

FOREWORD

This volume of the *Sociologija* journal introduces a selection of papers presented at the “Sociological Perspectives on Contemporary Post-Yugoslav Societies” international conference, organized by the Sociological Scientific Society of Serbia (SSSS) on 26 and 27 May, 2023¹. An important feature of this event was (reflected in) the fact that it represented the first academic conference organized by the SSSS after its transformation from the Sociological Association of Serbia and Montenegro to the Sociological Scientific Society of Serbia in 2020. Following the good tradition established by the Association, activities of the SSSS are directed towards building international ties and networks and especially towards restoring the sociological epistemic community that originated in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

One of the conference objectives was to showcase that, beyond professional and epistemic connections formed within shared disciplinary fields, sociologists from the region also share overlapping research interests rooted in the analogous social problems and common challenges faced by their respective societies. In this sense, the conference also represented a platform where social scientists from the post-Yugoslav region (or those dealing with the region) had the chance to exchange experiences both in terms of theoretical and conceptual elaborations of the problems they are dealing with and with regards to approaches to empirical explorations.

Over seventy colleagues from Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, and Serbia participated in the conference, making it one of the largest scientific symposiums of sociologists from the post-Yugoslav area since the 1980s². Of the forty-two presentations, seven were chosen to be presented in this volume, mostly, although not exclusively, addressing the common issues and challenges faced by countries of the post-Yugoslav region. They offer a solid basis for further discussions about similarities in the development of these societies

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- 1 The conference was financially supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, while the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory provided technical support and hosted the event on their premises.
 - 2 The International Scientific Board of the Conference brought together sociologists from six different countries that succeeded SFRY: Sergej Flere, University of Maribor (Slovenia), Konstantin Minoski, “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje (North Macedonia), Smiljka Tomanović, University of Belgrade (Serbia), Pavle Milenković, University of Novi Sad (Serbia), Adnan Džafić, University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Valerija Barada, University of Zadar (Croatia), Predrag Cvetičanin, University of Niš (Serbia), Srđan Prodanović, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade (Serbia), Nataša Krivokapić, University of Montenegro (Montenegro), and Jelena Pešić, University of Belgrade (Serbia).

resulting from their common historical experience, but also about differences that arise, to a large extent, from diverse developmental paths they followed after the breakup of the common state.

It's possible that researchers in the social sciences from all over the world would find our region fascinating for the same reasons that people living in the former Yugoslavia were once deemed pitiful in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In this period, like in a sociological laboratory, large-scale events unfolded before our eyes – the disintegration of the common state, the national building of new states, class restructuring, the rise of crony capitalism, mass migrations, the degradation of education and science, the revitalization of religion, re-traditionalization and much more in just thirty years.

Accordingly, sociology in the region should seize the “opportunity” and immerse itself in this reality. We think that sociology in such conditions should have three essential characteristics:

- Sociologists in the region should primarily be PRODUCERS OF KNOWLEDGE about the social reality in Southeast Europe.
- In order to do so, it is necessary to TRANSLATE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES mainly created in the post-industrial societies of Western Europe and the USA, so that they enable studies in significantly different conditions in this part of the world. Without this adjustment, there is a high probability that the research results, although formally correct, will miss essential aspects of the social reality one aims to decipher.
- Wherever possible, it would be desirable to use a COMPARATIVE APPROACH. According to Weber³, the comparative method is the closest social sciences can get to an experiment. Although this proposal does not apply only to Southeast European societies, as a result of seventy years of living in a common state and thirty years of independent development, they have significant similarities as well as evident and growing differences, which provides an extraordinary opportunity for the application of comparative research.

We believe that the articles in this special issue of *Sociologija* show how sociology in the region should look in the coming period. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, it should try to explain and understand the social reality in the region undergoing drastic transformation; it should be research-oriented and empirical, not for the sake of mindless collection of data, but in an attempt to answer important theoretical and social questions.

The volume opens with a paper by Miloš Bešić, titled “Intergenerational Mobility's Impact on Institutional and Economic Performance”, exploring the effects of parents' social status on their offspring's achievements and linking it with the country's institutional and economic performance. Using the European Value Study data from 2017-2019, the author tests the hypothesis that the strength of intergenerational transmission of social status is inversely related to the strength of economic performance and the effectiveness of institutions.

3 Weber, M. (2011 [1949]), *Methodology of Social Sciences*, New York: Routledge

By employing sophisticated statistical methods and measurements, Bešić's paper demonstrates that intergenerational reproduction occurs not just due to the inheritance of cultural or social capital, but mostly because of the parents' high-status capacities to clear a favourable path for their children's professional futures by manipulating institutional fairness. An interesting finding in that respect is that the most pronounced impact of parents' socioeconomic status on their children's achievements is observed in Southeastern and Balkan countries compared to other European regions. However, the author concludes that parental socioeconomic status exerts a decreasing effect in each successive generation, indicating a gradual shift toward greater upward intergenerational mobility, regardless of the specific contextual factors in individual countries.

The second text also deals with the consequences of specific institutional settings in Southeast Europe. The relationship between external political efficacy and populist attitudes in North Macedonia is explored by Jovan Bliznakovski, Misha Popovikj and Vlora Reçica in the paper "External Political Efficacy and Populist Attitudes: Understanding the Demand for Populism in North Macedonia". The authors argue that populist demands in Northern Macedonia are primarily driven by the perceived lack of political efficacy of state institutions and their failure to foster citizens' participation in political processes. They also demonstrate that populist attitudes are, to a large extent, related to the adoption of traditionalist value orientations as well as to belief in conspiracy theories. By assessing the effect of different factors on populist attitudes in the specific context of North Macedonia and Southeast Europe, the paper seeks to contribute to existing studies on the demand size of populism, as well as to examine the applicability of contemporary theories of populism on this particular empirical case.

The third text in this volume, titled "Life-strategies in Croatia during the Economic Crisis and Beyond: From Survival to Advancement", by Augustin Derado (Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences), deals with life strategies of Croatian households amidst the declining phase of the Great Recession. By employing Bourdieu's constructivist-structuralist methodology, the author analyzed semi-structured interviews gathered from diversely socio-economically positioned respondents from all over Croatia. Relying on Bourdieu's theory of practice, supplemented by recent insights into the social structuring of Croatia's neoliberal crony capitalism, Derado singled out five life strategies of households: the strategy of social advancement, the strategy of perseverance of social positions, the compensating strategy, the getting-by strategy, and the survival strategy. The author concludes that these strategies are shaped in the context of severe social inequalities and permanent and harsh consequences of post-socialist transformation, supplemented by the challenges of the recent economic crisis.

The paper by Anđela Pepić (University of Banja Luka – Faculty of Political Sciences), titled "Privatization and Social Conflicts in the Field of Work in (Post-)Socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina", addresses the issues of privatization and social conflicts in the field of work relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war. By using complementary data gathered from in-depth interviews with former employees of three large industrial complexes, different archive

documents and media content, the author analyzes narratives on privatization. She singles out the narratives of privatization as theft powerlessness of workers, politics of fear, and worker disunity. In addition, the author also deals with the strategies used by the ethnonational political and economic elites to pacify labor uprisings, which ultimately resulted in the dismantling of workers' unity and trade union organizations, and in the failure of organized workers action.

The article by Miran Lavrič and Andrej Naterer (University of Maribor), "Religious Polarization Among Youth in Southeast Europe: The Role of Secularization and Prevailing Confession", deals with the process of religious polarization among young people in Southeast European countries, exploring its linkages with the growing secularization and the predominance of specific confessional groups. The results obtained from the data from ten Southeast European countries indicate the existence of similar patterns that have been previously established in the countries of Western Europe, with the prevalence of Catholicism as the most significant predictor of religious polarization. Since only Croatia and Slovenia were predominantly Catholic countries in the sample that the authors analyzed, it is precisely in these societies that pronounced religious polarization emerged as the result of growing secularization, a rival secular ideology with universalistic pretensions. Relying on the theory of cultural (religious) defence, the authors conclude that religiosity can gain new vitality as a reaction to perceived threats stemming from the processes of secularization. A similar tendency, on the other hand, is not recorded in Southeast European societies dominated by the Orthodox confession or Islam.

The paper written by Danijela Gavrilović (University of Niš – Faculty of Philosophy), "A Comparative Analysis of Religiosity in Croatia and Serbia", also deals with the phenomenon of rising religiosity, in this case by comparing Croatian and Serbian post-war societies. By focusing on dominant confessionality, self-declared religiosity, and religious practices, the author's intention is to compare the prevailing tendencies in two societies by analyzing the existing empirical data. She argues that although the two societies share some common features, such as the post-socialist revitalization of religiosity and the rising significance of the religious-ethnic identity complex, religiosity in Serbia and Croatia tend to follow different paths. Similar to Naterer and Lavrič, Gavrilović concludes that Croatian society is characterized by the tendential move towards the "European model" of religiosity, reflected in the rise in specific forms of spirituality, as well as in increasing secularization. These jointly resulted in the "cultural defence" and increment in the number of dedicated believers, on the one hand, but also in the proliferation of those who find religion irrelevant, on the other. In Serbia, she finds quite a different tendency: an increase in religiosity is not followed by rising secularization, as in Croatia. However, an interesting finding is that in Serbia a significant number of those who claim not to have spiritual or religious convictions do consider themselves Orthodox Christians. In other words, while religiosity, especially Orthodox, remains low when it comes to religious practices, its importance grows in terms of identity.

The volume closes with the paper “A Relation Between High-School Students’ Achievement and their Socio-Economic Status in Post-Yugoslav Countries And Western Europe”, written by Mladen Radulović and Dragana Gundogan. They explored the effect of the socio-economic background of young people from Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Croatia on their educational practices and high-school students’ achievements on PISA tests and compared them to the Western European societies of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. The authors conclude that young people coming from the examined post-Yugoslav societies experience lower educational inequalities than their Western counterparts but also have lower overall quality of education. In their interpretation of these findings, they present the argument that lower educational inequalities in the studied ex-Yugoslav countries could be attributed to the protective shield of the socialist heritage. However, another interesting finding is that even the former Yugoslav societies are not homogeneous in this respect, with Serbian society being the only one in which an increase in the effect of socio-economic background on students’ educational achievements is recorded.

In the end, it remains for us to invite the readers to critically evaluate the texts that make up this special issue of *Sociologija* and to enjoy reading them. We would also like to thank the members of the organizing committee for realizing the conference and the editor and editorial board of the *Sociologija* journal, who helped present these texts to the sociological public.

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