually to Kosovska Mitrovica, but also further to Kraljevo, Kragujevac and Smederevo. The Ibarski Kolašin did not only have any new investments, but the existing plants were shut down as well – the hydropower plant and the sawmill in Čečevo. Kosovo and Metohija had a reputation of underdeveloped territory and all the republics of the former Yugoslavia allocated huge funds for economic development, but the funds did not come to the Ibarski Kolašin. The Municipality was also abolished and the territory of the Ibarski Kolašin was added to the Municipality of Kosovska Mitrovica in 1965. Kosovska Mitrovica, Novi Pazar and Metohija were still difficult and slow to reach and people travelled by poor gravel roads, muddy or dusty depending on the season. The basic means of transportation were still carts and pack horses, with very few field automobiles. Without any of the economic facilities, poor agricultural production, aggravated promotion of agricultural products and firewood, the Ibarski Kolašin was sentenced to slowly disappearance. More and more young people were leaving, so this area slowly almost stayed without the population. This situation has also continued for several decades after the World War II.

At the end of the 1960-ies (1968), the land part of the highway, i.e. route E65, passes through this territory connecting Kosovska Mitrovica, that is, the Ibar Highway, through Rozaje and Berane with Podgorica and the Adriatic Sea. This highroad was the first investment in infrastructure or some other facility in the Ibarski Kolašin in socialist Yugoslavia. This led to the

opening of the Kolašin to the world, exit from decades of isolation. This highway was the shortest connection of eastern and southern Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia to the Adriatic Sea. Columns of tourists passed through the Ibarski Kolašin. So this region has become a very important transit area, which has always been. Not only that this modern highroad has allowed a much faster transfer of goods and passengers, but has also influenced the revival of catering industry in this region. Instead of the former inns, restaurants and motels "emerged". Motels with bungalows were opened in Zupča and Zubin Potok, and only a motel in Ribarić. In order to connect remote villages with the highway, several bridges over the Ibar River were built. The very construction of this highway has employed a large number of workers from this territory. So, the Ibarski Kolašin has been saved from extinction and its natural wealth and beauty are becoming available and suitable for exploitation.

Another capital investment has greatly changed the Ibarski Kolašin in geographical, as well as in every other sense. In 1977 the construction of a dam on the Ibar River near the village of Gazivode was completed and filling of the eponymous reservoir began. Many people in the Ibarski Kolašin felt that the dam is detrimental and that it was another attack on this region. Something similar happened. In a cruel manner, quickly and often with a symbolic compensation, partially or completely, a dozen villages of the Ibarski Kolašin were flooded (Kovače, Gazivode, Rezala, Tušiče, Banje, Špilje and other). Population of these villages partially remained in the Ibarski Kolašin, but a large number of people moved to central Serbia.

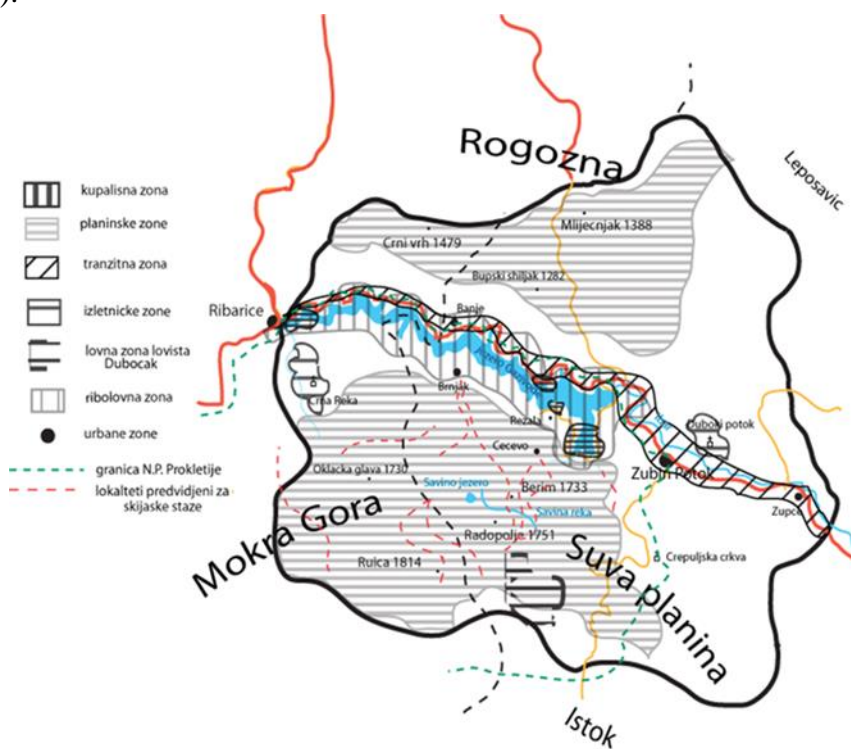
The built hydropower plant, reservoir and compensation basin, the so-called "Malo jezero" (Small lake) and canals that drain water to the valley of Kosovo, are an integral part of the enterprise "Ibar-Lepenac" based in Priština. The reservoir was built, among other things, to supply water to Kosovska Mitrovica and a number of settlements in its surroundings, but not for Zubin Potok that even today, in the summer period, has a serious deficit of drinking water. By filling the reservoir, the villages of Mokra Gora were practically cut off from the world.

On the other hand, the reservoir has remarkably fitted between two mountains which provide excellent opportunities for the development of tourism and related activities (Ivanović et al., 2011).

By persistence of prominent people and change in policy of the Republic of Serbia, the Ibarski Kolašin was returned its municipal administration in 1987. A period of general rebirth and renewal has begun.

During the 1990-ies, several industrial plants were built in the villages Čečevo, Ugljare, Gazivode, Brnjak, Donji Jasenovik and in Zubin Potok. A fish pond was opened in Gazivode managed by agricultural cooperative "Zubin Potok". Unfortunately, the economic crisis in the whole country has affected these companies as well and many have been closed or drastically reduced the number of employees. A magnificent infrastructure project was also built - a bridge across the lake in the village of Brnjak which connected the villages of Mokra Gora to the highway. Today it is one of the symbols of the Ibarski Kolašin.

In recent years, much has been invested in tourism, and in that purpose, several small hotels and motels were built - motel "Zapis" with 16 beds, motel "Aleksandrija" with 10 beds, a city hotel in Zubin Potok with 12 beds, motel "Villa Jakšić" with 18 beds, the youth camp in Rezala on the lake shore, and there are plans for building an ethno village in Špilje. By all estimates, the Ibarski Kolašin has the potential for the development of mountain tourism (Mokra Gora), excursions, transit, hunting (Mokra Gora and Rogozna), fishing and nautical (reservoir Gazivode) and rural eco-tourism (Ivanović et al., 2011).



Picture 1. Zones of tourism development of the Ibarski Kolašin region (Ivanović et al. 2011)



## 5. Conclusion

Neglected in every respect, the Ibarski Kolašin was isolated from the surrounding world. With poor and primitive agriculture, very bad roads, no opportunities for employment, the population has been living very difficult. Even in recent history – in socialist Yugoslavia, this region lived as in the Middle Ages. And when the huge funds were paid to the underdeveloped province of Kosovo and Metohija, and other parts of Serbia rapidly developed, this region remained aloof and in isolation. The Ibarski Kolašin was simply "sentenced to extinction" by the provincial government. The inertness of Belgrade has contributed to that. The population has been rapidly decreasing. Especially young people have been leaving in search of employment. Their objective were big industrial centres - Kosovska Mitrovica, Kraljevo, Kragujevac, Smederevo and others.

The year of 1968 was significant, because in that year the Ibarski Kolašin came out of isolation. The modern highway - land part of the Adriatic Highway was built (route E65). This was the first investment in any facility in the Ibarski Kolašin in socialist Yugoslavia. Along the route of the highway throughout the Ibarski Kolašin, restaurants, hotels and motels open and it gives new strength to this nation to survive. Catering industry and trade have begun to develop and the highway has greatly facilitated the overall life to the people. The beauty and natural resources of the Ibarski Kolašin have become available to many tourists passing through. From a totally isolated, this region has grown into an important transit area.

The Ibarski Kolašin is experiencing a huge geographic transformation by the formation of artificial reservoirs of "Gazivode" within the hydropower plant "Ibar-Lepenac". Much disputed among residents of the Ibarski Kolašin, the reservoir has remarkably fitted between two mountains, which offers tremendous opportunities for the development of various forms of tourism and related activities. The sites like the lake in the length of 22 km, its clear water, preserved nature of Mokra Gora and Rogozna, favourable terrains for winter sports, rich flora and fauna and especially the hospitality of the people and their love of the Ibarski Kolašin, enable the development of transit, mountain, nautical, fishing, hunting, excursion and rural tourism and other economic sectors that accompany tourism.

Unfortunately, since 1999, this territory, as well as the entire territory of Kosovo and Metohija, has been under the administration of the international

community which represents a limiting factor in the overall development of the economy and the unilateral declaration of the so-called "Republic of Kosovo" further brings anxiety among the local population due to bitter experiences in the past.

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