

Considering the forecasts that extreme droughts will continue in the whole of Europe for at least the next five years, it might not be a bad idea if, before we digitize all the villages in Serbia, we all get water and sewage first. In our country, almost a fifth of the population still does not have access to public water supply, and only 55% of settlements can boast of a civilizational achievement in the form of a sewage network. If you dream of escaping to Belgrade, think again about the fact that almost a third of the territory in the capital is decorated with septic tanks.

A lot of time has passed since, just before the corona virus broke into our lives, the state promised that by 2025, all residents of Serbia will be able to enjoy two incredible achievements, by getting access to water supply and sewage. The investment program "Serbia 2025" promises the expansion and rehabilitation of the sewage network, the construction of water treatment plants, the construction of water factories and the opening of new water sources.

In the meantime, what happened happened, so this program was only announced last year, when the Minister for the Care of the Village, Milan Krkobabić, reminded that this ambitious plan also includes three billion euros for the construction of water supply and sewage systems south of the Sava and Danube. as well as 300 million euros intended for the purchase of machinery, irrigation and composting. Then in April of this year, the Minister of Construction, Tomislav Momirović, announced again that Serbia will invest four billion euros in waste water treatment and communal infrastructure, which should cover about 80 percent of the population within a period that has been extended to the next five years. Until the water supply and sewage system start an avalanche of returnees to Serbian villages, this is how we currently stand with this vital life resource, according to the data presented in the analysis "Water is a common good", published by the Center for Emancipation Policies.

Access to a water supply does not mean that the water is potable

Serbia has about 16 billion cubic meters of water, of which 735 million are used for water supply. About 75% of water supply is done by depleting groundwater. The average consumption of water per inhabitant is about 350 liters per day, but in this average, the city dweller leads the way, consuming 400 liters of water per day, while the one living in the countryside consumes only 250 liters during that time. Of the total amount of produced water, the population uses 45%, a quarter is used for industry and public consumption, and the remaining 30% is spent on water treatment and losses in the network.

Due to the lack of investment in the maintenance of the existing infrastructure, its condition varies, and in some systems due to the obsolescence of the water supply network, there is a significant loss of water. It can reach up to 20%, which includes illegal connections to the network.

In Serbia, public water supply covers 81% of the population, and whether you will have

water in the 21st century depends on which part of the country you live in. Access to public water supply is worst in central Serbia (71%), and most common in Belgrade (92%) and Vojvodina (91%). In central Serbia, there are also some larger settlements that do not have a water supply network. In some municipalities in this territory, the lack of water is a mysterious phenomenon that lasts all year round, while some others are more fortunate, and only use water during dry summers.

Connection to the water supply network in Serbia increased by 5% in just over a decade, but not thanks to investment in infrastructure development, but due to the migration of the rural population to the cities. In addition to the fact that the population is divided according to whether or not they have access to water supply, not everyone is equal in terms of the quality of the water they drink.

Half of the controlled water supply systems do not have sufficient quality drinking water, due to physico-chemical and microbiological defects. Analyzes show that the highest quality sources are the rivers Djetinje, Studenica, Rzava, Moravice, Mlave and Visočice, while the most polluted watercourses include: Kereš, Krivaja, Zlatica, Begej, parts of the Danube-Tisa-Danube canal system, Topčiderska river, Studva and Veliki Lug.

The poor quality of drinking water stems from three key problems, which have not been solved for decades. First of all, the problem is the excessive exploitation of groundwater, which is characteristic of Vojvodina, as well as the inadequate quality of drinking water due to the natural characteristics of groundwater and inadequate nitrate content. The third big problem is that the springs are not sufficiently protected.

What would we do if the factories hadn't collapsed?

Namely, the fact that at a time when the state is talking loudly about the digitization of villages in Serbia, almost a fifth of the population still does not have access to the water network, is not the worst news in the local "water" statistics. The real stumbling block follows when it comes to data on the construction of the wastewater treatment infrastructure. Only 55% of settlements are covered by the sewage network, and only about 10% of the population has some level of wastewater treatment.

The social responsibility of companies in Serbia has apparently dried up when it comes to water, because tertiary treatment, which removes nitrogen and phosphorus, covers only 3% of wastewater. An extremely small number of factories pre-treats technical water before discharging it into the sewage system. The situation is often much worse on small watercourses, where larger urban centers are located.

On the other hand, the relatively good quality of water recorded in larger watercourses cannot be attributed to better water protection, but to the shutting down of large industrial plants during the 1990s and the fact that there is still more talk about reindustrialization than we are tripping over new domestic ones at every step. factories.

When it comes to industrial waste, only 5% of water polluted by industrial production goes

through all stages of purification. On the territory of Vojvodina, about 65% of industrial plants do not perform water purification treatment at all, and 12% of the population is not even covered by the waste water drainage system.

The situation is not better in other parts of Serbia either, because only 19 municipalities use wastewater treatment plants. Drainage and treatment of atmospheric and waste water in local self-governments is carried out by public utility companies. Most still complain about the lack of appropriate instruments that measure the flow and amount of waste water, so only a quarter of utilities submit an annual report on that topic.

Due to the insufficient amount of data, we remain deprived of the true picture of how wastewater is treated in Serbia, and perhaps it is better not to know this in a situation where we are already drinking tons of antidepressants in anticipation of an energy, food and nuclear cataclysm.

The recognizable smell of the capital

When it comes to public sewerage, those in cities suffer less, where even 75% of the population can use this benefit of civilization, while among those who are lucky enough to live in the countryside and relieve themselves in nature, only 9% use the aforementioned civilizational achievement. At first glance, living by the Danube seems like an exceptional privilege, but not for 3.5 million people who are connected to the sewage system, but only 4.3% won the “water supply” lottery, that is, they have a system for effective waste water treatment.

On the other hand, living in the city does not guarantee that you will have drinking water, as the residents of Zrenjanin know best. This city has come of age since the first time the sanitary inspection banned water from the city water supply for drinking and food preparation. Since then, a water purification plant has been built like Skadar na Bojana, and instead of poison-free drinking water, the people of Zrenjanin got a never-ending political affair. The citizens of Zrenjanin still pay for defective water, and about 20,000 euros are spent daily on the purchase of proper water.

The rest of Serbia does not look favorably on Belgrade, which sucks in both the population and investors at the expense of others. But even in the capital, as the largest agglomeration on the territory of Serbia, the sewage network does not really shine. Data show that as much as 30% of the city’s territory is not covered by the sewage system, so potential foreign investors are not attracted to these settlements with septic tanks that pollute the soil and groundwater. In Belgrade, there are about 100 sewage outlets into the Sava and Danube, so all waste and fecal waters end up in the rivers. This gives the capital a special charm, an original scent that makes it recognizable, especially in summer, BiF writes.