

EKOLOŠKA ODRŽIVOST I KLIMATSKE PROMJENE

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SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL PERILS AND HOPES IN THE FRAME OF INVERSE NOSTALGIA²³

Abstract: With ecological and other challenges posed in rural and small communities in mind, this text analyzes the relationship between vertical social mobility and Serbian politicians' framework to achieve sustainability and ecological transition and social innovation. This relation we called Inverse Nostalgia. Inverse nostalgia towards one's previous class position manifests as social and ecological risk generated by the new class: a gradual break with the middle and lower class through a closure of mobility channels and lifestyle change. There is also an aversion to one's erstwhile milieu, manifesting as a threat to non-urban spaces. Transformative social innovation is understood as a change in social relations involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing, and knowing, which challenges, alters, and replaces dominant institutions/structures in a specific social context. These changes intersected and correlated with social mobility, which is often the subject of generalizations. The progress of certain social groups is frequently seen as representative of progress in general. However, these events could be opposed to each other. The premise of this study is that the initial vertical social mobility of the Serbian political class, coupled with a change in place of residence, caused a narrowing social engagement framework.

Keywords: Sustainability transitions, Social mobility, Politicians, Social-institutional approach, Environment, Inverse nostalgia.

²³ This paper was written as part of the 2023 Research Program of the Institute of Social Sciences with the support of the Minister of Science, Technological Development and Innovation

Introduction

Transitions are the product of all transformative actions that lead to "unpredictable patterns of changes" (Loorbach et al., 2017: 605). It could be comprehended as a reaction to permanent modernization issues in a challenging context. Such activities include "social interaction" (cf. Geels et al., 2010: 11) and a set of radical transformations toward a sustainable society (Wittmayer, 2016. et al.). As a part of social transition, Transformative social innovations are understood as "change in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing, which challenges, alters and replaces dominant institutions/structures in a specific social context." (Pel et al., 2015: 18).

Most know the transition from the last century is transitions in the field of fossil fuels. Nevertheless, transition research ranges from understanding transition; power, agency, and politics; methodologies; ethical aspects; transition in practice, everyday life, cultural and social activism, etc. (Köhler et al., 2019). Loorbach et al. distinguish three basic approaches to transition research; "Socio-technical, Socio-ecological, and Socio-institutional" (2017: 610-611). According to this classification, this paper falls under the last type of research. In relevant studies, it has been underscored importance in different modeling and approaches to transition, leading to societal changes. Our attention is oriented to examining transformative and innovative possibilities through the optic of social mobility of the managing social group (Serbian politicians) and its risks and paradoxes over the last several decades.²⁴

It is well known that sustainability (transition) meets huge institutional, social, and ecological issues in developing countries (Loorbach et al., 2017). However, such studies are sporadic in analyzing specific sustainability issues, such as resilience (Mitrović, 2015a).

²⁴ Researches are conducted between 1989-2015. Database of Institute for Sociological Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. The project of the MNPRT: "Izazovi nove društvene integracije: koncepti i akteri" [Challenges of new social integration: concepts and actors] (no. 17095).

Although resilience ranges from ecology, psychology, and sociology to disaster studies, it is an integral part of social innovation (Moore and Westley, 2011).

Transition in most developed countries is framed within, in the Dutch case, "Participation society" or, in the British case, "Big Society" (Wittmayer et al., 2016). In non-West European countries, this context is *Inverse Nostalgia*. It will be said for now that Inverse Nostalgia can be detected in any social layer and with the reverse and destructive potential is the part of the "Apathetic society" (Mitrović, 2015b) and decreased resilience, especially in marginal groups (Mitrović, 2015a).

Urge for openness in sustainability transition studies is crucial for developing discipline spatially and theoretically, methodological and empirical (Loorbach et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, transformative innovation is expressed differently in various contexts and depends on socio-political and cultural factors and incumbents' routines (Loorbach et al., 2020).

Transformative innovation understands certain flexibility and adaptivity of actors, institutions, regimes, and systems. However, a society with rooted social inequalities, nonflexible incumbent policies, and Inverse Nostalgia toward its surroundings is challenging soil for such innovation.²⁵

Such contexts are best described as still no visible progress of EU's Chapter 27 about Serbia's environment and climate change.²⁶

²⁵ Since 2012, most dominant parliament parties no recognize environmental innovation as a social need (Mitrović, 2015b).

²⁶ See for more details Balkans green energy news
<https://balkangreenenergynews.com/still-insufficient-efforts-for-wastewater-treatment/>
<https://balkangreenenergynews.com/10-steps-serbia-should-take-on-the-path-of-green-growth/>
<https://balkangreenenergynews.com/serbian-government-adopts-chapter-27-negotiating-position/> https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/izvestaj_k27_2018_eng_web.pdf.
And report (2018) of the Coalition 27.
https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/izvestaj_k27_2018_eng_web.pdf

The problem. Definitions of terms

Upward mobility is often the subject of generalizations. The progress of certain social groups is commonly seen as representative of the progress of society in general, and numerous studies show the connection between social mobility and changes in the behavior of social groups (Barber, 1965; Davies, 1970; Weakliem, 1992).

However, system innovation implies the innovation of structure, in any case of that (social) structure that opposes innovation. Transitions, because of that, are socio-technical innovations and usually require one or two generations before they are completed. (<https://transitiepraktijk.nl/en/experiment/over-transities>).

In *The Open Society and its Enemies* (2011 [1945]), Karl Popper does not pose the question of who should govern but rather how states can be constituted to allow for bad governments or rulers to be removed without bloodshed.

Paraphrasing Popper, this paper analyzed such issues by focusing on the characteristics of the political class and how it is constituted and reproduced as a ruling class. Concerning the previous, our central question is how such constituted class or "regime actors" (Wittmayer et al., 2016, 3, cf. Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016; Geels, 2014) with its governance's potential influences the environmental innovation and transition in one society. The relevance of this research is in illuminating marginalized perspectives of transition or its possibilities in developing countries. The next relevance is in the connection characteristics of upward social mobility and transition in a specific politically calcified context. Furthermore, the third and most general relevance is re-connecting social mobility and transition studies. In such relation, the previous is inherently part of technological, economic, and social enhancement and transitions such as the Industrial Revolution, Fossil fuel transition, and increased Urbanization.

Upward social mobility carries aspects of insecurity due to change in position and "inadaptability to new circumstances" (Barber, 1965: 323), the most common incidental characteristics of nostalgia.

For the past several decades, sociological studies have shown an increase in the number of experts among those in the highest social positions, providing a stable recruitment pool.²⁷

Previous studies of members of the economic elite have shown that cultural capital and education are still channels of social mobility. However, reaching the middle class is still conducted by parents' investment in their children's "extracurricular activities" (Mitrović, 2015b: 73-6). Outside school, an upwardly mobile student engaged in some activity within a privatized institution (Moore, 2017).

Generally, the path to the highest social positions has gradually grown shorter. It can indicate a specific increase in the standards of living of a given society.

A 2014 study of Serbia's economic elite has noted that the power of this social layer lies not only in imposing a particular will but also in the possibility of remaining "passive" in situations that morally and legally demand action (Mitrović, 2014). Moreover, several studies show that powerful social groups and their passivity potential are critical in inhibiting the transition (Giddens, 1979; Hendriks, 2009; Loorbach et al., 2020; Pel, 2015; Shove, 2008).

As the central analytical tool, we assumed that the regime actors' (Serbian political class) initial vertical social mobility, coupled with a spatial or geographical transition (change in place of residence), causes the narrowing of a framework of their social (niche) engagement. Therefore, with ecological and other challenges and risks posed in rural areas and small communities in mind (Mitrović, 2015a),²⁸ this text analyzes the character of the vertical social mobility of Serbian politicians toward threats and hopes of sustainable, transformative innovations.

²⁷ See, for example, the characteristics of these processes in Lazić, M., 1988. Statusna konzistencija kao element klasne homogenizacije u socijalizmu [Status Consistency as an Element of Class Homogenization in Socialism]. *Sociologija*, XXX (1), 17-41. Today this process is complete, but in a specific way: namely, the managing class, whether from the economic or political sector, is characterized by common characteristics that speak to its class homogeneity.

²⁸ Coalition 27. 2018., Chapter 27 in Serbia: No-Progress Report. Young researchers of Serbia. Belgrade, Serbia.
https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/izvestaj_k27_2018_eng_web.pdf.

Relevant studies (Busch, 2020; Martiskainen, 2017) show the importance of both initiative ways for innovation, from top-down and bottom-up. In our study, the accent is on the politicians and their peril's potential in the transition. Nevertheless, we will see that low activism endangers bottom-up innovations in small and medium-size communities.

Not all upward mobility causes such anxiety. However, mobility through political channels has specific characteristics (inverse Nostalgia) that carry such risks. Above all, there is pronounced spatial mobility from villages to cities, followed by specific points of entry into the political field and speed of advancement far exceeding experience in politics. Moreover, these characteristics are accompanied by a negative subjective relation to one's material position in combination with a perception of natural resources as sources of investment. This set of features allows class (as well as political and economic) interests to be framed in a spatial way, that is, limited to the place of residence (the city) of politicians or public company directors. In short, managers of the top of the social pyramid.

This paper will treat these indicators through three temporal points within the given period. The frequency of reaching leading political positions indicates that after significant social shifts, such as the change in a political system and the founding of new dominant parties, there are also massive shifts via the political channels of social mobility. Such peaks occurred at the time (1989-90) of the dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, that is, the transformation of the League of Communists of Serbia into the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). After that, another peak occurred after the NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia, that is, during the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime (in 2000), and finally, in the subsequent years of the Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) split from the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), and the former's accession to power in 2012. The peaks in question happened over the course of two, four, and three years respectively, although in numbers, political positions populated in those few years equal the continuous advancement of the other half of the political class in the fifty years prior (table 1).

Table 1. Massive accession to managerial positions (%)

Study period			
Highest participation*	1989	2004	2015
1988-1990	42		
2000-2004		53	
2012-2015			40

* Peaks in an interval of fifty years for all three periods

Such a social dynamic in the political sphere can be regarded as "turbocharged politics": neither Government nor rule leads to this, but contests. Presently, "politics has expanded into governing and ordinary life" (Zack, 2018: 10-12).

Political managers even have the luxury of not reacting to critical moments (extreme decisions, such as negating the seriousness of a virus or a curfew at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic). By their narrow specialty (as shown in Busch, 2020, 4, politicians and "policymakers" increasingly use their professional or educational backgrounds to make political decisions within a "narrow focus on their discipline"), they contribute to degradation that intensifies the exploitation of the environment. As the circumstances devolve into crisis, certain cultures are prone to faster and more efficient devastation of their environment, attempting to use up their resources before they disappear.

Irresponsible action of the relevant actors in different domains, from policymakers to engineers (Mitrović et al., 2019), may lead to disasters. Reasons for such behaviors and actions range from a culture of problem denial (Norgaard, 2011) to politicians' fetishized deliberate but incomprehensible acts (Cunha, 2015: 3).

According to Schutz, actors see their actions in a "future past tense," which, in addition to showing an active or passive attitude towards a phenomenon, is both an action and motivation. Schutz describes this as the "project of the action": a thought complex or context in which each phase of the current action finds its significance (Schutz, 1967: xxiv; 60).

Inverse nostalgia, such as revenge, is an example of an actor's action in the future past tense.

Similar to Schutz action's dynamic crucial for an agency in social innovation, Moore and Westley (2011) use Emirbayer and Mische's (1998: 962) "temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)."

In that way, we look to nostalgia as a temporary bridge between the past and today's sentiment of actors. Step forward in such a process is defined as a "balance between the capacity to learn and adapt in the front loop and the ability to self-organize in the back loop is crucial for building resilience" (ibid, cf. Gunderson and Holling, 2002; Gilsing and Duysters, 2008).

In our research, we find some evidence of possible stuck in past social positions and sentiments like a choice of marital partner and best friend (from the middle class). However, such indicators are explained through the moment when these intimate relationships were created and not a nostalgic relation to that class. Namely, these intimate relations are produced in a time and social layer that preceded their accession to the elite.

However, inverse nostalgia towards one's previous class position manifests as social and ecological risk generated by the new class: gradual and progressive break with the middle and lower class through the closure of channels of mobility and change in lifestyle.

Inverse nostalgia can also represent an aversion to the erstwhile (rural) milieu and can manifest in a threat to non-urban spaces (du Plessis, 2020), that is, the environment. In this case, it can sustain "collective stress" (Barton, 2005), allowing a more extended period of governance over communal resources, treating them only as a source of investment.²⁹

²⁹ Aside from communal resources, such as natural resources or public companies, we are witness to a danger to resources going beyond all limits, that is, exploitation of the genetic, reproductive material of the population. Such policy is conducted through so-called demographic programs. For more on this issue, see study about "State altruism in the process of *in vitro* fertilization," in Mitrović, V. (2014), Parents' Religious and Secular

The Politicians from our research see natural resources through the lens of GDP and opening new working places without paying attention to the complex relationship between GDP and the environment (van den Bergh, 2010).

Since nostalgia is transient, the question remains whether and how this reverse process can be overcome? Inverse nostalgia understood through a temporal dimension, means maintaining a given state. Therefore, this phenomenon can be regarded as the inversion of Popper's empiricism of falsifiable political theory (2016). Thus, the inversion of falsifiability in democratic elections is finding a way to prolong a given political will or structure.

That allows for a more effortless transfer of position or politics, i.e., the corporative ethos among members of the economic elite, along with characteristic forms of advancement, via political channels.

Rise of the experts: the social profile of today's regime actors

Pareto's study, *The Rise and Fall of Elites*, describes the processes of rising, transformation, forms, and decline of elites through applied sociological theory (1991). Avoiding Pareto's zoomorphic understanding of elites, we would like to underscore its ethos through the term aristocracy (*aristocrazia*), starting with the word's etymology of the strongest, most energetic, and most capable for both good and bad.

The character and ethos of an elite can be indirectly analyzed by looking at its structure. Mills proposed a conformist principle, according to which members of the middle- and expert-class in American society accepted imposed conditions for advancement to elite positions. By synthesizing location in social structure and the ethos of the elite, Mills terms this type of advancement and acts as "high immorality" (Mills, 1956: 343).

With this in mind, let us look at the relevant moments in structuring the Serbian political elite.

perspectives on IVF Planning in Serbia. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 15 (43), 48-81.

Demographic level of the analyzing transition possibilities by regime actors

From a gender perspective, a third of politicians in Serbia are women,³⁰ likely partially due to legally mandated quotas of a minimal number of women in political bodies and institutions.³¹ A statistical significance test shows that gender and material position are not in a significant statistical correlation – the proportional distribution of material positions applies to both genders.

The participation of relatively young experts characterizes politicians without previous experience in positions of political management, i.e., there is a statistically significant correlation between age and one's first political position. For example, between 1995 and 2014, the level of participation of the age group from 44 to 65 was 50%, while 45% were those in the younger age group, from 23 to 44.³²

Three-quarters of politicians are married,³³ primarily to partners of similar education profiles, that is, from the middle class (65% and 75%).

Around a quarter of the sample have children of kindergarten age.³⁴ A third have children of school age (up to 18). Two-thirds of politicians do not have kids older than 21. The older children are divided according to class in the following way: 2.7% are in the highest ruling echelons, 52% are experts, and 24% are students. It tells us that most children from the political class will likely, through intergenerational mobility, start their careers in expert positions.

³⁰ Compared to 18.4% holding management positions in the economic sphere (Mitrović, 2015, 62).

³¹ The minimal quota of women's participation in political parties is 30%. For more, see <http://www.liderke.org/zene-u-politici-u-srbiji/>. (Accessed March 2, 2021).

³² Among managers in the economic sector, 70% are between the ages of 29 and 50, while the remaining third is between the ages of 51 and 70 (ibid.).

³³ The marital status of managers in the economic sector, the percentage is of those in a relationship is high (91%) (Mitrović, 2015, 69).

³⁴ The proportion of kindergarten-age children in these two groups is 22% of politicians compared to 30% of economic managers (Mitrović, 2015, 69).

Social and cultural background

However, it was not always so: namely, today's politicians, and in particular their parents, had a somewhat different path to the highest positions.

Less than half the parents of today's political elite are university educated (40% of fathers and 23% of mothers). An equal number of parents have a high school education, and a fascinating fact is that a tenth of fathers have only completed elementary school (and 20% of mothers).

Worthy of note is that politicians' parents, as couples, generally come from the same social layer. This regularity is particularly prominent among those in the highest position, although there are a few outlying cases of marital mobility from lowest to highest levels. This regularity can be explained by the fact that managers emerge from those very social layers, so it makes sense that their choice was made within that rung of social structure.

A little over two-thirds of politicians come from families from the highest social strata, which tells us that there is a self-reproduction of all types of ruling and governing layers and a global enclosing of the socio-economic structure. This closed-off social structure also means that our study participants were offered far greater opportunities in education and life in general. It can be seen clearly from the fact that compared to their fathers, twice as many politicians today hold university and graduate degrees.

Looking at the same education level scheme across generations, we can see that 7.8% of politicians today have a high school education, and 4.7% have junior degrees or completed community college. The most significant proportion, 87.5%, however, have university degrees. It is essential to say that nearly a quarter, 24%, holds a master's or doctorate, which is to say, they have specialized expertise. Half of those holding university education (46.4%) have studied social sciences or one of the fine arts or music academies (2.1%), while 12% studied natural sciences, medicine, pharmacy, or veterinary science (3.1% for the last). Given that they were in the political class, unsurprisingly, the most common field of study was law (19%), followed by economics (13%).

Education profile

The three periods, however, can be clearly distinguished regarding politicians' education. While the last two are generally similar, the lower education levels are up to three times more represented in the first period (before 2004). The highest education levels are similar for the periods after 2004 and 2015, with 20% less in the nineties.

The education level breakdown from 1989 shows a preponderance of social science junior degrees, 55.5%, followed by high school education at 22.5%, with junior degrees in engineering and natural sciences held at 11%, and vocational training schools at 7.3%. Law schools (22.8%), economics (14.6%), and other humanities (14.6%) dominate the education profile from 2004.

Similar to the heads and owners of large companies (Mitrović, 2014), an interesting question is whether today's regime actors will use their material and social power positions to ensure higher education and extracurricular activities for their offspring. In other words, how they will be involved in curating their lifestyle. Numerous studies indicate that education and income are not directly related to good health and a healthy environment; rather, the link is more complex: higher levels of education and cultural capital, in combination with better career positions (income), is reflected in a particular lifestyle, which in turn carries better care for one's health (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003).

The Covid-19 pandemic has complicated this regularity in two ways: first, certain politicians denied the seriousness of the virus and protection measures (such as wearing masks).³⁵ Furthermore, the cited pattern of care for health and adherence to personal and public hygiene is connected to that.

It is interesting to wonder whether, shortly, these managers will use their power and expert specialization to advance their living environment through transformative innovation, as it is the precondition of social life and considering their operating within a community, personal, and family advancement.

³⁵ For more, see <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/02/us/politics/donald-trump-masks.html>.

Paradoxes of geographic and class position

Bottom-up activism in small and medium-sized communities

The activities of the elite that result in ecological disasters and social crises should not take place without response, i.e., according to some authors, the *status quo* is not acceptable (Klein, 2015). However, half of Serbia's population is indifferent and uninterested in ecological or other kinds of activism (Mitrović, 2015b). These feelings are important because they are connected to values that shape social movements, their aims, and the motivation necessary for participants to join and display solidarity with other actors (Goodwin et al., 2001). Feelings are also important because the debate about climate change is no longer one of carbon dioxide and climate models but about values, culture, and ideology (Hoffman, 2012).

One reason for the weakening of activism can be the mechanism of legal consequences against whistle-blowers raising concerns about ecological and other risks to the community.³⁶

Self-actualization or a chance at a good life in one's place of birth is available to only a quarter or a fifth of the population. Regionally, self-actualization averages a quarter, while every other citizen has not achieved life goals in their hometown. It means that the specifics or the brand of these towns remain unused potential since it is not followed by the development, strengthening job security, health, and social security, or resolving communal problems.

³⁶ Kovačević, N., (2018), Užička vlast najavila krivičnu prijavu protiv biloškinje u JKP Vodovod. *Danas*. <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/uzicka-vlast-najavila-krivicnu-prijavu-protiv-biloskinje-u-jkp-vodovod/>. (Accessed March 2, 2021).

Similar cases happen in EU member countries. For example, in the northern Dutch town of Groningen, a multinational gas company collaborated with the government in conducting natural gas under people's residences, which for years caused frequent earthquakes and small "vibrations." Officially, these were explained as coming from a nearby airplane route. For more, see: Dutchnews.NL., 2018., Police make home visits to people who liked a Groningen gas protest on Facebook January, 10. 2018. <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2018/01/police-make-home-visits-to-people-who-liked-a-groningen-gas-protest-on-facebook/>. <https://www.reuters.com/article/netherlands-gas-groningen/update-1-dutch-minister-says-reduce-output-at-groningen-gas-field-by-as-much-as-possible-idUSL8N1P35J8>; <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2018/01/police-make-home-visits-to-people-who-liked-a-groningen-gas-protest-on-facebook/>. Accessed March 2, 2021.

In contrast, the capital of Serbia and the two regional urban centers are in politicians' focus and therefore get the lion's share of development policies (such an example is in Busch's study (2020) about various policies between urban and suburban Melbourne). In addition, there is the paradox of a large portion of residents of mid-sized towns believing it is impossible to achieve their life goals in their current place of residence but are inactive; their "struggle" is reduced to a certain passivity in civic movements, petitions, and activities. The most worrying fact is that educational "activism" is entirely neglected. The noted "inactivity" for the regions of Šumadija and Western Serbia is as high as 76%, while for east and southern Serbia, it is 71% and 54% in Vojvodina. Local tradition and culture represent a potential place for raising the level of problem recognition and intensifying activism. It is confirmed by the fact that 84% of the participants from the Vojvodina region recognize this potential in their towns and two-thirds of those in southern and eastern Serbia.³⁷

Noorgard emphasizes data regarding the global ambivalence towards ecology (2011: 5). She presents data from sociological studies in rural areas of highly developed and ecologically conscious countries. On the one hand, there is an abstract awareness of ecological problems. On the other is its denial on the quotidian level. For example, most youths in rural Norway are closer to ignoring than not recognizing the problem of climate change (ibid.). Some authors, therefore, suggest evidence-based Government without identities. Zack claims: "Government is supposed to serve common interests, and the common interests of one decade or even one year may change. Adaptation to climate change, for instance, is an intense interest of many environmentalists but not yet an urgent common interest, although sooner or later it will be an intensely urgent common interest" (2021, 7).

³⁷ Database for the study of territorial capital of mid-sized cities in Serbia. Researches are conducted between 2010-2019. Institute for Sociological Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Project MNPRT: "Izazovi nove društvene integracije: koncepti i akteri" [Challenges of new social integration: concepts and actors] (no. 17095)

Spatial mobility of the politicians and top-down policies

Increased spatial mobility from the village to the city has been a prominent feature since the beginning of the industrial revolution. It became particularly intense in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, with the mass movement of populations from villages into cities (Mitrović, 1969). Still, such mobility was hybrid, meaning that many people maintained characteristics of both positions (peasant and worker) to a greater or lesser extent.

In examining political managers from 1989, we can see that together with initial intra-generational mobility, there is a change in residence. Over half the politicians of that time were born in rural areas (53%),³⁸ yet their active place of dwelling in 1989 was in the city (97%). Nearly all who were born in villages moved to cities over the course of their careers (table 2).

Table 2. The connection between place of residence and type of occupation of participants in 2015 (in percentages)

Place of residence	Type of occupation of participant			
	Politician of higher rank	Politician of middle rank	Politician of lower rank	Total
Belgrade	40	38.7	70.7	45.8
Regional centers	55.6	55.7	26.8	49.5
Villages and rural communities	4.4	5.7	2.4	4.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Nevertheless, today's political class makes for a nearly identical picture. The similarity with the mass movement of lower social strata to cities is perhaps the reason for still mixed class consciousness and personal dissatisfaction with material standards of living. However, the essential difference is that they have significantly greater socio-economic

³⁸ Only 5% of them move to the city for higher pay.

independence, objectively have high living standards, and embrace the consumer lifestyle. They also drive the social criteria to advancement through education, extracurricular activities, and political belonging (which in turn close off channels of social advancement) (Mitrović, 2014). Another significant difference is in a break with the previous home, and thus a reorientation of their interests towards an urban setting. Simultaneously with this change, they acquire a perspective of rural areas as consumable (not renewable) resources.³⁹ The policy of neglecting smaller places and rural areas is the inversion of the EU's regional investment and solidarity policy.⁴⁰

The mass arrival of politicians, mostly into major cities (95%), is followed by their accession to ruling positions in characteristic "clear-outs," which is to say, in moments of significant social changes. As the relevant shift has taken place continuously since the end of the Second World War, the impression is of a periodical renewal of post-revolutionary, socio-economic (meaning, class) jumps, complete with all the risks and paradoxes that accompany these moves.

Starting points of inverse nostalgia

Rapid vertical mobility, that is, the rise of a significant number of politicians through political channels at so-called point zero moments drives us to examine other indicators, such as their first place of employment, social position prior to management, etc. It is also essential to check the number of politicians who assumed the highest positions in the decisive years of the dissolution of SFRY (1990) and the fall of Milošević's regime (2000).

In the first and last part of the periods in question, only a small number of today's politicians (9%) began their intra-generational mobility

³⁹ The report of the group "Coalition 27" claims that 170,000 cubic meters of wood is cut down illegally, which is 100 ha of forest. For more, see https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/izvestaj_k27_2018_eng_web.pdf. (Accessed February 20, 2021).

⁴⁰ EU-Regional Policy. https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/regional-policy_en (Accessed February 20, 2021).

from the highest position (table 3). Most, 80%, began their intra-generational mobility from the middle class in the period after 2004 and ten years later. From the beginning of the nineties, over two-thirds of politicians began their careers in the middle class. However, for the same period, three times as many began their career from the lowest level to the middle and five times as many from the lowest social stratum. It tells us that nearly a third of managers from the early nineties covered a much longer path to managing positions. The starting position of this class is relevant for their class consciousness, which was still primarily tied to the beginning stratum, including the significance of communal resources.

Table 3. Class position at the first place of employment

Period of study / Class position	1989	2004	2015
Elite: politicians, large-scale entrepreneurs, high echelon directors	8.7	11.7	8.9
Middle class: lower echelon directors, middle and smaller-scale entrepreneurs, experts	62.9	79.6	78.6
Transition stratum: technicians, clerks, self-employed, tradespersons	18.4	6.3	9.4
Manual workers	10	2.4	3.1

Two-thirds of participants (70%) in 1989 were on the verge of assuming managing positions (table 4), that is, in the middle class. More than half of this middle class (55%) had jobs as experts in social and administrative positions, meaning they already had a foot in the door of socio-political work. We find examples of relatively open political channels in two periods (1989 – 14% and 2004 – 10%), keeping in mind the transition stratum and manual workers, who could not reach the top positions in the last period. The relation between tables 3 and 4 shows the gradual closing of the highest positions for the transition and manual worker strata in the last period studied (2015).

Table 4. Class character prior to entering the elite

Period of study / Class position	1989	2004	2015
Elite: politicians, large-scale entrepreneurs, high echelon directors	14	18	14.1
Middle class: lower echelon directors, middle and smaller-scale entrepreneurs, experts	72	72	82.3
Transition stratum: technicians, clerks, self-employed, tradespersons	9	9	3.6
Manual workers	5	1	-

Corporative potential as a peril of transition

Looking at the two relevant points of expansion (1990 and 2000 in table 5) gives us a clearer picture of the composition of today's politicians (table 4). Namely, we can note that nearly half of the current political class comprises managers from the period of domination of SPS and the first privatization and politicians who assumed managerial positions after the democratic changes in 2000 (15% from 1990 and 31% from 2000). After 2000, a fifth of the political class (22%) remained from the time of SPS. Such intra-generational mobility suggests that participants who started their careers in managing positions (10%) acquired experience during the SPS rule and partially after 2000. This fact could indicate the maintenance of the same friendships (both personal and professional) with persons closest to each other in characteristics (ethos) – large-scale entrepreneurs from initial privatizations.

Table 5. Class position in 1990 and 2000*

Period of study / Class position	2004	2015	2015*
Elite: politicians, large-scale entrepreneurs, high echelon directors	21.8	14.6	30.8*
Middle class: lower echelon directors, middle and smaller-scale entrepreneurs, experts	73.3	72.9	64.4*
Transition stratum: technicians, clerks, self-employed, tradespersons	3.7	4.2	2.7*
Manual workers	1.2	2.1	-

2015* refers to positions of today's politicians in 2000

Although a large proportion of politicians (86%) objectively belong to the higher class, their subjective experience is tied to the middle class (97%), towards which they express an inverse nostalgia (having left a smaller town, for example, or a particular lifestyle). Interestingly, the remaining 3% do not identify with the higher but as belonging to the lower class. This fact, however, does not testify to nostalgia towards the middle class but rather dissatisfaction with income achieved for their high positions, which can spur them to turn their political capital into economic capital.

Second, sources of income⁴¹ also tell us that working in politics does not represent an existential, or even a life choice, which is to say, class homogenization is still incomplete. Despite this, many specialists in politics remain bound to the incomes and professions of their previous careers. Some second source of income is from renting property, agriculture, and the like, but they still point to the same conclusion. The prevalence of additional income confirms the subjective idea of participants of their dissatisfaction with the material standards that follows their objective social position. This trend's risk is reflected in the neglect of ecology, health, and other vital interests of the community, considering their subjectively-seen *middling status*.

Conclusion

Our attempt in this text was to take a first step in explaining the origin of risk and paradox of the social mobility of politicians and, more broadly, the higher strata of Serbian society toward ecological sustainability and transition. Thus, the study looked at the role of the political class and inverse nostalgia encountered by this social layer in navigating important challenges.

Inverse nostalgia represents at once both the risk and controversy of advancement for politicians. As a risk, it appeared in the form of a complete closing-off of the social structure, a socio-historical regression; as a paradox, we recognize it in the neglect of the environment, as well as

⁴¹ In 2015 60% of politicians has a second source of income. In 2004, the proportion was 40%, while in 1989, it was 86%.

the context from which, in the case of Serbia, most of these politicians emerge: the village, which is still mythologically represented as an ecological pearl of Serbia.

In Weberian language, inverse nostalgia is a latent component of politicians' "predestined" existential and professional acting.

Considering the paradoxes of advancement reflected in everyday accomplishments (such as Serbia's leading role in vaccinations and the high number of new cases of Covid-19 infection⁴²), it is only expected that the politicians will proceed in the same fashion. Thus, they will be formally highly interested in environmental and social innovation and the "economic valuation of biodiversity" (Nunes and van den Bergh, 2001). Nevertheless, they will devastate biodiversity and radically change the region's topography and landscape.

This devastation could be provided at least in two ways by politicians' active and passive roles. First, they may be active by misusing their professional background and misinterpreting the scientific concept (van den Bergh and Verbruggen, 1999).

One explanation for political inactivity in this field can be sought in the ambivalences that characterize the citizens and the political class (conflicted interests, inexperience, haste, the social determinants of the moment of advancement, etc.).

Along with a better standard of living, young experts cum politicians see their change in residence as freedom from ecological, communal, and similar problems. Moving to a specific environment, coupled with underdeveloped ecological consciousness, can be understood as a flight from a social environment burdened with problems and hope not to have to deal with them anymore, indeed wholly forget about them.

The prevalence of second incomes indicates higher material demands and a lack of commitment to primary political activity. It is thus easier to understand (if not justify) the avoidance of dealing with complex problems, such as climate change, that we can expect to face soon.

⁴² Compared data from Delauny, (2021, February 10), and Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and Institute for Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanović-Batut," (2021, March 4).

Given the deep-seated material inequalities (Popović, 1987), the situation produces myriad potential problems. In combination with the apathy that characterizes certain marginalized social groups, neglect of the problem by politicians could lead to a culture of organized denial, apathy, and the absence of deontology. In short, a state of low-speed catastrophe is not so different from natural disasters (Mitrović and Zack, 2018).

The spatial concentration of politicians, transfer of authority and care from the parliamentary Government to local institutions, and the low level of activism in smaller communities all lead to the conclusion that "the Government's dereliction of duty to protect the environment is merely a historical outcome of a difficult to untangle the knot of business and democratic representation" (Zack, 2018, 127).

Still, hope comes from the fact that humanity is not separate from nature, nor is nature some infinite resource; instead, humanity's welfare and survival are precisely tied to nature. More people should understand the holistic vision (Zack, 2018, 128).

In this sense, small communities, policymakers, and politicians should consider this holistic perspective in their decisions, no matter their niche. The greening policies in the cities will be short-lived if they prolong the devastation of the non-urban spaces and niche of small and medium size-communities.

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