

CA16233 - DRYLANDS FACING CHANGE: INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH ON CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD INSECURITY, POLITICAL INSTABILITY

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REPORT ON WG1 MEETING IN NIS, SERBIA, 5-7 FEBRUARY 2020

Decentralized WG1 meeting in Nis, Serbia, very productive meeting was organized by our colleague Dragisa Savic and took place in the gorgeous University of Nis. Besides working and moving WG1's deliverables forward, we had a great time discovering the rich history, culture, cuisine and wines of Nis and its surrounding landscape.

Participants included twelve WG1 members, i.e., Ilan Stavi (Israel), Kees van der Geest (Holland), Rositsa Yaneva (Bulgaria), Dragisa Savic (Sertbia), Karolina Sobczak-Szelc (Poland), Ana Fonseca (Portugal), Cláudia Cordovil (Portugal), Andrej Ficko (Slovenia), António Monteiro (Portugal), Lisa Thalheimer (England), David Williams (Germany) and Joana Roque de Pinho (Portugal); and local invited expert, soil scientist Professor Jovica Vasin, of the Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops at the University of Novi-Sad (Serbia). The WG has several outputs in progress. This includes manuscripts that are in final stages, and review papers that were recently proposed during the Évora meeting (November 2020).

February 5th, 2020 (Wednesday):

The meeting started with a keynote lecture by Professor Jovica Vasin. His presentation, *Degradation processes in the soils of Serbia*, focused on the quality and organic composition of the soils in Vojvodina (Serbia's northern agricultural region). It also touched on the abandonment of Serbia's rural areas (rural-urban migration; emigration), decline in livestock production and soil organic matter; foreign large scale land acquisitions in Serbia's most fertile areas; soil management, and solutions to increase soil organic matter. Professor Vasin spent the next two days participating in our activities and sharing his expertise on soil science and quality.

After that, Ilan, Kees and Andrej shared updates on four papers prepared for publishing: *Food security review paper*, *Climate & migration review paper*, *Multi-dimensional food security in drylands under the slow onset effects of climate change*, and *Water runoff harvesting systems for restoration of degraded rangelands*.

During the afternoon session, we split in small groups to fine-tune ongoing drafts: The food security commentary manuscript and the climate & migration manuscript.

February 6th, 2020 (Thursday): FIELD TRIP

Our first stop was in the mountain above the town of Pirot near the Bulgarian border, where we visited a EU-funded migrants' Reception Collective Center, "The Fourth Kilometer" (http://www.kirs.gov.rs/wb-page.php?kat_id=205&lang=2). We had the opportunity to hear the perspectives of members of the managerial and medical staff, as well as from some of the refugees and migrants (from diverse countries, including Burundi, Congo, Cameroon, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Iraq).

The second part of the field trip was guided by Milan Milovanovic, a researcher from the Department of Geography (University of Nis), and included driving through the impressive Sicevo Gorge, onto Niska Banja, a thermal baths town, where we started our 2h-hike (back and forth) in the snow to an abandoned village above the town and only 8 km from the center of Nis – a poignant illustration of the socioeconomic issues highlighted in Professor Vasin's talk. The reasons for its abandonment since 2005 are not entirely known. But migration to the city and emigration because of underdeveloped infrastructure and local investments (i.e., support for agriculture etc.), in times of economic instability, might have played important roles. This is a widespread phenomenon across Serbia's rural areas.



At the abandoned village above Niska Banja. From left to right: Karolina, Ana, Joana, David, Lisa, Dragisa, Prof. Vasin, António, Cláudia, Kees, Rositsa and Ilan (Photo: Milan Milovanovic).

Friday, February 7th saw us back in the University meeting room.

We voted on the location of our next WG1 decentralized meeting, planned for November 2020/February 2021. We asked our colleague Hamide whether she would be open to the idea of organizing it in Antalya (Turkey); Alternatively, Karolina offered to organize it in Poland, in Warsaw or Krakow. Next, the leaders of the new round of papers gave overviews of their drafts.

The [drylands.eu website](http://drylands.eu) is functional. Please contact Rositsa (r.s.yaneva@gmail.com) with content on drylands, your drylands-related activities, news about drylands-related events, photos of meetings etc. for upload to the website.

Kind regards,

Joana, with Ana, António, Cláudia, David, Dragisa, Ilan, Karolina, Kees, Lisa, and Rositsa.