

### EDITORIAL

This special issue brings contributions which, at first glance, appear to have little in common. A closer inspection, however, reveals a common thread. Indeed, all the contributions rely on data from the various social surveys. Moreover, we can say that each in some way addresses the problems of (temporal) social change, development processes, and the differences and similarities between societies, analysis of which is based on data drawn from social surveys. The idea that macro social phenomena can be studied on the basis of people's attitudes is another common theme running throughout the contributions. This idea would seem appropriate given the recent increase in concern (in the context of the economic crisis) for alternative measures of social development and quality of life, as opposed to the standard economic indicators (e.g. growth in GDP). Such discussions are not entirely new to the social sciences. Just a brief look at the sociological literature shows that, according to many important sociological concepts that have emerged in the development of modern sociology, social development and quality of life are actually understood as »soft« phenomena, along with life satisfaction, happiness, values, trust, social capital, and social cohesion. The idea of measuring prosperity and welfare using subjective indicators (drawn from social surveys) can also be found among political scientists and economists. The use of social survey data to measure and study social development is becoming an important part of policymaking. Thus, social surveys are an important basis for the preparation of the *UN Human Development Reports*. The *European Social Survey* is partially funded by the European Commission. *Eurobarometer* measurement on the level of public trust in the European institutions is included in Eurostat, the official statistical database of the European Commission.

The analyses and discussions of the articles featured in this issue are based on data from the social surveys that have been conducted within the framework of the ongoing research programme at the Centre for Public Opinion Research at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. The data is taken from both the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey (SPO) as well as the various international social survey research projects in which the SPO cooperates as a partner. These international surveys are: the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Values Study (EVS) and the World Value Survey (WVS) (for more about SPO's involvement in these projects see Toš and Müller ed., 2010). In the opening article, *Ivan Bernik* and *Valentina Hlebec* discuss the notion that our level of happiness is significantly determined by the current state of society and by social change. They take as their starting point an understanding of happiness as a measure of the legitimacy of the social order. Using the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey

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data they focus on the situation in Slovenia in the period from 2000 to 2009. *Brina Malnar* and *Milan Šinko* address environmental attitudes in Slovenia. Using the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey data, they track the changes in environmental concern during the period from 1973 to 2011. They discuss the possible macro factors that explain the shifts or differences in environmental concern at the macro societal level. The subsequent three contributions address the problems relating to the process of transition from socialism. The article by *Marjan Smrke* and *Samo Uhan* crosses over into the area of religious studies. The authors examine hypotheses based on stereotypical representations of the values of atheists in Slovenia. The Slovenian situation is then compared to the area of the former Yugoslavia, as well as to the wider world. The hypotheses are tested using data from three international social surveys: ISSP, EVS and WVS. Drawing on data from the latest Slovenian Public Opinion Survey (SPO 2011), *Janez Štebe* tests a hypothesis concerning the micro-level factors underlying the perceived legitimacy of the democratic political system, which entails an investigation of the respondents' understanding of democracy. *Mitja Hafner-Fink's* contribution combines the attitudes with the activities of the survey respondents. The article addresses the problem of political participation in Europe following the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. Using data from the European Social Survey, the author analyses the relations between political participation, selected human values, democratisation, and human development. The thematic section is rounded up with an article in which *Karl H. Müller* and *Niko Toš* discuss alternative models for explaining social inequalities. The theoretical discussion is supplemented by an analysis of the data from the Austrian-Slovenian survey on the effects of unemployment on health.

Contributions in this issue serve to illustrate the many possibilities for social science analysis offered by the rich empirical data of the SPO research programme. We thus have the possibility of (cross-time) analysis of national data covering the period from 1968 onwards. The inclusions of the SPO in the various international social survey programmes from 1990 onwards opens the doors to the possibility of observing Slovenian society in the context of international comparative analyses. Besides the topics presented by the authors in this issue, additional topics that can be analysed within the framework of these rich databases include: media consumption, leisure and sport, social and ethnic distance, attitudes towards inequalities, national identity etc.

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Guest Editor

REFERENCE:

Toš, Niko & Karl H. Müller (eds.) (2010): *Primerjalno družboslovje: Metodološki in vsebinski vidiki*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, IDV-CJMMK.