



INSTITUT  
DRUŠTVENIH NAUKA  
Institut od nacionalnog značaja  
za Republiku Srbiju

knjiga sažetaka

# Tri decenije tranzicije u Srbiji - Sociološka i antropološka perspektiva

Three Decades of Transition  
in Serbia: Sociological and  
Anthropological Perspectives

Naučni skup

TRI DEZENIJE TRANZICIJE U SRBIJI –  
SOCIOLOŠKA I ANTROPOLOŠKA PERSPEKTIVA

THREE DECADES OF TRANSITION IN SERBIA:  
SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

***Edicija***

Knjige sažetaka

***Izdavač***

Institut društvenih nauka, Beograd 2022.

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ISBN: 978-86-7093-253-1

*Knjiga sažetaka je pripremljena u okviru*

*Programa istraživanja Instituta društvenih nauka za 2022. godinu*

*koji podržava Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja Republike Srbije*

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NAUČNI SKUP

1. jun 2022. GODINE

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# A Mistrustful Society? Interpersonal Trust in Post-Socialist Serbia

In this paper, we examine the mechanisms underlying the lack of interpersonal trust in post-socialist Serbia. We may define interpersonal trust as people's confidence that others will act in the way they expect them to (Morrone et al., 2009). It is an important driver of desirable collective outcomes, as it explains cross-country differences in economic growth, well-performing democratic institutions and democratic stability, personal sense of well-being, optimism, tolerance etc. (Bjørnskov, 2006; Rothstein and Stolle, 2008).

Prior research indicates low levels of interpersonal trust in Serbia (Jovanović et al., 2021). That is not surprising given that large-scale international research has shown that low levels of trust generally characterize post-socialist countries, compared to Western European, or even many low-income countries (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Looking at the latest European Social Survey data from 2018, among 29 European countries, Serbia is ranked the lowest in terms of average interpersonal trust (3.56 out of 10), while other post-socialist countries differ very little.

We examine two potential mechanisms behind/underlying the above findings. The first is reflected in Inglehart's theory of modernization (e.g. Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Contextual factors that constrain everyday life conditions, such as economic development and political climate, shape the dominant value system. When survival is at risk, material needs become central, and consequently, individual priorities are centered on personal and social security or stability. When a society attains sufficiently high levels of existential security that survival comes to be taken for granted, it produces a shift from the values shaped by scarcity (survival values) toward an increasing emphasis on self-expression values. Such a context consequently promotes the growth of trust in remote and dissimilar others. Like other post-socialist countries, Serbia went through major economic and political turmoil, but additionally through the ex-Yugoslav wars, sanctions and hyperinflation during the 1990s and NATO bombing in 1999, all leading to further impoverishment of a large part of the population. Life under such conditions has been insecure and unpredictable, and living standards have had a sharp decline, which resulted in the strengthening of survival values (Lavrič et al., 2019) and thus a reduction in trust among people.

One more mechanism which may have impacted the transition countries' declining levels of trust is the rise of inequalities. If economic

outcomes, determine values and trust depends on having shared values, larger income gaps will reduce a person's general sense of trust by increasing disparities in values (Gould and Hijzen, 2016). Similarly, people are more willing to trust those similar to themselves, which is aggravated in the context of rising inequalities. Not only the inequality of outcomes but also inequality of opportunities may be important: to the extent that economic disparities derive from personal connections rather than individual merit, they may lower a person's sense of fairness and, therefore, trust in others (Gould and Hijzen, 2016). In addition, higher inequalities may lead to conflicts over resources, especially when these are scarce (Jordahl, 2009). Compared to other European countries, Serbia has relatively high inequality rates (Krstić, 2016), which have deepened during the transition, especially since the onset of the latest economic crisis (Krstić and Rakić, 2017).

**Keywords:** trust, post-socialist transformation, values, inequalities, Serbia

## Društvo nepoverenja? Međuljudsko poverenje u postsocijalističkoj Srbiji

Istraživanja ukazuju na veoma niske nivoe međuljudskog poverenja u Srbiji (Jovanović et al., 2021), pa čak i najniži nivo u Evropi – kada se analiziraju najnoviji podaci iz *European Social Survey*. To nije iznenađujuće imajući u vidu nalaze prema kojima je to generalna odlika postsocijalističkih društava u poređenju sa Zapadnim, ali i sa mnogim siromašnijim društvima. Ispitujemo dva moguća mehanizma ovakvih nalaza. Prvi se oslanja na Inghartovu teoriju modernizacije (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005), prema kojoj je nivo poverenja u društvu određen stepenom prevladavanja samoekspresivnih vrednosti u odnosu na vrednosti opstanaka, a koji je zavistan od stepena egzistencijalne sigurnosti populacije. U tom kontekstu, osiromašenje velikog dela stanovništva u početnim i kasnijim fazama postsocijalističke transformacije u Srbiji i posledično jačanje vrednosti opstanaka (Lavrić et al., 2019), mogu objasniti nizak nivo međuljudskog poverenja. Drugi mehanizam se oslanja na nalaze o rastu nejednakosti tokom transformacije, po čemu Srbija ne odstupa (Krstić i Rakić, 2017). Veći stepen nejednakosti može uticati na rast vrednosnih razlika, a time i na pad poverenja. To se odnosi i na nejednakost ishoda i na nejednakost mogućnosti (Gould and Hijzen, 2016). Dodatno, veći stepen nejednakosti pre vodi do konflikata oko raspodele resursa, naročito kada su oni retki (Jordahl, 2009).

**Cljučne reči:** poverenje, postsocijalistička transformacija, vrednosti, nejednakosti, Srbija