

Sergej Flere (ed.), *20 Years Later: Problems and Prospects of Countries of Former Yugoslavia*, Maribor: Faculty of Arts, Center for the Study of Post-Yugoslav Societies, 2013, 243 pages, ISBN: 978-961-6656-99-3

Review by Marius I. TĂȚAR

There is a vast literature on the sources and processes that led to the emergence of new states in the Western Balkans after the fall of communism. However, most of the research on this region has traditionally focused on understanding the conflicts that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia and their political, ethnical, religious and economic sources and effects. Despite much academic interest into the consequences of Yugoslav breakup, little systematic research compares how the new social systems of Yugoslav successor states evolved during the last two decades and to what extent they resemble to (or differ from) the patterns followed by the neighboring Central and East European post-communist societies.

Elaborating on societal modernization approaches, the book "*20 Years Later: Problems and Prospects of Countries of Former Yugoslavia*" edited by Sergej Flere aims to fill this knowledge gap by comparatively analyzing the dynamics of post-Yugoslav societies. In this timely collection of research reports, a team of sociologists and social psychologists from the University of Maribor (Slovenia) explore the multidimensionality of changes that occurred during the last two decades (1991-2011) within the ex-Yugoslav space. Methodologically the approach in all chapters of this book is quantitative and diachronic, relying on sound comparative analysis of available longitudinal data on topics such as socio-economic development, value orientations, political culture, family structure and religiosity. The outcome of this scholarly endeavor is a comprehensive examination of modernization processes unfolding on various dimensions of social life. The

authors analyze these developments in a changing context marked by both difficulties and uncertainties, commonly accompanying post-communist transitions, but also by struggles for state and nation building, particularly salient in this region.

The book comprises eight chapters that explore different aspects of social transformations that occurred in the post-socialist period. The first chapter by Rudi Klanjšek and Sergej Flere examines whether the dissolution of Yugoslavia was the expression of grassroots support for breaking up the federal state, or it was rather instigated by a small group of ‘political entrepreneurs’ eager to consolidate their power positions by propagating ethnic fears and hatreds. Using two pan-Yugoslav surveys from the period preceding the dissolution, the authors contend that overall, popular support for the establishment of mono-national states was relatively weak, invariant of respondents’ socioeconomic status. However, some nationalities (i.e. Kosovo Albanians and Slovenians) were significantly more prone to favor national independence, compared to other nationalities. While acknowledging the international context as well as the internal economic and political crises that preceded the Yugoslav breakup, the authors suggest that ‘a small group of political entrepreneurs’ played a decisive role in leading the dissolution process. However, if these small elite groups were not relying on wider popular support for national emancipation, it is still problematic to understand their success in manipulating the public and subsequently achieving electoral gains, which brought them to power in some Yugoslav successor states.

In the second chapter, Sergej Flere provides a critical overview of the sociological research carried out in the post-Yugoslav countries between 1991 and 2011. The study points out major gaps in terms of research quality, scope and methods used by sociologists from these states in analyzing social changes after 1991. This chapter is also useful as a comprehensive literature review of post-Yugoslav transition research that insistently points out the lack of studies that systematically compare the dynamics of these countries on various dimensions of social life.

The third chapter, authored by Rudi Klanjšek, highlights the economic developments after the collapse of the Yugoslav federation. The author asserts that aside the burdens caused by wars, the greatest economic liability of the Yugoslav dissolution was the market disintegration cost, resulting from the weakening of trade connections between former Yugoslav republics. While some states successfully compensated the dissolution of the Yugoslav market by rapid reorientation to the western markets, others have plunged into economic isolation



coupled with international economic sanctions. The author remarks that 20 years later, the ex-Yugoslav area as a whole is still below the level of relative economic strength of the former Yugoslavia, although some countries such as Slovenia and Croatia have strengthened their leading economic position in the region in this period. The author highlights the increasing economic disparities between the more and the less developed states, doubled by greater economic and social insecurity and inequality. Despite these disparities, Klanjšek eventually points out several positive developments regarding the human capital in the region. Overall, people do live longer, they acquire more education, their incomes are somewhat rising, and it seems they are feeling more satisfied with their lives, although a significant part of the population expresses a 'sentiment of yearning for the old system and Yugoslavia' (p. 124).

In the fourth chapter, Sergej Flere examines the changing patterns of family structure in the post-Yugoslav entities. The study shows that after an initial re-traditionalizing of families in some countries during the early post-communist transition, in all post-Yugoslav entities one can note the development towards an increasingly modern family structure characterized by the reduction of family size, the parity of spouses and the diminution of the number of children. These changing trends are even more evident in the former economically least developed parts of ex-Yugoslavia.

In chapter five, Andrej Kirbiš and Marina Tavčar Krajnc explore the dynamics of gender role attitudes in post-Yugoslav countries. Supporting theoretical expectations derived from modernization approaches, the authors find that aggregate levels of gender role traditionalism are lower in socioeconomically more developed countries (i.e. Slovenia and Croatia). Moreover, the authors note an overall decline of gender role traditionalism (measured here as the opinion that men have more right to a job than women) in the region, between 1995 and 2008. In addition, the results of individual level analyses reported in this chapter tend to confirm the arguments drawn from modernizations theories by pointing out that in general levels of gender role traditionalism are lower among women, better educated persons, and those displaying lower levels of religiosity. Only in Croatia and Slovenia did younger generations report less gender role traditionalism. The authors suggest that this can contribute in the next years to increased divergence on gender role attitudes among publics of various post-Yugoslav countries.

In chapter six, Andrej Kirbiš focuses on determinants of political participation by placing post-Yugoslav citizens' political engagement in a larger context provided by modernization theories and comparative analyses with citizens

from Western Europe and post-communist East-Central Europe. The author reports a general decline of voter turnout in the last two decades, and an increase of protest participation. This trend somehow confirms the thesis of political engagement styles metamorphosis from conventional to protest oriented forms of political action, which seems to have also occurred in more advanced democracies. Explanatory models using social cleavages (based on age, gender, and socioeconomic status) might perform better in explaining political participation variance in Western Europe and therefore the author suggests that participation inequalities are on average 'greater in established democracies than in post-communist countries'. Moreover, the stratification of participation inequalities according to socio-demographic factors seems to be more evident in levels of citizen protest engagement than in individuals' levels of electoral participation. The implications of these persistent participation inequalities for the quality and stability of democracies in three European regions are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Chapters seven and eight explore the shifts in value orientations of post-Yugoslav citizens. The focus of Bojan Musil in chapter seven is on the evolution of three value dimensions: traditional vs. secular-rational, survival vs. self-expression, and the qualities which children should be encouraged to learn at home. The general picture depicted by Musil is one of re-traditionalization in most post-Yugoslav societies, although some exceptions do exist. In chapter eight, Miran Lavrič addresses the question of religious change. The main aim of the author is to test the privatization of religion hypothesis. He is interested in the degree to which religion has become individualized, referring to an intimate, private character of religion manifested through the perceived importance of God and feelings of comfort and strength derived from religion. He analyzes to what extent this process occurred at the expense of the institutionalized dimension of religion (that is confessional identification with a religious organization and attendance of religious services offered by such confessional organizations). Lavrič reports a substantial process of religious privatization in all post-Yugoslav societies, especially among the younger and more educated segments of the population. He also finds a decreasing impact of religiosity on emancipative values and interprets these changes as having a beneficial role for the stability and democratization of the region.

Overall, the studies in this book aim to attain in-depth insights into societal structures and fundamental processes that have marked the post-Yugoslav societies. However, further reflections on the role of agency in bringing about



social changes could contribute to a more thorough understanding of the social transformations analyzed in this book. What was the role of various political and social actors in designing the institutional and policy frameworks that might have shaped the trajectories followed by these countries? Such questions emphasize the role of agents and institutions and could open further research direction in this region.

Despite inherent limitations of the available data used in the secondary analyses reported in different chapters, the book provides a valuable contribution to the scholarly literature on the ex-Yugoslav space and post-socialist societies, more generally. By exploring and comparing issues of economic development, family structure, religiosity and basic value orientations, as well as citizens' political participation, the studies presented in this book broaden our understanding on various dimensions and paces of modernization processes occurring in the challenging contexts of disintegrating states and post-communist transitions to democracy.