Croatia – the land and natural features

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Abstract: As both Middle-European and Mediterranean country, the Republic of Croatia is composed of several regional units. Every single natural and geographical unit is not specific only in terms of its general natural features, but also by its role in linking Croatia with the rest of the world. Additional peculiarity of these geographic units is their complementary value, which gives good prerequisites for successful economic development of the country.

In Pannonian section of Croatia prevail natural features close to those in other Central-European countries. Namely, this section of Croatia participates in Danube catchment area, linking Croatia with the rest of Central Europe. Dinaric Alps are typical mountainous area; in north-western part of the range (i.e. in the region of Gorski Kotar) they are very narrow, making thus possible a comparatively easy communication between Pannonian part of Croatia and the Adriatic coast. Coastal region of Croatia – stretching along the most of (north)eastern coast of the Adriatic – is predominantly characterised by Mediterranean natural features. Due to its size and share in total area of the country, territorial waters of the Adriatic sea can be accepted as the fourth natural and geographic unit of Croatia.

Introduction

With the area of 56,538 km² the Republic of Croatia is the twenty-first European country (out of 39 countries) in size and, having the population 4,784,256 (1991) the twenty-third in Europe in number of inhabitants. If internal waters and territorial sea are taken into account – covering the area of 31,421 km² (Lapaine et al. 1993) – the Republic of Croatia reaches 87,959 km² in size.

With respect to its natural characteristics, Croatia is a part of moderate (climatic) geozone, and more stringently observed – participates in Dinaric-Hellenic-Balkan-Carpathian subcontinental natural and geographic entity. This large area can be divided into several mega-regional units: Pannonian basin, Adriatic basin, Valahian lowlands and mountain ranges of Carpathians, Balkans, Hellenides and Dinaric Alps.

The Republic of Croatia itself includes three large natural and geographical units: Pannonian, Dinaric and Adriatic areas. They are parts of larger mega-regional areas of Pannonian basin, Dinaric Alps and Adriatic basin, respectively. Morphostructural and morpholithological elements (Bognar 1992b) are – out of any doubt – decisive for regional differentiation of the country. However, internal classification of regions can not be accomplished if the interference of other physical-geographic elements as climate, hydrology, biogeography and pedology are not taken into account (Figure 1).

Pannonian Croatia

Pannonian part of Croatia is the south-western section of large Pannonian mega-region. It occupies approximately 55 percent of Croatian territory or some 36 percent of the country area if territorial sea is included. From geographical viewpoint, the area is a part of Central Europe but, morphotectonically, it mostly participates in the region of Pannonian basin (Bognar 1987), which has been subjected – under the influence of recent Dinaric and Alpine tectonics – to differentiated, predominantly negative movements. Therefore, the dominating morphological category in Pannonian Croatia is accumulative-tectonic relief which, in general, encompasses two relief types: intermontane basins (e.g. Croatian north-western basin) and smaller basins and valleys (e.g. basins of Crna Mlaka, Samobor and Požega). Along the more elevated border areas adjacent to the Alps and Dinaric Alps, prevailing plateaus are intersected by fault-zones, and often characterised by uplifted horst-structures. Thus, the area is morphologically characterised by succession of mountains and basins; the most expressive among them are Slavonic block-mountains (Papuk, 953 m; Psunj, 985 m; etc.), as
well as mountains of Hrvatsko Zagorje in the northwest (Ivanšćica, 1,060 m; Medvednica, 1,033 m; etc.) and Žumberak mountain (1,178 m). Compared to more elevated mountains and plateaus, some portions of lowlands were also affected by uplifting, being consequently reformed by different morphoclimatic processes into piedmont zones, hilly regions and loess plateaux. Nevertheless, the Panonnian Croatia is mainly characterised by accumulation plains, which were formed by dominant tectonic subsidence, and are divided into floodplains (e.g. along the rivers of Sava, Drava, Danube and tributaries), fluvial terrace plains, of fluvial-aeolian plains (e.g. Đurđevački pijesci), and fluvial-marshy plains.