in teorija praksa

3 | 2026

Družboslovna revija

Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Science

Milan BRGLEZ

Luka JESENŠEK

Ana MARKOVIĆ

Svenja FISCHBACH

Dora MATEJAK, Andreja VEZOVNIK

Blaž VREČKO ILC

Cirila TOPLAK

Tomaž PUŠNIK, Gregor ČEHOVIN

Marko HOČEVAR

Marinko BANJAC

FDV

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI

Fakulteta za družbene vede

TEORIJA IN PRAKSA
Družboslovna revija

Let. LXIII, št. 3, str. 431–698
Ljubljana, julij–september 2026
UDK 4, ISSN (tiskana izdaja): 0040-3598
ISSN (spletna izdaja): 2820-591X

Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Science

Vol. LXIII, No. 3, pp. 431–698
Ljubljana, July–September 2026
UDK 4, Print ISSN: 0040-3598
Online ISSN: 2820-591X

Ustanovitelj in izdajatelj / *Founder and Publisher*
Fakulteta za družbene vede, Univerza v Ljubljani
Faculty of Social Sciences, *University of Ljubljana*

Glavni urednik / *Editor-In-Chief*
PIKALO, Jernej Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*

Sekretarka revije / *Issue Manager*
ČERNČIČ TOMAŽEVIČ, Tina

Mednarodni uredniški odbor / *International Editorial Board*
BOJINOVIĆ FENKO, Ana, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
BURGER, Anže, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
CABADA, Ladislav, *Metropolitan University Prague*
CALABRESE, Andrew, *University of Colorado Boulder*
ÇELIK, Burçe, *Loughborough University London*
Cipek, Tihomir, *University of Zagreb*
CLARKE, Alissa, *De Montfort University*
COENDERS GALLART, Germà, *University of Girona*
COHEN, Sara, *University of Liverpool*
CZADA, Roland, *University of Osnabrück*
DAHLGREN, Peter, *Lund University*
DE BEULE, Filip, *KU Leuven*
DOBROTIĆ, Ivana, *University of Zagreb, University of Oxford*
DŽANANOVIĆ MIRAŠČIJA, Nedžma, *University of Sarajevo*
FILIPOVIČ HRAST, Maša, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
GEMINI, Laura, *University of Urbino Carlo Bo*
JANSSEN, Susanne, Erasmus University Rotterdam
KOGOVŠEK, Tina, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
KOS-STANIŠIĆ, Lidija, *Zagreb University*
KOTNIK, Lia Lola V., Univerza na Primorskem / *University of Primorska*
BANJAC, Marinko, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
LUTHAR, Breda, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
MANIGART, Philippe, *Royal Military Academy*
MITREVSKA, Marina, *Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje*
PAJTINKA, Erik, *University Matej Bel, Banska Bystrica*
ROMANENKO, Sergei, *Russian Academy of Sciences*

KOMEL, Mirt, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
ŠADL, Zdenka, Univerza v Ljubljani / *University of Ljubljana*
WANIS-ST. JOHN, Anthony, *American University Washington DC*
WILLKE, Helmut, *Zeppelin University*
WINTER, Rainer, *The University of Klagenfurt*
ZIMMERMANN, Katharina, University of Hamburg

Oblikovalec / *Graphic Design*
KOCJAN, Marjan

Prelom / *Page Layout*
BETON, Leon

Tisk / *Print*
Tiskarna CICERO, Begunje, d. o. o.

Naklada 250 izvodov
Copies printed: 250

REVIJA TEORIJA IN PRAKSA V BIBLIOGRAFSKIH IN BESEDILNIH ZBIRKAH PODATKOV SCOPUS, Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), DLib, EBSCO, PROQUEST, COBISS.SI/COBIB, COBISS.SI/ODKLJ, International Political Science Abstracts (IPSA), CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (CSA WPSA), CSA Sociological Abstracts (CSA SA, Internationale Bibliographie der Rezensionen geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Literatur / International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBR-Online), IBZOnline, Internationale Bibliographie der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Zeitschriftenliteratur / International Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences / Bibliographie internationale de la littérature périodique dans les domaines des sciences humaines et sociales (IBZ-Online), CSA Social Services Abstracts (CSA SSA).

Naslov: Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1000 Ljubljana, tel.: 01/5805-147
e-pošta: teorija.praksa@fdv.uni-lj.si

Revija je dostopna prek http://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/revije/znanstvene-revije/teorija-in-praksa

Celoletna naročnina za leto 2026: za študente in dijake 40,00 eur, za druge individualne naročnike 50,00 eur, za podjetja in ustanove 100,00 eur. Cena posamičnega zvezka v prosti prodaji je 25 eur.

Revija izhaja s podporo ARIS – Javne agencije za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije.

ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING SERVICES

SCOPUS, Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), DLib, EBSCO, PROQUEST, COBISS.SI/COBIB, COBISS.SI/ODKLJ, International Political Science Abstracts (IPSA), CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (CSA WPSA), CSA Sociological Abstracts (CSA SA, Internationale Bibliographie der Rezensionen geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Literatur / International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBR-Online), IBZOnline, Internationale Bibliographie der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Zeitschriftenliteratur / International Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences / Bibliographie internationale de la littérature périodique dans les domaines des sciences humaines et sociales (IBZ-Online), CSA Social Services Abstracts (CSA SSA)

Address: Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; Tel.: 00 386 1/5805-147
E-mail: teorija.praksa@fdv.uni-lj.si

Teorija in praksa is accessible at http://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/revije/znanstvene-revije/teorija-in-praksa

The annual subscription fee for 2026 is EUR 40.00 for students, EUR 50.00 for other individual subscribers, and EUR 100.00 for companies and institutions. The price of an individual issue is EUR 25.00.

The journal is subsidised by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

VSEBINA / CONTENTS

ČLANKI / ARTICLES

Milan BRGLEZ
AN ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SMALL STATES' AGENCY IN AN ILLIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER 437–469

Luka JESENŠEK
STRUKTURA SLOVENSKE POLITIČNE RAZPRAVE NA SPLETNEM DRUŽBENEM OMREŽJU X PRED VOLITVAMI V EVROPSKI PARLAMENT 2024 471–496

Ana MARKOVIĆ
FROM COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALISED CONSUMPTION: SOCIALLY ENGAGED MUSIC IN POST-YUGOSLAV CROATIA 497–513

Svenja FISCHBACH
THE GENDERED IMPACT OF WOMEN'S CARE MOBILITY TO GERMANY: CONSEQUENCES FOR MOBILE CARE WORKERS AND 'STAYING SPOUSES' IN SERBIA 515–533

Dora MATEJAK, Andreja VEZOVNIK
MED ZELENO ODGOVORNOSTJO IN TRŽNO RACIONALNOSTJO: EKOLOŠKI KMETJE IN NJIHOVA SUBJEKTIVITETA SKOZI PRIZMO POLITIK 535–555

TEMATSKI SKLOP / THEMATIC SECTION

ISKANJE POLITIČNIH ALTERNATIV V DOBI (TEHNO)KAPITALIZMA
POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES IN THE ERA OF (TECHNO)CAPITALISM

Blaž VREČKO ILC
GENERATIVE AI AS A SYMPTOM OF THE POLYCRISIS OF US DIGITAL CAPITALISM AND OF THE TRUMPIAN END-TIMES FASCISM 559–588

Cirila TOPLAK
UPOR V NARCISOCENU 589–607

Tomaž PUŠNIK, Gregor ČEHOVIN
A REFLECTION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION IN SLOVENIA IN THE ERA OF NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITY 609–635

Marko HOČEVAR
THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ALLIANCES AND COMPROMISES IN THE POLITICAL THEORY OF NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI 637–652

Marinko BANJAC
THE DIGITAL SUBJECT: POWER(S) OF DIGITAL ORDER, COUNTER-CONDUCT, AND NEO-LUDDISM 653–680

PRIKAZI, RECENZIJE / BOOK REVIEWS

E. H. GOMBRICH
Zgodovina umetnosti
(Neven BORAK) 681–683

Laleh KHALILI
Extractive Capitalism: How Commodities & Cronyism Drive the Global Economy
(Enej ZORMAN) 684–687

Milan BRGLEZ*

AN ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SMALL STATES' AGENCY IN AN ILLIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

Abstract. *In the article, it is argued that an Illiberal International Order does not eliminate the agency of small states and instead reconfigures it through asymmetrical material, institutional, ideational and historical international (social) relations. The author reconstructs the genealogy of small-state studies and views Long's relational turn as a bridge from attribute-based definitions to conditioned agency, before extending that move via a (dialectical) critical realist framework. Foreign-policy and diplomatic practices mediate between asymmetrical international relations and internally constituted state capacities, reproducing or transforming the conditions of action. Small-state analysis should therefore ask how, under which conditions, and for whom security, influence, and transformation are produced.*
Keywords: *agency; (dialectical) critical realism; diplomacy; Illiberal International Order; practices; relational turn; small-state studies.*

INTRODUCTION

Small states have long been in an ambiguous position in International Relations (IR). Although they are ubiquitous in the empirical world of diplomacy, international institutions, security policy and global governance, they continue to be conceptually under-theorised or theoretically marginalised.[1] An enduring reason for this is the tendency to define them solely by way of attributes:

* Milan Brglez, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Centre of Diplomatic, Economic and Legal Studies, and Chair of International Relations, milan.brglez@fdv.uni-lj.si; ORCID: 0009-0002-8977-7969.
** Research article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.437

[1] For classic and more recent approaches to small-state studies, see Fox (1959), Vital (1967; 1971), Keohane (1969; 1971), East (1973), Baehr (1975), Amstrup (1976), Handel (1981), Väyrynen (1983), Abt and Deutsch (1993), Hey (2003), Neumann and Gstöhl (2006), Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006), Veenendaal and Corbett (2015), Radoman (2018), Thorhallsson (2018) and Baldacchino and Wivel (2020). Beyer's (2006) annotated bibliography provides an earlier point of reference. The present article draws on an extended mapping of the literature rather than a systematic review.

population, territory, military capabilities, gross domestic product, or other measurable indicators of relative weakness. Such definitions offer useful descriptive shortcuts, yet also create arbitrary classifications and ontologically weak explanations. If 'smallness' is simply treated as a set of observable characteristics, the analysis quickly loses sight of the structured international contexts in which small states are embedded and in which they derive both their constraints and their opportunities for action.[2] This led earlier critiques of small-state studies (Brglez 2005, 17) to insist that there are no small states as agents (Latin: *agentes*) without the structured contexts which condition and partly shape them, and that any realistic diagnosis of their position needs a stronger ontological foundation than can be provided by 'as if' empiricism.[3]

This article re-examines that argument in the conditions of an increasingly Illiberal International Order (ILIO), noting that the designation "Liberal International Order" (LIO) is itself contested. Even institutionalist accounts acknowledge the US-led order's hierarchical and historically restricted reach (Ikenberry 2018, 9–12), while Jahn (2018, 43) and Parmar (2018, 151) located contradictions and exclusions within liberal internationalism and its imperial development, rather than viewing them as mere departures from liberal principles. Here, the ILIO denotes an uneven reconfiguration of commitments to institutional restraint, reciprocity, and universal rules, not the complete replacement of a previously uniform or consistently liberal order.[4] The argument neither equates the two normatively nor presumes a clean historical succession. Both shape small-state agency through historically specific asymmetries. Accordingly, the question is: how do the changing relations enable, constrain and redistribute capacities for action, instead of whether small states possess agency in the abstract.

A decisive step towards such a reformulation comes from the relational turn in recent literature on small states, notably that associated with Tom Long (2017, 144–49; 2022, 22–23). Rather than treating the small state as a fixed category, Long focuses on the dynamics of salient asymmetrical relationships. In this regard, small states are constituted to be weaker parties within asymmetrical

[2] In Slovenian, "*majhne države*" can describe characteristics or attributes, whereas "*male države*" denotes an analytical category or a role within the international community. In English, this distinction must be established contextually. It is relevant to the necessary dialogue between IR, Comparative Foreign Policy, and Comparative Politics within small-state studies.

[3] This article develops the metatheoretical argument of Brglez (2008), just as the earlier assessment (Brglez 2005) built on Brglez (2001; 2002). Following an initial contribution to the field (Brglez 1997), the 2005 paper largely evaluated the literature, whereas this article develops the metatheoretical foundations of small-state studies. The iterative character of this work is captured by the title of the collection *Žižek, Slavoj. 2011. Poskusiti znova – spodleteti bolje* [Try Again – Fail Better]. Edited by Peter Klepec. Translated by Simon Hajdini and Lidija Šumah. Cankarjeva založba.

[4] The distinction concerns the changing configurations of order, not the disappearance of capitalist relations or inherited hierarchies (Guzzini 2013; Jessop 2016; Lovec and Svetličič 2019; Hočevar et al. 2023). Nor does LIO/ILIO map directly onto international law-based and rules-based orders, whose vocabularies and institutional forms overlap (Brglez 2026, 94–95). Contemporary strategic texts and ordering projects (The White House 2025; United States Department of War 2026; Magid 2026) are materials for examining such reconfigurations, not self-sufficient evidence that a coherent new order has been established.

relationships. Their agency is conditioned by these relationships and broader international contexts, although not eliminated by them. This shift is crucial because it avoids both a reduction to material capabilities and overly voluntaristic notions of 'punching above one's weight'. It also helps explain why the same state might appear more or less capable, vulnerable or influential in different policy areas, within different institutional environments, and at different historical moments (cf. Lange and Svetličič 2024, 368–69). Long's framework remains primarily relational and middle-range, concentrated on the influence, strategies and foreign policy success of small states in particular circumstances.

The present article combines insights from the relational and practice turns[5] with critical realist and relational-sociological approaches (Patomäki and Wight 2000; Bhaskar 2016; Guzzini 2017; Dépelteau 2018; Selg and Ventsel 2020; Guzzini and Casas Klausen 2025). Its distinctive contribution is the analysis of small-state agency within real, emergent and stratified relations as opposed to treating such states as self-sufficient units with a fixed capacity for action. Emphasis is given to the way historically constituted asymmetries acquire causal efficacy and how diplomatic and foreign-policy practices mediate their reproduction or transformation.

The dialectical dimension directs attention to contradictions, absences, and unequal access to action. It also raises an explicitly axiological question: security, influence and transformation for whom? Without distinguishing the capacities of state institutions from those of the people and the groups they represent, analysis risks mistaking elite advantage for a general expansion of agency, or tactical success within asymmetry for a substantive reduction of domination.

The argument proceeds in five steps. First, the principal approaches to small states and their limitations are mapped. Second, Long's relational account of asymmetry and conditioned agency is reconstructed. Third, a relational-critical realist framework is developed. Fourth, the way practices and internal state selectivities mediate the reproduction or transformation of asymmetry is examined. Finally, the implications for small-state agency under 'illiberalisation' are considered. The central thesis is that this agency is historically structured, unevenly distributed and normatively contestable.

FROM SMALLNESS AS AN ATTRIBUTE TO SMALLNESS AS A RELATIONSHIP

The study of small states has not developed as a linear research programme and instead has been a fluid sequence of problems. Its genealogy ranges from classical attempts to define 'smallness', via realist and institutional explanations of vulnerability, adaptation and leverage, to more recent work on status, shelter,

[5] While Jackson and Nexon (1999, 291–95) and Go and Nexon (2025) are representative of the relational turn, the practice turn is even broader (Neumann 2002, 627–30; Adler and Pouliot 2011a; 2011b; Sending et al. 2015; Drieschova et al. 2022).

strategies, and graded agency. Literature reviews by Thorhallsson (2018) and Baldacchino and Wivel (2020) outline this trajectory well. The field has thus gone from an emphasis on lack of capacity and survival (Neumann and Gstöhl 2006, 17–23)[6] to opportunities for agency, strategic action and positioning, yet the question of what exactly 'smallness' means is still open.

One strand in this genealogy centred on definition and classification.[7] Vital (1967) and Keohane (1969) linked smallness to inequality and strategic dilemmas, whilst Baehr (1975) and Amstrup (1976) demonstrated how unstable and analytically limited this category remains. East (1973), Handel (1981) and Hey (2003) steered the issue to the study of foreign policy behaviour and systemic strategies. The field has thus been dogged by a persistent problem: whether 'smallness' refers to measurable capacity, diplomatic constraints, or a position within broader structures of dependency and recognition (Šabič and Brglez 2002).

A second strand has been security-centred and engaged with political-realist explanations (Pedi and Wivel 2024). In this framework, small states emerged as weaker actors encountering stronger incentives to adapt, coordinate, seek shelter, guard against risks, or exploit tensions between stronger powers. Elman's (1995) challenge to neorealism, Mouritzen's (1983; 1991; 1998) analyses of the strategies of the weak, and the later work on shelter and grand strategy (Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006; Wivel and Ingebritsen 2019; Wivel 2021) are representative precisely because they preserve the reality of asymmetry while expanding the repertoire of responses available to small states.

A further strand has expanded the field to include institutions, diplomacy, and political economy. Katzenstein (1985; 2003) showed that small states are historically specific formations characterised by openness, embeddedness and domestic compensation, rather than just miniature great powers. Research into the European Union (EU) and multilateralism has since shown how administrative competence, coalition-building, agenda-setting, legalisation, and niche diplomacy can transform weakness into selective leverage.[8] 'Smallness' has thereby become visible not only as a vulnerability, but also as a position mediated via institutions, political capacities and domestic compensatory arrangements.

A particularly useful consolidation of this institutional-practice agenda appeared in the 2012 *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* thematic

[6] Knudsen (2002, 182) also highlighted three unrelated traditions in the small-state studies literature. The first deals with issues of self-determination, the second with the foreign policy options of neutrality or alliance, whilst the third comprises comparative literature on the foreign policy of small states and policymaking in small states. He proposed the study of the life cycles through which small states pass (i.e., state formation, survival, disappearance) as a unifying element (as we would see it today) of the traditional literature in small-state studies, a perspective also adopted by Maass (2017; 2020).

[7] We still frequently encounter this approach (e.g., Crowards 2002; Maass 2009; Sutton 2011; Baldacchino 2018).

[8] Representative samples can be found in Baillie (1998), Abbott and Snidal (2000), Bučar and Šterbenc (2002), Mouritzen and Wivel (2005), Neumann and Gstöhl (2006), Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006), Cooper and Shaw (2009), Sinclair (2010), Thorhallsson (2012), Šabič et al. (2016), Thorhallsson and Bailes (2016), Butler and Morris (2017), Arbeiter et al. (2019) and Fromm (2019).

section "Small States in International Negotiations". Panke (2012a, 313) connected resource asymmetries to the possibility of prioritising selected issues and redirecting scarce administrative capacity towards them. Her EU cases add an important qualification. The concentration of resources is only a precondition, whereas argumentative success depends on the fit between the type of claim, the nature of the issue and the prior beliefs of its addressees (Panke 2012b, 329). Deitelhoff and Wallbott (2012, 345) extended this logic to coalition-building, which can pool expertise and manpower but remains dependent on the institutional setting and the issue at stake. Jackson (2012, 367) pointed out a related mechanism in WTO compliance bargaining, where dispute-settlement procedures can generate bargaining leverage for a materially much weaker actor. As a whole, these studies reveal that institutionalisation mediates rather than cancels asymmetry – limited capacities become politically consequential through situated practices.

Another strand has stressed social recognition and relational positioning. Constructivist, status-oriented and practice-sensitive work has shown that smallness is also realised by way of recognition, legitimacy, role-playing, diplomatic practice and hierarchies of respect. Hence the importance of Browning (2006), Björkdahl (2008), de Carvalho and Neumann (2015), Sending et al. (2015) and Neumann's (2024, 59–60) later formulation of graded agency since they clearly demonstrate that small states do not enter international life from equal positions, even if formally they are equally sovereign.

This genealogy reveals a fundamental tension between descriptive convenience and conceptual adequacy. Much of the older literature addressed the problem through attributive definitions (e.g., Udovič and Svetličič 2007). Such endeavours clearly held practical appeal. They enabled comparative research designs, generated empirical datasets, and offered a seemingly neutral basis for identifying classes of states (Christmas-Møller 1983; Šabič 2002). At the same time, however, they produced recurring arbitrariness and often obscured prior theoretical assumptions about what counts in international politics. Precisely for this reason, an exclusively attribute-based approach risks producing ontologically weak results by treating as empirically given something which in fact is theoretically mediated and relationally constituted (Brglez 2008, 131–32).

The described problem becomes quite clear when one considers the prevailing theoretical traditions (Luša and Mijić 2012; Calleya 2016; Rickli and Almezaini 2017; Galal 2020; Timilsana 2024). In materialist approaches (Brglez 2008, 105–7), small states appear chiefly as weaker units situated within an external environment of asymmetrically distributed capabilities. In classical and structural realism (Brglez 2008, 128–30), they are generally defined by their relative weakness and the limited range of choices available to them in conditions of anarchy. Their position is shaped by security imperatives, proximity to more powerful forces, alliance dependence, the dynamics of balancing and alignment, and the broader distribution of material capabilities. Even where classical or neoclassical realism

offers a more historically nuanced interpretation of statecraft and prudence, or the English School situates states within a historically constituted international society, the small state typically enters the analysis as an actor with more room for accommodation than for initiative. This is exactly why political realism has been both indispensable and insufficient in small-state studies. While it captures something of the reality of asymmetry and constraints, it frequently reduces the politics of small states to adaptation within externally imposed hierarchies.

A similar problem arises with rationalist and institutionalist approaches (Brglez 2008, 132–34). Nevertheless, these approaches go beyond crude capacity metrics since they consider institutions, negotiating environments, issue-specific coalitions, and strategic adaptation. Small states can gain leverage if they act early, specialise, invest in administrative competence, build a reputation, and embed themselves in dense institutional environments. Such approaches are particularly productive in studies of the EU, international organisations, coalition-building, and multilateral diplomacy. They show that limited size does not automatically imply irrelevance, and that institutional contexts can redistribute influence in ways that cannot be reduced to raw power. However, their analytical framework often remains closer to strategic adaptation than a deeper reflection on 'smallness' itself. The small state continues to be taken for granted as a given actor with limited resources, operating within rules and incentives treated as external to its constitution.

Idealist and constructivist approaches (Brglez 2008, 134–37) broaden the picture even further by viewing 'smallness' not just as a material condition, but also as a socially mediated position. The focus moves to identity, recognition, status, role, legitimacy, communities of practice, and the ways in which international institutions and norms structure the opportunities available to smaller actors. Work along these lines has been crucial by revealing that small states cannot be understood solely through material inferiority. Their influence may depend on their legitimacy, credibility, normative entrepreneurship, institutional embeddedness, or skill in mobilising symbolic and ideational resources. These perspectives help to correct the reductionism of materialist explanations as they show that 'smallness' is not simply observed, but interpreted within international social relations. Yet, accounts centred on identity and shared meanings risk under-specifying the material and institutional relations via which recognition becomes consequential. The issue is not a uniform weakness of constructivism, but the explanatory limits of certain versions that leave deeper hierarchies insufficiently examined (Kurki and Sinclair 2010, 7–8, 18–20).

Different traditions often presuppose different objects of inquiry: survival in a hostile environment, bargaining within institutions, or the enactment of identities and roles in international society. The problem is not theoretical pluralism itself, but the transfer of an apparently unchanged category of the small state across ontologically distinct explanatory projects. Table 1 summarises these ideal-typical emphases rather than placing entire schools in mutually exclusive positions.

Accordingly, the key move today is not to abandon small-state studies but to reconceptualise 'smallness'. The central question should no longer be whether a specific fixed set of states meets a stable size threshold, or merely whether small states have agency despite structural constraints. A more productive question is how actors, conventionally defined as small, are constituted, enabled and constrained within structured and asymmetrical international contexts. This implies a shift from attributes to relations, from a static classification to a structured asymmetry, and from conceiving agency as residual capacity to understanding it as conditioned, mediated and unevenly distributed. Namely, the study of small states must move from smallness as an attribute to smallness as a relationship.

Table 1: ENTANGLEMENT OF EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY IN SMALL-STATE STUDIES

Epistemology / Ontology	Explanation / Materialism	Understanding / Idealism
Holism / Structure	The international system as external structures in anarchic (global, regional, bilateral) environments of balance of power and hegemony	The international community as collective rules and institutions within asymmetric (global, regional, bilateral) international (social) relations
Individualism / Agency	Units of the system – small states identified through measurable attributes and perceptions/cognitions, acting rationally on the basis of their own resources and capabilities	Subjects – small states as social constructs and roles/positions acting reasonably based on opportunities within international (social) relations

Source: Author's elaboration developed and updated from Hollis and Smith ([1990]1991, 5), Dunne (1995, 371), Adler (1997, 331), Wendt (1999, 29, 32) and Brglez (2008, 66; 2011, 553; 2021, 17; 2022, 26).

LONG AND THE RELATIONAL TURN IN SMALL-STATE STUDIES

Recent literature on small states has introduced numerous significant corrections to older approaches focused on vulnerability and attributes. Here, Long's work (2017, 144–49; 2022, 22–23) stands out by offering a particularly systematic reworking of the field around asymmetry and conditioned agency (Thorhallsson 2018; Baldacchino and Wivel 2020). The significance of Long's intervention lies not only in providing yet another definition of a small state, but above all in reframing the problem itself. Rather than asking which states count as small according to absolute thresholds, he asks how states come to be understood as small within salient asymmetrical relationships. This is a decisive shift because it moves the field away from the search for a stable essence of 'smallness' and directs it towards the dynamics of relationships whereby one actor is positioned as the weaker party. In so doing, it retains the intuitive view that small states

face recurring vulnerabilities, whilst avoiding the conceptual arbitrariness of attributive classifications.[9]

Long's relational shift is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it avoids reducing 'smallness' to a measurable size. While absolute indicators may still be useful for descriptive purposes, they no longer bear the central analytical burden. A state is not small in an abstract sense, but in relation to other actors and within specific contexts of asymmetry. This means the same actor may face different degrees and forms of 'smallness' in different relationships, issue areas, and institutional environments (Long 2022, 22–23; Wivel 2025, 27–28). Second, the shift towards asymmetry brings context to the fore without slipping into determinism. Long does not claim that relationships entirely determine what small states do. Nonetheless, he argues that they condition their scope for action. It is precisely this formulation that is crucial since it rejects both voluntarist narratives of heroic influence and fatalist narratives of inevitable subordination. Third, Long's approach makes influence analytically manageable. If action is conditioned by relations, then the study of small states' influence must examine not only the resources, but in addition the particular relational configurations via which these resources may (not) be transformed into effects.

This leads directly to Long's concept of conditioned agency (2022, 60–61). In contrast to perspectives which either assume agency as a generic attribute of sovereign states or deny weaker actors the capacity for meaningful agency, Long views small-state agency as the capacity to articulate interests and identities and to make meaningful, albeit never unlimited, choices within asymmetrical contexts. Agency is neither a metaphysical remnant nor just a synonym for strategic calculation. Instead, it is relationally constituted and contextually conditioned. Different asymmetrical relationships confer varying degrees of room for manoeuvre, and this space can expand or contract subject to the issue, broader international environment, and configuration of preferences among more powerful actors.

Long's most practical contribution is his attempt to identify the conditions in which influence is more or less likely (Long 2022, 52–54). Rather than resorting to vague claims about diplomatic skill or the advantages of reputation, he proposes a diagnostic framework centred on three relational variables: (i) the degree of policy divergence between the small state and the stronger actor; (ii) the importance of the issue within the relationship; and (iii) the degree of cohesion of preferences within the more powerful actor. The value of this tool is found in its middle-range clarity. It links abstract relational asymmetry to concrete foreign policy situations and offers a more operational vocabulary for considering when small states' actions are likely to be effective and which strategies are most

[9] Long's relational turn should be read in conjunction with the bridges opened by Neumann and Gstöhl (2006), Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006), Wivel et al. (2014), Thorhallsson (2018) and Wivel and Ingebritsen (2019).

likely to produce influence. Consequently, the agency of small states appears as neither a residual category nor a miracle (cf. Baldacchino 2023), but as a conditional capacity that is strategically exercised within asymmetry.

Such a reformulation explains why much of the earlier research on small states became bogged down on the definition level. When the relationship, rather than the attribute, becomes analytically primary, the question goes from "what is a small state?" to "within which asymmetrical relationship, regarding which issues, and under which historical and institutional conditions does 'smallness' become politically significant?". Long therefore does not merely add yet another theory of influence, and instead provides a conceptual framework via which it is possible to cumulatively interpret the realist concern for asymmetry, the institutional concern for embeddedness, and the constructivist concern for recognition.

Recent research on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) extends this relational problem to recognition itself. Kavalski and Pomorska (2026, 694–95) conceptualise actorness through recognition, encounter and enactment rather than as an attribute secured by material power or institutional membership. Their discussion of the post-2022 'Ukraine moment' concerns the changed reception of previously marginalised knowledge, not the sudden creation of agency (2026, 692–93). For the present framework, the distinction is crucial – capacities can persist while their recognition and opportunities for effective exercise fluctuate. The regional debate is relevant without making CEE a homogeneous category of small states.

At the same time, Long's intervention should be understood as a bridge, not an endpoint. It connects the older literature on small states with a more distinctly relational mode of analysis, without requiring a fully developed social ontology. Small states are not treated as isolated units facing an external system, nor are they dissolved into discourse. They are constituted as weaker actors within salient asymmetrical relationships. This makes Long's framework useful for translating the claim that there are no small states without structured contexts into an empirically oriented vocabulary. The further account of these contexts as emergent and stratified is developed here, rather than attributed to Long himself.

The first question concerns the ontology of asymmetry. Long's account identifies relational conditions of influence, while the present framework additionally asks how these relations endure, how their dimensions interact, and how they acquire causal powers beyond particular bargaining episodes. This is a difference in explanatory scope rather than evidence that a relational approach must already subscribe to critical realism.

The second question concerns reproduction and transformation. Explaining when a smaller actor can exert influence does not settle whether its strategy alters the conditions of future action or reproduces the asymmetry within which that influence is achieved. The dialectical extension thus considers contradictions, absences, and unequal access to action alongside strategic effectiveness.

The third question relates to axiology. Strategic achievement within an existing relationship does not by itself establish whose capacities have expanded. A dialectical analysis must distinguish the benefits accruing to small-state elites, ruling coalitions, bureaucracies, and wider populations. This question, already raised in the concluding discussion of Brglez (2005), informs the present article's assessment of both the reproduction and transformation of asymmetry.

Yet precisely because Long is at his strongest at the level of relational diagnosis, his framework invites a further ontological step.[10] A second bridge concerns practice and deeper social structure. Joseph and Kurki (2018, 91–94) argued that ontological realism can complement the practice turn by restoring attention to the conditions of possibility under which practices emerge. Their criticism concerns the risk of treating practice as ontologically exhaustive, not the value of studying practices. Kurki and Sinclair (2010, 7–8, 18) similarly showed that accounts of mutual constitution can leave deeper social structures and unequal positions insufficiently theorised. Read along with Long, these interventions support examining how salient asymmetrical relationships are sustained through multi-layered, enduring and causally efficacious structures.

The relational diagnosis–ontological explanation distinction is therefore a matter of complementary questions. Long's work moves beyond fixed size categories towards relationally conditioned agency. Critical realism[11] asks which kinds of relations and causal powers make that conditioning possible. Its dialectical development further asks how contradictions, absences, and blocked possibilities enter the reproduction or transformation of asymmetry. The purpose is not to displace Long's middle-range framework. Instead, it is to clarify its place within a wider account of the conditions, practices and consequences of small-state agency.

TOWARDS A RELATIONAL-CRITICAL REALIST FRAMEWORK

Asymmetrical international relations are real, emergent and stratified. Their effects cannot be reduced to either states' attributes or shared meanings. Ontological realism here labels this explanatory commitment, not a version of political realism or a claim that social structures exist independently of human activity. Structures are reproduced via activity while remaining irreducible to any particular episode or actor's understanding (Bhaskar [1979]1998; Patomäki

[10] For the wider critical realist argument in IR, see Patomäki and Wight (2000), Patomäki (2002), Wight (2006), Kurki (2008) and Joseph and Wight (2010). For Slovenian contributions to the interpretation, application and development of critical realism, as well as related metatheoretical debates across the social sciences, including International Studies and IR, also see Brglez (2001), Lange [Kajnč] (2006), Bojinović Fenko (2009), Lovec (2013), Amon Prodnik (2014), Rutar (2016; 2017; 2018) and Hočevar et al. (2023). This article is situated within this wider intellectual context, with its particular contribution being the development of a relational and dialectical critical-realist account of small-state agency.

[11] Critical realism combines ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality (Bhaskar [1975]2008; [1979]1998; Collier 1994; Brglez 2008, 73–75). Its dialectical development informs the treatment of absence, contradiction, and transformative practice (Bhaskar 1993; 1994; Ollman 2003; Norrie 2010; Patomäki and Morgan 2023a; 2023b).

and Wight 2000; Wight 2006; Brglez 2008, 73–75). The task is to explain their causal relevance to small-state agency more than to restate critical realist philosophy in full.

The relational premise also has an earlier genealogy. Marx's conception of society as constituted by relations rather than as an aggregate of individuals ([1857–58]1985, 159) informs the transformational model the author developed in his earlier work (Brglez 2008, 74–75) based on Bhaskar's Transformational Model of Social Activity ([1979]1998, 34–42). This is an ontological starting point, not an endorsement of a predetermined historical trajectory. It directs attention to the relations through which actors and their capacities are constituted, whilst retaining the distinction between those capacities and the conditions in which they are exercised.

For small states, the relevant asymmetries are material, institutional, ideational and historical. Unequal resources and dependencies intersect with rules governing access, authority and representation, with hierarchies of legitimacy and recognition, and with the sedimented consequences of earlier conflicts, alignments and exclusions. Even though these dimensions are analytically distinguishable, they cannot simply be added as independent variables. Their configurations condition different possibilities for action without determining a single outcome.

Ejdus' analysis of "ontic spaces" gives this multidimensional claim a useful material-ideational specification. Material environments can anchor collective identity and purposeful agency, yet only when incorporated into identity narratives. Even then, states do not fully control the process because those narratives remain contested domestically and internationally (Ejdus 2017, 23–24). This reinforces the need to treat material and ideational dimensions as internally related without collapsing one into the other.

Relational sociology helps specify this account but does not resolve all the differences among relational approaches. Emirbayer (1997, 281–86) and Jackson and Nexon (1999, 291–95) challenged substantialist starting points, while Donati (2015, 87–90; see also Donati and Archer 2015) emphasised the emergent effects of relations irreducible to individuals or systemic wholes. Kurki (2020) extended the relational challenge beyond an exclusively inter-state horizon. The narrower concern here is how relatively durable social relations mediate small-state capacities rather than an assumption that all of these approaches share an identical ontology.

Bourdieu's account of social space connects objective positions, dispositions and symbolic struggles without reducing practice to either visible interaction or the mechanical expression of structure (1989, 15–18; see also Vandenberghe 1999). Akram's critical realist reconstruction sharpens this connection by treating habitus as a historically formed, generative system of durable dispositions (2023, 59–61), field as a configuration of objective relations between positions (2023, 110–11), and institutional settings as contexts in which situated agents

(*agentes*), unequally endowed with resources or capital, reproduce or contest systems of power (2023, 162). Applied here, these arguments help conceptualise diplomatic competence not simply as an individual skill but as a practical capacity arising from the habitus–field relation. Historically acquired dispositions are exercised from unequal positions and via differential access to resources, whereas action remains open to improvisation and contestation.[12]

These distinctions matter for the analysis of security guarantees, aid relationships, dependency ties, coalitions, and status hierarchies. None can be reduced to the patron's preferences or the client's weakness. Guzzini (2012, 5–7) distinguishes governance as steering capacity from governance as informal rule, while resisting the reduction of governance to power. Ordering can also work by way of diffuse, habitual practices rather than overt commands (Guzzini 2012, 9). Small-state agency must thus be examined relative to both direct influence and the wider mechanisms through which political order is sustained.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 970–73) expanded on this point by considering agency as a time-embedded process comprising iterative, projective and practical-evaluative dimensions. This is especially useful for small-state studies as it avoids two common pitfalls: (i) equating agency with immediate success; and (ii) the assumption that strong asymmetry completely precludes agency. Smaller actors rely on past routines, project possible futures, and assess context-dependent possibilities in the present. What changes in the face of asymmetry is not the existence of agency, but the horizons within which these temporal dimensions can be realised.

Institutional and legal structures form part of this explanation, not just its background. Kurki and Sinclair (2010, 18–20; see also Sinclair 2010) challenge accounts that treat international law primarily as rules and intersubjective meanings, whereas Sinclair (2021, 216–20) identifies international law's structural significance for agency. The implication is not that international law determines state conduct. It is that legal positions and procedures can constitute capacities whose activation, obstruction or non-use requires further explanation. Formal availability, practical exercise and successful influence must therefore remain analytically distinct.

Causal explanation must identify how such conditions combine. In open social systems, this requires reconstructing causal complexes rather than assuming invariant sequences between isolated variables (Patomäki 2002, 78; Brglez 2008, 73). Practices mediate these configurations, yet their observed regularities do not exhaust the powers and relations which sustain them. The dialectical contribution is to include contradictions and consequential absences in that reconstruction, and to examine possibilities of reproduction and transformation

[12] This is a selective dialogue, not a claim of wholesale philosophical equivalence. Donati (2015, 88) explicitly criticises both Bourdieu and Emirbayer. The present argument draws on particular insights without treating their ontologies as interchangeable.

without presuming their outcome (Bhaskar 1993, 92, 97; 1994; Norrie 2010, 13–16, 65–75, 81–85; Patomäki 2017).

The debate over agency also becomes clearer. Small states must be understood as actors possessing 'power to' – the capacity to act, to refrain from acting, and to permit others to act. This formulation (and the initial idea for Diagram 1) has a special genealogy. Guzzini's discussion of agent power (1993, 471, esp. n. 85) explicitly directs the reader to Patomäki's closely related definition of power within critical social realism (1991, 234). Agency is hence not limited to successfully influencing others, nor does it disappear where asymmetry is strong. It exists within pre-existing but transformable structures. Wight's ontological treatment of agency (2006) is useful here because it resists both voluntarism and structural reification. Whether a particular omission manifests strategic restraint, institutional blockage or an unavailable capacity cannot be decided from non-action alone. It requires examining the relations, authorisations and alternatives involved. This keeps the reality of agency distinct from both its exercise and its effects.

The epistemological implication is equally significant. Explanation must identify the real relations and mechanisms that condition outcomes, while understanding reconstructs the meanings actors attach to their conduct. Neither is sufficient when taken in isolation. Explanatory critique connects them by investigating how certain relations sustain domination or obscure its conditions (Bhaskar 1986; 2016, 95–102; cf. Fluck 2017). Koskenniemi (2005, 540–41, esp. 541 n. 58) discusses the critical challenge to false consciousness whilst warning against assuming that the critic already knows others' interests. Critique is not simply an external judgement added after explanation since it examines how constraints, interests and their representations are themselves socially produced. Nonetheless, the existence of a constraint does not by itself establish domination, nor does every transformation imply emancipation. Evaluation must specify the actors affected, the alternatives available, and the normative grounds of judgement. This gives substantive content to the question "for whom?" without deriving a verdict from asymmetry alone.

The resulting framework is not a compromise between materialism and idealism. It re-specifies the object of inquiry as relationally constituted capacities within historically structured asymmetries. Table 2 summarises the conceptual distinctions. The next section develops their practical implications: how capacities are exercised, internally authorised and implicated in the reproduction or transformation of relations.

Table 2: A RELATIONAL-CRITICAL REALIST EXTENSION OF SMALL-STATE STUDIES

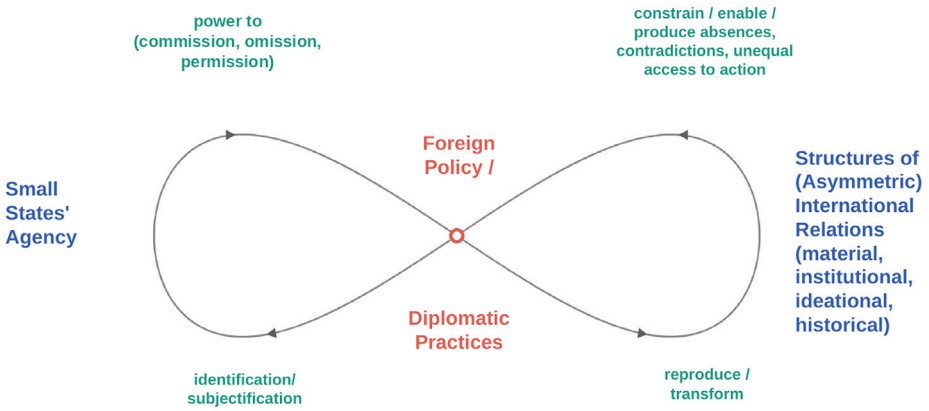
Ontology	Materialism	Ontological Realism	Idealism
Structures	The international system as external structures in anarchic (global, regional and bilateral) environments of balance of power and hegemony. Smallness is treated primarily as a function of relative material capabilities, systemic position, vulnerability, and dependence.	Asymmetric international relations as real, emergent and stratified (material, institutional, ideational, historical) structures that pre-exist particular actions, possess causal efficacy, and shape differentiated opportunities for action. Small states are embedded in structured contexts that are real even when not directly observable.	The international community/ society as collective rules and international institutions within asymmetric (global, regional and bilateral) international (social) relations. Smallness is mediated through norms, legitimacy, recognition, and institutional inclusion or exclusion.
Processes	Balancing, bandwagoning, deterrence, bargaining, capability aggregation, dependence management, and adaptation to external pressure. The main analytical focus is on how materially weaker states cope with systemic constraints.	Generative mechanisms linking structure and agency through enablement/constraint, emergence, positionality, morphostasis/morphogenesis, and practical mediation. The task of analysis is to identify how structured contexts shape, channel and condition the possibilities of small-state action.	Socialisation, norm diffusion, recognition, institutionalisation, identity formation, role enactment, persuasion, and status performance. The emphasis is on how meanings, roles and norms shape what small states can plausibly do.
Relations	Asymmetric interdependence, alliance ties, shelter relations, dependency relations, and resource differentials. Relations are treated mainly as channels via which material inequalities operate.	Relations connect material asymmetry, institutional position, recognition, and historical context. Long's (2017; 2022) account of salient asymmetrical relationships provides a bridge – weaker actors' agency is conditioned, not eliminated. Treating these relations as emergent and causally efficacious is this article's critical realist extension, not an attribution of that ontology to Long.	Intersubjective relations, status, role/position, recognition/misrecognition, and communities of practice. Smallness is constituted relationally through social interaction and shared understandings rather than material capability alone.
Agency	Units of the system – small states identified via measurable properties and perceptions/cognitions, acting rationally on the basis of their own resources and capabilities. Agency is limited, instrumental, and usually derivative of material position.	Small states as agents (*agentes*) possessing 'power to' – the capacity to act, to refrain from acting, and to permit others to act – are reflexively positioned and subjectified within asymmetric relations. Capacities are also internally constituted through strategically selective institutions. Foreign-policy and diplomatic practices mediate their exercise within pre-existing but transformable structures. Agency is distinct from both its activation and successful influence.	Subjects – small states as social constructs and their roles/positions acting reasonably on the basis of opportunities within international (social) relations. Agency is shaped by identity, recognition, legitimacy, and role expectations.
Epistemology	***Explaining***	***Critique***	***Understanding***

Source: Author's elaboration developed from Brglez (2008, 125), with relational and strategic-relational extensions drawing on Long (2017; 2022) and Jessop (2007, 29–37).

AGENCY, PRACTICE AND THE REPRODUCTION OR TRANSFORMATION OF ASYMMETRY

Foreign-policy and diplomatic practices mediate between small-state capacities and asymmetrical international relations. They neither express an unconstrained sovereign will nor mechanically implement structural imperatives. Negotiating, representing, framing claims, and maintaining institutional routines draw upon inherited resources and positions at the same time as reproducing or modifying them.[13] Practice is accordingly indispensable to explanation, albeit it does not exhaust the relations that make action possible (Neumann 2002, 627–30; Joseph and Kurki 2018, 91–94). Diagram 1 summarises this relationship.[14]

Diagram 1: CAPABILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL STATES' AGENCY



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis and design. The specific conceptual and visual starting point for Diagram 1 is Guzzini's (1993, 471–74) dyadic conceptualisation of power phenomena, particularly his distinction between agent power and impersonal governance and the accompanying visual representation. While discussing agent power, Guzzini (1993, 471, n. 85) explicitly notes the affinity with Patomäki's (1991, 234) critical-social-realist definition of power. Diagram 1 does not reproduce Guzzini's model but develops its relational insight within a dialectical critical-realist account of small-state agency in which foreign-policy and diplomatic practices mediate between small states as agents (*agentes*) and historically constituted asymmetrical structures, reproducing or transforming the conditions of subsequent action. The wider relational genealogy and conceptual elaboration draw on Marx ([1857–58]1985, 159), Guzzini and Leander (2001, 326), Patomäki (2002; 2017), Brglez (2008, 74–75), Patomäki and Morgan (2023a; 2023b), and Guzzini and Casas Klausen (2025, 667).

Note: The diagram illustrates external relational mediation. The internal constitution of state capacities is developed in section 4.

[13] The studies discussed in section 1 illustrate this mediation: prioritisation, argumentative fit, coalition-formation and legally structured bargaining alter how limited capacities are activated without dissolving the asymmetry in which they operate (Panke 2012a, 313; Panke 2012b, 329; Deitelhoff and Wallbott 2012, 345; Jackson 2012, 367; Arbeiter et al. 2019).

[14] Diagram 1 also builds on a teaching aid based on Brglez (2008). The author thanks the students at the Faculty of Social Sciences whose engagement with successive versions helped clarify the model.

The exercise of agency need not take the form of overt intervention. Withholding cooperation, delaying a decision, or leaving a legal position nonactivated may be consequential practices. Yet the same observed non-action can result from a blocked procedure or lack of capacity. The distinction is not between action and an empty absence, but between differently constituted possibilities and the practices via which they are used or foreclosed. Analysis must therefore reconstruct what actors could authoritatively attempt, not simply infer either freedom or powerlessness from the outcome.

Recognition and subjectification influence these possibilities. Foucault's account of power as action upon possible actions is useful because it links the shaping of subjects with a field of responses, rather than equating power with either consent or direct physical coercion (1982, 781, 789–92).[15] Diplomatic status, expertise, and role expectations can enlarge access while also disciplining how a smaller actor may speak or act (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015; Kaul 2023). Such recognition is not just symbolic decoration nor is it a guarantee of influence.

Formal institutional membership does not remove these asymmetries. Comparing CEE participation in the EU and NATO, Lovato and Pomorska (2026, 741–42) explain how competence claims are recognised, dismissed or reprimanded through role expectations and inherited preconceptions. Their findings qualify claims that post-2022 recognition has durably transformed diplomatic hierarchies. Increased recognition coexists with resilient hierarchies, while defence contributions carry different weight in NATO from the cross-issue reputational effects found in the EU (Lovato and Pomorska 2026, 753–54). Practical mediation thus depends on the institution and issue, not on formal membership or diplomatic skill alone.

Weiss's comparison of Czech specialisation in human rights and the Western Balkans sharpens the distinction between expertise and its political recognition (2026, 796–97). Comparable resource commitments and prominent policy declarations did not generate comparable recognition. Czechia's participation in a relatively small network promoting the Western Balkans made its contribution more recognisable than its human-rights specialisation in a crowded and fragmented field. This supports treating demand for expertise and relative positioning as conditions of its political usability rather than inferring influence from investment or competence alone. The finding concerns recognition, and it is not by itself a measurement of influence over policy outcomes.

External relations do not, however, act upon an internally undifferentiated state. Jessop's strategic-relational approach understands state power as a social relation mediated by a strategically selective institutional ensemble, not as a thing or a coherent subject standing above society (2007, 29–37; 2016). Individual

[15] This borrowing concerns subjectification and the shaping of possible action, not a wholesale identification with critical realism (cf. Marsden 1999). The present framework retains the distinction between a capacity, its exercise, and its effects.

and collective actors encounter unequal access to representation, resources and decision-making, whilst institutional arrangements privilege some strategies, projects and temporal horizons over others. A diplomatic opportunity must consequently be translated through procedures of mandate formation, legal assessment and authorisation before it can be pursued as a foreign-policy initiative attributable to the small state. Implementation then shapes its effects. This internal constitution of agency complements the external analysis without collapsing the two into one. Domestic and international relations are analytically distinguishable, not self-contained spheres (cf. Gourevitch 1978; Putnam 1988). Their interaction can enable action, leave a capacity nonactivated, or block its use (cf. Bojinović Fenko and Lovec 2015, 113–17; Bojinović Fenko and Šabič 2017, 42–43). Agency attributed internationally to 'the state' – including 'the small state' – is thus internally produced and contested.

A complementary argument about emergence is laid out by Ejdus and Rečević (2021, 29). Drawing on complexity theory, they conceptualise collective ontological insecurity as a macro-level phenomenon that can arise non-linearly from horizontal micro-interactions and feedback loops. Their object is ontological insecurity rather than foreign-policy capacity, and hence the analogy should not be overstated. Yet it supports the more general point at issue here – properties attributed to 'the (small) state' may be emergent without being reducible to either individual intentions or a pre-given unitary state subject.

This double perspective makes contradictions and absences analytically consequential. The same arrangement may enable diplomatic access while foreclosing alternatives, or strengthen executive discretion while restricting other actors' participation. A missing safeguard or blocked route matters when it can be shown to shape a specific possibility of action, not merely because it falls short of an analyst's preference. Dialectical critical realism directs attention to such relations between realised capacities and foreclosed possibilities (Bhaskar 2016, 116–26, 129–32, 140–41). The question is how these tensions are sustained, displaced or contested in practice.

Practices can reproduce asymmetry even when they secure immediate gains. Adaptation may preserve access while stabilising dependence, and competent diplomatic performance may obtain benefits without changing the hierarchies within which it is recognised (Corbett et al. 2019). Transformation requires a change in the conditions of subsequent action, for example through altered institutional access, recognition, or dependency relations. The reproduction–transformation distinction is thus neither a contrast between failure and success nor a presumption of sudden systemic rupture. Changes may be partial, uneven and reversible. Morphostasis and morphogenesis provide terms for investigating these different effects, rather than labels assigned in advance (Norrie 2010, 113–17; Donati and Archer 2015).

The internal constitution of agency also sharpens the question of its beneficiaries. A strategy may expand the executive's external room for manoeuvre

while narrowing parliamentary, social or minority participation. Conversely, restraint may preserve accountability or a capacity for future contestation. These are possibilities to investigate, not necessary properties of certain strategies. State effectiveness and social emancipation must as a result be distinguished. Asking who gains security, influence or transformative capacity connects the analysis of diplomatic practice to the distribution of its benefits and costs, within the state and across its international relations.

SMALL STATES' AGENCY IN THE ILIO

The framework developed thus far allows for a re-examination of small-state agency under 'illiberalisation'. The following discussion identifies mechanisms and analytical expectations, not a uniform causal effect established across all small states. Work on agency, security and governance provides a broader point of departure (Koff and Kolnberger 2024). Long's (2022, 60–61) language of conditioned agency therefore remains indispensable, yet it must be read alongside older literature on vulnerability, hedging, openness, resilience, alliance policy and status since their effects depend on the particular configurations of 'illiberalisation'. What is changing is not a single variable called "order" (Ish-Shalom et al. 2021; Česnakas and Juozaitis 2023; Panke and Thorhallsson 2024; Aryal and Pulami 2026), but a pattern of market dependence, strategic coercion, institutional access, legal protection and hierarchies of recognition, within which smaller actors operate.

Material asymmetries involve both security dependence and exposure to economic and infrastructural pressures. Research on geopolitics and small-state foreign policy illustrates how geopolitical change can reshape roles (Moisio 2022; Michalski et al. 2024), while Schindler et al. (2022) direct attention to infrastructure and geoeconomic competition. Earlier political-economy research shows that openness is mediated by domestic adjustment and compensatory institutions rather than producing a single outcome (Katzenstein 1985; Armstrong and Read 1998; Briguglio et al. 2006; Bohle and Jacoby 2017; Jaklič 2024, 15). The implication for 'illiberalisation' is conditional. Where access to security, markets or infrastructure becomes more coercively managed, dependence may supply leverage while also increasing vulnerability (cf. Vangeli et al. 2026). The task is to identify which relations change and which strategies remain available, rather than infer a uniform loss of agency (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018).

These changes operate through historically differentiated relations. Past alignments, colonial and postcolonial positions, strategies of Europeanisation or non-alignment, and accumulated economic specialisations influence the conditions of present action. They should be investigated rather than treated as a shared essence of 'smallness'. Kaul (2023) examines geopolitical subalternisation in Bhutan, and Montana (2022) analyses mediated sovereignty in the British Overseas Territories. The latter are not sovereign small states, but provide a bounded comparison which highlights why formal status and practical capacities must be distinguished.

Historical differentiation here should not be reduced to path dependence. Rosenberg's reconstruction of uneven and combined development (UCD) identifies societal multiplicity – the plural nature of human social existence – as one of UCD's distinctive ontological premises and uses it to reopen the role of "the international" in social development (Rosenberg 2021, 152–53).[16] While UCD is not identical to the critical realist framework adopted here, its insistence on multiplicity, unevenness and combination complements the claim that small states act from differently structured historical positions. Leigh (2021, 186) adds an ideational mechanism with his theory of geocultural feedback, locating the formation of identities and discourses within conjunctures of global unevenness rather than viewing culture as an internally generated domain. Together, these interventions help specify why historical and ideational asymmetries should not be treated as passive background variables.

Institutional and legal asymmetries require a similarly differentiated analysis. 'Illiberalisation' does not render institutions irrelevant. Their importance may increase even where expectations of stable reciprocity and shared international social and/or legal norms are weakened. Small states still rely on institutions (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018) to secure a voice, protection, and procedural influence, yet these gains remain uneven and potentially reversible. Here, the literature on soft law, legalisation, and imperial hierarchies becomes relevant (Abbott and Snidal 2000; Chimni 2004; Anghie 2016). Although formal rules may remain in force, their protective effects may be diluted by selective enforcement or by shifts to more informal arrangements of guidance and discipline (Guzzini 2012, 5–6, 9; Guzzini and Casas Klausen 2025, 667). These possibilities turn on institutional enactment rather than on the vocabulary of order alone (Brglez 2026, 94–95).

Ideational and political asymmetries concern the recognition of legitimate speakers, expertise, and roles. Niche diplomacy and struggles over competence show how visibility can create opportunities without removing subordination (Fromm 2019; Lovato and Pomorska 2026, 741–42). Recognition may accordingly enable mediation while confining a smaller actor to restrictive role expectations. The question under 'illiberalisation' is how these expectations are contested or reorganised, not whether status suddenly becomes relevant.

Status here is significant not only because it expands or restricts access to forums, but because it shapes the strategic significance of action. A state recognised as a credible mediator, a rule-abider or an indispensable hub can sometimes compensate for its material weakness (Eriksson 2020). A state treated as peripheral or unreliable struggles to transform even favourable conditions into

[16] More generally, both contemporary IR scholarship and the practice of international relations should take account of not just the political logic of anarchy but the social logic of multiplicity as well (Kurki and Rosenberg 2020). In this article, "the international" is therefore understood in terms of the dialectical containment of the political logic of anarchy within the social logic of multiplicity, and vice versa (Davenport 2020; Rosenberg 2020; Brglez 2022, 41).

influence. Status literature and relational sociology of diplomacy (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015; Adler-Nissen 2015; 2025) help analyse how the room for manoeuvre of small states is filtered via symbolic hierarchies that are themselves politically contentious (Selg and Ventsel 2020).

Here, the distinction between state and socially distributed capacity for action is crucial. 'Illiberalisation' can increase the room for manoeuvre of executive bodies, foreign policy elites or security bureaucracies, whilst simultaneously restricting the scope of action of parliaments, the opposition, civil society, or vulnerable social groups (Bailes 2014; Briguglio 2018; Joensen and Taylor 2021; Briguglio et al. 2023). A small state may appear strategically successful since it attracts investment, secures external support or gains diplomatic significance (Kozera 2025). Such gains do not by themselves establish broader social empowerment. Research on democratic regression identifies distinct domestic processes (Diamond 2021). Whether these coincide with or are reinforced by external strategic gains requires case-specific explanations. An axiological question therefore becomes unavoidable. It is not merely a question of whether the capacity to act or agency exists, but whose capacity to act is expanding, whose is contracting, and with which practices these shifts are being stabilised.

This perspective also reframes the strategic debate. The contemporary grand strategies of small states cannot be reduced to balancing, accommodation or neutrality alone (Benko 1969; 1992; 1997; Bebler 1998). They are better understood as selective combinations of seeking shelter, specialising in specific issues, building coalitions, diversifying dependencies, managing status, hedging against risks, and controlling exposure to greater powers (cf. Bojinović Fenko and Požgan 2014; Lange and Marn 2024, 57–59). Wivel's (2021) description of the grand strategy of small states is useful here as it shows that smaller actors do not choose between autonomy and dependence in a binary manner. They prioritise and combine strategies in order to survive and shape their environment, especially their immediate environment (Mouritzen 1998), within a context of structural inequality. Strating's (2020) work on risk management demonstrates a similar pattern in a more openly competitive regional environment.

Haxhiraj's study of Albania provides a bounded illustration of such strategic combinations (2026, 16–17, online-first pagination). A continuing Euro-Atlantic orientation coexists with expanded regional and multilateral engagement, indicating changes in the exercise of agency rather than a wholesale change of strategic direction. Institutional embedding is thus an enabling as well as a constraining relation. Even though this case does not establish a general effect of 'illiberalisation', it identifies institutionally mediated adaptation whose conditions and consequences the present framework can help investigate.

For this reason, the most useful question is not whether the ILIO makes small states more or less important in general. Rather, it is a question of which types of action by small states become more feasible, which become more costly, and which are completely sidelined. Some aspects of the problem may reward agility,

mediation, ambiguity, or niche expertise. Others may penalise openness, legalist strategies (Hoffmann 2016; Brglez 2026) or dependence on routine reciprocity. Relational-critical realist analysis is valuable precisely because it does not presuppose a single answer. It inquires into how different combinations of coercion, recognition, institutional access, legal forms and historical dependencies create different strategic repertoires and different political consequences.

The analytical implication is clear. Small states in the ILIO should not be viewed as either heroic defenders of the rules or passive objects of domination. They are reflexive actors operating within historically specific asymmetrical relationships which simultaneously enable, constrain, stratify and sometimes reshape their scope for action. Their agency is real but unevenly conditioned, strategic yet socially mediated, potentially innovative yet often reproductive of broader hierarchies. This means that an appropriate analysis of small states in contemporary circumstances involves tracing the causal mechanisms or causal complexes (Patomäki 2002, 78; 2023, 79) via which different opportunities for action emerge, and assessing the distributional consequences of their use.

CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this article that the ILIO does not eliminate the agency of small states, and instead reshapes it. To grasp this reshaping, small-state studies must leave behind definitions of 'smallness' based on attributes and fragmented interpretations that isolate either material weakness or ideational positioning. The key analytical shift is from small states as fixed units to asymmetrical relationships within which smaller actors are constituted, enabled, constrained and valued. The described shift preserves the field's central achievements – from classical debates on the vulnerability and behaviour of weak states to more recent work on shelter, status, hedging and resilience – whilst situating them within a relational ontology which makes their conditions of possibility explicit.

Its (meta-)theoretical contribution is to connect conditioned agency, practical mediation and the selective constitution of state capacities. The framework treats practices as the means by which real asymmetrical relations are reproduced or transformed, without reducing those relations to their immediate enactment. It also distinguishes the availability of a capacity, its authorised exercise and its consequences. These distinctions make it possible to examine why similar external positions can generate different courses of action, and why apparently successful state strategies may distribute benefits and costs unevenly.

A further implication concerns the articulation of external relations and internal state selectivities. Their correspondence should not be presumed. Drawing selectively on Althusser's materialism of the encounter (2006, 163–74), their conjunction may be understood as contingent, sometimes stabilising and acquiring durable effects, sometimes failing to take hold. This is an opening for further research, not a claim that aleatory materialism and critical realism are fully reconciled. The proposed articulation rejects a guaranteed historical outcome

without abandoning causal explanation or the reality of emergent structures.

The main contribution is thus theoretical, yet with clear analytical implications. The capacity of small states to act should no longer be regarded as a fixed quantity stemming from weak capabilities, nor as a residual exception to structural constraints. It must be analysed as relationally conditioned and unevenly distributed agency within historically structured fields of asymmetry. Once this shift is made, the central question ceases to be whether small states have agency. A more productive question becomes how their agency is structured, via which practices it is exercised, in what conditions it reproduces or transforms asymmetry, and for whom security, influence and transformation are ultimately produced.

FUNDING

This article is the result of research conducted within the Research Programme Group "Slovenia and its actors in international relations and European integration" (P5-0177) financed by ARIS – the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new research data were generated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Kenneth W., and Duncan Snidal. 2000. "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance". *International Organization* 54 (3): 421–56.

Abt, Clark C., and Karl W. Deutsch. 1993. "Basic Problem of Small Countries". In *Kleinstaat: Grundsätzliche und aktuelle Probleme*, edited by Arno Waschkuhn, 19–30. Verlag der Liechtensteinischen Akademischen Gesellschaft.

Adler, Emanuel. 1997. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics". *European Journal of International Relations* 3 (3): 319–63.

Adler, Emanuel, and Vincent Pouliot. 2011a. "International Practices". *International Theory* 3 (1): 1–36.

Adler, Emanuel, and Vincent Pouliot, eds. 2011b. *International Practices*. Cambridge University Press.

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca. 2015. "Conclusion: Relationalism or Why Diplomats Find International Relations Theory Strange". In *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*, edited by Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot and Iver B. Neumann, 284–308. Cambridge University Press.

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca. 2025. "Practices". In *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Sociology*, edited by Stacie Goddard, George Lawson and Ole Jacob Sending, 177–98. Oxford University Press.

Akram, Sadiya. 2023. *Bourdieu, Habitus and Field: A Critical Realist Approach*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Althusser, Louis. 2006. *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987.* Edited by François Matheron and Olivier Corpet. Translated by G. M. Goshgarian. Verso.

Amon Prodnik, Jernej. 2014. *Protislovja komuniciranja: h kritiki poblagovljenja v politični ekonomiji komuniciranja* [Contradictions of Communication: Towards a Critique of Commodification in the Political Economy of Communication]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.

Amstrup, Niels. 1976. "The Perennial Problem of Small States: A Survey of Research Efforts". *Cooperation and Conflict* 11 (3): 163–82.

Anghie, Antony. 2016. "Imperialism and International Legal Theory". In *The Oxford Handbook of the Theory of International Law*, edited by Anne Orford, Florian Hoffmann and Martin Clark, 156–72. Oxford University Press.

Arbeiter, Jana, Maja Bučar, and Boštjan Udovič. 2019. "Slovenian Development Cooperation and Commercial Diplomacy: Twins or Rivals?". *Teorija in praksa* 56 (Special Issue): 454–71.

Armstrong, Harvey W., and Robert Read. 1998. "Trade and Growth in Small States: The Impact of Global Trade Liberalisation". *The World Economy* 21 (4): 563–85.

Aryal, Saroj Kumar, and Manish Jung Pulami. 2026. "Dispersed Agency in Global Politics: Reimagining Small States in the Post-International Era". *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*. Published online 17 January. https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754261418573.

Baehr, Peter R. 1975. "Small States: A Tool for Analysis?". *World Politics* 27 (3): 456–66.

Bailes, Alyson J. K. 2014. "Societal Security and Small States". In *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*, edited by Clive Archer, Alyson J. K. Bailes and Anders Wivel, 66–79. Routledge.

Baillie, Sasha. 1998. "A Theory of Small State Influence in the European Union". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 1 (3/4): 195–219.

Baldacchino, Godfrey. 2018. "Mainstreaming the Study of Small States and Territories". *Small States & Territories* 1 (1): 3–16.

Baldacchino, Godfrey, ed. 2023. *The Success of Small States in International Relations: Mice That Roar?* Routledge.

Baldacchino, Godfrey, and Anders Wivel. 2020. "Small States: Concepts and Theories". In *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, edited by Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, 2–19. Edward Elgar.

Bebler, Anton. 1998. "Security Policy of a Small Central-European Candidate for the Enlarged EU: Slovenia". In *Small States inside and outside the European Union: Interests and Policies*, edited by Laurent Goetschel, 125–37. Kluwer.

Benko, Vlado. 1969. "Majhne in srednje države v svetovni politiki" [Small and medium-sized states in world politics]. *Teorija in praksa* 6 (2): 183–94.

Benko, Vlado. 1992. "The Position and the Role of Small States in the International Community: The Case of Slovenia". Heidelberg: Pan-European Conference on International Relations (ECPR, SG on IR), 16–20 September.

Benko, Vlado. 1997. *Znanost o mednarodnih odnosih* [The Science of International Relations]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.

Beyer, Jessica. 2006. "Annotated Bibliography". In *Small States in International Relations*, edited by Christine Ingebritsen, Iver B. Neumann, Sieglinde Gstöhl and Jessica Beyer, 293–318. University of Washington Press and University of Iceland Press.

Bhaskar, Roy. [1975]2008. *A Realist Theory of Science*. London and New York: Routledge.
Bhaskar, Roy. [1979]1998. *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*. Routledge.
Bhaskar, Roy. 1986. *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. Verso.
Bhaskar, Roy. 1993. *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. Verso.
Bhaskar, Roy. 1994. *Plato Etc.: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution*. Verso.
Bhaskar, Roy. 2016. *Enlightened Common Sense: The Philosophy of Critical Realism*. Edited with a preface by Mervyn Hartwig. Routledge.
Björkdahl, Annika. 2008. "Norm Advocacy: A Small State Strategy to Influence the EU". *Journal of European Public Policy* 15 (1): 135–54.
Bohle, Dorothee, and Wade Jacoby. 2017. "Lean, Special, or Consensual? Vulnerability and External Buffering in the Small States of East-Central Europe". *Comparative Politics* 49 (2): 191–212.
Bojinović Fenko, Ana. 2009. *Sooblikovanje in sovplivanje zunanje politike držav in regionalne strukture v kontekstu procesa regionalizacije v Sredozemlju* [The Mutual Constitution and Reciprocal Influence of States' Foreign Policies and Regional Structure in the Context of Regionalisation in the Mediterranean]. PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences.
Bojinović Fenko, Ana, and Marko Lovec. 2015. "From a Good to a Poor Student: The De-Europeanisation of Slovenian Foreign Policy in the Light of (European) Economic and Financial Crisis". *Études helléniques / Hellenic Studies* 23 (1): 111–40.
Bojinović Fenko, Ana, and Jure Požgan. 2014. "Regionalisation of Slovenian Foreign Policy: Escape from the Balkans, Return to the Western Balkans". *Studia Historica Slovenica* 14 (1): 55–73.
Bojinović Fenko, Ana, and Zlatko Šabič. 2017. "Slovenia's Foreign Policy Opportunities and Constraints: The Analysis of an Interplay of Foreign Policy Environments". *Croatian International Relations Review* 23 (79): 41–72.
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power". *Sociological Theory* 7 (1): 14–25.
Brglez, Milan. 1997. "Understanding and explaining small states: Realist perspectives within international relations". ECPR Workshop on Small States in the Transforming European System, 27 February – 4 March.
Brglez, Milan. 2001. "Reconsidering Wendt's Meta-theory: Blending Scientific Realism with Social Constructivism". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 4 (4): 339–62.
Brglez, Milan. 2002. "NATO Enlargement and Slovenia: Interpreting, Mapping and Constructing International Relations Perspectives". In *Small States in the Post-Cold War World: Slovenia and NATO Enlargement*, edited by Zlatko Šabič and Charles Bukowski, 25–52. Praeger.
Brglez, Milan. 2005. "A New International Role for Small(er) States? Lessons Learned from Small State's Research for Contemporary Diagnosis, Prognosis, Therapy". Paper presented as a keynote speech at CEPSA Annual Conference.
Brglez, Milan. 2008. *Filozofija družbenih ved v znanosti o mednarodnih odnosih: od kritike političnega realizma h kritičnemu ontološkemu realizmu* [Philosophy of Social Sciences in International Relations: From Criticism of Political Realism towards Critical Ontological Realism]. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.
Brglez, Milan. 2011. "K slovenskim diplomatskim študijam" [Towards Slovenian Diplomatic Studies]. *Teorija in praksa* 48 (3): 545–61.

Brglez, Milan. 2021. "Očrt 'znanstvenosti' v znanosti o mednarodnih odnosih" [An Outline of 'Scientificity' in the Science of International Relations]. In *60 let študija in raziskovanja mednarodnih odnosov na Fakulteti za družbene vede* [60 years of Study and Research into International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences], edited by Bojko Bučar, 11–36. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.

Brglez, Milan. 2022. "Prolegomena: kritično ovrednotenje, kontekstualna teoretična aktualizacija ter povabilo k ponovnemu branju znanstvenega opusa profesorja Vlada Benka" [Prolegomena: A Critical Assessment, Contextual Theoretical Reappraisal, and an Invitation to Reread the Scholarly Oeuvre of Professor Vlado Benko]. In *Vlado Benko: Sociologija in teorija mednarodnih odnosov* [Vlado Benko: Sociology and Theory of International Relations], edited by Niko Toš and Milan Brglez, 15–41. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.

Brglez, Milan. 2026. "International Law- or Rules-Based International Order? The Politics of International Law in Comparative Perspective". *Journal of Comparative Politics* 19 (2): 93–126. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20969965.

Briguglio, Lino, ed. 2018. *Handbook of Small States: Economic, Social and Environmental Issues*. Routledge.

Briguglio, Lino, Michael Briguglio, Sheila Bunwaree, and Claire Slatter, eds. 2023. *Handbook of Civil Society and Social Movements in Small States*. Routledge.

Briguglio, Lino, Gordon Cordina, Nadia Farrugia, and Stephanie Vella. 2006. "Conceptualising and Measuring Economic Resilience". In *Building the Economic Resilience of Small States*, edited by Lino Briguglio, Gordon Cordina and E. J. Kisanga, 265–87. Formatek.

Browning, Christopher S. 2006. "Small, Smart and Salient? Rethinking Identity in the Small States Literature". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19 (4): 669–84.

Bučar, Bojko, and Primož Šterbenc. 2002. "Relations between Large and Small States in a Multilateral Context: A Case Study of U.S.-Slovenian Relations Concerning NATO". In *Small States in the Post-Cold War World: Slovenia and NATO Enlargement*, edited by Zlatko Šabič and Charles Bukowski, 103–28. Praeger.

Butler, Petra, and Caroline Morris, eds. 2017. *Small States in a Legal World*. Springer.

Calleya, Stephen. 2016. "Developing States Diplomacy". In *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, edited by Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp, 423–34. SAGE.

Česnakas, Giedrius, and Justinas Juozaitis, eds. 2023. *European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security: In the Shadow of Power*. Routledge.

Chimni, B. S. 2004. "International Institutions Today: An Imperial Global State in the Making". *European Journal of International Law* 15 (1): 1–37.

Christmas-Møller, Wilhelm. 1983. "Some Thoughts on the Scientific Applicability of the Small State Concept: A Research History and a Discussion". In *Small States in Europe and Dependence*, edited by Otmar Höll, 35–53. Westview.

Collier, Andrew. 1994. *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*. Verso.

Cooper, Andrew F., and Timothy M. Shaw. 2009. "The Diplomacies of Small States at the Start of the Twenty-first Century: How Vulnerable? How Resilient?". In *The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper and Timothy M. Shaw, 1–20. Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan.

Corbett, Jack, Yi-chong Xu, and Patrick Weller. 2019. "Norm Entrepreneurship and Diffusion 'from Below' in International Organisations: How the Competent Performance of Vulnerability Generates Benefits for Small States". *Review of International Studies* 45 (4): 647–68.

Crowards, Tom. 2002. "Defining the Category of 'Small' States". *Journal of International Development* 14: 143–79.

Davenport, Andrew. 2020. "Multiplicity: Anarchy in the Mirrors of Sociology". *Globalizations* 17 (3): 532–45.

de Carvalho, Benjamin, and Iver B. Neumann. 2015. "Introduction: Small States and Status". In *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*, edited by Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann, 1–21. Routledge.

Deitelhoff, Nicole, and Linda Wallbott. 2012. "Beyond Soft Balancing: Small States and Coalition-Building in the ICC and Climate Negotiations". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25 (3): 345–66.

Dépelteau, François, ed. 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Diamond, Larry. 2021. "Democratic Regression in Comparative Perspective: Scope, Methods, and Causes". *Democratization* 28 (1): 22–42.

Donati, Pierpaolo. 2015. "Manifesto for a Critical Realist Relational Sociology". *International Review of Sociology* 25 (1): 86–109.

Donati, Pierpaolo, and Margaret S. Archer. 2015. *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge University Press.

Drieschova, Alena, Christian Bueger, and Ted Hopf, eds. 2022. *Conceptualizing International Practices: Directions for the Practice Turn in International Relations*. Cambridge University Press.

Dunne, Timothy. 1995. "The Social Construction of International Society". *European Journal of International Relations* 1 (3): 367–89.

East, Maurice A. 1973. "Size and Foreign Policy Behavior: A Test of Two Models". *World Politics* 25 (4): 556–76.

Ejdus, Filip. 2017. "'Not a Heap of Stones': Material Environments and Ontological Security in International Relations". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30 (1): 23–43.

Ejdus, Filip, and Tijana Rečević. 2021. "Ontological Insecurity as an Emergent Phenomenon: Bottom-Up Securitization of Migration in Serbia". *European Psychologist* 26 (1): 29–44.

Elman, Miriam Fendius. 1995. "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard". *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (2): 171–217.

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology". *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (2): 281–317.

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "What Is Agency?". *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962–1023.

Eriksson, Jacob. 2020. "Mediation by Small States: Norway and Sweden in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict". In *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, edited by Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, 207–21. Edward Elgar.

Fluck, Mathew. 2017. *The Concept of Truth in International Relations Theory: Critical Thought Beyond Post-Positivism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power". *Critical Inquiry* 8 (4): 777–95.

Fox, Annette Baker. 1959. *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II*. University of Chicago Press.

Fromm, Nicolas. 2019. *Constructivist Niche Diplomacy: Qatar's Middle East Diplomacy as an Illustration of Small State Norm Crafting*. Springer VS.

Galal, Abdelraouf Mostafa. 2020. "External Behavior of Small States in Light of Theories of International Relations". *Review of Economics and Political Science* 5 (1): 38–56.

Go, Julian, and Daniel H. Nexon. 2025. "What Is Relationalism?". In *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Sociology*, edited by Stacie Goddard, George Lawson and Ole Jacob Sending, 31–62. Oxford University Press.

Gourevitch, Peter. 1978. "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics". *International Organization* 32 (4): 881–912.

Guzzini, Stefano. 1993. "Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Power Analysis". *International Organization* 47 (3): 443–78.

Guzzini, Stefano. 2012. "The Ambivalent 'Diffusion of Power' in Global Governance". In *The Diffusion of Power in Global Governance: International Political Economy Meets Foucault*, edited by Stefano Guzzini and Iver B. Neumann, 1–37. Palgrave Macmillan.

Guzzini, Stefano. 2013. "Liberal International Order". In *Liberal World Orders*, edited by Tim Dunne and Trine Flockhart, 247–56. Proceedings of the British Academy 190. Oxford University Press.

Guzzini, Stefano. 2017. "Power and Cause". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20 (4): 737–59.

Guzzini, Stefano, and Jimmy Casas Klausen. 2025. "Power in International Political Sociology". In *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Sociology*, edited by Stacie Goddard, George Lawson and Ole Jacob Sending, 661–93. Oxford University Press.

Guzzini, Stefano, and Anna Leander. 2001. "A Social Theory for International Relations: An Appraisal of Alexander Wendt's Theoretical and Disciplinary Synthesis". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 4 (4): 316–38.

Handel, Michael I. 1981. *Weak States in the International System*. London: Frank Cass.

Haxhiraj, Elmas. 2026. "Small-State Foreign Policy in the Western Balkans: Continuity and Change in Albania's Euro-Atlantic and Regional Strategy". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. Published online 22 July. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2026.2701994.

Hey, Jeanne A. K., ed. 2003. *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*. Lynne Rienner.

Hočevar, Marko, Tibor Rutar, and Marko Lovec, eds. 2023. *The Neoliberal World Order in Crisis, and Beyond*. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Publishing House.

Hoffmann, Florian. 2016. "International Legalism and International Politics". In *The Oxford Handbook of the Theory of International Law*, edited by Anne Orford, Florian Hoffmann and Martin Clark, 954–84. Oxford University Press.

Hollis, Martin, and Steve Smith. [1990]1991. *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*. Clarendon.

Ikenberry, G. John. 2018. "The End of Liberal International Order?". *International Affairs* 94 (1): 7–23.

Ish-Shalom, Piki, Markus Kornprobst, and Vincent Pouliot, eds. 2021. *Theorizing World Orders: Cognitive Evolution and Beyond*. Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus, and Daniel H. Nexon. 1999. "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics". *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (3): 291–332.

Jackson, Sarita. 2012. "Small States and Compliance Bargaining in the WTO: An Analysis of the Antigua–US Gambling Services Case". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25 (3): 367–85.

Jahn, Beate. 2018. "Liberal Internationalism: Historical Trajectory and Current Prospects". *International Affairs* 94 (1): 43–61.

Jaklič, Andreja. 2024. "Has Twenty Years of Slovenia's EU Membership Boosted Competitiveness and Foreign Direct Investments?". In *Slovenia and the EU: 20 Years of Membership in Perspective*, edited by Michael Kaeding and Boštjan Udovič, 9–16. Springer.

Jessop, Bob. 2007. *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*. Polity.

Jessop, Bob. 2016. *The State: Past, Present, and Future*. Polity.

Joensen, Tómas, and Ian Taylor, eds. 2021. *Small States and the European Migrant Crisis: Politics and Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Joseph, Jonathan, and Milja Kurki. 2018. "The Limits of Practice: Why Realism Can Complement IR's Practice Turn". *International Theory* 10 (1): 71–97.

Joseph, Jonathan, and Colin Wight, eds. 2010. *Scientific Realism and International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Katzenstein, Peter J. 1985. *Small States in World Markets: Industrial Policy in Europe*. Cornell University Press.

Katzenstein, Peter J. 2003. "Small States and Small States Revisited". *New Political Economy* 8 (1): 9–30.

Kaul, Nitasha. 2023. "Subalternizing Geopolitics: Bhutan as a Small Himalayan State". *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs* 9: 11–18.

Kavalski, Emilian, and Karolina Pomorska. 2026. "Coming out of the Periphery? The Curious Case of the (Vanishing) Actorness of Central and Eastern Europe in World Affairs". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 39 (5): 692–707. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2026.2724192.

Keohane, Robert O. 1969. "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics". *International Organization* 23 (2): 291–310.

Keohane, Robert O. 1971. "The Big Influence of Small Allies". *Foreign Policy* 2 (Spring): 161–82.

Knudsen, Olav F. 2002. "Small States, Latent and Extant: Towards a General Perspective". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 5 (2): 182–98.

Koff, Harlan, and Thomas Kolnberger. 2024. "Introduction: Agency, Security, and Governance of Small States in a Fast-Changing World". In *Agency, Security and Governance of Small States: A Global Perspective*, edited by Thomas Kolnberger and Harlan Koff, 1–10. Routledge.

Koskenniemi, Martti. 2005. *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument – Reissue with a new Epilogue*. Cambridge University Press.

Kozera, Łukasz. 2025. "Strategies of Asymmetric Diplomacy of Small States in a Multipolar World". *Foreign Affairs* (Ukraine) 35 (5): 18–28. https://doi.org/10.59214/ua.fa/5.2025.18.

Kurki, Milja. 2008. *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Kurki, Milja. 2020. *International Relations in a Relational Universe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kurki, Milja, and Justin Rosenberg. 2020. "Multiplicity: A New Common Ground for International Theory?". *Globalizations* 17 (3): 397–403.

Kurki, Milja, and Adriana Sinclair. 2010. "Hidden in Plain Sight: Constructivist Treatment of Social Context and Its Limitations". *International Politics* 47 (1): 1–25.

Lange [Kajnč], Sabina. 2006. *Razumevanje evropske zunanje politike z vidika dihotomije agent–struktura* [Understanding European Foreign Policy from the Perspective of the Agent–Structure Dichotomy]. PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Lange, Sabina, and Matej Marn. 2024. "Twenty Years in the EU (CFSP): From 'Now What'? To Finding a Distinct Voice for Slovenia's Foreign Policy". In *Slovenia and the EU: 20 Years of Membership in Perspective*, edited by Michael Kaeding and Boštjan Udovič, 55–60. Springer.

Lange, Sabina, and Marjan Svetličič. 2024. "Slovenia's First and Second EU Council Presidency: Lessons Learnt to Enhance the Benefits of EU Membership". *Acta Histriae* 32 (3): 367–90.

Leigh, Joseph. 2021. "Geoculture and Unevenness: Occidentalism in the History of Uneven and Combined Development". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34 (2): 186–206.

Long, Tom. 2017. "It's Not the Size, It's the Relationship: From 'Small States' to Asymmetry". *International Politics* 54 (2): 144–60.

Long, Tom. 2022. *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics*. Oxford University Press.

Lovato, Marianna, and Karolina Pomorska. 2026. "Preserving the 'Pecking Order' in Europe's Diplomatic Hierarchies: Comparing the Place of Central Eastern Europeans in the EU and NATO". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 39 (5): 736–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2026.2698112.

Lovec, Marko. 2013. *Ontološka realistična analiza reform Skupne kmetijske politike Evropske unije* [An Ontological Realist Analysis of Reforms of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy]. PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Lovec, Marko, and Marjan Svetličič. 2019. "Saving Liberal Internationalism from a Liberal World Order in Crisis". *Teorija in praksa* 56 (Special Issue): 356–71.

Luša, Đana, and Petra Mijić. 2012. "Vanjska politika malih država – normativna moć kao faktor utjecaja u međunarodnim odnosima" [Foreign Policy of Small States – Normative Power as a Factor of Influence in International Relations]. *Političke perspektive* 2 (3): 39–65.

Maass, Matthias. 2009. "The Elusive Definition of the Small State". *International Politics* 46 (1): 65–83.

Maass, Matthias. 2017. *Small States in World Politics: The Story of Small State Survival, 1648–2016*. Manchester University Press.

Maass, Matthias. 2020. "Small States: Surviving, Perishing and Proliferating Through History". In *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, edited by Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, 20–37. Edward Elgar.

Magid, Jacob. 2026. "Full text: Charter of Trump's Board of Peace". *The Times of Israel*, 18 January 2026. https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-charter-of-trumps-board-of-peace/.

Marsden, Richard. 1999. *The Nature of Capital: Marx after Foucault*. Routledge.

Marx, Karl. [1857/58]1985. *Kritika politične ekonomije 1857/58* [Grundrisse]. METI I/8. Delavska enotnost.

Michalski, Anna, Douglas Brommesson, and Ann-Marie Ekengren. 2024. "Small States and the Dilemma of Geopolitics: Role Change in Finland and Sweden". *International Affairs* 100 (1): 139–57.

Moisio, Sami. 2022. "Geopolitics of Explaining Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and the Challenge of Small States". *Political Geography* 97: 102683. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102683.

Montana, Jasper. 2022. "Mediating Sovereignty for the Environment in the British Overseas Territories". *Small States & Territories* 5 (1): 103–20.

Mouritzen, Hans. 1983. "Defensive Acquiescence: Making the Best of Dependence". In *Small States in Europe and Dependence*, edited by Otmar Höll, 239–62. Westview.

Mouritzen, Hans. 1991. "Tension between the Strong, and the Strategies of the Weak". *Journal of Peace Research* 28 (2): 217–30.

Mouritzen, Hans. 1998. *Theory and Reality of International Politics*. Ashgate.

Mouritzen, Hans, and Anders Wivel, eds. 2005. *The Geopolitics of Euro-Atlantic Integration*. Routledge.

Neumann, Iver B. 2002. "Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy". *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 31 (3): 627–51.

Neumann, Iver B. 2024. "The Graded Agency of Small States". In *Agency, Security and Governance of Small States: A Global Perspective*, edited by Thomas Kolnberger and Harlan Koff, 49–62. Routledge.

Neumann, Iver B., and Sieglinde Gstöhl. 2006. "Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?". In *Small States in International Relations*, edited by Christine Ingebritsen, Iver B. Neumann, Sieglinde Gstöhl and Jessica Beyer, 3–36. University of Washington Press and University of Iceland Press.

Norrie, Alan. 2010. *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds of Justice*. Routledge.

Ollman, Bertell. 2003. *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*. University of Illinois Press.

Panke, Diana. 2012a. "Dwarfs in International Negotiations: How Small States Make Their Voices Heard". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25 (3): 313–28.

Panke, Diana. 2012b. "Being Small in a Big Union: Punching Above Their Weights? How Small States Prevailed in the Vodka and the Pesticides Cases". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25 (3): 329–44.

Panke, Diana, and Baldur Thorhallsson. 2024. "Foreign Policy of Small States". In *The Oxford Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis*, edited by Juliet Kaarbo and Cameron G. Thies, 501–18. Oxford University Press.

Parmar, Inderjeet. 2018. "The US-Led Liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name?". *International Affairs* 94 (1): 151–72.

Patomäki, Heikki. 1991. "Concepts of 'Action', 'Structure' and 'Power' in 'Critical Social Realism': A Positive and Reconstructive Critique". *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 21 (2): 221–50.

Patomäki, Heikki. 2002. *After International Relations: Critical Realism and the (Re)Construction of World Politics*. Routledge.

Patomäki, Heikki. 2017. "Praxis, Politics and the Future: A Dialectical Critical Realist Account of World Causation". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20 (4): 805–25.

Patomäki, Heikki. 2023. *World Statehood: The Future of World Politics*. Springer.

Patomäki, Heikki, and Jamie Morgan. 2023a. "World Politics, Critical Realism and the Future of Humanity: An Interview with Heikki Patomäki, Part 1". *Journal of Critical Realism* 22 (3): 562–603.

Patomäki, Heikki, and Jamie Morgan. 2023b. "World Politics, Critical Realism and the Future of Humanity: An Interview with Heikki Patomäki, Part 2". *Journal of Critical Realism* 22 (4): 720–66.

Patomäki, Heikki, and Colin Wight. 2000. "After Postpositivism?: The Promises of Critical Realism". *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2): 213–37.

Pedi, Revecca, and Anders Wivel. 2024. "The Power (Politics) of the Weak Revisited: Realism and the Study of Small-state Foreign Policy". In *Agency, Security and Governance of Small States: A Global Perspective*, edited by Thomas Kolnberger and Harlan Koff, 13–28. Routledge.

Putnam, Robert D. 1988. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games". *International Organization* 42 (3): 427–60.

Radoman, Jelena. 2018. "Small States in World Politics: State of the Art". *Journal of Regional Security* 13 (2): 179–200.

Rickli, Jean-Marc, and Khalid Almezaini. 2017. "Theories of Small States' Foreign and Security Policies and the Gulf States". In *The Small Gulf States: Foreign and Security Policies Before and After the Arab Spring*, edited by Khalid S. Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli, 8–30. Routledge.

Rosenberg, Justin. 2020. "Trotsky's Error: Multiplicity and the Secret Origins of Revolutionary Marxism". *Globalizations* 17 (3): 477–97.

Rosenberg, Justin. 2021. "Results and Prospects: An Introduction to the CRIA Special Issue on UCD." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34 (2): 146–63.

Rutar, Tibor. 2016. *Sodobni zagovor historičnega materializma: sociologija, zgodovina, filozofija* [A Contemporary Defence of Historical Materialism: Sociology, History, Philosophy]. Sophia.

Rutar, Tibor. 2017. *Od klasične sociologije k mednarodni historični sociologiji: izvori in narava modernosti* [From Classical Sociology to International Historical Sociology: The Origins and Nature of Modernity]. Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts.

Rutar, Tibor. 2018. *Mikrotemelji in makrovzroki družbenih pojavov: sodobna sociološka metateorija* [Microfoundations and Macro-Level Causes of Social Phenomena: Contemporary Sociological Metatheory]. Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts.

Schindler, Seth, Jessica DiCarlo and Dinesh Paudel. 2022. "The New Cold War and the Rise of the 21st-Century Infrastructure State". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 47: 331–46.

Selg, Peeter, and Andreas Ventsel. 2020. *Introducing Relational Political Analysis: Political Semiotics as a Theory and Method*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sending, Ole Jacob, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, eds. 2015. *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Sinclair, Adriana. 2010. *International Relations Theory and International Law: A Critical Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Sinclair, Adriana. 2021. "Why We Should See International Law as a Structure: Unpicking International Law's Ontology and Agency". *International Relations* 35 (2): 216–35.

Strating, Rebecca. 2020. "Small Power Hedging in an Era of Great-Power Politics: Southeast Asian Responses to China's Pursuit of Energy Security". *Asian Studies Review* 44 (1): 97–116.

Sutton, Paul. 2011. "The Concept of Small States in the International Political Economy". *The Round Table* 100 (413): 141–54.

Šabič, Zlatko. 2002. "Small States Aspiring for NATO Membership: Some Factors Influencing the Accession Process". In *Small States in the Post-Cold War World: Slovenia and NATO Enlargement*, edited by Zlatko Šabič and Charles Bukowski, 1–24. Praeger.

Šabič, Zlatko, Ana Bojinović Fenko, and Petra Roter. 2016. "Small States and Parliamentary Diplomacy: Slovenia and the Mediterranean". *Mediterranean Quarterly* 27 (4): 42–60.

Šabič, Zlatko, and Milan Brglez. 2002. "The National Identity of Post-Communist Small States in the Process of Accession to the European Union: The Case of Slovenia". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 35 (1): 67–84.

The White House. 2025. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, DC.

Thorhallsson, Baldur. 2012. "Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?". *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 7: 135–60.

Thorhallsson, Baldur. 2018. "Studying Small States: A Review". *Small States & Territories* 1 (1): 17–34.

Thorhallsson, Baldur, and Alyson J. K. Bailes. 2016. "Small State Diplomacy". In *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, edited by Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp, 294–307. SAGE.

Thorhallsson, Baldur, and Anders Wivel. 2006. "Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19 (4): 651–68.

Timilsana, Binod Khanda. 2024. "Soft Power and Small States: A Theoretical Discussion". *Journal of Political Science* 24: 139–58.

Udovič, Boštjan, and Marjan Svetličič. 2007. "Majhne države v novih teorijah mednarodne trgovine" [Small States in New Theories of International Trade]. *Teorija in praksa* 44 (1/2): 29–48.

United States Department of War. 2026. *2026 National Defense Strategy: Restoring Peace Through Strength for a New Golden Age of America*. Washington, DC.

Vandenberghe, Frédéric. 1999. "'The Real Is Relational': An Epistemological Analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's Generative Structuralism". *Sociological Theory* 17 (1): 32–67.

Vangeli, Anastas, Ana Bojinović Fenko, and Faris Kočan. 2026. "Doomscrollers by Day, Gamers by Night: Patching Digital Sovereignty in the Western Balkan States amid US-China Technological Rivalry". *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 34 (2): 387–409.

Väyrynen, Raimo. 1983. "Small States in Different Theoretical Traditions of International Relations Research". In *Small States in Europe and Dependence*, edited by Otmar Höll, 83–104. Westview.

Veenendaal, Wouter P., and Jack Corbett. 2015. "Why Small States Offer Important Answers to Large Questions". *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (4): 527–49.

Vital, David. 1967. *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations*. Clarendon Press.

Vital, David. 1971. *The Survival of Small States: Studies in Small Power/Great Power Conflict*. Oxford University Press.

Weiss, Tomáš. 2026. "Specialisation (Un)recognised: Human Rights and Western Balkans in Czech Foreign Policy". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 39 (5): 784–802. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2025.2574688.

Wendt, Alexander. 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Wight, Colin. 2006. *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology*. Cambridge University Press.

Wivel, Anders. 2021. "The Grand Strategies of Small States". In *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, edited by Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, 490–505. Oxford University Press.

Wivel, Anders. 2025. "Why Small States Offer Answers to Important Questions in International Relations: Rethinking Power and Agency". *Small States & Territories* 8 (1): 26–29.

Wivel, Anders, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Clive Archer. 2014. "Setting the Scene: Small States and International Security". In *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*, edited by Clive Archer, Alyson J. K. Bailes and Anders Wivel, 3–25. Routledge.

Wivel, Anders, and Christine Ingebritsen. 2019. "Why Shelter Theory Matters: Ramifications for International Relations and Small State Studies". In *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs*, edited by Baldur Thorhallsson, 205–13. Routledge.

Wivel, Anders, and Baldur Thorhallsson. 2018. "Brexit and Small States in Europe: Hedging, Hiding or Seeking Shelter?". In *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*, edited by Patrick Diamond, Peter Nedergaard and Ben Rosamond, 266–77. Routledge.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2011. *Poskusiti znova – spodleteti bolje* [Try Again – Fail Better]. Edited by Peter Klepec. Translated by Simon Hajdini and Lidija Šumah. Cankarjeva založba.

ONTOLOŠKO PROUČEVANJE ZMOŽNOSTI DELOVANJA MALIH DRŽAV V NELIBERALNEM MEDNARODNEM REDU

Povzetek. *Članek trdi, da neliberalni mednarodni red ne odpravlja zmožnosti delovanja malih držav, temveč se ta zmožnost preoblikuje v okviru asimetričnih materialnih, institucionalnih, idejnih in zgodovinskih mednarodnih (družbenih) odnosov. Najprej rekonstruira genealogijo študij malih držav, nato Longov relacijski obrat prebere kot most od atributivnih definicij malih držav k njihovi pogojeni zmožnosti delovanja ter ga razširi z (dialektično) kritično realističnim okvirom. Zunanjepolitične in diplomatske prakse posredujejo med asimetričnimi mednarodnimi odnosi in notranje konstituiranimi zmožnostmi države ter reproducirajo ali preoblikujejo pogoje delovanja. Zato mora analiza malih držav odgovoriti na vprašanje, kako, pod kakšnimi pogoji in za koga se v mednarodnih odnosih oblikujeta varnost in vpliv ter potekajo procesi transformacije.*

Ključni pojmi: *(dialektični) kritični realizem, diplomacija, neliberalni mednarodni red, prakse, relacijski obrat, študije malih držav, zmožnost delovanja.*

Luka JESENŠEK*

STRUKTURA SLOVENSKE POLITIČNE RAZPRAVE NA SPLETNEM DRUŽBENEM OMREŽJU X PRED VOLITVAMI V EVROPSKI PARLAMENT 2024**

Povzetek. *Strukturna analiza več kot 67.000 tvitov razkriva, kdo oblikuje slovensko politično razpravo na omrežju X in kako fragmentirana je bila pred evropskimi volitvami leta 2024. Z analizo socialnih omrežij preučujem aktivnost in vpliv uporabnikov, strukturo skupnosti in pretok informacij v omrežju. Rezultati se skladajo s pričakovanji: aktivnost je neenakomerno porazdeljena, najaktivnejši uporabniki niso nujno najbolj vidni, omrežje pa je politično strukturirano. Politično desno usmerjen del omrežja je večji in aktivnejši – to velja tudi za politike, ki so med najvplivnejšimi uporabniki znotraj svojih skupnosti. Pretok informacij med različnimi deli omrežja je majhen, kar kaže na vse večjo fragmentacijo spletne javne sfere.*

Ključni pojmi: *spletna družbena omrežja, X, središčni uporabniki, fragmentacija, odmevne sobe, evropske volitve, analiza socialnih omrežij.*

UVOD

Spletna družbena omrežja, ki jih zaznamujeta povezljivost in hitrost pretoka informacij, spreminjajo način političnega komuniciranja, odnose med politiki in državljani ter načine dostopanja do informacij o javnih zadevah (Jungherr idr. 2020). Tokovi komuniciranja, ki so jih v tradicionalnem medijskem sistemu v veliki meri obvladovali novinarji in politiki, se dandanes (so)oblikujejo v večsmernem komunikacijskem procesu, v katerem se vloge pošiljateljev in prejemnikov sporočil vse bolj zamegljujejo in izmenjujejo. Ko se pomemben del javne razprave seli na spletne platforme, ki vsaj teoretično ponujajo enakovredne možnosti vključenosti širokemu krogu uporabnikov, postaja vse pomembnejše vprašanje, kdo ima v spletni politični razpravi moč in vpliv. Platforme, kot je X,

* Dr. Luka Jesenšek, luka@jesensek.si.
** Izvirni znanstveni članek.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.471

vsakomur omogočajo objavljanje sporočil, ne glede na njegov sloves, dostop do medijev ali družben status – kar bi, vsaj teoretično, lahko prineslo opolnomočenje državljanov, omogočilo široko in odprto javno razpravo ter zmanjšalo moč tradicionalnih nosilcev vpliva (van Dijk in Hacker 2018).

Kljub vključujoči zasnovi spletnih družbenih omrežij pa so pogosta opozorila, da spletne platforme krepijo drobljenje javne sfere (Dylko idr. 2017; Kubin in von Sikorski 2021) ter spodbujajo delitve in radikalizacijo javnega diskurza (Bradshaw in Howard 2018; Rieger idr. 2018), zaradi česar naj ne bi bila primerna za razvoj smiselne politične razprave (Fuchs 2021). Gre za svojevrsten paradoks sodobnega komunikacijskega okolja: z nenehnim, hipnim komuniciranjem na spletnih družbenih omrežjih in skoraj neomejenim dostopom do informacij smo bolj povezani kot kadar koli doslej, obenem pa tudi bolj razdeljeni in obdani s sebi podobnimi. Na spletu naj bi tako večino časa preživeli v ideološko pretežno homogenih okoljih, ki jih nekateri imenujejo odmevne sobe – v prostorih, v katerih "odmevajo" enaka mnenja, dialoga z drugače mislečimi pa je malo. Odmevne sobe naj bi bile še posebej prisotne na spletnem družbenem omrežju X (nekoč Twitter). Platforma, ki je že od svojega nastanka priljubljen prostor javnega komuniciranja med novinarji, ustanovami in politiki, je po Muskovem prevzemu leta 2022 doživela številne spremembe, ki jih mnogi vidijo kot dokončen odmik od ideala spletnih družbenih omrežij kot vključujočih prostorov javne razprave, nekakšnih digitalnih približkov starogrškega foruma, prostora mrežne javne sfere[1] (Benkler 2006).[2] Namesto da bi spletne tehnologije komuniciranja pripomogle k boljši obveščenosti, dialogu in argumentirani razpravi, se vse bolj zdi, da z ustvarjanjem vzporednih, po meri urejenih realnosti le spodbujajo delitve (Jacobson idr. 2019), državljani pa se na njih zapiramo v skupnosti, v katerih so drugačna mnenja demonizirana – ali pa nas sploh ne dosežejo. A vendar številni opozarjajo, da so svarila o negativnih posledicah, ki v veliki meri temeljijo na predpostavki tehnološkega determinizma, pretirana, raziskave spletnega komuniciranja pa pogosto ne najdejo trdnih empiričnih dokazov o umikanju uporabnikov v izolirane skupnosti (Bruns 2019). Slednje, če obstajajo, bi naj bile redke, večina uporabnikov spletnih družbenih omrežij pa naj bi bila izpostavljena celo večji raznolikosti vsebin kot neuporabniki (Duggan in Smith 2016).

Ali na spletu res živimo v odmevnih sobah? Kako slovenski uporabniki omrežja X komunicirajo v predvolilnem času, kateri uporabniki imajo največji vpliv na razpravo, kako se med seboj povezujejo in kaj to pove o sodobnem političnem diskurzu? Ta vprašanja usmerjajo raziskovalni problem: v kolikšni meri je razprava na spletnih družbenih omrežjih 1) osredinjena okoli omejenega kroga najvidnejših akterjev in 2) razdeljena na skupnosti uporabnikov, med katerimi je

[1] Angl. *networked public sphere*.

[2] Gre za nesmisel ideje mrežne javne sfere – okolje, ki bi naj državljanom ponujalo možnost vključenosti v javno razpravo in argumentirano soočanje različnih mnenj temelji na tehnologijah spletnih platform, ki za kaj takega niso bile ustvarjene – gre za zasebna podjetja, katerih glavni namen ni krepitev demokracije, pač pa zadovoljstvo lastnikov in delničarjev (gl. Sekloča 2020).

malo povezav. To empirično preučujem s pomočjo korpusa več kot 67.000 slovenskih tvitov, objavljenih v obdobju enega meseca pred volitvami v Evropski parlament leta 2024. Analizo usmerjata dve raziskovalni vprašanji:

RV 1: Kakšen je obseg slovenske politične razprave na spletnem družbenem omrežju X in kako je aktivnost porazdeljena med uporabniki? Pri tem se osredinim na tri podvprašanja: (1) Koliko uporabnikov v njej sodeluje? (2) Kdo so najaktivnejši in najvplivnejši uporabniki? (3) Kakšna je vloga politikov pri širjenju vsebin?

RV 2: Kako fragmentirana je slovenska politična razprava na spletnem družbenem omrežju X? Pri tem se osredotočam na dve podvprašanji: (1) Ali so uporabniki razdeljeni po skupnostih glede na njihovo politično in svetovnonazorsko prepričanje? (2) Kakšen je pretok informacij med različnimi deli omrežja?

Poglobljena strukturna analiza komuniciranja na spletnem družbenem omrežju X (1) ponuja podatke o obsegu spletne politične razprave v Sloveniji, (2) izpostavlja najaktivnejše in najvplivnejše uporabnike, (3) empirično ovrednoti fragmentacijo javne razprave na spletu in (4) odpira možnost domačih in mednarodnih primerjav ter vpogled v navzočnost globalnih usmeritev spletnega političnega komuniciranja v slovenskem okolju. V nadaljevanju najprej predstavim teoretična in konceptualna izhodišča o vlogi akterjev in fragmentaciji spletnega političnega komuniciranja. Sledijo uporabljene metode ter pregled rezultatov empirične analize (o obsegu slovenske predvolilne razprave, središčnih uporabnikih in strukturi skupnosti ter pretoku informacij med njimi). Članek sklenem z razpravo o pomenu ugotovitev ter omejitvah.

POLITIČNO KOMUNICIRANJE NA X: AKTERJI IN FRAGMENTACIJA

Spletno družbeno omrežje X

X je spletno družbeno omrežje, ki omogoča objavljanje kratkih sporočil (tvitov), povezav, fotografij in posnetkov. Od nastanka leta 2006 je postal eno izmed najbolj priljubljenih spletnih družbenih omrežij za javno in politično komuniciranje, komentiranje tekočih dogodkov in pomemben prostor javne razprave (Bruns in Highfield 2016). Leta 2022 je omrežje s skupino vlagateljev prevzel Elon Musk, kar je privedlo do številnih sprememb v delovanju platforme, ki se je preimenovala v X. Obdobje je zaznamovalo zmanjšanje prizadevanj za moderiranje vsebin (Arun idr. 2024) in prilagajanje algoritmov za njihovo razvrščanje (Ye idr. 2024), kar naj bi prispevalo k vse bolj polariziranemu in sovražnemu okolju (Oxford Analytica 2025). Nekatere raziskave ugotavljajo, da so te spremembe povzročile porast neprimernega govora in botov (Hickey idr. 2023) ter najbolj koristile (skrajno) desnim uporabnikom, katerih vidnost in doseg vsebin naj bi se močno povečala (Barrie 2023). To kaže na ideološki zasuk platforme, ki je nekoč veljala za prostor liberalnih in progresivnih idej (Wojcik in Hughes 2019). Spremembe na področju politike moderiranja vsebin in očitki o ideološki pristranskosti so povzročile premike v uporabniški bazi platforme, kar vpliva tudi na ustroj komunikacijske krajine na področju (spletnega) političnega

komuniciranja. Spremembe naj bi povzročile opuščanje uporabe (Cava idr. 2023) – X so tako zaradi očitkov o razmahu nedostojne komunikacije, politični pristranskosti ter nepreglednem postopku verifikacije uporabnikov (Haman in Školník 2025) zapustile nekatere medijske hiše[3] ter vplivni uporabniki. V Sloveniji je konec leta 2022 objavljanje na platformi opustila takrat največja koalicijska stranka Gibanje Svoboda, ki je ob tem zapisala, da se je X "sprevrgel v družbeno omrežje, ki so ga določene skupine – predvsem gre za člane in podpornike nekaterih političnih strank – zlorabile za poglabljanje polarizacije, širjenje lažnih novic, manipulacij, diskreditacij, žalitev in celo sovražnega govora" (Gibanje Svoboda 2022). A kljub pozivom o selitvi na alternativne platforme, kot so Mastodon, Threads in Bluesky (Jeong idr. 2024), so številni ključni javni akterji (politiki, ustanove, novinarji itd.) v Evropi in ZDA zaradi dosega, občinstva in profesionalnih obveznosti v veliki meri ohranili svojo prisotnost na X (Ng in Ray 2025; Peña-Fernández idr. 2025). Vpliv teh dejavnikov na javno komuniciranje je lahko velik, zato je ob odsotnosti celovitih raziskav strukture in dinamike (politične) spletne razprave v Sloveniji in Evropi dobrodošlo nadaljnje preučevanje razvijajoče se vloge platforme X v raznolikih političnih in medijskih okoljih.

Spletna družbena omrežja in središčni uporabniki

Pri preučevanju politične razprave na spletnih družbenih omrežjih so zelo pomembni središčni uporabniki – to so uporabniki, ki imajo zaradi svojega položaja v omrežju nadpovprečen vpliv na širjenje informacij. Za spletna družbena omrežja je značilno, da ima majhen del najbolj aktivnih uporabnikov – nekateri jih imenujejo superudeleženci (Graham in Wright 2014) – odločilen vpliv na oblikovanje razprave, medtem ko je večina uporabnikov pasivnejša. Poleg aktivnosti je na družbenih omrežjih pomemben tudi vpliv, ki ga lahko kvantitativno izrazimo s številom prejetih povezav, pri čemer sklepamo, da so najbolj vplivni tisti uporabniki, katerih sporočila so največkrat deljena (Dang-Xuan idr. 2013; Dubois in Gaffney 2014). Obe meri nista nujno povezani; medtem ko nekateri ugotavljajo, da večja aktivnost v komunikacijskih procesih prinese tudi večji vpliv in vidnost (Bastos idr. 2013), empirične raziskave kažejo tudi nasprotno – da uporabniki, ki delijo velike količine vsebin, (zgolj) zaradi tega niso tudi bolj vplivni (Cha idr. 2010; Bracciale idr. 2018). Večsmerno komuniciranje in vključenost državljanov, ki ga s tehnološko zasnovo omogočajo spletna družbena omrežja, lahko vplivata tudi na komunikacijske vloge in vpliv tradicionalnih političnih akterjev. Transformacijska teza predpostavlja, da spletna družbena omrežja omogočajo vzpon politikom in pogledom, ki so bili v tradicionalnem medijskem sistemu zgolj obrobno zastopani, saj – s tem ko vsakomur omogočajo objavljanje mnenj – zmanjšujejo vlogo tradicionalnih nosilcev vpliva (van Dijk in Hacker 2018). Po drugi strani pa normalizacijska teza predpostavlja, da spletne platforme zgolj odsevajo obstoječe družbene strukture in razmerja moči

[3] Med največjimi NPR, PBS, The Guardian, Le Monde.

(Stromer-Galley 2017), zaradi česar naj bi predstavniki političnih, medijskih in družbenih "elit" prevladovali tudi v digitalnem komunikacijskem prostoru.

Z vidika političnega komuniciranja so središčni uporabniki še posebej pomembni, saj imajo zaradi svojega položaja v omrežju (veliko število povezav z drugimi enotami) odločilen vpliv na komunikacijske tokove. V gosto povezanih omrežjih lahko s tem, da odstranimo zgolj nekaj središčnih uporabnikov močno omejimo ali prekinemo pretok informacij (Ghajar-Khosravi in Chignell 2017). Posledično lahko središčni uporabniki delujejo kot posredniki ali odbiratelji[4] (Vos 2015; Barzilai-Nahon 2008), zaradi velikega dosega in moči uokvirjanja razprave pa jih povezujemo tudi s konceptom mnenjskih voditeljev (Katz in Lazarsfeld 1966), uporabnikov z veliko prepričevalno močjo, ki lahko vplivajo na poglede in dejanja drugih (Dubois in Gaffney 2014). Središčni uporabniki so prav tako odvisni od strukture omrežja, kar je še posebej razvidno v fragmentiranem okolju politične razprave. Status uporabnikov je tako pogosto omejen na dele omrežja oz. skupnosti podobno mislečih uporabnikov, znotraj katerih si posamezniki pridobijo vpliv z deljenjem vsebin, ki ustrezajo pogledom članov (Soares idr. 2018; Stewart idr. 2017). Take skupnostne elite[5] (Papacharissi 2018) vsebine filtrirajo in razširjajo na osnovi ideoloških prepričanj, kar Bruns opisuje s konceptom nadzora odbirateljstva[6] (Bruns 2011). Zaradi vpliva na usmerjanje razprave je zanimiva vloga politikov kot središčnih uporabnikov, saj fragmentirano komunikacijsko okolje ponuja možnosti učinkovitega nagovarjanja ciljnih skupin. Med središčnimi uporabniki so tako pogosto politiki, ki nagovarjajo nišna občinstva in s strateškim deljenjem vsebin, ki se skladajo z nazori njihovih sledilcev, pridobivajo pozornost in podporo znotraj določenih skupnosti (Ceia 2020), s tem pa pogosto razdvajajo javno mnenje (Marwick in Lewis 2017; Jungherr idr. 2020) in (so)oblikujejo odmevne sobe (Guo idr. 2020; Soares idr. 2018).

Glede na opisano literaturo in dosedanje empirične raziskave lahko pričakujemo neenakomerno porazdelitev aktivnosti (RV 1): manjši del uporabnikov bo prispeval velik delež objav, večina pa bo sodelovala občasno. Tak vzorec je pokazala že raziskava slovenske razprave ob evropskih volitvah leta 2019, ki je obenem ugotovila razlike med najaktivnejšimi uporabniki in tistimi, katerih objave so drugi najpogosteje posredovali (Jesenšek idr. 2021). Podobne razlike med izrazito aktivnimi in izrazito vplivnimi uporabniki so opisane tudi v tuji literaturi (Bracciale idr. 2018), zato pričakujemo, da se skupini najaktivnejših in najpogosteje posredovanih uporabnikov ne bosta povsem prekrivali. Glede vloge akterjev pričakujemo, da bodo politiki in politične stranke med vidnimi viri posredovanih objav, ob njih pa tudi mediji in komentatorji. Pričakovanje izhaja iz normalizacijske teze, po kateri se tradicionalna medijska in politična razmerja

[4] Angl. *gatekeepers*.
[5] Angl. *crowd-sourced elites*.
[6] Angl. *gatewatching*.

moči deloma ohranjajo tudi v spletnem okolju, ter iz analize komuniciranja ob predhodnih slovenskih in italijanskih volitvah (Bracciale idr. 2018; Jesenšek idr. 2021).

Spletna družbena omrežja in fragmentacija javnosti

Tehnološko posredovana mrežna javna sfera (Benkler 2006) temelji na univerzalni vključenosti pri nastajanju in razširjanju sporočil, ki medijske vsebine združuje s komuniciranjem državljanov in interaktivnostjo spletnih družbenih omrežij. Zato so nekateri v letih, ko je internet začel postajati prevladujoča komunikacijska tehnologija našega časa, v spletnih družbenih omrežjih videli novo priložnost za razvoj široke, vključujoče in racionalne javne sfere oz. njeno virtualno reinkarnacijo (Papacharissi 2008), digitalne tehnologije pa bi lahko ponovno omogočile vzpon aktivne in kritične javnosti.[7] Splichal (2005, 162) ugotavlja, da "internet predstavlja tako rekoč popolno komunikacijsko okolje ali infrastrukturo, ki si je še pred dobrim stoletjem ni bilo mogoče zamišljati: omogoča refleksivno razmišljanje in razpravljanje udeležencev", kar povezuje s Kantovo razsvetljensko idejo o pravici do javne uporabe uma – a pri tem opozarja tudi na težave, ki jih prinašata razpršenost in poplava informacij. Spletna družbena omrežja sicer omogočajo nove oblike odnosov med javnostjo in institucijami oblasti, vendar pa jih sama po sebi ne zagotavljajo. Izrazito pozitiven pogled, ki predpostavlja, da spletne tehnologije komuniciranja nadgrajujejo prostore javne razprave (Coleman in Blumler 2009), se tako vse bolj sooča z opozorili, da razprava na spletnih družbenih omrežjih – še posebej na platformi X – zaradi pomanjkanja racionalne in smiselne dvosmerne komunikacije, pretiranega združevanja enako mislečih, neenakosti med uporabniki ter podrejenosti platforme kapitalskim in političnim interesom ne zadovoljuje pogojev za razvoj javne sfere (Fuchs 2021; Rasmussen 2016; van Dijk in Hacker 2018; Sekloča 2020).[8]

Razprava na spletnih družbenih omrežjih je pogosto razdeljena na različne skupnosti, kar odraža fragmentacijo mrežne javne sfere (Rasmussen 2016) v množico med seboj bolj ali manj povezanih in prepletenih javnosti, ki nastajajo, se spreminjajo in ugašajo glede na interese njihovih članov. Drobljenje javne sfere v spletnem okolju v svojih novejših delih bežno omenja tudi Habermas (2006), ki govori o zadevnih javnostih[9]. Gre za skupine posameznikov, ki se za omejen čas združujejo okoli skupnega vprašanja, dogodka ali področja zanimanja. Različne zadevne javnosti lahko naslavljajo isti problem, a med seboj ne komunicirajo,

[7] Literatura ponuja natančnejše razčlenitve različnih zasnov javne sfere, ki jih tukaj le bežno omenjam (prim. Pinter 2005).

[8] V analizi Habermasove zamisli javne sfere Dahlberg (2004) navaja šest pogojev za njen obstoj: (1) univerzalnost, (2) refleksivnost, (3) prevzemanje idealnih vlog, (4) odkritost, (5) enakopravnost, (6) avtonomija.

[9] "Razmah milijonov po vsem svetu razpršenih spletnih klepetalnic vodi do drobitve velikih, politično usmerjenih množičnih občinstev v veliko število izoliranih zadevnih javnosti" (Habermas 2006, 423).

kar pomeni, da se v razpravi ne soočijo partikularni interesi in javne zadeve niso obravnavane z različnih vidikov. Skladno s tem Bruns (2023) opozarja, da bi bilo smiselno teorijo javne sfere (Habermas 1989) nadgraditi z modelom, skladnim z empirično realnostjo, ki jo opazujemo ob preučevanju sodobnega komunikacijskega okolja na spletnih družbenih omrežjih – kjer se, namesto enovitega modela javne sfere, ustvarjajo okolja manjših skupin, ki skupaj tvorijo mrežo raznolikih javnih, poljavnih in zasebnih, osebnih in tematskih, majhnih in velikih komunikacijskih skupnosti; člani pa med njimi prehajajo glede na trenutne osebne, politične in druge interese. Nekateri take skupnosti, ki se kot bolj ali manj začasne strukture oblikujejo ob aktualnih vprašanjih, imenujejo javne mikrosfere[10] (Cunningham 2001; Bruns 2023) – te imajo nekatere značilnosti javne sfere, vendar pa zaradi omejenega obsega, ožje določenih interesov in manjšega števila sodelujočih ne odsevajo širše družbene razprave. Posamezne javne mikrosfere med seboj povezujejo uporabniki, ki so člani različnih skupnosti in s svojimi komunikacijskimi aktivnostmi omogočajo pretok vsebin med njimi – tak preplet Bruns (2023) imenuje model omrežja javnosti,[11] v katerem različne javne mikrosfere predstavljajo nivoje javne razprave, ki se od splošne, široke družbene razprave pomika k vse manjšim, bolj specifičnim in nišnim skupnostim. Pristop se oddaljuje od evropske oz. nemške tradicije enovite javnosti in je bližje situacijski teoriji javnosti (prim. Grunig 1997), ki izhaja iz ameriškega okolja – Dewey je že na začetku 20. stoletja opisoval javnosti kot skupine ljudi, ki so soočeni s problemom, o njem razpravljajo ali se organizirajo, da bi ga rešili.[12] Zamisli o javnostih, ki nastajajo, se spreminjajo in ugašajo med diskurzivnimi procesi reševanja problemov, so bližje hipermodernim in mrežnim pristopom in se zdijo v primerjavi s Habermasovim klasičnim modelom primernejše za opis dogajanja v sodobnem komunikacijskem okolju (Self 2020).

Mnogi svarijo, da javne mikrosfere, skupnosti uporabnikov na spletnih družbenih omrežjih, z delovanjem algoritmov ter tehnološke in ekonomske zasnove spletnih platform postajajo vse bolj izolirane, odmaknjene in ekstremne – tako stanje zaznamuje pogosto uporabljen termin odmevna soba (Sunstein 2017)[13]. Še posebej je priljubljen v kontekstu političnih razprav, v katerem je okolje močno polarizirano, uporabniki pa se zelo hitro razdelijo v mnenjsko homogene skupnosti, ki odražajo njihove svetovnonazorske poglede. Empirične raziskave na platformi X potrjujejo obstoj takih skupnosti v več državah (Falkenberg

[10] Angl. *public sphericules*.

[11] Angl. *network of publics*.

[12] Javnost je tako ožja interesna skupnost, ki se oblikuje kot odziv na določen problem z namenom njegovega reševanja, obsega tiste, ki jih problem zadeva, ko je ta rešen, pa se vezi med člani začenjajo razgrajevati (Dewey 1927).

[13] Združevanje v skupnosti sorodnih uporabnikov je pričakovana lastnost, ki je ne najdemo zgolj na spletu. Glavni psihološki dejavnik, ki spodbuja združevanje v skupine, je izborna izpostavljenost, tj. težnja, da ljudje selektivno obdelujemo in se odzivamo na dražljaje iz okolja (Kubin in von Sikorski 2021). Spletna družbena omrežja, še posebej X, te težnje le še dodatno spodbujajo z algoritmi za razvrščanje vsebin, ki različnim uporabnikom prikazujejo različne vsebine glede na njihovo vedenje, interese in prepričanja – z njihovo pomočjo izborna izpostavljenost postaja avtomatizirana in privzeta (Sekloča 2020).

idr. 2024), še posebej v razpravah o odmevnih temah in dogodkih, kot so npr. volitve, brexit ali covid-19 (Riedl idr. 2024). Takšno okolje je bilo opazovano v nekaterih evropskih državah, npr. na Finskem (Gronow in Malkamäki 2024), pa tudi v Sloveniji na primeru evropskih volitev leta 2019 (Jesenšek in Verčič 2025; Jesenšek idr. 2021). Po drugi strani pa naj bi bilo pretirano osredinjanje na obstoj odmevnih sob neplodno; številni kritiki tako poudarjajo, da je spletna razprava kljub svojim pomanjkljivostim v primerjavi s tradicionalnim medijskim okoljem še zmeraj bolj odprta in vključuje večjo raznolikost mnenj in zastopanost pogledov (Papacharissi 2018).[14] Fragmentacija tako ne pomeni nujno problematične izolacije in razpada skupne družbene resničnosti, saj model raznolikih in med seboj prepletenih javnosti omogoča članstvo v različnih interesnih, političnih, ideoloških in drugih skupnostih – sodelovanje v njih je osebna izbira uporabnika, navzočnost tako velike izbire pa je novost v primerjavi s tradicionalnim modelom javne sfere in prevladujočimi množičnimi mediji (Bruns 2019). Skladno s tem nekatere empirične raziskave ugotavljajo, da so kljub strahu pred odmevnimi sobami politične razprave na omrežju X pluralistične in omogočajo pretok informacij ter izmenjavo mnenj med različno mislečimi uporabniki (Arlt idr. 2019). Odmevne sobe na omrežju X sicer lahko obstajajo, vendar pa ne predstavljajo vsakodnevne izkušnje povprečnega uporabnika (Neudert in Marchal 2019) – analize politične razprave na Madžarskem in Poljskem npr. ugotavljajo, da je izrazito enostranskim pogledom izpostavljena slaba polovica sodelujočih uporabnikov (Matuszewski in Szabó 2019). Na platformi X lahko različne skupnosti oz. javne mikrosfere empirično opazujemo z analizo socialnih omrežij, ki razkriva strukturo komunikacijskih procesov (uporabnikov in interakcij med njimi) – tako lahko preverimo, ali obstajajo komunikacijske vezi med različnimi skupnostmi in ali se lahko sporočila iz ene skupnosti razširijo v druge dele omrežja.

Glede na opisano literaturo in dosedanje empirične raziskave pričakujemo, da bo opazovano omrežje politično strukturirano in razdeljeno na skupnosti, katerih najvidnejši akterji bodo kazali sorodne politične oz. svetovnonazorske usmeritve (RV 2). Domačo oporo temu pričakovanju daje raziskava evropskih volitev leta 2019 v Sloveniji, ki je pokazala jasno razločevanje med levim in desnim delom omrežja (Jesenšek in Verčič 2025; Jesenšek idr. 2021). Analize iz drugih držav EU prav tako kažejo, da skupnosti na družbenih omrežjih odražajo strankarske in koalicijske delitve (Federico idr. 2024; Tolsma in Spierings 2024). V primeru evropskih volitev 2024 v Sloveniji na omrežju X tako pričakujemo oblikovanje prepoznavnih skupnosti podobno usmerjenih uporabnikov, ne predpostavljamo pa njihovega vnaprej določenega števila ali enoznačnega ujemanja vsake skupnosti z določeno stranko. Oblikovanje skupnosti uporabnikov s podobnimi idejami

[14] Papacharissi (2008, 2018) ugotavlja, da digitalne tehnologije in splet sicer ne prinašajo ponovnega oživljanja javne sfere, vendar pa vnašajo v širše okolje predstavniških demokracij večjo pluralnost, kot so jo omogočali množični mediji: "/A/rhitektura spletnih tehnologij je refleksivna in odraža potrebe različnih javnosti, ki bi brez spletne povezljivosti ostale izolirane." (2008, 244)

vpliva tudi na pretok informacij med različnimi deli omrežja. Ob evropskih volitvah leta 2019 v Sloveniji so bile nekatere desno usmerjene skupnosti med seboj močno povezane in prepletene, ena skupnost pa je povezovala levi in desni del omrežja in delovala kot most med različnimi idejami in pogledi (Jesenšek idr. 2021); podobno tudi leta 2024 pričakujemo razlike v odprtosti posameznih skupnosti do preostalega omrežja.

METODOLOGIJA

V raziskavo so vključena javno objavljena sporočila oz. tviti, ki so v mesecu dni pred volitvami v Evropski parlament vsebovala vsaj eno izmed opazovanih ključnih besed, ki se nanašajo na evropske volitve[15] (Jesenšek 2026a). Zajem podatkov in metodološki pristop sledita predhodnim raziskavam slovenske razprave na spletnih družbenih omrežjih ob evropskih volitvah leta 2019 in 2024 (Jesenšek idr. 2021; Jesenšek 2023; Jesenšek in Verčič 2025; Jesenšek 2026b). Raziskovalnih vprašanj se lotevam s kvantitativno analizo socialnih omrežij, pri čemer uporabljam omrežje retvitov, saj je retvit oz. posredovana objava prepoznan kot glavni mehanizem, s pomočjo katerega se širijo informacije med uporabniki omrežja X (Firdaus idr. 2018). Kvantitativna analiza je opravljena s pomočjo programskega jezika Python (različica 3.5.6.) in modula TSM (Freelon 2018). Analiza je razdeljena na dva povezana sklopa. Prvi odgovarja na vprašanje o obsegu razprave in vlogi njenih udeležencev: vključuje opis števila uporabnikov in objav ter analizo aktivnosti. Drugi sklop odgovarja na vprašanje o fragmentaciji razprave: vključuje prepoznavanje omrežnih skupnosti, interpretacijo njihovih svetovnonazorskih značilnosti ter analizo povezav znotraj skupnosti in med njimi. Oba sklopa temeljita na istem podatkovnem korpusu, uporabljene mere in postopki pa so prilagojeni posameznemu raziskovalnemu vprašanju.

Pri prvem raziskovalnem vprašanju uporabljam metode analize socialnih omrežij, ki omogočajo odkrivanje središčnih uporabnikov. Mera središčnosti glede na izhodno stopnjo razkriva najaktivnejše uporabnike. Povezana je konceptom superudeležencev (Graham in Wright 2014), uporabnikov, ki so najbolj aktivni pri objavljanju in posredovanju vsebin, s tem pa imajo tudi moč oblikovanja spletne razprave. Mera središčnosti glede na vhodno stopnjo razkrije uporabnike, katerih sporočila so najpogosteje deljena. Vhodna stopnja v usmerjenem omrežju pokaže, koliko povezav poteka proti določeni enoti – kar je v literaturi najpogosteje razumljeno kot pokazatelj vpliva (Dubois in Gaffney 2014) in jo lahko povežemo s konceptom mnenjskih voditeljev (Katz in Lazarsfeld 1966).

[15] Zbiranje podatkov je potekalo med 9. 5. 2024 in 9. 6. 2024 na podlagi nabora 14 ključnih besed – 9 pogosto uporabljenih ključnikov na temo evropskih volitev in besedo "volitve" v različnih sklonih. Nabor služi operacionalni zamejitvi opazovanja slovenske razprave o volitvah na platformi X in sledi pristopu, uporabljenemu pri zajemu podatkov za evropske volitve leta 2019. Iskalni niz: *"#epvolitve OR #epvolitve24 OR #epvolitve2024 OR #euvolitve OR #euvolitve24 OR #euvolitve2024 OR #volitve24 OR #evropskevolitve OR #tokratgremvolit OR volitve OR volitev OR volitvam OR volitvah OR volitvami"*.

Za odgovor na drugo raziskovalno vprašanje uporabljam algoritmično metodo za iskanje skupnosti Louvain (Dugué in Perez 2015), ki omrežje razdeli v skupnosti na podlagi komunikacijskih povezav med uporabniki. Znotraj posameznih skupnosti je opravljena analiza najpogosteje deljenih vsebin (spletnih domen), uporabljenih ključnikov in središčnih uporabnikov, s čimer lahko ocenimo glavne značilnosti skupnosti in opredelimo njihovo politično oziroma svetovnonazorsko usmeritev.[16] Interpretacija gradi na dokumentiranih ideoloških položajih slovenskih političnih strank v literaturi (Fink-Hafner in Novak 2022; Rovny idr. 2025; Fink-Hafner 2024). Pet največjih skupnosti je združenih v tri širše skupine: politično desno, politično levo in protisistemsko. Prvi oznaki opisujeta prevladujočo ideološko usmeritev, tretja pa poudarjeno nasprotovanje uveljavljenim političnim elitam, osrednjim medijem in institucijam. Protisistemska usmeritev zato ne pomeni položaja zunaj osi levo–desno in se lahko prepleta z levo ali desno ideološko usmeritvijo. Pri interpretaciji ideološke usmerjenosti medijskih akterjev se opiram tudi na predhodne raziskave slovenskega medijskega prostora (Ribać idr. 2026; Valič idr. 2023; Martinc idr. 2025). Oznake opisujejo prevladujoče značilnosti skupnosti, ne pa nujno prepričanj vsakega posameznega člana. Za podrobnejše preučevanje fragmentacije omrežja uporabim več mer analize socialnih omrežij, ki kažejo stopnjo fragmentacije med skupinami uporabnikov. Koeficient nakopičenosti je osnovna mera za iskanje skupin v omrežju, ki pove, v kolikšni meri se uporabniki nagibajo k medsebojnemu združevanju. Tokove informacij in stopnjo izoliranosti posameznih skupnosti analiziram z uporabo indeksa E-I, ki omogoča normalizirano primerjavo števila povezav znotraj skupnosti (notranje ali homofilne) s številom povezav s člani drugih skupnosti (zunanje ali heterofilne). Izražen je s številko med -1 in 1, pri čemer -1 pomeni, da vse povezave med uporabniki ostajajo znotraj svoje skupnosti; 1, da se vse povezave širijo izven nje; vrednost 0 pa kaže na enako število notranjih in zunanjih povezav. Dodatno pripravim tudi vizualizacijo omrežja, ki s prikazom položaja uporabnikov, povezav in skupnosti ponuja prostorski prikaz pretoka informacij in odnosov med uporabniki ter prinaša uporabno dopolnitev z vidika predstavitve in interpretacije rezultatov analize omrežij. Vizualizacija omrežja je narejena z orodjem Gephi (različica 0.9.2.) in algoritmom ForceAtlas2 (Jacomy idr. 2014).

REZULTATI

V slovenski politični razpravi na spletnem družbenem omrežju X je v mesecu dni pred evropskimi volitvami 2024 sodelovalo 4017 uporabnikov, ki so skupaj objavili 67.676 sporočil oz. tvitov. Večino sporočil (80 %) predstavljajo posredovane objave oz. retviti (Tabela 1).

[16] Empirične raziskave potrjujejo, da lahko ideološko prepričanje uporabnikov z veliko verjetnostjo predvidimo na podlagi strukture družbenih omrežji, katerih člani so (Barberá 2015).

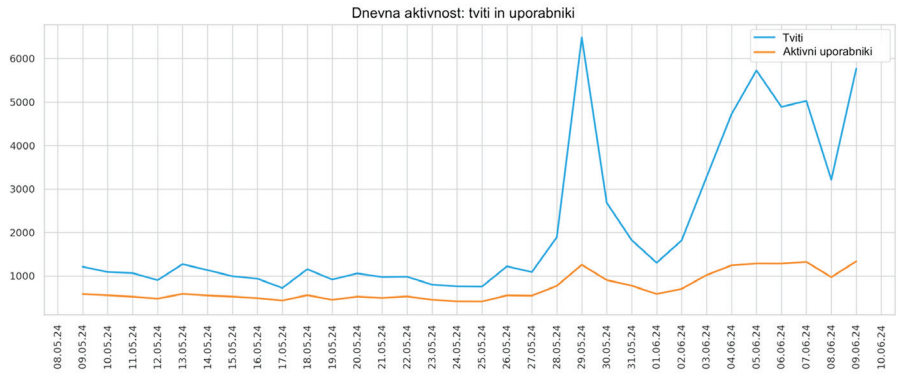
Tabela 1: OBJAVE (TVITI) NA TEMO EVROPSKIH VOLITEV V SLOVENIJ, 2024.

Št. vseh tvitov	67.676
Št. vseh uporabnikov	4.017
Št. retvitov	54.766 (80 %)
Št. tvitov, ki vsebujejo URL-povezave	37.613 (56 %)

Vir: Lastni prikaz.

Aktivnost (tako glede na število uporabnikov kot glede na količino sporočil) je močno povečana ob pomembnejših političnih, družbenih in medijskih dogodkih, ki so zaznamovali volilno kampanjo, z opaznim porastom v zadnjih dveh tednih pred volitvami (Slika 1) – takšna razporeditev je sicer pričakovana in potrjuje, da spletno družbeno omrežje X kljub številnim spremembam ostaja prostor, ki je v veliki meri namenjen komentiranju tekočih dogodkov.

Slika 1: DNEVNA AKTIVNOST: TVITI IN UPORABNIKI.

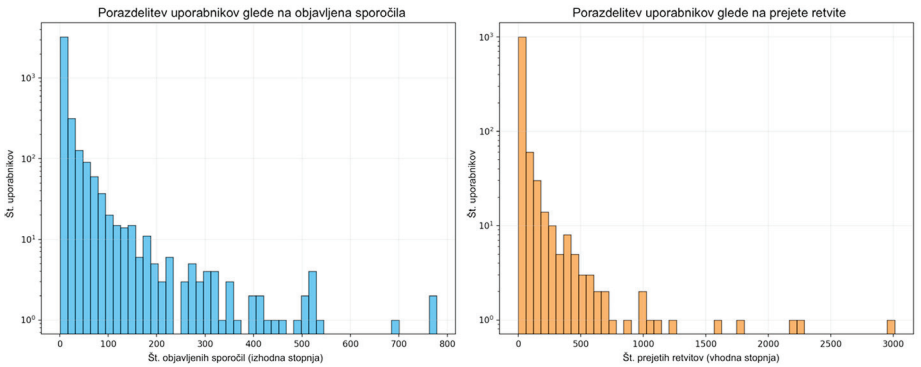


Vir: Lastni prikaz.

Najvplivnejši profil (mera središčnosti glede na vhodno stopnjo) je profil predsednika stranke SDS (*@jjansasds*) – njegova sporočila so bila v obdobju enega meseca pred volitvami retvitana 2993-krat. Med desetimi najvplivnejšimi uporabniki so tudi uradni profili nekaterih političnih strank (SDS, SLS), političnih podpornikov in komentatorjev, novinarjev in medijev. Med najaktivnejšimi uporabniki je večina v javnem življenju manj znanih oseb. Najaktivnejši je profil uporabnika *@vstavanja93370*, ki je v obdobju enega meseca pred volitvami objavil 733 sporočil (v povprečju dobrih 24 na dan). Število nadpovprečno aktivnih uporabnikov je sicer nizko; distribucija aktivnosti prikazuje tipičen vzorec porazdelitve po zakonu moči (z nekaj zelo aktivnimi uporabniki in pasivnejšo

večino), značilnem za družbena omrežja (Slika 2). Graf na levi prikazuje porazdelitev uporabnikov glede na objavljena sporočila: v povprečju je sicer vsak uporabnik v mesecu dni pred volitvami objavil 16,8 tvita, pri čemer pa mediana znaša le 3 – kar pomeni, da večina uporabnikov objavlja zelo malo, medtem ko je manjše število zelo aktivnih. Graf na desni prikazuje porazdelitev uporabnikov glede na to, kako pogosto so njihova sporočila deljena. Tudi tukaj je povprečje relativno visoko (47,6 prejetih retvitov na uporabnika v opazovanem obdobju), a z mediano 5, kar kaže, da je večina uporabnikov le redko retvitana, medtem ko so objave manjšega števila vplivnih uporabnikov deljene zelo pogosto.

Slika 2: DISTRIBUCIJA AKTIVNOSTI UPORABNIKOV.



Vir: Lastni prikaz.

Za preučevanje komunikacijskih vzorcev sem iz zbranih podatkov ustvaril omrežje retvitov (n = 54.766), ki vsebuje 3.081 enot (uporabnikov) in 30.961 povezav (retvitov).[17] Omrežje je usmerjeno, saj poznamo smer komunikacije (uporabnik A deli sporočilo uporabnika B; med njima obstaja povezava A → B). Dolžina povprečne poti v omrežju je 4,27; povprečen koeficient nakopičenosti znaša 0,127 – kar je več, kot bi pričakovali v naključnem omrežju enake velikosti.[18] Dolžina povprečne poti je pričakovana za spletna družbena omrežja (Ugander idr. 2011), relativno visok koeficient nakopičenosti pa nakazuje, da so nekateri deli omrežja med seboj tesneje povezani oz. da v omrežju obstajajo skupnosti uporabnikov, ki med seboj intenzivneje komunicirajo. S pomočjo algoritmične metode za prepoznavanje skupnosti Louvain (Dugué in Perez 2015) je v omrežju

[17] Število povezav v omrežju je manjše kot število vseh retvitov, saj med nekaterimi uporabniki obstaja večje število retvitov. Če je uporabnik A v opazovanem obdobju sporočila uporabnika B retvital n-krat, je to v usmerjenem omrežju izraženo kot ena povezava z utežjo n.

[18] Za primerjavo je po modelu Erdős in Rényi (1960) generirano naključno omrežje z enakim številom vozlišč in povezav kot v opazovanem omrežju, vendar z naključno razporejenimi povezavami. V tako ustvarjenem omrežju je povprečna dolžina poti znašala 2,68, povprečni koeficient nakopičenosti pa 0,007. Primerjava omogoča presojo, koliko se povezanost opazovanega omrežja razlikuje od povezanosti, ki nastane pri naključnem vzpostavljanju povezav.

zaznanih 46 takih skupnosti. V podrobnejšo analizo je vključenih pet največjih, ki skupaj obsegajo 98 % vseh uporabnikov (Tabela 3).[19] Znotraj obravnavanih skupnosti sem poiskal središčne uporabnike, najpogosteje uporabljene ključnike in najpogosteje deljene vsebine (URL-povezave na spletne strani). Opazovane skupnosti se med seboj razlikujejo po velikosti, deljenih vsebinah, intenzivnosti komuniciranja in prevladujočih ideoloških pogledih njihovih članov:

- **Skupnost 1** (20,4 % vseh uporabnikov). Med najvidnejšimi uporabniki prevladujejo politiki stranke SDS in medijski portali. Med najpogosteje deljenimi vsebinami prevladujejo povezave do medijev *nova24tv.si* in *demokracija.si* ter spletne strani *sds.si.*
- **Skupnost 2** (29,4 % vseh uporabnikov). Najvidnejši uporabniki vključujejo mnenjske voditelje, medijske portale in podpornike desnih političnih strank. Med najpogosteje deljenimi vsebinami prevladujejo povezave do medijev *nova24tv.si* in *demokracija.si.*
- **Skupnost 3** (19,9 % vseh uporabnikov). Med najvidnejšimi uporabniki prevladujejo politični podporniki in mnenjski voditelji, povezani z desno usmerjenimi strankami (predvsem SDS in NSi), izpostavljen je tudi profil stranke SLS. Med najpogosteje deljenimi vsebinami prevladujejo povezave do medijev *nova24tv.si* in *demokracija.si.*
- **Skupnost 4** (22,5 % vseh uporabnikov). Med najvidnejšimi uporabniki so profili osrednjih medijev, novinarji in ustanove. V tej skupnosti so tudi levo usmerjene politične stranke (SD, Levica). Med najpogosteje deljenimi vsebinami prevladujejo povezave do osrednjih medijev (*n1info.si, vecer.com, rtvslo.si*).
- **Skupnost 5** (6,1 % vseh uporabnikov). Najvidnejši člani vključujejo tako levo kot desno usmerjene uporabnike ter politične profile (npr. stranka Resnica); prevladuje izražanje nezaupanja v ustanove in politični sistem. Med najpogosteje deljenimi vsebinami so povezave do spletnih strani *frelih.org, nova24tv.si, insajder.com.*

Na podlagi analize središčnih uporabnikov in deljenih vsebin lahko skupnosti razdelimo v tri ideološko različne dele omrežja:[20] politično desno (skupnosti 1, 2 in 3), politično levo (skupnost 4) in protisistemsko (skupnost 5). Ideološko

[19] Veliko število zaznanih skupnosti z izbrano metodo je pričakovano in je posledica delovanja algoritma, ki uporabnike razvršča v skupnosti glede na komunikacijske vzorce med njimi. Večina manjših skupnosti obsega zgolj nekaj bolj ali manj izoliranih in neaktivnih uporabnikov, ki v strukturni analizi omrežja ne igrajo bistvene vloge – zato se je v analizi smiselno osredotočiti na največje skupnosti.

[20] Delitev omrežja se opira na interpretacijo vidnih članov in vsebin znotraj posameznih skupnosti ter na raziskave slovenskega političnega okolja. Ocene CHES 2024 umeščajo Levico, SD, Vesno in Gibanje Svoboda na levo stran ideološke lestvice, NSi, SLS in SDS pa na desno (Rovny idr. 2025). Resni.ca je v isti zbirki ocenjena kot desno usmerjena stranka z izrazito protiestablišmentsko oziroma protielitno retoriko. Oznaka "protisistemska skupnost" tako poudarja značilnost političnega nastopanja osrednjih akterjev te skupnosti, ne opredeljuje pa tretjega, od levice in desnice izključujočega se ideološkega položaja. Ocene strank so opora pri interpretaciji skupnosti in jih samodejno ne moremo pripisati vsem njenim članom.

Tabela 3: PET NAJVEČJIH SKUPNOSTI V OMREŽJU, SREDIŠČNI UPORABNIKI IN NAJPOGOSTEJE DELJENE VSEBINE

Skupnost	**Skupnost 1**	**Skupnost 2**	**Skupnost 3**	**Skupnost 4**	**Skupnost 5**
Št. članov	*631 (20,4 % vseh)*	*905 (29,4 % vseh)*	*614 (19,9 % vseh)*	*692 (22,5 % vseh)*	*189 (6,1 % vseh)*
Najvplivnejši uporabniki (vhodna stopnja); *uporabnik, št. prejetih retvitov.*	jjansasds, 2993 strankasds. 2171 nova24tv, 1800 peterjancic, 1216 demokracija, 683 karinplaninsek, 648 brencenejc, 597 milanzver, 557 romanatomc, 491 aleshojs, 473	bojanpozar, 2237 libertarec, 1624 strankasls, 1070 spelarotar, 984 zigaturk, 514 lahovnikmatej, 418 petergregorcic, 402 domovina_je, 352 rebernikj, 301 tinomamic, 296	johanca_4me, 1093 edvardkadic, 966 zvonecadez, 881 ciriljenko, 753 slovenijavsrcu, 672 brutus91101394, 620 antonin71682981, 553 2021m2021, 525 vanegosnik, 472 mitjairsic, 424	xbrnot, 307 n1slovenija, 218 zelenislovenije, 141 europarl_sl, 95 vecer, 80 dvk_rs, 73 rtvslo, 67 zigabonca, 64 strankasd, 57 matijastepisnik, 56	zmagoplemeniti, 181 pertinacal, 127 polonafrelih, 113 resni_ca, 109 licenmitja, 93 alesernecl, 28 zrcaljen, 24 aljosadragas, 18 slovencurban, 17 ulipuscek, 13
Najpogosteje uporabljeni ključniki; *ključnik, št, povezav.*	preudarno, 643 volitve, 600 eu, 470 slovenija, 270 svoboda, 114 poptv, 111 demokracija, 110 totalitarizem, 104 2024, 104 euvolitve, 91	volitve, 316 eu, 245 volisls, 145 slovenija, 124 prioritete, 87 odmevtedna, 83 preudarno, 80 svoboda, 68 totalitarizem, 66 evropskevolitve, 63	volitve, 711 eu, 549 slovenija, 344 preudarno, 236 svoboda, 141 uri, 111 soča, 111 totalitarizem, 108 poptv, 103 gibanjesvoboda, 88	slovenija, 506 evropskevolitve, 472 euvolitve24, 375 slovenia, 356 volitve, 225 desus, 216 dobradržava, 216 uporabisvojglas, 179 zelenislovenije, 143 euvolitve, 135	euvolitve, 26 facts, 25 najprejslovenija, 22 volitve, 18 resnicajerešitev, 13 eu, 10 izberirešitev10, 8 novapomlad, 6 totalitarizem, 4 preudarno, 3
Najpogosteje deljene povezave *(vrhovna domena); spletna stran, št. delitev.*	nova24tv.si, 718 sds.si, 351 demokracija.si, 346 spletnicasopis. eu, 251 n1info.si, 211 portal24.si, 111 e-maribor.si, 90 peticija.online, 56 domovina.je, 52 zalatomasic.eu, 46	nova24tv.si, 414 demokracija.si, 303 spletnicasopis. eu, 211 n1info.si, 188 portal24.si, 160 domovina.je, 159 plusportal.si, 131 rtvslo.si, 99 sds.si, 85 pisrs.si, 56	nova24tv.si, 503 demokracija.si, 290 portal24.si, 222 plusportal.si, 109 n1info.si, 106 spletnicasopis. eu, 98 rtvslo.si, 77 e-maribor.si, 55 domovina.je, 46 24ur.com, 42	n1info.si, 382 vecer.com, 326 rtvslo.si, 209 uros-lipuscek.si, 145 telex.si, 129 necenzurirano. si, 113 delo.si, 108 europa.eu, 100 mladina.si, 97 dvk-rs.si, 69	frelih.org, 47 nova24tv.si, 23 insajder.com, 23 resni.ca, 23 rtvslo.si, 22 n1info.si, 10 demokracija.si, 10 mikstone.com, 7 portal24.si, 6 24ur.com, 5

Vir: Lastni prikaz.

desno usmerjen del omrežja je mnogo večji, obsega skoraj 70 % vseh uporabnikov; dobrih 22 % jih lahko uvrstimo na levi pol; 6 % pa v protisistemskega (Tabela 4). Desni del omrežja je prevladujoč tako po številu uporabnikov kot tudi v njihovi aktivnosti – vseh deset najvplivnejših in najaktivnejših uporabnikov v omrežju (Tabela 2) prihaja iz skupnosti, ki jih lahko opišemo kot politično desno usmerjene (skupnosti 1, 2 in 3). Podobno velja tudi za politike in profile političnih strank – profili, ki pripadajo stranki SDS, so med najvplivnejšimi profili v omrežju in imajo velik vpliv na pretok vsebin in usmerjanje razprave znotraj

skupnosti, ki jim pripadajo. Nasprotno pa politikov ali profilov političnih strank, ki se uvrščajo politično levo od sredine, ni med najaktivnejšimi ali najvplivnejšimi uporabniki v omrežju; prav tako niso med najvidnejšimi profili znotraj svojih skupnosti.

Tabela 4: RAZDELITEV OMREŽJA GLEDE NA IDEOLOŠKO PREPRIČANJE UPORABNIKOV

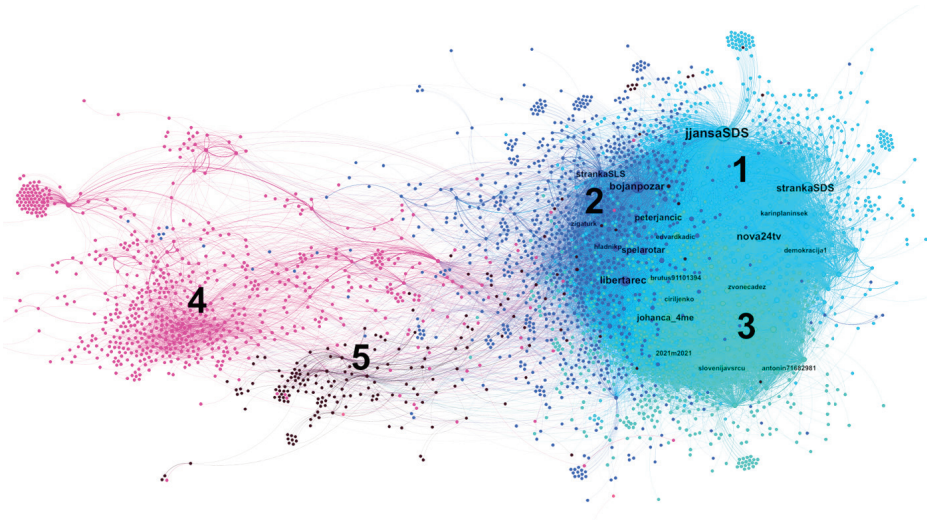
Prevladujoča politična opredelitev	**Politično desno**	**Politično levo**	**Protisistemsko**
Skupnosti	1, 2, 3	4	5
Št. uporabnikov	2150 (69.7 %)	692 (22,5 %)	189 (6,1 %)
Indeks E-I	-0,952	-0,608	0,262

Vir: Lastni prikaz.

Pretok informacij med različnimi deli omrežja lahko kvantitativno izrazimo z indeksom E-I, ki razkriva, ali so skupnosti komunikacijsko zaprte (t. i. odmevne sobe, v katerih prevladujejo podobni pogledi) ali pa se informacije širijo med različnimi deli omrežja. Skupnost št. 4 (politično levo) ima negativen indeks E-I (-0,608), kar pomeni, da njeni člani pretežno komunicirajo med seboj in redkeje s člani drugih skupnosti. Še nižji (-0,952) je indeks E-I politično desno usmerjenih skupnosti (1, 2 in 3), kar kaže na veliko izoliranost tega dela omrežja – člani teh skupnosti skoraj izključno komunicirajo med seboj, povezav z ideološko drugače usmerjenimi uporabniki je zelo malo. Skupnost št. 5 (protisistemsko) ima pozitiven indeks E-I, kar pomeni, da ta del omrežja ni izoliran, temveč njeni člani ohranjajo komunikacijske vezi s člani drugih skupnosti.

Pretok informacij med skupnostmi je viden tudi na vizualizaciji omrežja (Slika 3). Ta prikazuje položaj posameznih uporabnikov v omrežju in povezave z drugimi uporabniki glede na njihove vzorce komuniciranja. Točke predstavljajo uporabnike, velikost točk njihov vpliv, povezave med točkami deljenje vsebin (retvit). Uporabniki, ki so med seboj tesneje povezani (tj. pogosteje delijo vsebine drug drugega), so prikazani bližje skupaj. Barve in številke označujejo pet največjih skupnosti, z imeni je označen tudi položaj 20 najvidnejših uporabnikov v omrežju. Opazna je delitev omrežja med skupnostmi 1, 2 in 3 (ki jih lahko opredelimo kot politično desno usmerjene) na eni ter skupnostma 4 (politično levo) in 5 (protisistemsko) na drugi strani. To je pomembna ugotovitev z vidika preučevanja komunikacijskih vzorcev, saj nakazuje, da se informacije lahko učinkovito širijo znotraj določenih skupnosti, ne pa po celotnem omrežju. Uporabniki večinoma delijo vsebine s politično ali nazorsko podobno usmerjenimi uporabniki, medtem ko je povezav s politično drugače mislečimi malo.

Slika 3: VIZUALIZACIJA OMREŽJA, NAJVEČJE SKUPNOSTI IN NAJVIDNEJŠI UPORABNIKI.



Vir: Lastni prikaz.

RAZPRAVA

V slovenski politični razpravi na spletnem družbenem omrežju X je v mesecu dni pred volitvami v Evropski parlament sodelovalo 4017 aktivnih uporabnikov, ki so skupaj objavili 67.676 sporočil.[21] Ugotovitve o porazdelitvi aktivnosti in odmevnosti objav so skladne s pričakovanji pri prvem raziskovalnem vprašanju. Opazovana aktivnost je izrazito neenakomerna (povprečno število objav na uporabnika je znašalo 16,8, mediana pa 3). Večina uporabnikov objavlja zelo malo, medtem ko je peščica najaktivnejših uporabnikov vir večine objavljenih vsebin. Pri tem je zanimivo, da aktivno sodelovanje v razpravi ni povezano z vplivom – tisti, ki so v opazovanem obdobju objavljali največ, niso med najvplivnejšimi. Podoben vzorec je bil ugotovljen ob predhodnih volitvah v Sloveniji in EU (Bracciale idr. 2018; Jesenšek idr. 2021). Med najaktivnejšimi uporabniki prevladujejo javnosti manj znani državljani, med najvplivnejšimi uporabniki pa zasledimo kar nekaj poznanih profilov politikov, strank, medijskih hiš in komentatorjev. To je skladno s t. i. normalizacijsko tezo, po kateri predstavniki tradicionalnih političnih, medijskih in družbenih "elit" prevladujejo tudi v digitalnem komunikacijskem prostoru. Njihova zastopanost pa ni enaka v vseh skupnostih: v skupnosti 1 izstopajo politiki, v skupnosti 4 pa osrednji mediji, novinarji in ustanove. Ugotovitve tako kažejo tudi na pomen razlik med posameznimi skupnostmi.

[21] To je več kot ob predhodnjih evropskih volitvah leta 2019, kar kaže, da omrežje X v Sloveniji ostaja pomembna platforma za politično komuniciranje, se pa spreminja struktura njenih uporabnikov.

Razprava na spletnem družbenem omrežju X je močno fragmentirana in razdeljena na skupnosti uporabnikov, ki pretežno komunicirajo med seboj. Analiza pretoka informacij kaže, da se vsebine pogosto delijo med podobno mislečimi uporabniki, širjenje informacij, ki bi presegale meje ideoloških skupnosti in dosegle večino posameznikov v omrežju, pa je v opazovanem omrežju omejeno. To je v skladu z literaturo, ki opozarja, da se v okolju personaliziranega množičnega komuniciranja javni forumi težko oblikujejo, saj smo ljudje večinoma v stiku s podobno mislečimi ter ne delimo istih virov informacij. Namesto široke javne razprave na spletu se raje zapiramo v skupnosti s podobnimi pogledi, kar vodi v oblikovanje t. i. odmevnih sob, kot kažejo rezultati pričujoče raziskave. Politična razprava na spletnih družbenih omrežjih sicer prinaša večjo vključenost državljanov, a ta je pogosto omejena na določene skupine, ni refleksivna in ne spodbuja širše družbene razprave (Hong in Kim 2016; van Dijk in Hacker 2018), v kateri bi se lahko soočila moč argumentov in oblikovale rešitve za javne probleme. Izsledki raziskave kažejo na veliko fragmentacijo slovenske razprave na platformi X, kar potrjuje opažanja, da lahko na spletnih družbenih omrežjih opazujemo preplet globalno povezanih in hkrati močno personaliziranih javnih, poljavnih in zasebnih vsebin, namenjenih množicam razpršenih in prepletenih javnosti, ki niso trajne strukture, pač pa se oblikujejo, povezujejo in razkrajajo glede na skupne interese njihovih članov (Bruns 2023). Tako se nenehno odpirajo novi javni prostori, v katerih potekajo družbenopolitične razprave; imajo svoje dinamike delovanja, med seboj se lahko dopolnjujejo ali si nasprotujejo, vendar pa mnogi izmed njih ostajajo za določen del javnosti nevidni. Kljub močni fragmentaciji pa celotnega omrežja ne moremo označiti kot komunikacijsko zaprtega. Negativna indeksa E-I desnega dela omrežja, ki združuje skupnosti 1, 2 in 3 (skoraj 70 % vseh uporabnikov), ter skupnosti 4 (dobrih 22 % vseh uporabnikov) kažeta na to, da njihovi pripadniki pretežno komunicirajo med seboj. Nasprotno ima skupnost 5 (dobrih 6 % vseh uporabnikov) pozitiven indeks E-I, kar kaže, da ti uporabniki pogosto komunicirajo s člani drugih skupnosti. Fragmentacije omrežja zato ni mogoče enačiti z enako stopnjo zaprtosti vseh njegovih delov. Razlike v povezovanju med deli omrežja so bile ugotovljene že ob evropskih volitvah leta 2019, ko je manjša skupnost okoli NSi povezovala levi in desni del omrežja (Jesenšek idr. 2021). Primerjava kaže, da lahko politično strukturirano omrežje hkrati vključuje bolj zaprte dele kot tudi skupnosti z izrazitejšimi zunanjimi povezavami; ne pomeni pa, da so se sestava in vloge skupnosti med volitvama ohranile.

Pri analizi slovenske politične razprave na spletnem družbenem omrežju X je zelo očitna delitev na ideološko levo in desno usmerjen del omrežja; pri čemer desnica prevladuje v vseh opazovanih merah. Skupnosti, ki vključujejo desno usmerjene politike in njihove podpornike, imajo mnogo več članov (skupaj skoraj 70 % vseh uporabnikov), so komunikacijsko mnogo bolj aktivne (iz tega dela omrežja prihajajo vsi uporabniki s seznamov desetih najaktivnejših in najvplivenjših profilov), povezave do vsebin (v tem delu omrežja prevladujejo povezave

do virov *nova24tv.si* in *demokracija.si*) pa so prav tako med najbolj deljenimi povezavami v celotnem omrežju. Prevlada desnega pola je vidna tudi na vizualizaciji omrežja. Glede na tako močno prevladovanje enega političnega pola se zdi, da omrežje X v Sloveniji postaja predvsem platforma za razpravo, izražanje in politično komuniciranje desnice. Podobno je opazovano tudi v drugih državah, kjer je platforma po Muskovem prevzemu in domnevnemu favoriziranju desnih vsebin (Barrie 2023) doživela ideološki zasuk. Pri tem je zanimiva vloga politikov, ki razdrobljeno okolje izkoriščajo z namenom strateškega komuniciranja – fragmentacija jim namreč ob odsotnosti kritikov omogoča učinkovito komuniciranje s svojimi podporniki ter nagovarjanje različnih skupin z različnimi sporočili; tudi takimi, ki bi v bolj vključujoči javni razpravi naletela na neodobravanje (Kubin in von Sikorski 2021; Ceia 2020). Politiki tako X uporabljajo za "neovirano interpretativno komuniciranje v obliki mnenj, /.../ interpretacije medijskih agend ter gradnje medijskih okvirov ali protiokvirov" (Tomanić Trivundža 2014, 46), kar jim omogoča izgradnjo selektivno odbrane resničnosti. Tako delovanje odraža globalne smernice političnega komuniciranja na spletnih družbenih omrežjih (Ceia 2020), ki so opazne tudi v slovenskem okolju. Kljub temu da raziskava ne vključuje kvalitativne analize sporočil, strukturna analiza razkriva veliko izpostavljenost in vpliv politikov, strank in drugih profilov desnega političnega pola, kar je najbolj očitno v primeru Slovenske demokratske stranke (SDS) – profili članov stranke in njihovih podpornikov zasedajo središčna mesta v omrežju in imajo ključen vpliv na razprave znotraj svojih skupnosti. Velikost in aktivnost teh skupnosti nakazujeta, da lahko politiki na tak način uspešno nagovarjajo svoje podpornike ter platformo uporabljajo za širjenje svojih sporočil, usmerjanje toka razprave, prednostno tematiziranje in uokvirjanje interpretacije tekočih dogodkov. Izsledki so skladni z globalnimi smernicami komuniciranja konservativnih strank, ki se na spletnih družbenih omrežjih odmikajo od sredine ter izkoriščajo razdvajajoče teme za pritegovanje pozornosti, učinkovitejše nagovarjanje svojih podpornikov in testiranje sporočil (Ceia 2020; Kubin in von Sikorski 2021).

Skupnost, opredeljena kot politično leva, vključuje 22,5 % vseh uporabnikov. V primerjavi z desnimi skupnostmi imajo v njej vidnejšo vlogo osrednji mediji, novinarji in ustanove; med najpogosteje deljenimi spletnimi viri so *n1info.si, vecer.com* in *rtvslo.si*. Politiki in profili levo usmerjenih strank niso med središčnimi uporabniki in nimajo večjega vpliva na oblikovanje razprave, vidnost njihovih sporočil pa je omejena (med desetimi najpogosteje posredovanimi profili te skupnosti sta sicer *@zelenislovenije* in *@strankasd*, ki pa ne spadata med najvplivnejše uporabnike v celotnem omrežju in imata manj prejetih retvitov kot najvidnejši medijski profil *@n1slovenija*). Nekateri politiki (najbolj očiten je primer Roberta Goloba) so zaradi očitkov o politični pristranskosti platforme X, potem ko jo je prevzel Elon Musk, ter distanciranja od diskurza, ki je prisoten med politiki in podporniki desnice, platformo zapustili. Razlika med levim in desnim delom omrežja se tako kaže tudi v sestavi osrednjih akterjev ter njihovi

aktivnosti in vplivu, ne zgolj po številu uporabnikov. Medtem ko desnica krepi svojo navzočnost na družbenem omrežju X ter ga uporablja kot pomemben kanal strateškega komuniciranja in nagovarjanja svojih podpornikov, nasprotni politični pol ta prostor zapušča. Oboje lahko razumemo kot načrtno odločitev, ki odraža komunikacijske pristope slovenskih političnih strank.

Protisistemsko opredeljena skupnost je s 6,1 % vseh uporabnikov najmanjša med obravnavanimi skupnostmi in ima (glede na obseg, količino komuniciranja in vidnost) majhen vpliv na celotno opazovano razpravo. Med njenimi najvidnejšimi profili je tudi stranka *Resni.ca*. Nabor pogosto deljenih virov v tej skupnosti se deloma prekriva z drugimi deli omrežja, zato ne predstavlja povsem ločenega informacijskega prostora. Komunikacijski vzorci kažejo, da skupnost ohranja povezave z drugimi deli omrežja in ne deluje kot odmevna soba; na podlagi tega pa ne moremo sklepati, da njeni člani opravljajo vlogo posrednikov med nasprotujočimi si političnimi skupinami ali zmanjšujejo razlike med njimi, saj pripadniki te skupnosti ne sodijo med vplivnejše uporabnike uporabnike v celotnem omrežju in imajo omejeno vidnost v drugih delih omrežja.

Politična strukturiranost slovenskega omrežja je skladna z analizami predvolilnega diskurza v drugih državah, ki potrjujejo, da se v spletnih skupnostih in povezavah med njimi odražajo strankarske in koalicijske delitve (Federico idr. 2024). Slovenski rezultati ta vzorec dopolnjujejo z izrazito neenako zastopanostjo političnih polov. Primerjava s predhodnimi evropskimi volitvami kaže, da taka neenakost ni konstantna značilnost slovenske spletne razprave, pač pa se je v zadnjem času okrepila: leta 2019 je desni del omrežja zajemal 50,7 % uporabnikov, levi pa približno 40 %, medtem ko sta leta 2024 ta deleža znašala skoraj 70 % in 22,5 % (Jesenšek in Verčič 2025; Jesenšek 2026b). Razmerje je bilo torej leta 2019 bolj uravnoteženo, čeprav je bil desni del že takrat številčnejši. Osb politični razdeljenosti, ki je prisotna v obeh obdobjih, se je spremenila predvsem velikost posameznih delov omrežja in vidnost sporočil njihovih pripadnikov.

OMEJITVE

Ugotovitve se nanašajo na korpus objav, zajet z izbranim iskalnim nizom. To pomeni, da ne vključuje objav, ki ne vsebujejo izrazov, zajetih v iskalnem nizu, in je časovno omejen na obdobje enega meseca pred evropskimi volitvami, zato ne zagotavlja popolne pokritosti slovenske politične razprave na platformi X. Analiza zajema komuniciranje na eni platformi v enem predvolilnem obdobju. Deleži posameznih politično opredeljenih skupnosti opisujejo sestavo zajetega omrežja, ne pa podpore političnim strankam med volivci ali razmerij v slovenski javnosti. Raziskava ne vključuje sistematične analize vsebine sporočil, zato tudi ne omogoča neposredne presoje kakovosti argumentacije ali komunikacijskih namenov posameznih akterjev. Zaradi odsotnosti ali manjše vidnosti nekaterih politikov v analiziranem omrežju prav tako ni mogoče sklepati, v kakšni meri so ti komuniciranje preselili s platforme X na druge platforme, lahko pa to sklepamo glede na objavljeno literaturo iz drugih držav.

SKLEP

Analiza več kot 67.000 tvitov razkriva strukturo slovenske politične razprave na spletnem družbenem omrežju X pred volitvami v Evropski parlament leta 2024. Med najaktivnejšimi uporabniki prevladujejo javnosti manj znani profili, medtem kot najvplivnejša mesta v razpravi zasedajo politiki, komentatorji, novinarji in druge javne osebnosti. Slovenska politična razprava na spletnem družbenem omrežju X je močno fragmentirana. Razdeljena je na skupnosti, ki so oblikovane glede na politično in svetovnonazorsko prepričanje njihovih članov. Pretok informacij med različnimi deli omrežja je majhen, saj uporabniki pretežno komunicirajo s pripadniki svojih skupnosti; izmenjava mnenj z drugače mislečimi je omejena. To kaže na navzočnost odmevnih sob – informacije se hitro širijo znotraj podobno usmerjenih delov omrežja, težko pa prodrejo onkraj ideoloških meja. Očitna je delitev na ideološko levo in desno usmerjen del omrežja, pri čemer desno usmerjene skupnosti močno prevladujejo, imajo mnogo več članov in so komunikacijsko mnogo bolj aktivne. Pri tem posebej izstopajo politiki, ki zasedajo središčna mesta v omrežju, zaradi česar imajo možnost oblikovanja in usmerjanja razprave ter učinkovitega nagovarjanja svojih podpornikov. Ugotovitve so skladne s predhodnimi raziskavami tako slovenskega kot tudi širšega evropskega predvolilnega konteksta glede neenakomerne aktivnosti, razlik med najaktivnejšimi in najvplivnejšimi uporabniki ter politične strukturiranosti omrežja. Obenem pa rezultati tudi pokažejo, da fragmentacija ne pomeni nujno tudi komunikacijske zaprtosti vseh delov omrežja oz. oblikovanja odmevnih sob: medtem ko v levem in desnem delu omrežja prevladujejo notranje povezave (uporabniki preferenčno komunicirajo in širijo vsebine s pripadniki enake skupnosti), ima protisistemsko opredeljena skupnost več zunanjih povezav. Slovenski primer tako dopolnjuje razumevanje fragmentacije z razlikovanjem med politično razdeljenostjo omrežja in komunikacijsko odprtostjo njegovih posameznih delov. Raziskava nadaljuje z empirično analizo slovenske politične razprave na platformi X ter ponuja vpogled v strukturo spletne komunikacijske krajine v Sloveniji in prisotnost globalnih smernic političnega komuniciranja v slovenskem okolju.

DOSTOPNOST RAZISKOVALNIH PODATKOV

Jesenšek, Luka. 2026. "Slovenska razprava na spletnem družbenem omrežju X pred volitvami v Evropski parlament 2024". *Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov*. https://doi.org/10.17898/10154.

NAVZKRIŽJE INTERESOV

Avtor izjavlja, da ni v navzkrižju interesov.

LITERATURA

Arlt, Dorothee, Adrian Rauchfleisch in Mike S. Schäfer. 2019. "Between Fragmentation and Dialogue. Twitter Communities and Political Debate About the Swiss "Nuclear Withdrawal Initiative". *Environmental Communication* 13 (4): 440–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1430600.

Arun, Arvindh, Saurav Chhatani, Jisun An in Ponnurangam Kumaraguru. 2024. "X-posing Free Speech: Examining the Impact of Moderation Relaxation on Online Social Networks". *Proceedings of the 8th Workshop on Online Abuse and Harms (WOAH 2024)*, 201–11. https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2024.woah-1.15.

Barberá, Pablo. 2015. "Birds of the Same Feather Tweet Together: Bayesian Ideal Point Estimation Using Twitter Data". *Political Analysis* 23 (1): 76–91. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpu011.

Barrie, Christopher. 2023. "Did the Musk Takeover Boost Contentious Actors on Twitter?" *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, advance online publication, avgust 29. https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-122.

Barzilai-Nahon, Karine. 2008. "Toward a theory of network gatekeeping: A framework for exploring information control". *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59 (9): 1493–512. https://doi.org/10.1002/ASI.20857.

Bastos, Marco Toledo, Rafael Luis Galdini Raimundo in Rodrigo Travitzki. 2013. "Gatekeeping Twitter: Message diffusion in political hashtags". *Media, Culture and Society* 35 (2): 260–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712467594.

Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. Yale University Press.

Bracciale, Roberta, Antonio Martella in Chiara Visentin. 2018. "From super-participants to super-echoed: participation in the 2018 Italian electoral twittersphere". *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 11 (2): 361–93. https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v11i2p361.

Bradshaw, Samantha in Philip N. Howard. 2018. *Why does junk news spread so quickly across social media? Algorithms, advertising and exposure in public life*. Knight Foundation.

Bruns, Axel. 2011. "Gatekeeping, gatewatching, real-time feedback: new challenges for Journalism". *Brazilian Journalism Research* 7 (2): 117–36. https://doi.org/10.25200/bjr.v7n2.2011.355.

Bruns, Axel. 2019. "Echo Chambers? Filter Bubbles? What Even Are They?" V *Are Filter Bubbles Real?* Polity.

Bruns, Axel. 2023. "From 'the' public sphere to a network of publics: towards an empirically founded model of contemporary public communication spaces". *Communication Theory* 33 (2–3): 70–81. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtad007.

Bruns, Axel in Tim Highfield. 2016. "Is Habermas on Twitter? Social Media and the Public Sphere". V *The Routledge companion to social media and politics*.

Cava, Lucio La, Luca Maria Aiello in Andrea Tagarelli. 2023. "Drivers of Social Influence in the Twitter Migration to Mastodon". *Scientific Reports* 13 (1): 21626. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-48200-7.

Ceia, Vanessa. 2020. "Digital Ecosystems of Ideology: Linked Media as Rhetoric in Spanish Political Tweets". *Social Media and Society* 6 (2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120926630.

Cha, Meeyoung, Hamed Haddadi, Fabrício Benevenuto in Krishna P. Gummadi. 2010. "Measuring user influence in Twitter: The million follower fallacy". *Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* Association.

Coleman, Stephen in Jay G. Blumler. 2009. *The internet and democratic citizenship: Theory, practice and policy*. V *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818271.

Cunningham, Stuart. 2001. "Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2): 131–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/136787790100400201.

Dahlberg, Lincoln. 2004. "The Habermasian Public Sphere: A Specification of the Idealized Conditions of Democratic Communication". *Studies in Social and Political Thought* 10 (10): 2–18.

Dang-Xuan, Linh, Stefan Stieglitz, Jennifer Wladarsch in Christoph Neuberger. 2013. "An Investigation of Influentials and the Role of Sentiment in Political Communication on Twitter During Election Periods". *Information Communication and Society* 16 (5): 795–825. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.783608.

Dewey, John. 1927. *The Public and Its Problems*. The New Scholasticism 2 (2). https://doi.org/10.5840/newscholas19282253.

Dijk, Jan van in Kenneth L. Hacker. 2018. *Internet and democracy in the network society*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351110716.

Dubois, Elizabeth in Devin Gaffney. 2014. "The Multiple Facets of Influence: Identifying Political Influentials and Opinion Leaders on Twitter". *American Behavioral Scientist* 58 (10): 1260–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214527088.

Duggan, Maeve in Aaron Smith. 2016. *The political environment on social media*. Pew Research Center. http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/25/the-political-environment-on-social-media/.

Dugué, Nicolas in Anthony Perez. 2015. *Directed Louvain: maximizing modularity in directed networks*. Université d'Orléans. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4497.0328.

Dylko, Ivan, Igor Dolgov, William Hoffman, Nicholas Eckhart, Maria Molina in Omar Aaziz. 2017. "The dark side of technology: An experimental investigation of the influence of customizability technology on online political selective exposure". *Computers in Human Behavior* 73 (avgust): 181–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.031.

Erdős, Paul in Alfréd Rényi. 1960. "On the evolution of random graphs". *Publ. Math. Inst. Hung. Acad* 5 (1): 17–60.

Falkenberg, Max, Fabiana Zollo, Walter Quattrociocchi, Jürgen Pfeffer in Andrea Baronchelli. 2024. "Patterns of Partisan Toxicity and Engagement Reveal the Common Structure of Online Political Communication across Countries". *Nature Communications* 15 (1): 9560. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-53868-0.

Federico, Lorenzo, Ayoub Mounim, Guido Caldarelli in Gianni Riotta. 2024. "Multi-Scale Analysis of the Community Structure of the Twitter Discourse around the Italian General Elections of September 2022". *Scientific Reports* 14 (1): 15980. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-65564-6.

Fink-Hafner, Danica. 2024. "Changes in the Party System (1989–2022)". V *Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy: Slovenia in a Comparative Perspective*, uredila Danica Fink-Hafner. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54949-6_7.

Fink-Hafner, Danica, in Meta Novak. 2022. "Party Fragmentation, the Proportional System and Democracy in Slovenia". *Political Studies Review* 20 (4): 578–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299211059450.

Firdaus, Syeda Nadia, Chen Ding in Alireza Sadeghian. 2018. "Retweet: A popular information diffusion mechanism – A survey paper". *Online Social Networks and Media* 6 (junij): 26–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.OSNEM.2018.04.001.

Freelon, Deen. 2018. "Partition-Specific Network Analysis of Digital Trace Data". V *The Oxford Handbook of Networked Communication*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190460518.013.3.

Fuchs, Christian. 2021. *Social media: a critical introduction*. SAGE.

Ghajar-Khosravi, Shadi, in Mark Chignell. 2017. "Pragmatics of Network Centrality". V *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, uredila Luke Sloan in Anabel Quan-Haase. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Gibanje Svoboda. 2022. "Svoboda Zapušča Twitter". 2022. november 26. https://gibanjesvoboda.si/svoboda/svoboda-zapusca-twitter/.

Graham, Todd in Scott Wright. 2014. "Discursive Equality and Everyday Talk Online: The Impact of "Superparticipants"". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19 (3): 625–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12016.

Gronow, Antti in Arttu Malkamäki. 2024. *Political polarisation in turbulent times: Tracking polarisation trends and partisan news link sharing on Finnish Twitter, 2015-2023*. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2403.03842.

Grunig, James E. 1997. "A situational theory of publics: Conceptual history, recent challenges and new research". V *Public relations research: An international perspective*, uredili Danny Moss, Toby MacManus, in Dejan Verčič. International Thomson Business Press.

Guo, Lei, Jacob A. Rohde in H. Denis Wu. 2020. "Who is responsible for Twitter's echo chamber problem? Evidence from 2016 U.S. election networks". *Information Communication and Society* 23 (2): 234–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1499793.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *Strukturne spremembe javnosti*. Studia Humanitatis.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2006. "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research". *Communication Theory* 16 (4): 411–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00280.x.

Haman, Michael in Milan Školník. 2025. "The unverified era: politicians' Twitter verification post-Musk acquisition". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 22 (2): 167–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2023.2293868.

Hickey, Daniel, Matheus Schmitz, Daniel Fessler, Paul E. Smaldino, Goran Muric in Keith Burghardt. 2023. "Auditing Elon Musk's Impact on Hate Speech and Bots". *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 17 (junij): 1133–37. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v17i1.22222.

Hong, Sounman in Sun Hyoung Kim. 2016. "Political polarization on Twitter: Implications for the use of social media in digital governments". *Government Information Quarterly* 33 (4): 777–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.04.007.

Jacobson, Jenna, Anatoliy Gruzd, Priya Kumar in Philip Mai. 2019. "Networked Influence: An Introduction". *Social Media and Society* 5 (3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119865473.

Jacomy, Mathieu, Tommaso Venturini, Sebastien Heymann in Mathieu Bastian. 2014. "ForceAtlas2, a continuous graph layout algorithm for handy network visualization designed for the Gephi software". *PLoS ONE* 9 (6): e98679. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0098679.

Jeong, Ujun, Paras Sheth, Anique Tahir, Faisal Alatawi, H. Russell Bernard in Huan Liu. 2024. "Exploring Platform Migration Patterns between Twitter and Mastodon: A User Behavior

Study". *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 18 (maj): 738–50. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v18i1.31348.

Jesenšek, Luka. 2023. "Polarizacija in širjenje vsebin na spletnih družbenih omrežjih pred slovenskimi volitvami v Evropski parlament 2019 : doktorska disertacija". Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede. https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=147414.

Jesenšek, Luka, 2026a. "Slovenska razprava na spletnem družbenem omrežju X pred volitvami v Evropski parlament 2024". *Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov*. https://doi.org/10.17898/10154.

Jesenšek, Luka. 2026b. "The advantage of the right? Ideological asymmetry in link-sharing on X during 2019 and 2024 European elections in Slovenia". *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 0 (0): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2026.2718751.

Jesenšek, Luka in Dejan Verčič. 2025. "Strategic Polarization? Filter Bubbles, Bridges and the Role of Politicians on Twitter during 2019 European Election in Slovenia". *Communications* 50 (4): 930–53. https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2024-0018.

Jesenšek, Luka, Dejan Verčič in Luka Kronegger. 2021. "Struktura slovenske politične razprave na Twitterju ob volitvah v Evropski parlament". *Teorija in Praksa* 58 (1): 49–71. https://doi.org/10.51936/TIP.58.1.49-71.

Jungherr, Andreas, Gonzalo Rivero in Daniel Gayo-Avello. 2020. *Retooling Politics*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108297820.

Katz, Elihu in Paul F. Lazarsfeld. 1966. *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Transaction Publishers.

Kubin, Emily in Christian von Sikorski. 2021. "The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review". *Annals of the International Communication Association* 45 (3): 188–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070.

Martinc, Matej, Nina Perger in Senja Pollak. 2025. "Viewpoint Detection on LGBT + Reporting Using Contextual Embeddings and Qualitative Thematic Analysis: The Use Case on the Word Deep". *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 165–166 (1–2): 154–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/07591063251317085.

Marwick, Alice in Rebecca Lewis. 2017. *Media manipulation and disinformation online*. Data & Society Research Institute. https://datasociety.net/output/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/.

Matuszewski, Paweł in Gabriella Szabó. 2019. "Are Echo Chambers Based on Partisanship? Twitter and Political Polarity in Poland and Hungary". *Social Media + Society* 5 (2): 205630511983767. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119837671.

Neudert, Lisa Maria in Nahema Marchal. 2019. *Polarisation and the use of technology in political campaigns and communication*. European Parliamentary Research Service.

Ng, Yee Man Margaret in Rik Ray. 2025. "The Journalists' Exodus: Navigating the Transition from Twitter to Mastodon and Other Alternative Platforms". *New Media & Society*, 17 marec, 14614448251321165. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251321165.

Oxford Analytica. 2025. *Musk will contribute to polarisation in Europe*. Expert Briefings. Emerald. https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB292238.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2008. "The virtual sphere 2.0: The Internet, the public sphere, and beyond". V *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*. Routledge.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2018. "The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere". V *Praktiken der Überwachten*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-11719-1_3.

Peña-Fernández, Simón, Ainara Larrondo-Ureta in Jordi Morales-i-Gras. 2025. "Straddling Two

Platforms: From Twitter to Mastodon, an Analysis of the Evolution of an Unfinished Social Media Migration". *Social Sciences* 14 (7): 402. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14070402.

Pinter, Andrej. 2005. *Sodobne teorije javne sfere*. Fakulteta za družbene vede, zbirka Javnost.

Rasmussen, Terje. 2016. "The idea of a networked public sphere". V *The Internet Soapbox: Perspectives on a Changing Public Sphere*.

Ribać, Marko, Doruk Şen, Lori Šramel-Čebular in Mojca Pajnik. 2026. "Media Oligarchs and the Attention Economy: Ownership Dynamics in Slovenia's Media System". *Communication & Society*, junij 12, 243–62. https://doi.org/10.15581/003.39.1.017.

Riedl, Jasmin, Wiebke Drews in Friederike Richter. 2024. "Avoiding the Elephant in the Room: Echo Chambers and the (de-)Politicization of COVID-19 during the 2021 German Federal Election on Twitter". *Frontiers in Political Science* 6 (december). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1509981.

Rieger, Diana, Josephine B. Schmitt in Lena Frischlich. 2018. "Hate and counter-voices in the internet: Introduction to the special issue". *Studies in Communication and Media* 7 (4): 459–72. https://doi.org/10.5771/2192-4007-2018-4-459.

Rovny, Jan, Jonathan Polk, Ryan Bakker, idr. 2025. "The 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey on political party positioning in Europe: Twenty-five years of party positional data". *Electoral Studies* 97 (oktober): 102981. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102981.

Sekloča, Peter. 2020. "Ohranjanje zaupanja v mrežni javni sferi: Problem javnih forumov in personalizacija novic". *Teorija in Praksa* 57 (1): 308–25.

Self, Charles C. 2020. "Dewey, the Public Sphere, and Strategic Communication". V *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*, uredil Derina Holtzhausen in Ansgar Zerfass. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094440.

Soares, Felipe Bonow, Raquel Recuero, in Gabriela Zago. 2018. "Influencers in polarized political networks on Twitter". *SMSociety '18: Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Social Media and Society*, 168–77. https://doi.org/10.1145/3217804.3217909.

Splichal, Slavko. 2005. *Kultura javnosti*. Fakulteta za družbene vede, zbirka Javnost.

Stewart, Leo Graiden, Ahmer Arif, A. Conrad Nied, Emma S. Spiro in Kate Starbird. 2017. "Drawing the Lines of Contention: Networked Frame Contests Within #BlackLivesMatter Discourse". *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 1 (CSCW): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1145/3134920.

Stromer-Galley, Jennifer. 2017. "Political Discussion and Deliberation Online". V *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, uredil Kate Kenski in Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.015_update_001.

Sunstein, Cass. 2017. *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.

Tolsma, Jochem in Niels Spierings. 2024. "Twitter and divides in the Dutch parliament: social and political segregation in the following, @-mentions and retweets networks". *Information, Communication & Society* 27 (7): 1458–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2024.2305159.

Tomanić Trivundža, Ilija. 2014. "Vernakuarna vizualna politična kultura: Vizualni tviti v predvolilni kampanji za EP 2014". *Javnost – The Public* 21: 41–58.

Ugander, Johan, Brian Karrer, Lars Backstrom, in Cameron Marlow. 2011. *The Anatomy of the Facebook Social Graph*. 18 november. https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.1111.4503.

Valič, Tamara Besednjak, Borut Rončević in Matevž Tomšič. 2023. "How Media Pluralism Navigates Ideological Orientations: The Case of Slovenia". *Frontiers in Communication* 8 (julij). https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1143786.

Vos, Tim P. 2015. "Revisiting Gatekeeping Theory During a Time of Transition". V *Gatekeeping in Transition*, uredil François Heinderyckx in Tim P. Vos. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315849652.

Wojcik, Stefan in Adam Hughes. 2019. "How Twitter Users Compare to the General Public". Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/.

Ye, Jinyi, Luca Luceri in Emilio Ferrara. 2024. "Auditing Political Exposure Bias: Algorithmic Amplification on Twitter/X Approaching the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election". SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 5018879. *Social Science Research Network*, 4 november. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5018879

STRUCTURE OF SLOVENIAN POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS ON X AHEAD OF THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Abstract. *A structural analysis of over 67,000 tweets reveals who was shaping Slovenian political discourse on X and how fragmented it was before the 2024 European elections. Using social network analysis, user activity and influence, community structure, and the flow of information across the network is examined. The results are largely aligned with expectations: activity is unevenly distributed, the most active users are not necessarily the most visible ones, and the network is politically structured. The politically right-leaning part of the network is larger and more active. This also applies to politicians, who are among the most influential users within their respective communities. Information flow between different parts of the network is limited, indicating a growing degree of fragmentation.*

Keywords: *online social networks, X, central users, fragmentation, echo chambers, European elections, social network analysis.*

Ana MARKOVIĆ*

FROM COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALISED CONSUMPTION: SOCIALLY ENGAGED MUSIC IN POST-YUGOSLAV CROATIA**

Abstract. *The article examines how socially engaged music in post-Yugoslav Croatia has been reshaped by platformisation and post-socialist disillusionment. Drawing on constructivist grounded theory analysis of 28 semi-structured interviews with musicians and audience members (2022–2023), the author traces shifts in production practices, thematic content, social functions, and listening contexts. While digital infrastructures expand access and visibility, participants describe intensified competition for attention, algorithmic gatekeeping, and market metrics that fragment publics and encourage shorter formats and increasingly visual modes of presentation and circulation. The findings show that while engagement persists, it occurs under conditions that make collective resonance harder to sustain.*

Keywords: *socially engaged music, Croatia, post-Yugoslav space, platformisation, streaming platforms, attention economy, grounded theory.*

INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, socially engaged music in Croatia has undergone a noticeable transformation in both its cultural functions and the conditions in which it is produced and consumed. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, during the post-war transition from Yugoslav socialism and wartime nationalism to an independent state and market economy, the social and political weight held by socially engaged music was distinct. Musicians wrote about the corruption, fraudulent privatisation, and failures of the democratic transition, whereas audiences found in this music a valuable articulation of shared grievances that helped them process post-war realities. In this period, music not only acted as

* Ana Marković, PhD candidate, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, ana.markovic1709@gmail.com.

** Research article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.497

entertainment but also as a language via which political disappointment, social inequality, and collective identity could be debated and felt in common.

In this article, socially engaged music refers to post-war musical practices in Croatia and the wider post-Yugoslav space that sustain a critical focus on systemic social and political conditions rather than treating such conditions as mere backdrop. It is understood as a *genre*[1] that emerged from widespread disillusionment with the post-war promises of democratisation and prosperity, and which develops critique through recurring attention to power relations, corruption, privatisation, inequality, and other collective grievances. The focus is placed on the term socially engaged rather than protest music so as to capture a broader range of critical work, including music that frames problems, interprets lived experience, and imagines alternatives, even when it does not function as direct mobilisation.

Today, the environment in which socially engaged music circulates has changed considerably. Digital technologies, streaming platforms, and social media have restructured production practices, reshaped listening habits, and altered the pathways by which music becomes visible. The music industry has moved from physical formats to platform-based access, studio-centred production to affordable digital tools, and album-oriented listening to track- and playlist-based consumption (Hesmondhalgh 2022; Arditi 2018). These developments are often described as democratising since the lowered barriers to production and distribution permit more people to publish music and potentially participate in socio-political discourse through cultural production. Nevertheless, this expansion of formal access also comes with contradictions. Platform infrastructures centralise visibility and revenue using new gatekeeping systems, while fragmented attention and individualised forms of cultural participation can undermine the shared spaces in which collective political consciousness might form (Kiberg 2023; Hesmondhalgh 2022).

These tensions are especially significant in post-socialist contexts such as Croatia where collective solidarity and political engagement carry particular historical weight. Croatia's post-Yugoslav trajectory, from 'hopeful' independence and promised 'democratisation', via corrupt privatisation and the consolidation of elite power, to persistent economic precarity and political exhaustion, has shaped the way cultural participation and political critique are experienced. Yet the effects of digital transformation on socially engaged music in such contexts remain underexplored. Scholarship on streaming, platform governance and algorithmic curation has mainly been theorised through empirical cases drawn from Western music industries and platform ecosystems (Prey 2020; Maasø and Spilker 2022; Hesmondhalgh 2022; Arditi 2018). Recent work on

[1] Here, genre does not refer to a conventional musicological classification, but to an analytical category that groups musical practices according to their social and political function across different musical styles. The term is therefore used in a deliberately broader sense than in conventional genre classifications.

post-Yugoslav cultural production has shown how artistic forms can negotiate war, nationalism, and collective memory, sustain counter-narratives, and open space for political critique (Kirn 2026). However, considerably less attention has been paid to how such critical cultural practices are transformed in platform economies and following the changing modes of cultural consumption. At the same time, studies of socially engaged music tend to privilege historical movements or activist scenes, rarely examining how platform economies reshape the visibility, circulation, and perceived efficacy of musical critique.

This article addresses that gap by examining how digital transformation, neoliberal capitalism, and post-socialist disillusionment interact to reshape socially engaged music in Croatia. Using constructivist grounded theory analysis of semi-structured interviews with 7 musicians and 21 audience members conducted between 2022 and 2023, the article analyses transformation across four dimensions: (1) production practices; (2) thematic content; (3) social functions; and (4) listening contexts. While digital platforms expand formal access to music creation and circulation, they simultaneously introduce new forms of gatekeeping, economic precarity, and audience fragmentation that make collective cultural-political identification more difficult. Parallel to this, post-socialist disillusionment informs the contemporary tone and orientation of socially engaged music, contributing to the growing prominence of cynicism and fatigue in how musicians narrate political life and audiences position themselves in relation to engagement.

After outlining the theoretical framework which synthesises scholarship on platformisation, digital democratisation, and post-socialist trajectories, the author briefly contextualises the emergence of socially engaged music in post-war Croatia. Findings of the interview-based analysis in terms of the four dimensions listed above are then presented. The conclusion reflects on how the Croatian case clarifies the broader tensions between technological accessibility and collective solidarity, offering implications for the study of digital transformation in post-socialist cultural contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the transformation of socially engaged music in post-Yugoslav Croatia calls for three interconnected perspectives to be brought together: (1) the platformisation of cultural production; (2) the contradictions of digital democratisation; and (3) the post-socialist trajectories of political economy and cultural meaning. As a whole, these lenses clarify why changes in technology are also changes in labour, visibility, and political address, and why these changes might be experienced differently in post-socialist societies.

Platformisation and Hybrid Gatekeeping

Platformisation describes the penetration of digital platforms' economic, infrastructural and governmental logics into cultural production and circulation

(Nieborg and Poell 2018). Rather than acting as neutral channels, platforms like Spotify, YouTube, and social media are reconfiguring the entire ecosystem in which music is created, distributed, discovered and evaluated. In this environment, music is increasingly functioning not simply as a cultural object but also as a stream of data organised for recommendation, segmentation and monetisation (Prey 2020). Platform infrastructures are thereby influencing not just what is heard, but how it is heard, through interface design, playlist systems, ranking mechanisms, and patterns of algorithmically shaped discovery.

The described reconfiguration operates using hybrid gatekeeping mechanisms that combine algorithmic coding and interface governance with human curation (Maasø and Spilker 2022). Traditional gatekeepers such as labels and radio operated via explicit editorial decisions and identifiable institutional power. By contrast, platform gatekeeping is often less transparent to users and creators, even though it may privilege engagement metrics, mainstream optimisation, and commercially compatible forms of content (Bonini and Gandini 2019). The result is a streaming paradox: platforms offer access to vast catalogues, yet listening and visibility frequently consolidate around a relatively narrow segment of content that benefits from algorithmic promotion and institutional alignment (Maasø and Spilker 2022). For socially engaged music, this is significant because the impact of critical content depends on it being able to be discovered within infrastructures that shape attention and circulation.

Platformisation is also transforming musical labour and value extraction. In platform economies, the output of musicians becomes valuable not merely as recordings but as a means of generating continuous engagement – plays, skips, shares and other behavioural traces which platforms can monetise (Papadimitropoulos 2021). This logic connects to the attention economy where attention has become the scarce resource that structures competition and monetisation (Simon 1971). Socially engaged music often requires sustained listening and interpretive investment; however, platform environments tend to reward content that is easy-to-consume, rapidly circulatable, and compatible with engagement-driven metrics.

Digital Democratisation and its Contradictions

Digital technologies are frequently framed as democratising cultural production. Affordable tools and platforms lower barriers to entry, allowing a wider range of actors to produce and distribute music and potentially participate in socio-political discourse (Kiberg 2023). Such logic is especially attractive for analyses of socially engaged art because it suggests an expansion of cultural voice and access to public expression. Yet the interviews reveal a more general tension between expanded formal access and the effective distribution of cultural power. Here, debates about democratisation offer a useful analogy. Tilly (2000) conceptualised democratisation as a movement towards broader and more equal citizenship, binding consultation, and protection from arbitrary power. By analogy,

expanded access to cultural production and distribution does not necessarily translate to substantive cultural power. With platformised music, technological accessibility coexists with algorithmic gatekeeping that impacts visibility, revenue concentration among platform owners and aligned industry actors (Klein et al. 2017), along with audience fragmentation that weakens shared cultural spaces. Greater capacity to publish accordingly does not automatically mean being heard, nor the formation of collective publics able to sustain political identification through music.

Neoliberal individualisation adds to these contradictions. Neoliberal logics increasingly frame cultural participation in terms of entrepreneurship, self-branding, and competitive visibility rather than collective cultural projects (León 2014; Taylor 2015). Musicians are encouraged to operate as entrepreneurial subjects navigating platform economies that reward personal branding and continuous output (Hracs 2015). In such conditions, socially engaged music is becoming reorganised around individualised strategies of visibility, while critique tends to adopt forms compatible with platform circulation, favouring brevity, visuality and more individualised forms of expression over longer, collective, movement-oriented articulations.

Post-socialist Trajectories and Disillusionment

Even though platformisation and democratisation contradictions are global processes, they are experienced as part of specific historical trajectories. In Croatia, the post-Yugoslav transition followed a distinctive arc: from the promise of independence and democratisation, through a privatisation process widely seen as corrupt and elite-serving, to persistent economic precarity and political exhaustion. In such contexts, privatisation can function less as transparent reform than as the legalisation and stabilisation of power relations, enabling the conversion of politically accumulated resources into legitimate ownership (Nikolaidis 2015). Comparable dynamics have been documented in Slovenia where neoliberal post-socialist restructuring shifted structural risks towards individuals, weakened collective agency, and individualised the social and emotional consequences of economic transformation (Vodopivec 2025). These experiences shape political subjectivity and cultural meaning: cynicism and exhaustion are not merely attitudes but responses to repeated betrayals of promised transformations. The mentioned process produces post-socialist disillusionment as a cultural-political condition marked by diminished expectations of institutional change, scepticism of political rhetoric, and fatigue with collective mobilisation. These sensibilities influence both the production and reception of socially engaged music by determining which forms of critique appear credible, which messages feel redundant, and which kinds of engagement seem worth sustaining. Their significance is accentuated by the speed of the post-socialist transformation. Within roughly a generation, Croatia has moved from socialism to war and then to digital neoliberal capitalism. Such a compressed series of change

intensifies disorientation and can destabilise the cultural frameworks in which music once functioned as a 'sacred' identity marker, a collective scene practice, or an alternative information channel.

These considerations position socially engaged music in Croatia within the interplay of platform infrastructures, democratisation tensions, neoliberal individualisation, and post-socialist disillusionment. The analysis follows how changes in production practices, thematic expression, social functions and listening contexts emerge from this interaction, rather than treating technology as an autonomous driver of cultural change. The focus is on how technological conditions intersect with historical and ideological trajectories to reshape what socially engaged music can do, how it circulates, and how it is experienced.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A constructivist grounded theory approach was used to examine how socially engaged music in Croatia has changed with regard to production practices, thematic content, social functions, and listening contexts. The aim was to develop analytical categories from participants' accounts through iterative comparison instead of applying predefined explanatory models. The data collection and analysis therefore proceeded parallel to each other, with emerging insights informing subsequent interviews and coding. Fieldwork was conducted in Croatia in 2022–2023 and consisted of semi-structured interviews with 7 musicians and 21 audience members (28 interviews, approximately 60 hours of recordings and around 500 pages of transcripts). Audience participants provided written informed consent. Musicians were informed prior to the interviews that their identities would not be disclosed and that the interview material would be treated confidentially. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Musicians were selected based on sustained engagement with socio-political themes in their work, while audience participants identified themselves as listeners of socially engaged music and reported active engagement such as concert attendance and attention to lyrical and public messaging. Interviews were transcribed and anonymised, and the transcripts were organised using MAXQDA[2]. Analysis followed Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory procedures. Initial coding stayed close to the data through line-by-line and incident-focused coding. Codes were then compared across interviews and participant groups and gradually clustered into higher-order concepts and analytic categories. The data collection and analysis continued iteratively until new interviews no longer added substantial properties to the developing categories.

[2] Interview excerpts are identified using anonymised participant codes: ART for musicians and AUD for audience members; audience codes additionally indicate a participant's number, age and gender.

THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED MUSIC

Contemporary socially engaged music in Croatia is produced and received within a platformised music economy that has altered the conditions of visibility, circulation and engagement. The shift from physical formats to streaming has expanded formal access to production and distribution, yet also introduced new forms of algorithmic gatekeeping and intensified competition for attention, changes that matter for artists whose work depends on being found as much as on what is being said. Against this backdrop, interviewees consistently contrasted the post-war period when the socio-political conditions demanded more direct, collectively resonant musical critique, with the present, which they described as politically fragmented and affectively exhausted, calling for different modes of address. One musician captured this perceived shift in the political moment, and its implications for music, by describing the late 1990s/early 2000s as a unique moment of shared urgency that has since faded (ART-6):

> *Well, I think the difference is that there was a unique moment that was clear to everyone… Today, there is no specific moment like that; everything is much faster and freer, and there is no need for a representative in that sense. Nobody says anything, but everyone knows everything. People are more interested in making money and are fed up with stories about politics and change… I think the amount of rebellion needed back then was much higher than it is now. Now, that level of rebellion is not necessary because, you know, we're doing well or whatever.*

This account frames the contemporary context as one of political saturation rather than collective mobilisation, shifting the conditions in which socially engaged music can function as a shared outlet for critique. The findings presented below trace how participants negotiate this altered terrain in terms of production practices, thematic choices and listening contexts.

Musicians consistently saw technological change as reshaping how socially engaged music is made, especially through a shift from band-based work to more individualised production. One artist described "the increase in solo artists" as the most visible change, arguing that technology means "you no longer require an entire band" and that if you are "internet and software literate… you can convey your message without a lot of collaborators… you don't need endless rehearsals with a band" (ART-1). In this account, digitalisation is not only a new distribution infrastructure but a transformation of the social organisation of creativity and labour. Musicians simultaneously emphasised what can be lost when production becomes individualised. One interviewee noted, "it's much easier to create some material solo in my bedroom with headphones than in a band", because "a band requires both discipline and democracy… much more patience, whereas going solo can become 'I don't need anyone'". Still, they insisted that "the vibe of a band is much different… very important" (ART-2). Notably, this

musician also suggested that the post-Yugoslav region has been partly resisting the global decline of bands: "When you look at the BBC's Top 100, there are very few bands, but our region is quite old-fashioned… luckily for bands… our region will push bands and band music for a long, long time" (ART-2). In their view, technological affordances encourage solo work, but local scene expectations continue to value band-based collectivity.

Musicians also linked platform-era listening to changes in musical format and release strategies, describing a renewed emphasis on singles over albums. One interviewee framed this as a historical return: "with digital technology, we've actually gone back, in a way, to pre-album times", adding that "we're returning to a focus on singles once more, because one single is enough to arouse the interest of the audience" (ART-1). These positions show musicians understanding the digital transformation as at once enabling individual autonomy, reconfiguring collaboration, and reshaping how socially engaged messages are packaged for visibility and attention.

Audience accounts largely echoed the musicians' descriptions of digital individualisation, but also reframed these shifts via changes in everyday listening and value. While musicians stressed that software literacy enables artists to "convey [a] message without a lot of collaborators" (ART-1), audience participants described the same transformation as a reconfiguration of the entire production pathway: "I have free software… it can go from my laptop to release-ready… artists massively self-release… 'my material, my rights'" (AUD-12-36-F). At the same time, listeners connected the ubiquitous access to a perceived devaluation of music: "music is just a click away… constantly available… we might not engage with it as thoughtfully as we used to" (AUD-14-35-F), a context which helps explain why the musicians are experiencing renewed pressure to prioritise singles and immediate visibility.

From both perspectives, digitalisation is described as changing the social organisation of making and listening to socially engaged music. Musicians stressed having greater autonomy and a shift towards solo work and singles-first releases, but also noted what is lost when band-based collectivity becomes less central. Audience accounts align with this, suggesting that creation and release feel easier, yet constant availability can thin attention and reduce perceived value, which helps explain the move towards shorter, more immediately visible releases.

COMPETING FOR ATTENTION

In the platform era, constraints on socially engaged music extend beyond production and distribution to the problem of attention. Interviewees repeatedly framed music as increasingly marginal within a dense media ecology where it competes not just with other music but with games, feeds, and continuous audiovisual content. One musician described this as a loss of cultural potency and of the 'sacred' status music once held as a marker of identity and ideological belonging (ART-4):

> *Music isn't as potent a medium anymore, thanks to technology. It's just one part of the audio-visual stimulation technology provides. When I was growing up, music was sacred; we'd argue over ideologies… But now, it doesn't matter… Music can serve as some aesthetic screen (…) not at all as something that will initiate the matter because it does not have that power. Nowadays, a video game can hold more sway.*

Another musician framed the same shift via the changing informational role of socially engaged music. In the pre-Internet period, they argued, music could function as an alternative channel of critique when mainstream media did not address corruption or social issues. In the current environment of informational abundance, by contrast, they described political critique as harder to make consequential because it risks repeating what is already widely known (ART-5):

> *You really couldn't read about it in the newspapers back then… there was no Internet, and in a way, we [musicians] represented those newspapers… Now… we all know that (…) you can only say what everyone already knows… How to present it and have an effect… I don't know.*

Further, one interviewee linked these developments to changing regimes of power and accountability. They contrasted earlier representative politics, when elected officials could be confronted, with today's dependence on corporate infrastructures that set the terms of participation. In this account, music's diminished force is tied less to censorship than to a broader commodification and restructuring of everyday life around platform logics (ART-3):

> *One way society is changing is that it's becoming more complicated than before. Previously, we democratically elected our representatives, and if we didn't like them, we could say, 'Hey, you fool, what are you doing?'. Now, you haven't elected anyone… you're just conditioned to work through them, and then they dictate all their terms. The space for change is because they made it that way. Not because they fear protests or music, but because music became just another commodity, something they structured for us to purchase like tomatoes and potatoes… What will happen when everyone is programming algorithms, who will plant potatoes?*

Audience accounts frame the platform era as a mix of expanded access and thinner engagement. One participant described how the "exclusivity" once attached to music has faded, contrasting the earlier effort and shared rituals with today when music is "just a click away and constantly available as you go about your day" (AUD-14-35-F). In this account, the constant availability lowers the perceived value and causes listening to be less focused: "the more accessible something is, the less we tend to value it", and being immersed in an

"audio-visual world" can mean "we might not engage with it as thoughtfully as we used to" (AUD-14-35-F).

At the same time, listeners also emphasised opportunity. One interviewee stressed that "technology opens up countless possibilities, through YouTube and streaming services" and that "any performer can gain visibility at any moment", even if earlier periods involved "more attention and focus" in music-making and engagement (AUD-12-36-F). Another connected this directly to socially engaged music, suggesting it may be easier today to "find an audience that will align with you… and support your message, and to gather those like-minded people" (AUD-11-36-F). Yet this connection was often described as segmented rather than shared, with the Internet producing "a multitude of small tribes" (AUD-5-38-M) and socially engaged performers remaining fragmented rather than widely recognisable.

Changes in listening format reinforce these dynamics. One interviewee argued that people increasingly "listen to individual songs now, which weakens the album as a coherent form resembling a book or a journey" (AUD-18-30-F). For socially engaged themes in particular, they emphasised that "you need time", and that albums can be "better for depicting such problems because they have the ability to hold the listener's attention longer" (AUD-18-30-F).

Socially engaged music in this context is not disappearing, but its impact is harder to sustain. What is changing is the pathway from message to reception. Attention is fragmented, listening is more track-based, and engagement is ever more organised in smaller publics rather than becoming shared cultural moments.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES: NEW CODES, NEW PUBLICS AND NEW FORMATS

Generational change emerged as a key lens via which participants explained the shifting styles of critique, listening habits, and what engagement now looks like in socially engaged music. Musicians repeatedly described generational change as an alteration of both expressive codes and the cultural references available to younger artists. Rather than reproducing older ideological scripts, younger musicians were portrayed as rejecting inherited narratives and speaking from within a different media and political environment. One interviewee welcomed this rejection of familiar post-Yugoslav storylines, claiming that "the new generation brings new things" and praising artists who avoid "that narrative that gets on everyone's nerves," describing their stance as "a form of activism in its own right" (ART-2). A related issue concerns style and legibility. Younger artists were described "as searching for their own code" since repeating older modes of address was seen as "lame, boring, or Boomer", and generational conflict was understood as "cyclical within music cultures" (ART-6).

Generational differences also appeared in listening practices. Participants described a move away from rigid genre identities towards eclectic,

context-driven consumption. One interviewee suggested that newer listeners "cherry-pick, taking the best from various sources, rather than treating genre as a fixed identity" (ART-1). Another described this as "an erosion of subcultural borders, where audiences now move fluidly across styles that previously would have been socially incompatible, with genres… erased and music consumed more broadly as entertainment rather than as a marker of group belonging" (ART-3). In this environment, visibility and circulation were also seen as increasingly tied to visual formats. One interviewee argued that "without a video, it's almost as if [a song] doesn't exist at all", noting that tracks can sit online for long periods with album reviews and awards yet only gain attention once a music video appears, because "people aren't really listening to the albums anymore" (ART-5). Together, these accounts position generational change as intertwined with platform-era habits in which short-form, visually supported releases travel more effectively than album-centred statements. This shift also becomes clearer when juxtaposed with earlier patterns of music consumption in the Yugoslav context. Pušnik, Luthar and Jontes (2024) show that although individualised listening practices were already emerging in the 1980s through technologies such as headphones and home-recorded cassette playlists, music taste, associated styles, and spaces of gathering still strongly marked generational and subcultural distinctions and contributed to the formation of relatively bounded cultural "we-communities". Seen against this historical pattern, the erosion of subcultural boundaries described by participants here appears to involve not simply a rise in individualised listening, but a weakening of music's role in organising relatively stable cultural and generational affiliations.

Musicians linked generational difference to shifting orientations regarding politics itself. One participant suggested that younger listeners are "not really that interested in political issues" (ART-3), but others viewed this apparent distance as a rational adaptation rather than apathy. One interviewee stated that "youth hedonism" can be "a political stance", rooted in the fact that younger cohorts have only known the "post-post-war era" and grown up within a political scene perceived to be exhausted and untrustworthy. In that context, reshaping influence within digital systems, such as "changing the algorithm on Instagram", can seem more meaningful "than investing in conventional political participation" (ART-4). The same interviewee further described political alienation as a widening gap between distant decision-makers and everyday life, highlighting the difficulty of "bridg[ing] the gap between those in power and those below" in a context where they appear "more disconnected than before" (ART-4). In this sense, generational change was described not only as new aesthetic preference but as a reconfiguration of what counts as engagement, where music reflects and operates within the altered conditions of attention, authority, and social participation. A similar pattern is apparent in recent research on young adults in Slovenia. Filipič and Kuhar (2026) describe political engagement as increasingly situational, issue-specific and digitally mediated, while showing

that perceived limits to individual influence may coexist with a strong awareness of the structural character of contemporary social problems. This broader regional pattern supports an interpretation of political distance not simply as apathy, but as part of a changing relationship between individual agency and collective political action.

Audience narratives reinforce musicians' claims about generational change, but specify how this shift is experienced on the reception side through the loosening of the links between genre, political identity, and belonging. One listener described a contemporary landscape in which political and musical boundaries no longer align in predictable ways, suggesting that "someone who votes for HDZ[3], Škoro[4] or Možemo![5] can still attend a Vojko V concert and resonate with the music because the era of clearly defined political stances has completely eroded" (AUD-20-30-F). In the same account, platform-speed cultural circulation is enabling rapid switching between styles and identities, where "today, you might identify as a rapper, tomorrow as a punker… and on the fifth day, perhaps a trap music enthusiast", a fluidity framed as "liberating", yet also risky because "it blurs distinctions that once structured scenes and commitments" (AUD-20-30-F). This complements musicians' descriptions of younger artists developing new "codes" and rejecting the inherited narratives, while showing how that rejection is mirrored by a more mobile and less ideology-bound listening culture.

Listeners also linked generational difference to the experience of abundance and to a perceived decline in sustained engagement. One interviewee contrasted earlier listening, when music was "not easily accessible and people therefore absorbed it for much longer and truly lived that" with the present "chaos of everything available, where young listeners may be unsure of what's good and where critical discussion feels less anchored in schools, peer groups, or institutions" (AUD-6-30-F). A different participant viewed this shift less as a decline than as a recurring pattern of generational judgment, noting that during the 2008–2009 university blockades "they spoke about us… saying we were the ones who would lead society to ruin", before concluding that "while change is real, it is also an evolution of society" (AUD-9-38-M). Placed alongside the musicians' accounts, the audience perspective suggests that generational change is expressed simultaneously as new stylistic repertoires and as a broader reorganisation of how political meaning is attached to music, with weaker subcultural boundaries and more fluid, platform-shaped pathways into socially engaged content.

What emerges is less a simple decline in engagement than a shift in how it is being organised and recognised. Younger artists and listeners operate with different cultural references and platform habits, which is reshaping both the forms of critique and the publics which gather around them.

---

[3] Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union).
[4] Miroslav Škoro is a Croatian singer and conservative politician.
[5] Možemo! is a Croatian green-left political platform/party founded in 2019.

GLOBAL CAPITALIST DYNAMICS AND LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Along with technological change, participants framed the contemporary music landscape through an ideological shift towards neoliberal capitalism where individualisation and competition are increasingly shaping cultural production and everyday values. In the post-Yugoslav context, this was often expressed as the perceived erosion of solidaristic norms that had structured earlier social life. One musician illustrated this by presenting a contrast with socialist-era "work actions", describing how ordinary people once volunteered time "for the common good", and then questioning whether such collective practices would hold any appeal today (ART-3):

> *Would the idea of work actions appeal to young people today? No fucking chance! Things have changed… Perhaps this is a legacy of neoliberal capitalism. The concept of solidarity has somewhat been lost.*

The same interviewee linked this broader value shift to the contemporary commodification of culture, arguing that today music circulates under market logics which reduce it to purchasable goods rather than vehicles of ideology: "music became just another commodity… structured for us to purchase like tomatoes and potatoes" (ART-3). Read together, these statements position neoliberalisation as both a cultural and economic condition that is reshaping what socially engaged music is up against. It is narrowing solidaristic horizons while pushing artists into visibility-driven, market-facing environments, even as it simultaneously generates new objects of critique in the form of inequality, precarity, and the privatisation of public life.

From the audience side, the platform-era attention problem was frequently explained through profit logics and the metrics that organise visibility. One listener referred to a compressed window in which recognition is won or lost, claiming that older "quality music" would struggle today because "if you don't catch someone's attention in the first five seconds, you are history" (AUD-5-38-M). According to this framing, the dominant criterion is not simply taste but the measurable capturing of attention.

Such metric-driven logic is also described as accelerating production cycles and shortening the time available for artistic development. As one interviewee put it (AUD-1-41-M):

> *The pursuit of rapid profit has become central, producing an overwhelming emphasis on quick releases, where we now rely on algorithms to predict audience preferences, and if a piece doesn't perform well, it's quickly discarded.*

The same interviewee linked this acceleration to the loss of artistic commitment, noting that "what disappeared is the commitment to spend as much

time as needed to truly express what one wants to say" (AUD-1-41-M). Another listener referred to the perceived outcome as standardisation, stating contemporary output is "like a Ford assembly line… just churning out music", where "it all sounds the same, both instrumentally and lyrically" (AUD-6-30-F).

Audience members also connected these commercial and algorithmic pressures to a broader individualisation of both themes and listening. One interviewee observed that even when songs can be described as socially engaged, they are "most often focused on the individual… on the self… not so much on the collective", with problems that "revolve and start from 'I'" (AUD-5-38-M). Shifts in consumption format were described in similar terms. Easy access has "destroyed the anticipation of new music and the unique way we used to experience it" (AUD-6-30-F), while listeners increasingly "listen to individual songs now", which is weakening the album as a longer, coherent form "that resembles a book" (AUD-18-30-F). Read alongside the musicians' accounts of weakened potency and fragmented attention, these audience perspectives specify how profit-driven metrics, speed, and format fragmentation impact not only what circulates, but what kinds of socially engaged messages are most likely to be sustained.

Seen from both sides, the problem is not that socially engaged music has vanished, but that it must operate inside a culture and an industry organised around individual competition, commodification, and speed. In that setting, solidarity is harder to sustain and so is attention, which helps explain why complex, collective critique often struggles to travel as easily as fast, immediately 'grabbable' content.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how musicians and audiences in Croatia make sense of socially engaged music in conditions of platformisation and post-socialist disillusionment. The interviews show that socially engaged music continues to matter as a vehicle for critique and collective reflection, yet its capacity to generate sustained, large-scale political effects is experienced as constrained. Musicians and listeners described a terrain in which increased formal access and production autonomy coexist with algorithmic gatekeeping, attention scarcity, revenue concentration, and intensified promotional labour, all of which are reconfiguring what can be heard, how it circulates, and which messages persist (Prey 2020; Maasø and Spilker 2022; Hesmondhalgh 2022). Participants linked these infrastructural pressures to broader ideological and historical conditions. The shift from band-based, album-oriented practices to solo, single-led production reflects both the affordances of digital tools and the imperatives of platform economies that reward visibility and frequency (Arditi 2018; Hracs 2015). Parallel to this, the long-standing post-socialist trajectories, privatisation, elites' consolidation of power, and erosion of faith in institutional change add to the cynicism and emotional exhaustion, making collective imaginaries harder to sustain (Nikolaidis 2015; Vodopivec 2025).

Empirically, the article reveals that thematic and expressive transformations (towards more individualised narratives and new expressive codes) and changes in listening contexts (from album journeys to playlist fragments) are not simple technological effects but emergent outcomes of the interaction of platform infrastructures, neoliberal individualisation and local political histories. Namely, technology mediates but does not fully determine cultural meaning; rather, technological conditions intersect with historical and ideological trajectories to shape what socially engaged music can do, who hears it, and how publics form around it.

Methodologically, the article illustrates how a constructivist grounded theory approach can bring these interactions to the surface through comparative, dialogical interviews with artists and audiences. The findings suggest several directions for future research: (1) comparative work that examines post-socialist cases across different platform ecologies; (2) quantitative analyses of circulation and playlisting practices to complement interpretive accounts; and (3) interventionist studies exploring alternative infrastructure models that might sustain more durable collective cultural spaces (see Hesmondhalgh 2022; Prey 2020).

The Croatian case underscores the need for broader caution with debates about digital democratisation. Expanded capacity to publish does not in itself produce expanded cultural power or collective political identification. Understanding the contemporary limits and possibilities of socially engaged music thus requires viewing platforms as political-economic architectures embedded in historical trajectories of power and meaning, and to the everyday labour which artists and listeners undertake to keep critical music audible.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The qualitative interview data underlying this article are not publicly available due to confidentiality and consent restrictions. Audience participants provided written informed consent specifying that the collected data would remain confidential and accessible only to the researcher(s). Musicians participated on the understanding that the interview data would be treated confidentially and anonymously. Given these conditions, and the potential for re-identification in a small qualitative sample, the interview transcripts are not publicly available or to be shared with third parties for secondary use.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arditi, David. 2018. "Digital Subscriptions: The Unending Consumption of Music in the Digital Era". *Popular Music and Society* 41 (3): 302–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2016.1264101.

Bonini, Tiziano, and Alessandro Gandini. 2019. "First Week Is Editorial, Second Week Is Algorithmic: Platform Gatekeepers and the Platformization of Music Curation". *Social Media + Society* 5 (4): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880006.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory.* 2nd ed. SAGE.

Filipič, Urška, and Metka Kuhar. 2026. "Kako mladi odrasli razumejo sodobni svet: prepleteni družbeni procesi, negotovost in možnosti delovanja". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (2): 205–22. https://doi.org/10.51936/tip.63.2.205.

Hesmondhalgh, David. 2022. "Streaming's Effects on Music Culture: Old Anxieties and New Simplifications". *Cultural Sociology* 16 (1): 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/17499755211019974.

Hracs, Brian J. 2015. "Cultural Intermediaries in the Digital Age: The Case of Independent Musicians and Managers in Toronto". *Regional Studies* 49 (3): 461–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.750425.

Kiberg, Håvard. 2023. "(Plat)formatted Creativity: Creating Music in the Age of Streaming". *Cultural Sociology* 19 (3): 263–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/17499755231202055.

Kirn, Gal. 2026. "Postjugoslovanske vojne in (proti)spomin v grafičnih novelah Joeja Sacca in stripu Bosanske basni Tomaža Lavriča". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (1): 143–55. https://doi.org/10.51936/tip.63.1.143.

Klein, Bethany, Leslie M. Meier, and Devon Powers. 2017. "Selling Out: Musicians, Autonomy, and Compromise in the Digital Age". *Popular Music & Society* 40 (2): 222–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1120101.

León, Javier F. 2014. "Introduction: Music, Music Making and Neoliberalism". *Culture, Theory and Critique* 55 (2): 129–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2014.913847.

Maasø, Arnt, and Henrik S. Spilker. 2022. "The Streaming Paradox: Untangling the Hybrid Gatekeeping Mechanisms of Music Streaming". *Popular Music and Society* 45 (3): 300–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2022.2026923.

Nieborg, David B., and Thomas Poell. 2018. "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity". *New Media & Society* 20 (11): 4275–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694.

Nikolaidis, A. 2015. "Kad jaganjci utihnu: Tranzicija kao poslijeratni zločin". In *Dobrodošli u pustinju postsocijalizma*, edited by Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks. Fraktura.

Papadimitropoulos, Evangelos. 2021. "Platform Capitalism, Platform Cooperativism, and the Commons". *Rethinking Marxism* 33 (2): 246–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2021.1893108.

Prey, Robert. 2020. "Locating Power in Platformization: Music Streaming Playlists and Curatorial Power". *Social Media + Society* 6 (2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120933291.

Pušnik, Maruša, Breda Luthar, and Dejan Jontes. 2024. "Spominski narativi in bitke za opredelitev socializma: jugoslovanska osemdeseta". *Teorija in praksa* 61 (2): 407–27. https://doi.org/10.51936/tip.61.2.407.

Simon, Herbert A. 1971. "Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World". In *Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest*, edited by Martin Greenberger, 37–72. The Johns Hopkins Press.

Taylor, Timothy D. 2015. *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present.* University of Chicago Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2000. "Processes and Mechanisms of Democratization". *Sociological Theory* 18 (1): 1–16.

Vodopivec, Nina. 2025. "From Self-Management to Postsocialism: Industrial Workers' Silenced Experiences of Dispossession in Slovenia". *Teorija in praksa* 62 (4): 897–916. https://doi.org/10.51936/tip.62.4.897.

OD KOLEKTIVNEGA UPORA K INDIVIDUALIZIRANI POTROŠNJI: DRUŽBENO ANGAŽIRANA GLASBA NA HRVAŠKEM V POSTJUGOSLOVANSKEM OBDOBJU

Povzetek. *Članek analizira, kako se je družbeno angažirana glasba v postjugoslovanski Hrvaški preoblikovala pod vplivom platformizacije in postsocialističnega razočaranja. Na podlagi konstruktivistične utemeljene teorije in 28 polstrukturiranih intervjujev z glasbeniki ter poslušalci (2022–2023) članek prikaže spremembe v produkcijskih praksah, tematskih vsebinah, družbenih funkcijah in kontekstih poslušanja. Digitalne infrastrukture širijo dostop in vidnost, hkrati pa intervjuvanci izpostavljajo okrepljeno konkurenco za pozornost, algoritmično selekcijo in tržne metrike, drobljenje občinstev ter premik h krajšim formatom in vse bolj vizualnim načinom predstavljanja in kroženja. Angažma tako vztraja, a kolektivni odmev je težje vzdrževati.*

Ključni pojmi: *družbeno angažirana glasba, Hrvaška, postjugoslovanski prostor, platformizacija, pretočne platforme, ekonomija pozornosti, utemeljena teorija.*

Svenja FISCHBACH*

THE GENDERED IMPACT OF WOMEN'S CARE MOBILITY TO GERMANY: CONSEQUENCES FOR MOBILE CARE WORKERS AND 'STAYING SPOUSES' IN SERBIA**

Abstract. *The article examines how Blagojević-Hughson's concepts of "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" and the "crisis of masculinity" – as key characteristics of the Serbian gender regime – manifest in the context of women's irregular care mobility to Germany. The traditional role of mobile care workers as primary caregivers continues despite their temporary absence, sustained by a strong attachment to the pattern of "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy". Simultaneously, their position as the main breadwinner challenges male provider norms, reshaping gender relations and power dynamics within partnerships. The weakened position of 'staying spouses' in the family and exposed lack of responsibility are adding to their "crisis of masculinity".*
Keywords: *irregular care mobility, gender regime in Serbia, impact of care migration, self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy, crisis of masculinity.*

INTRODUCTION

Every year, millions of women migrate from economically disadvantaged countries to more advantaged ones to work in care and domestic roles, such as housemaids, nannies, caregivers, nurses, or doctors. They accordingly often leave their families and communities to provide care for children, older people, the sick, and persons with disabilities in wealthier economies. The global demand for care workers has created a thriving market for transnational care migration and caused a large-scale exodus of women to join the global care economy.

* Svenja Fischbach, PhD candidate, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work, svenja.fischbach@gmx.de.
** Research article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.515

Although care migration has existed for centuries[1], in recent decades its expansion has reached historically high levels. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the demand for carers in countries of the Global North has risen exponentially. The same applies to middle- and upper-class households in Asia, the Middle East, and Central and Latin America. There are many reasons for this continued growth in the transnational care sector. These include the ongoing withdrawal of the state from institutional care – especially care for older people – the introduction of 'cash-for-care' policies in traditional European welfare states, and the ongoing lack of state involvement in institutional care in countries where the welfare state has historically been weak (Lutz 2018, 578). The migration of women from Eastern to Western Europe is just one of several care migration flows that form a *global care chain*. Other major migration streams include movements from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka) to the wealthy Gulf States, as well as to Singapore and Hong Kong, and from Central American countries to the United States (Addati et al. 2018, 288).

The strong demand in Western European countries is due to a growing care crisis seen in significant gaps in care provision and a serious shortage of healthcare and long-term care workers (Lutz 2018, 578). One strategy that Western European countries use to alleviate the care crisis is to rely on migrant labour in the health and care sectors, thereby exploiting and perpetuating geopolitical inequalities of interdependence with less economically advantaged regions, particularly in Central and South Eastern Europe.

Germany is one of the main destination countries for care migration from Central and South Eastern Europe, including Serbia. Two types of care migration between Serbia and Germany can be observed. The first is the regular, permanent migration of trained healthcare workers, such as nurses, within a legal framework; these women generally work officially in hospitals and nursing homes. The second type is irregular, temporary care migration of women untrained in the care sector, hereafter referred to as irregular *care mobility*. Even though this form of care migration is much more widespread and numerous, it hardly appears on the European research agenda, with only a few emerging exceptions (e.g., the author's research project or Višič 2022). It also does not feature much in media and public discourse, remaining in the shadow of the much more prominently discussed nurse migration. Unlike most studies, this research highlights not simply the irregular form of care migration but also the implications it holds for the 'sending' country.

This article presents selected findings of the author's dissertation project, "The Social Consequences of Care Migration for Local Communities in Northern Serbia", conducted at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana.

[1] A well-known example refers to the '*Aleksandrinke*': Between 1850 and 1970, large numbers of women from rural regions of Slovenia migrated to Egypt to work as domestic workers and wet nurses, often leaving their children in the care of relatives in their home communities (Zaviršek 2015, 255).

The research examines the social impact of irregular care mobility on *mobile*[2] care workers, their family members, and their communities in Serbia. In the article, focus is given to the gendered implications held by women's care mobility to Germany, especially for the mobile care workers and their male partners who remain in Serbia. It explores how the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" and "crisis of masculinity" – which Blagojević-Hughson (2015) identified as key features of the Serbian gender regime – manifest in the context of women's mid- and later-life care mobility. Further, it shows how this is reshaping gender roles and influencing gender dynamics within partnerships.

Therefore, after a brief description of the phenomenon of irregular care mobility occurring between Serbia and Germany (section 2), the concepts of "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" and the "crisis of masculinity" within Serbia's historical and economic context are outlined (section 3). A short methodological section follows (section 4), before selected research findings are presented and discussed with reference to the introduced concepts (section 5). The article concludes with a summary of the main findings (section 6).

IRREGULAR CARE MOBILITY BETWEEN SERBIA AND GERMANY

Irregular care mobility from Serbia to Germany is characterised by short-term stays of up to 90 days (3 months) because non-EU citizens cannot remain any longer without a visa. Employment is not allowed during these stays, nor can care workers obtain a residence permit. These mobile care workers are engaged in 24/7 live-in care arrangements within private households of older care-dependent individuals, yet operate entirely outside any legal framework, lacking formal work contracts and access to social security benefits like healthcare coverage or pension contributions (author's findings; Višič 2022). Their labour is provided within what has been described as a "semi-legal shadow care market" (Višič 2022). So-called live-ins typically perform tasks such as bathing, feeding, changing nappies, dressing, administering medications or insulin, assisting with movement or repositioning, and accompanying care recipients on walks. They are also responsible for hygiene and sanitary care, as well as household duties like grocery shopping, cleaning, and other domestic tasks (Višič 2022, 240, 251).

The majority of women who engage in irregular care mobility are aged 50–65; namely, they are women in mid- and later life, typically with adult children. They are usually trained and professionally experienced in fields other than long-term care. They generally earn significantly lower wages than formally employed care workers, with monthly earnings ranging from around €1,200 to €1,500 (author's findings; Višič, 2022, 154–60, 240). These private, uncontracted

[2] The terms *mobile* and *mobility* are used here to denote engagement in care work abroad as a form of short-term movement, in contrast to permanent migration, which implies a stay of longer than 3 months. However, despite its widespread use, this terminology remains contested in migration research due to its neoliberal connotation – particularly with its implicit opposition to the notion of immobility.

caregiving arrangements are often characterised by highly precarious working, living and travelling conditions. They are marked by considerable instability and unpredictability: the job promised by intermediaries might not exist at all or may vary substantially from the description – most commonly involving different tasks, care recipients or health conditions than initially indicated. The denial of breaks, sick leave or holidays, unpaid overtime, and missing salaries are not uncommon (see also Višić 2022, 182, 261–302). Older-age care is an emotionally and physically demanding task, especially when performed in the conditions of 24/7 care, isolated in the private home of the care recipient, and without any formal education in caregiving. Moreover, Višić (2022, 329–74) reports cases in which care recipients and their family members perpetrated racial discrimination, mistreatment, and (sexual) harassment. In addition, travelling between the women's homes in Serbia and their often remote workplaces in Germany is frequently dangerous, stressful and unpredictable (see also Višić 2022, 262–302). The constant fear of being caught working without a work permit and the challenges of crossing multiple borders add to their insecurity. Illegal or semi-legal agencies and private intermediaries have a major role in placing care workers in Germany. They primarily advertise jobs through Facebook, as well as on other social media platforms like Viber and Telegram.

Small-scale irregular care mobility has existed in Yugoslavia/Serbia for decades, yet became much more prominent following the liberalisation of the visa regime in December 2009. Since then, Vojvodina has developed into an epicentre of irregular care mobility, with the share of such mobility being much larger than the share of regular care migration (author's findings). In addition to Germany as a key destination country, Austria, Italy and Slovenia also feature as regular destinations. For the case of Slovenia, see Hrženjak and Breznik (2024).

THE CONCEPTS OF "SELF-SACRIFICING MICRO-MATRIARCHY" AND "CRISIS OF MASCULINITY" IN SERBIA

According to Blagojević-Hughson (2015, 255), a gender regime refers to the dominant pattern of gender relations within a specific socio-historical context. It encompasses divisions of labour and power, gender roles, identity practices, emotional relations, cultural symbols, and discourses, all situated within the broader societal gender order. Blagojević-Hughson identifies four key features of gender regimes in Serbia: the intensive exploitation of women's resources in both public and private spheres; the existence of a "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy"; the presence of a "crisis of masculinity"; and deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies (ibid., 257). She further notes that within these regimes individuals operate with constrained possibilities since deviation often comes at a cost. Personal freedoms are limited by the dominant gender patterns and their embedded hierarchies. Societies nevertheless vary concerning the extent to which individuals are pressured to conform (ibid., 255). Further, when Blagojević-Hughson analysed the gender regime in Serbia she placed clear emphasis on the country's

positionality as part of the *semi-periphery*[3], arguing that in the Balkan semi-periphery particular gender regimes emerge under the dual influence of local conditions and in relation to Western Europe as part of the *core* (ibid., 257). While analysing European transnational care mobility, the lens of the semi-periphery is particularly relevant and instructive.

In socialist Yugoslavia, women's emancipation was envisioned as an integral part of constructing a socialist society. The state actively promoted women's participation in the labour force and introduced progressive measures to advance gender equality – a process which may be described as "top-down emancipation" (Blagojević 2019, 1003; Friedrich 2010, 30). Blagojević-Hughson and Bobić (2014, 514–16) argue the official egalitarian ideology, employed to implement the socialist state's ambitious industrialisation project – always seeking to catch up with the "West" (or *core*) – required the intensive and extensive consumption of women's resources in both private and public spheres. Yet the norm of dual employment and working women has a long tradition extending across the generations that grew up in socialist Yugoslavia. On the micro level, however, domestic responsibilities remained almost entirely the domain of women, reflecting the persistence of private patriarchy. Thus, women continued to bear the 'double burden' of paid work and unpaid domestic labour (Blagojević 2019, 1008).

While socialist Yugoslavia traditionally relied heavily on women's resources in both the private and public spheres, this dependence grew even stronger during the economic and political crises of the 1990s. As Blagojević-Hughson and Bobić (2014, 515) note, this resulted in "a retreat to privacy, delayed transformation of the family and diversification of partnerships, the strengthening of kin networks, and strong interdependence among household members and generations as a coping strategy". At the same time, the previously progressive trend towards gender equality was interrupted, giving way to a marked shift towards "re-traditionalisation" and "re-patriarchalisation" (Milić 1995; 2004; Blagojević 2019). It is during this period that Blagojević (2019, 1009) situates the emergence of the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy":

> *The concept of self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy was coined to denote micro-level (family) gender organization which, on one hand exhausts women's resources through provision of goods and services for the family members, while on the other hand provides women with identity based on heroic sacrifice. This ideological shift has been very instrumental for the even*

[3] The division of countries into core, *periphery and semi-periphery* goes back to Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory (1974). This approach explains the dynamics of the capitalist world economy and highlights how *peripheral* regions have been integrated into the global economy by core capitalist countries (Haas et al. 2020). Scholars from Eastern Europe often describe countries of Eastern Europe as part of the *global semi-periphery* (e.g., Todorova 2009). Semi-peripherality is not just a geopolitical and economic condition; it also entails forms of marginalisation in social, cultural and symbolic terms (Blagojević 2009).

greater extraction of women's resources (time, energy, skills, emotions, health, knowledge, physical strength etc.) than occurred during socialism by way of women's overexploitation due to their double burden.

Accordingly, the pattern of the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" allows women, instead of constructing themselves as "victims", to become "heroines of their own sacrifice" (Blagojević-Hughson 2015, 258), in turn upholding the image of the "omnipotent woman" (Blagojević 2019, 1014).

The subsequent post-socialist transition, denoted by *de-development*[4] – which includes the long-term erosion of the public sphere and significant job losses, particularly among women – pushed them even more into the private sphere, transforming the gender regime towards an even greater emphasis on family and "familialism". The prominent role of women in the family was in this way reinforced, as was the family's dependence on women's resources in the private sphere (Blagojević-Hughson and Bobić 2014, 516).

In recent years, Blagojević-Hughson and Bobić (2014, 511–16) have observed a decline in, and stronger resistance to, the model of women's "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy", particularly among younger, higher educated women from urban areas. Still, this egalitarian trend might not apply to women (and their partners) in mid- and later life, as they represent the age group which engages in irregular care mobility. Parallel to this, other factors coincide with a more traditional orientation to gender roles: the women (and men) in the research sample have low to middle levels of education and, in some cases, live in very rural environments.

Blagojevic-Hughson (2015, 259) contends that masculine identities, like all identities, are formed relationally, and that the forming of male identities in Serbia must be understood while considering two important contexts: first, Serbia's positionality as semi-peripheral and, second, the local transforming gender regime mostly shaped by the existence of a "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy". Further, the formation is marked by several contradictions and ambivalences. Blagojević states that in the forming of Serbian masculinity the point of reference is, in one respect, the European *core* – or neighbouring men in the 'West' – marked by both attraction and admiration on one hand, and resistance and rejection on the other. She adds that a sense of inferiority often gives rise to assertions of 'superiority', characterised by hostility and antagonism toward the 'Other'. Blagojević situates this development at the turn of the 1990s, a period that saw profound political upheavals which led to wars, ethnic conflicts, and

[4] Marina Blagojević used the term *de-development* instead of *transition*, underscoring it as a key characteristic of the contemporary post-socialist Balkan semi-periphery. She employed this term to emphasise that, in contrast to the dominant discourse in Serbia at the time – that "social progress is very close by, pending" – society is, in fact, experiencing a "permanent social regression" (Blagojević-Hughson and Bobić 2014, 514). She added that de-development refers to "a deep structural change that, in economic terms, is related to the depreciation of human, institutional, and infrastructural capital" (Blagojević 2019, 1004).

the dissolution of Yugoslavia – and the accompanying emergence of a nationalist political project. This project entailed an intense production of 'Otherness' along both gendered and ethnic lines. Women, too, were cast in this role of 'the Other' and subjected to a rising tide of misogyny (Blagojević-Hughson 2015, 260; Blagojević 2019, 1009).

Blagojević-Hughson (2015, 262) argues that a salient trend in the local formation of Serbian male identities is the rise of female authority – especially via the emergence and evolution of the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" – which, according to her, has unfolded alongside the collapse of patriarchal male authority in nearly all spheres of family life. She notes that men have been significantly traumatised by the breadwinner role imposed on them during the wave of "re-traditionalisation" and "re-patriarchalisation" in times of economic crisis. They are faced with a paradox: even though they value family just as much as women do, they are losing their clearly defined role in family life, while also having limited opportunities in the public sphere to live up to the traditional expectation of being the breadwinner. As a result, men are hindered in their self-realisation in both the private and public spheres. Blagojević-Hughson further observes a clear divergence in how men and women cope with and respond to these demands: while women have managed to adapt by finding ways to balance what is expected of them with the reality of their everyday lives, men encounter a dramatic gap between what society expects and their actual opportunities – leading to a deep "crisis of masculinity".

Blagojević (2019, 1009) and others identify another ambivalence/paradox in the forming of male gender identities. As mentioned above, in the 1990s militarisation, war and conflict shaped shifting forms of hegemonic masculinity in two contrasting directions. On one side, there was a move toward "masculine domination": the official ideology glorified "machismo" and "toughness", which was increasingly permeating the public sphere (Pavićević et al. 2011). On the other side, many men in their everyday lives began to experience a growing sense of victimhood shaped by the realities of both war and the socio-economic dislocations of the post-socialist transition. Here, Blagojević (2019, 1009) describes the emergence of "a new type of hybrid hegemonic masculinity (…) one with a 'tough' appearance (machismo), yet also increasingly unstable and vulnerable ('masculinity crisis')".

In the following, this article examines the gendered implications of women's mid- and later-life care mobility to Germany for both mobile care workers and their male partners who remain in Serbia. Drawing on two crucial features of the Serbian gender regime outlined above – the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" and the "crisis of masculinity" – the way these features manifest and are evolving in the context of women's care mobility is explored, together with how this mobility, in turn, is reshaping gender roles and dynamics within intimate partnerships.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative-reconstructive research design to provide a comprehensive overview of the multiple social consequences of care mobility in an exploratory and inductive manner, taking several layers of the phenomenon into account (individuals, families/households, community). The research consisted of in-depth interviews with mobile care workers and their family members, complemented by semi-structured interviews with professionals working in/for the communities. The interview guides covered a broad range of topics concerning care mobility and its potential social consequences for people in Serbia. Some questions in the interview guides indirectly addressed the issues presented in this article[5]; however, their gendered dimension emerged as a cross-cutting theme in the empirical materials. This led the study to examine the values, beliefs and attitudes, as well as the struggles, identities and positions, of mobile and 'staying' actors. Apart from participants' own personal or professional experiences, the research also explored their views, perceptions and opinions regarding the experiences of others.

Study participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with eligibility based on participants either being personally engaged in care mobility or having a family member engaged in that area. Recruitment followed a dual approach: First, with the support of a research assistant, mobile care workers were contacted directly through specific Facebook groups focusing on care mobility in Vojvodina. Second, the research assistant drew on her personal networks to identify and approach women engaged in care mobility abroad. As the fieldwork progressed, this initial purposive sampling strategy was complemented with snowball sampling, which proved particularly useful for reaching members of this hard-to-reach population and led to the recruitment of other mobile care workers as well as their family members.

The fieldwork consisted of five research trips to Vojvodina, amounting to a total of 3 months in the field between May and September 2023. During this period, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 participants; most of them were active irregular care workers (15 participants), while others were their family members or friends (6 participants). All participants were residing in different cities and villages across Vojvodina. In addition, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 professionals working in various communities in Northern Serbia. The participants included directors, managers, and healthcare staff from two private care homes, a Centre for Social Work (CSR), a feminist NGO, two NGOs operating in the social sector, and an NGO combating human

[5] The interview guide for mobile care workers, for example, included, among others, the following questions: What are the usual household or care tasks you do every day when you are at home? How do you re-organise these tasks when you are away? // What is the biggest struggle for family members back in Serbia when the woman goes abroad for care work? // What do other people in your community think about women going abroad for care work?

trafficking and labour exploitation.[6] The collected data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022), supported by MAXQDA software. To protect the participants' identities, all interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms.

THE GENDERED EFFECTS OF THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF CARE MOBILITY

The data first show that many women pursue care work abroad due to financial hardship or acute existential insecurity as their (family) income is insufficient to meet basic needs. Their decision to enter care mobility is influenced by the effects of the post-socialist transformation and segmentation of the labour market. Today, many women in mid- and later life often face exclusion from formal employment and are left with few options beyond irregular, precarious and low-paid jobs in the secondary or informal labour market. By the time they decide to engage in transnational care mobility, most women have already spent years enduring extremely insecure and precarious employment conditions in Serbia (e.g., care workers Dejana, Pos. 27; Lana, Pos. 63/109; Ljerka, Pos. 27)[7]. For these women, employment in care mobility abroad often means not only the (short-term) relief from financial hardship but also serves as a means to pursue specific goals and personal aspirations by having improved financial resources. This is evident, for example, in the following statement by mobile care worker Ljerka (Pos. 106–14):

> *Being able to afford a nice vacation with the kids, to go somewhere, I have never been on vacation. My husband only loved to lie around, sleep, and eat, and so he didn't like to travel (…) what can I say. (…) I've never been anywhere. Well, now I am off the leash. I go on vacation with the kids, treat myself to whatever I can.*

The data also show that for some women engaging in care mobility marks the first time in their lives that they have direct control over the financial resources and the freedom to decide independently how to allocate them (Katarina, founder of a feminist NGO, Pos. 16).

Second, the study found that in some cases care mobility provides women with a socially legitimate way to temporarily withdraw from their restrictive domestic circumstances, such as an unhappy marriage, excessive caregiving responsibilities, or domestic violence. This is illustrated, for instance, in the

[6] This was preceded by an exploratory pilot study in March 2022, which included 12 interviews with 16 experts from diverse professional backgrounds: 4 academics specialising in care, gender and/or migration; 1 professor of social work; 2 managers from NGOs focused on care for older people; 2 employees of GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation); 4 feminist activists/academics; 2 women's labour rights activists; and 1 mobile care worker.

[7] The abbreviation "Pos." stands for "Position" and refers to the paragraph number in the respective interview transcript.

following account by Jelena, the manager of a private care home (Pos. 43): "They are not happy (…) with their lives, with the way they are treated. (…) And it's their escape to somewhere where nobody knows".

Third, the data reveal that care mobility gives an opportunity to explore new countries and gain new experiences, thereby broadening women's horizons and perspectives on life (care worker Ljerka, Pos. 130; CSR Vojvodina, Pos. 99). It allows them to encounter different normative frameworks and observe diverse practices, for example as concerns gender regimes. This, in turn, can foster both self-reflection and critical engagement with the values and norms prevailing in Serbia.

In conclusion, a key social consequence of women's care mobility is that it can serve as a source of empowerment, creating moments of personal freedom, independence and enhanced autonomy – albeit within the constraining contexts of irregular care mobility, given its precarious working conditions and inherently temporary nature.

At the same time, the data indicate that mobile care workers – as, indeed, most women in Serbia – are the main carers in their families and bear a significantly bigger share than their male partners of household work and caregiving for several family members, both inside and outside their own households. In this respect, the study found that in the context of transnational care mobility even though temporary absence provides short-term relief from the heavy burden of hands-on household and family care tasks in Serbia mobile care workers still remain largely responsible for their household and caregiving duties during their time abroad.

This is shown in two ways. On one hand, they play a significant role in reorganising care work in their absence – by delegating tasks to other female family members (notably their mothers and daughters who remain in Serbia) or by paying women from their social network to step in. This was, for instance, acknowledged by Branka, a nurse in a private care home (Pos. 16), who stated: "These are smart women who organise very well who's going to take care of things here, who's going to take care of what".

Moreover, the data reveal that mobile care workers adopt various strategies to compensate for the care gap that emerges while they are away, many of which involve their own direct involvement. Three distinct strategies used by mobile care workers to manage this gap are identified in the data: first, managing household tasks both in advance of their absence and upon their return; second, caring from a distance via digital technologies; and third, leaving their jobs abroad in the event of a family emergency (care workers Bojana, Pos. 53; Cveta, Pos. 94/248–249; Natalija, Pos. 61–67/174–176; Ljubica, Pos. 237/244–264; Lidija, Pos. 346–350/586–588; Milica, Pos. 279; Sarita, Pos. 463–465).

What this means for mobile care workers can be seen in the following interview sequence with Danijela, a mobile care worker, who talked about the first strategy (Pos. 145–151):

Danijela: "Then you're there for a month with your children and your husband, and you wash, iron, cook for a month, freeze everything, put it in the freezer".
Interviewer: "To prepare everything?" .
Danijela: "Exactly".
Interviewer: "That exactly interests me. How does life look for the women who take care of the families?".
Danijela: "Shit. Shit that is. When you're working there [in Germany], you're working twice as much at home. You have to prepare everything so that the family stays calm when you come back".
Interviewer: "Two households".
Danijela: "Exactly, two households. That's not easy".

To sustain their households in this way, many mobile care workers were limiting their stays abroad to 4 to 6 weeks rather than the possible 3 months – a pattern which entails constant and burdensome travel between their place of work and home in Serbia. They justified the limited stay with the need to meet their care and household responsibilities back in Serbia and stressed they do not wish to leave the household unattended for too long (care workers Milica, Pos. 70–75; Andreja, Pos. 121–23; Bojana, Pos. 53–55; Danijela, Pos. 143–45).

At the same time, in the sample of this research, the husbands of mobile care workers largely remain disengaged from household tasks or caregiving duties while their wives are working in Germany. They typically undertake such tasks only when necessary for their own daily needs and wait until their wives return from their stay in Germany. Instead, female family members such as daughters and mothers step in and take over household tasks and caregiving for the husband and other care-dependent relatives.

All of these coping strategies reveal mobile care workers are strongly attached to their caregiving role, which can be explained via the persistence of the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy", which is quite widespread among generations of women in mid and later life. The data thus illustrate that mobile care workers often struggle to break free from their caregiving roles at home. Even in their absence, these women continue to be the main caregivers in the family, and embody and uphold the ideal of the "omnipotent woman" (Blagojević 2019, 1014). This ideal makes it nearly impossible for them to fully step away from caregiving responsibilities – albeit many do not wish to do so. As a result, they often find themselves caught between two or three households in each country – one in Germany and the others in Serbia – bearing the double, even triple burden of maintaining several households sequentially and simultaneously. The described 'care split' across two or more locations, and the burden of sustaining multiple households in different countries, is a key finding of the analysis of care mobility's consequences for these workers.

The data also show the coping strategies for reorganising care work, which principally involve other female family members, are highly gendered and reflect the deeply entrenched patriarchy. The husbands' lack of involvement in caregiving is widely accepted, and the belief that care work is exclusively a woman's responsibility remains largely unquestioned. These practices leave little room for a shift in gender roles – even though such a change could significantly ease both the double/triple burden of mobile care workers and the additional household and caregiving responsibilities of female family members who stay in Serbia.

The findings thus reveal that, despite – or perhaps even due to – the short-term absence of the mobile care worker, the traditional gender norms surrounding care work remain firmly in place, and the patriarchal gender order is upheld. Consequently, the traditionally strong reliance on women's care work in the private sphere continues to be highly pronounced.

In addition, the data make it clear that women's engagement in care mobility can often threaten the male breadwinner status. Noting the stark income disparities between Germany and Serbia, the husbands' earning opportunities, if any at all, are relatively small compared to those available to their wives abroad. Mobile care worker Danijela (Pos. 56) commented on a husband who stays behind in her social circle as follows:

> *He had a bus, he had a van, he worked. (…) They bought land, bought all sorts of things, look he fought (…) like a lion. But when they decided she would leave, he started sitting on his backside. Pfff. Why would he work for 2000, 3000 [dinar] when she is going to bring 4000 euros?*

Thus, by engaging in care mobility women often assume the role of the primary family provider, which poses a threat to the traditional gender order. This is reflected in the statement by Vladan, the husband of a mobile care worker (Pos. 98–100), who explained:

> *Because you have two problems. If you say 'No, don't go', there's no chance. I'll go my own way, you go your own way… Everything collapses. You can go for this milder option, 'Okay, woman, go, work, leave me alone' (…) whatever you earn is yours'. For me, essentially, that money doesn't interest me. I'm a construction worker by profession, I can earn money! (…) However, she has her personal proving. (…) [She says] 'No, I'll solve everything, I'll solve every problem.'*

The data further reveal that husbands are blamed by their social environment for not meeting the social expectations associated with male gender roles. They may be suspected of being lazy and passive, unwilling to work, living comfortably at their wives' expense, and not providing for their families. This is reflected in the ironic words of care worker Danijela (Pos. 37–43):

It pays off when the woman is working 24 hours, don't tell me (…) And he grows flowers. (…) And you wanna tell me that's justice. (…) Brother, he does flowers, and she wipes asses.

Care mobility abroad means that women move beyond the sphere of control exercised by their husbands, families and communities, causing a loss of control and power for the men involved over their wives. Mobile care worker Dejana (Pos. 15-23) explained:

Rarely does a husband stay calm while they're here [in Germany] and working, (…) our Balkan men as they are, there's always some doubt, there's always some worry that she might find (…) someone with money" (…) he's not close to be able to control anymore, the situation, and then that fear arises that she might accidentally find a better life or meet a better man, nicer, richer.

Mobility thus becomes a source of anxiety for men, most clearly shown by their fear that the women who leave might find a 'better', namely a wealthier, man in Germany (as part of the *core*). This reinforces the threat to the male breadwinner status, leaving the men who stay behind feeling both economically inadequate and socially inferior. As a result, care mobility fuels fears of abandonment and anxieties about being replaced – reflecting not only personal insecurity but also class-based concerns within the context of Serbia's semi-peripheral position.

Such insecurity is exacerbated by mockery directed at husbands who remain in Serbia, suggesting that a man who cannot 'keep' his wife at home is somehow less of a man – too weak to assert his authority and hold the family together. Živorad, the husband of a care worker (Pos. 228), explained he had received comments from his social environment such as: "Why did you let her go, she'll get married (laughing)".

This can lead to disempowerment, a sense of victimhood, mistrust and jealousy on the part of the men who stay behind, which in turn can cause partnership conflicts and an increased risk of divorce. Staying husband Živorad (Pos. 208–10) added: "many marriages broke up, families broke up, because of (…) essentially jealousy".

As shown previously, most care workers' husbands remain disengaged from domestic and family care work, even during their wives' absence due to care mobility. In this study's sample, the husbands of mobile care workers were generally not seen as responsible for household tasks or caregiving while their wives are working in Germany. Still, there are exceptions, such as in the following group interview sequence where Dragica (Pos. 102) complained: "They don't take over. Most of them don't take over anything. She has to send money, to feed the family, come on! Come on!" and Violeta (Pos. 103) agrees by stating: "Well, yes. There are many who are constantly in cafes!".

Parallel to this, the data reveal that several women in the sample viewed men as largely incompetent in domestic and family care work, with their small contributions to household tasks receiving little recognition or value. This is illustrated, for instance, when care worker Lidija (Pos. 325) said this about her husband: "The machine washes laundry, he just hangs it, and, when he cleans, he only cleans the middle [of the room] (laughter)". In their depictions of men, many mobile care workers and other women resorted to humour, mockery and ridicule to highlight what they perceived to be men's inadequacies, such as the following:

> *So usually when I'm at home everything is taken care of (…) everything that is more challenging is done while I'm here, that's why you have four weeks to (…) sort all your problems out. So, he stays to enjoy, he cooks. I leave everything clean for him (laughter) (…) He goes fishing, he fishes, he hasn't got any problems.* (care worker Lidija, Pos. 346-50)

Moreover, the critique of male incompetence at times moves beyond domestic and care work. Accusations of passivity broaden into perceptions of a general lack of initiative and agency, reinforcing the impression that men are fundamentally redundant. This can relegate them to being seen as "entirely useless" by both family members and outsiders. Such is the case with care worker Ljerka's comment about her husband: "He only loves to lie around, sleep, and eat (…). He is somehow passive (…) that's the way he is, he cannot find a way out of a paper bag, but well, what can I say" (Pos. 108). As this statement shows, some of the women's narratives reveal a deep sense of frustration, resignation, and even contempt towards men.

The findings of this study reveal that care mobility undermines the traditional gender order and threatens traditional male gender roles and identities. The study hence reinforces what Blagojević (2015, 262) described as a profound "crisis of masculinity" characterised by an immense gap between what society expects and men's actual opportunities.

Already burdened by the stronger pressure to provide for their families during prolonged economic crises and as part of the broader trends of "re-traditionalisation" and "re-patriarchalisation", women's engagement in care mobility challenges the position held by males in the family and society even further since women earn significantly more with their care work abroad. Women's care mobility signifies a clear removal of the breadwinner role from men, thereby exposing their failure to comply with a key norm of masculinity – being a strong and stable provider for the family.

Care mobility exemplifies what Blagojević (2015, 262) identifies as the different ways women and men cope with strained economic conditions. Through care mobility, women find a strategy to manage economic hardship: they perform paid work abroad while simultaneously meeting the expectation of remaining

the primary caregivers responsible for household and family tasks – albeit in the conditions of intense exploitation of their resources. In contrast, many men who stay behind fail to fulfil their role as breadwinners and also do not take on care responsibilities, thereby displaying a dual lack of family responsibility, in turn forcing mobile care workers to shoulder the double burden of obligations.

Women have traditionally exercised strong authority in the private sphere, linked to their "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy". By becoming mobile care workers abroad, they extend this authority into the public sphere, which reinforces the notion of the "omnipotent woman" as encompassing all aspects of sustaining a family. Hence, care mobility strongly weakens the male position in the family and exposes fragile masculinities that depend heavily on stable patriarchal structures. Care mobility threatens these very structures since it entails women moving away from the sphere of patriarchal control. Such a move is accompanied by the women gaining independence and autonomy, while producing a corresponding loss of power and control for the men. In this manner, another central norm of masculinity is violated – male dominance over women.

As outlined previously, Blagojević (2019, 1009) argues that within the Serbian gender regime a new form of "hybrid hegemonic masculinity" has emerged. This form is characterised by a tough, machismo-like appearance that at the same time is ever more unstable and vulnerable. The described tension in male identities becomes virtually irreconcilable in the context of care mobility because women's engagement in it makes it impossible to maintain the tough appearance; instead, hegemonic masculinity develops deep cracks and grows increasingly fragile. Care mobility brings the risk of rendering men redundant, potentially leading to a perceived loss of purpose, a sense of victimhood, diminished self-esteem, and a void in male identity among those who stay behind. This, in turn, is a cause of disempowerment, declining motivation, frustration, and passivity.

Blagojević-Hjuson 2013 (249–50) observes that men – particularly those in older age groups and from lower social strata – are likely to resist and often struggle to adapt to the transforming gender roles and changing gender relations. Namely, these are exactly the same men whose wives are most likely to engage in care mobility abroad. As a result, they run the risk of failing to meet their partner's expectations. All of these factors are reshaping the gender dynamics within partnerships and may reinforce or trigger conflicts between partners.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this article reveal the gendered effects of women's mid- and later-life care mobility to Germany for both mobile care workers and their male partners who remain in Serbia. A contribution is thus made by increasing understanding of the gender regime's transformation in the context of women's care mobility in contemporary Serbia. In particular, the findings illustrate how two key features of the Serbian gender regime – the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" and the "crisis of masculinity" – are expressed and

transformed via women's care mobility. The findings additionally show how care mobility is reshaping gender roles and dynamics within intimate partnerships. In this analysis, transnational care mobility is understood as a phenomenon rooted in the post-socialist, semi-periphery Balkan space and also as an expression of the growing European care economy embedded in the broader global framework of neoliberal advanced capitalism. Both the key features of the Serbian gender regime and the phenomenon of irregular care mobility extend beyond Serbia and can be observed across the former Yugoslav region. Accordingly, these findings are transferable to other countries within this regional context.

As regards the gendered consequences of care mobility for the mobile care workers, the main conclusions are: On one hand, women's traditional central position in the household – particularly as primary caregivers and organisers of family life – remains intact even when they engage in short-term care mobility and are absent for a period of time. An explanation of this is the deeply entrenched patriarchy and strong attachment to the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy" among women in mid and later life generations, to which the mobile care workers typically belong. Mobile care workers employ various strategies to mitigate the care gap emerging during their absence, which drains their energy, emotions and resources. The double burden of maintaining two (or even more) households across the two countries at once constitutes a significant strain inherent to transnational care mobility. The transfer of household and family care responsibilities to female relatives who remain at home adds to their caregiving burden, whereas the male spouses who stay behind largely remain disengaged from care work. With regard to household and family care work during short-term care mobility, the patriarchal gender order is thus being upheld.

On the other hand, the study showed that through their engagement in care mobility, women take on the conventionally male role of primary breadwinner. With respect to the gendered consequences of care mobility for the 'staying' male partners, the following may therefore be concluded: Women's care mobility can threaten male partners' identities as the main financial providers of the family. It accordingly challenges central norms of masculinity related to male breadwinning as well as power and control over women. Moreover, care mobility provokes fears of abandonment and worries about being replaced by a richer man from the *core*. Many staying men not only fail to fulfil their role as breadwinners but also refuse to assume responsibility for household and family care work, thereby displaying a dual lack of responsibility within the family. In contrast, mobile care workers shoulder the double burden of breadwinning and care work responsibilities – at the expense of the immense exploitation of their resources. Several women in the sample portrayed men as being largely incapable in domestic and family care work, with this criticism at times extending to a broader perception of passivity, lack of competence, and agency with regard to all spheres of life.

In summary, while care mobility offers aspects of empowerment, independence and autonomy for mobile care workers, it is considerably weakening the

male position within the family, exposing fragile masculinities and pushing staying partners into the position of being redundant. In this way, care mobility is altering gender relations and reconfiguring within-partnership power dynamics. This means care mobility can contribute to male disempowerment, fostering mistrust, diminished self-esteem, and a perceived loss of purpose and identity among the men who stay, while women engaged in mobility often view men with deep frustration, resignation, and even contempt for their failures. Such a dynamic holds considerable potential for conflict within partnerships.

The research demonstrated that when engaged in care mobility women in mid and later life not only strongly maintain the pattern of the "self-sacrificing micro-matriarchy", but also extend it into the public sphere of paid labour. Here, their already strong position and authority within the private sphere of the family acquires an additional dimension. For their male partners who remain behind, mid- and later-life care mobility causes a weakening of their position in the family and exacerbates their "crisis of masculinity" by exposing their inadequacies and lack of responsibility. Care mobility thus confronts these male partners with the profound challenge of redefining their role within the family structure and of finding a meaningful way to contribute to family life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research project was conducted in collaboration with a research assistant, Slađana Jeremić (University of Belgrade), whose contribution to the success of the research project cannot be overstated. She played a crucial role in facilitating access to the field and contacting interview partners, served as a translator and cultural mediator during the fieldwork and interviews, and transcribed and translated the audio recordings. In particular, I would like to emphasise the considerable value that our joint reflections before, during, and after the fieldwork had for me.

FUNDING

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska- Curie grant agreement No 955518.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Fischbach, Svenja. 2026. "The Gendered Impact of Women's Care Mobility to Germany: Consequences for Mobile Care Workers and Staying Spouses in Serbia". *Repository of the University of Ljubljana*. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12556/RUL-186341.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Addati, Laura, Umberto Cattaneo, Valeria Esquivel, and Isabel Valarino. 2018. *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*. International Labour Office.

Blagojević, Marina. 2009. *Knowledge Production at the Semiperiphery. A Gender Perspective*. Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja.

Blagojević, Marina. 2019. "Caring Men and Masculinities on the Balkan Semiperiphery". *Teorija in Praksa* 56 (4): 1001–16.

Blagojević Hjuson, Marina. 2013. "Rodni Barometar u Srbiji: Razvoj i Svakodnevni Život". UN Women.

Blagojević-Hughson, Marina. 2015. "Rodni režimi na poluperiferiji". *Zenica Notebook: Journal for Social Phenomenology and Cultural Dialogue* (21): 255–65.

Blagojević-Hughson, Marina, and Mirjana Bobić. 2014. "Towards New Understanding of Change in Gender Relations at the Micro Level: Serbian Case". *Zbornik Matice Srpske Za Drustvene Nauke* (148): 511–23. https://doi.org/10.2298/ZMSDN1448511B.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2022. *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE.

Friedrich, Stefanie. 2010. "Der Einfluss der postsozialistischen Wandlungsprozesse auf die Aushandlung der Geschlechterrollen in Serbien". *Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft* 2 (3): 28–39. https://doi.org/10.25595/2560.

Haas, Hein de, Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller. 2020. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 6th ed. Red Globe Press.

Hrženjak, Majda, and Maja Breznik. 2024. "Multiple Interacting Migration Patterns in Senior Care in Europe's Semi-Periphery". In *Home Care for Sale: The Transnational Brokering of Senior Care in Europe*, edited by Brigitte Aulenbacher, 97–111. SAGE Publications.

Lutz, Helma. 2018. "Care Migration: The Connectivity Between Care Chains, Care Circulation and Transnational Social Inequality". *Current Sociology* 66 (4): 577–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118765213.

Milić, Anđelka. 1995. "Svakodnevni život porodica u vrtlogu društvenog rasula: Srbija 1991–1995". In *Društvene promene i svakodnevni život: Srbija početkom devedesetih*, edited by Silvano Bolčić, 135–80. Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu.

Milić, Anđelka. 2004. "Transformacija porodice i domaćinstava – zastoj i strategija preživljavanja". In *Društvena transformacija i strategije društvenih grupa: Svakodnevica Srbije na početku trećeg milenijuma,* edited by Anđelka Milić. Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu.

Pavićević, Olivera, Biljana Simeunović-Patić, and Leposava Kron. 2011. *O negativnom društvenom junaku*. Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja.

Todorova, Maria. 2009. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.

Višič, Tanja. 2022. *Peripheral Labour Mobilities: Elder Care Work Between the Former Yugoslavia and Germany*. Campus Verlag.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (4): 387–415.

Zaviršek, Darja. 2015. "Global Parenting in Migrant Women Care Workers' and Children's Lives". In *Sozialpolitische Interventionen: Eine Festschrift für Tom Schmid*, edited by Peter Pantuček-Eisenbacher, Monika Vyslouzil, Johannes Pflegerl, 253–66. Ilse Artl Institut fur Soziale Inklusionsforschung.

SPOLNO ZAZNAMOVANE POSLEDICE MOBILNOSTI ŽENSK ZARADI OSKRBOVALNEGA DELA V NEMČIJI ZA OSKRBOVALKE IN NJIHOVE PARTNERJE, KI OSTANEJO V SRBIJI

Povzetek. *Članek preučuje, kako se koncepta "samožrtvujočega mikromatriarhata" in "krize moškosti", ki ju je razvila Blagojević-Hughson in ki predstavljata ključni značilnosti srbskega spolnega režima, udejanjata v kontekstu neregularne mobilnosti žensk zaradi oskrbovalnega dela v Nemčiji. Tradicionalna vloga mobilnih oskrbovalk kot primarnih skrbnic se kljub njihovi začasni odsotnosti ohranja, kar temelji na trdni zavezanosti vzorcu "samožrtvujočega mikromatriarhata". Hkrati njihov položaj glavnih hranilk družine postavlja pod vprašaj tradicionalne norme, po katerih naj bi moški preživljali družino, ter preoblikuje razmerja med spoloma in dinamiko moči v partnerskih odnosih. Oslabljen položaj partnerjev, ki ostajajo doma, v družini in njihovo izkazano pomanjkanje odgovornosti dodatno poglabljata njihovo "krizo moškosti".*

Ključni pojmi: *neregularna mobilnost zaradi oskrbovalnega dela, spolni režim v Srbiji, vpliv migracij zaradi oskrbovalnega dela, samožrtvujoči mikromatriarhat, kriza moškosti.*

Dora MATEJAK, Andreja VEZOVNIK*

MED ZELENO ODGOVORNOSTJO IN TRŽNO RACIONALNOSTJO: EKOLOŠKI KMETJE IN NJIHOVA SUBJEKTIVITETA SKOZI PRIZMO POLITIK**

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava, kako politični okvir ekološkega kmetijstva v EU usmerja in oblikuje specifične subjektivitete ekoloških kmetic in kmetov, pri čemer varovanje okolja in ekonomsko donosnost opredeljuje kot njuni osrednji odgovornosti. S poststrukturalistično analizo politik članek analizira predpise, strateške dokumente in komunikacijska gradiva EU, z analizo slovenskih gradiv pa ponazori uveljavljanja pravil EU v nacionalnem okviru države članice. Članek pokaže, kako preplet zakonodaje, certificiranja, nadzora, subvencij in moralnih nagovorov konstituira ekološke kmetice in kmete kot odgovorne zelene in ekonomske subjekte. Hkrati tudi izpostavlja, da takšen politični diskurz v praksi ustvarja protislovja, saj so okoljski cilji lahko spodkopani v prizadevanju za gospodarsko rast.*
Ključni pojmi: *ekološke politike, ekološki kmetje, subjektivacija, individualizacija odgovornosti.*

UVOD

Sodobna intenzivna kmetijska pridelava povzroča pomembne okoljske izzive. Zahteva namreč velike količine vode, hkrati pa prispeva k onesnaževanju voda in zemlje. Agroživilski sistemi prispevajo približno tretjino vseh antropogenih izpustov toplogrednih plinov (FAO 2025). Ob tem je sodobno kmetijstvo zaznamovano z nenehnim upadanjem števila kmetov in kmetic, zlasti malih in ekstenzivnih pridelovalcev in pridelovalk, ki kmetijstvo vse pogosteje doživljajo kot ekonomsko nevzdržno in preveč negotovo panogo, da bi lahko pomenilo dolgoročen vir preživetja (Subedi et al. 2022).

* Dr. Dora Matejak, Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, dora.matejak@fdv.uni-lj.si; dr. Andreja Vezovnik, Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede.
** Izvirni znanstveni članek.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.535

Kot odziv na te prepletajoče se okoljske in družbeno-ekonomske dejavnike je na ravni Evropske unije (EU) ekološko kmetijstvo promovirano kot model pridelave hrane, ki naj bi hkrati naslavljal oba izziva sodobnega kmetijstva: razvoj kmetijstva kot uspešne tržne dejavnosti in zmanjševanje njegovih okoljskih vplivov. Ta dvojna ambicija je vpeta v samo jedro političnega oblikovanja ekološkega kmetijstva, kar je razvidno tudi iz Uredbe o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov (2018, 1), ki v svoji preambuli navaja, da "ekološka pridelava tako opravlja dvojno družbeno vlogo, saj po eni strani zagotavlja poseben trg, ki se odziva na povpraševanje potrošnikov po ekoloških proizvodih, po drugi strani pa javne dobrine, ki prispevajo k varovanju okolja in dobrobiti živali ter k razvoju podeželja". Ekološko kmetijstvo je predstavljeno kot praksa, ki naj bi hkrati pripomogla k ekonomski dejavnosti na podeželju in k dolgoročni trajnosti kmetijske pridelave, predvsem z opuščanjem uporabe mineralnih gnojil in pesticidov ter s spodbujanjem praks, kot so kolobarjenje, ohranjanje naravne rodovitnosti tal in skrb za dobrobit živali. V tem kontekstu je ekološko kmetijstvo obravnavano tudi kot ključni element evropske agende zelene rasti (EK 2019).

Ker je ekološko kmetijstvo v politike umeščeno kot zaželen model kmetovanja, saj naj bi usklajevalo varovanje okolja z ekonomsko vzdržnostjo, je nujno preučiti, kako se ta dvojna ambicija prevaja v konkretna pričakovanja in odgovornosti, naložene kmetom in kmeticam. Študije vladnosti opozarjajo, da se neoliberalno oblikovanje politik vse bolj opira na pripisovanje osebne odgovornosti posameznikom in posameznicam za doseganje specifičnih političnih ciljev (Foucault 1991; Dean 1999; Lemke 2001). Pri tem ne gre zgolj za usmerjanje njihovega ravnanja, temveč tudi za prizadevanja za oblikovanje subjektivitet, skladnih s pripisanimi odgovornostmi. Med drugim literatura izpostavlja odgovornost za varovanje okolja, skozi katero se posameznike nagovarja kot zelene subjekte. Ti naj bi z nakupovanjem okolju prijaznih izdelkov in prilagajanjem vsakdanjih navad prispevali k trajnosti. Naložena jim je tudi odgovornost za lastno blaginjo, ki naj bi jo zagotavljali s prepoznavanjem tržnih priložnosti, prevzemanjem tveganj in prilagajanjem zahtevam trga, kar jih pozicionira kot podjetne in tržno usmerjene ekonomske subjekte (Lemke 2001; Fletcher 2010; Moulton in Popke 2017; Pyysiäinen et al. 2017).

Obstoječe razprave o vladnosti in individualizaciji odgovornosti nadgrajujeva s preučevanjem medsebojnega utemeljevanja okoljske in ekonomske odgovornosti v politikah ekološkega kmetijstva. V prispevku želiva odgovoriti na vprašanje: kako politični okvir ekološkega kmetijstva EU povezuje okoljsko in ekonomsko odgovornost ter ekološke kmetice in kmete konstruira kot zelene in ekonomske subjekte? Skladno s tem v nadaljevanju preučiva politične racionalnosti in tehnologije, prek katerih se vzpostavlja in promovira preplet ekonomskih in okoljskih subjektivitet. Z osredotočanjem na presek omenjenih dveh subjektivitet izpostavljava tudi omejitve diskurza o zeleni rasti in neenakomerno porazdelitev bremen, ki jih predstavljanje okoljskih in ekonomskih ciljev kot komplementarnih nalaga kmetom in kmeticam.

Poleg uvoda in zaključka prispevek obsega štiri poglavja. V drugem predstaviva teoretični okvir, ki izhaja iz individualizacije odgovornosti kot pomembnega elementa sodobne vladnosti, s poudarkom na političnih tehnologijah in racionalnostih, ki so pomembne za subjektivacijo kmetov in kmetic. V tretjem poglavju oriševa izbor empiričnega gradiva in metodo analize. V četrtem pokaževa, kako politike ekološkega kmetovanja kmete in kmetice konstruirajo kot zelene in ekonomske subjekte. V petem poglavju te subjektne pozicije interpretirava v luči širših družbenopolitičnih procesov ter kritično obravnavava napetosti med individualizacijo odgovornosti ter okoljskimi in ekonomskimi koristmi, ki jih politični okvir predstavlja kot medsebojno dopolnjujoče.

(PRE)OBLIKOVANJE ODGOVORNOSTI IN ODGOVORNIH SUBJEKTIVITET V SODOBNEM KMETIJSTVU

Analiza vladnosti ima ključno vlogo pri razumevanju sodobnih trendov oblikovanja politik in z njimi povezanih diskurzov, ki legitimirajo prelaganje odgovornosti za družbene izzive na posameznice in posameznike. Pristop izhaja iz razumevanja sodobnih oblik oblasti kot načinov delovanja, ki strukturirajo polje možnega delovanja posameznikov ter s tem soustvarjajo razmere, v katerih se oblikujejo njihove prakse in subjektivitete (Gordon 1991; Foucault 2007). Moderna oblast ni omejena zgolj na regulacijo praks in vedenja, temveč vključuje tudi (pre)oblikovanje načinov, kako posameznice in posamezniki razumejo sebe, svoj položaj v družbi in lastno odgovornost (Miller in Rose 1990; Lemke 2001). Ti procesi potekajo kot prizadevanja za utrjevanje oblasti in oblikovanje subjektov, ki niso odgovorni le za lastno blaginjo in zadovoljstvo, temveč tudi za blaginjo družbe ter uspešno delovanje politik. Z besedami Nikolasa Rosea (1991) je cilj pripraviti posameznike in posameznice do tega, da ravnajo in presojajo na način, skladen s političnimi cilji oblasti. Posledično je odgovornost v sodobnih neoliberalnih družbah konstruirana kot osrednji element državljanstva; posameznice in posamezniki, ki sebe razumejo in se ravnajo kot odgovorni državljani in državljanke, kmetje in kmetice, so s tem dojeti kot legitimni in polnopravni člani in članice družbe (Gill 2011; Pyysiäinen et al. 2017).

Neoliberalne oblike oblasti konstruirajo in promovirajo odgovorne subjekte kot racionalne, ekonomsko usmerjene, samoupravne in moralno zavezane akterje (Lemke 2001; Fletcher 2010). Tako neoliberalizem kot specifična umetnost vladanja prežema vsakdanje življenje v celoti, pri čemer ekonomska racionalnost zavzema osrednje mesto in postane "/…/ splošni slog mišljenja, analize in imaginacije" (Foucault 2008, 218). V tem okviru se prelaganje odgovornosti na posameznike in posameznice kaže kot pomemben premik v političnih racionalnostih, ki se oddaljujejo od odgovornosti države in vse bolj poudarjajo odgovornost posameznika ali posameznice na ključnih družbenih področjih, kot so ekonomska vzdržnost, socialna varnost in varovanje okolja (Dean 1999; Lemke 2001).

Poleg tega postaja vse bolj izrazit vpliv neoliberalne vladnosti[1] na politično odločanje, povezano z upravljanjem okolja. Prizadevanja za varovanje okolja, vključno s trajnostno pridelavo hrane, so vse pogosteje utemeljena z ekonomskimi koristmi, ki naj bi izhajale iz okoljsko odgovornih praks (Fletcher 2010; Leffers in Ballamingie 2013). Te se zato ne predstavljajo le kot okoljsko trajnostne, temveč tudi kot prakse, ki naj bi prispevale k ustvarjanju zelenih delovnih mest, ohranjanju gospodarske rasti in spodbujanju tehnološkega razvoja (Luke 1999). Varovanje okolja se tako vse bolj predstavlja kot združljivo z gospodarsko rastjo, posamezniki in posameznice pa kot ključni nosilci tega prehoda. V kmetijstvu se to kaže v vse večjem prenosu odgovornosti na kmete in kmetice, ki naj bi bili hkrati odgovorni za ekonomsko uspešnost proizvodnje ter trajnostno ravnanje z zemljo in živalmi. Od njih se pričakuje, da delujejo kot racionalni, podjetni, refleksivni, trajnostno usmerjeni in prilagodljivi subjekti, ki poznajo svoje pravice in obveznosti ter sami prevzemajo odgovornost za njihovo uresničevanje (Higgins 2001; Pyysiäinen et al. 2017).

Amichev et al. (2015) in van den Berg (2016) poudarjajo, da je odgovornost za varovanje okolja v politikah pogosto predstavljena kot oblika nesebične skrbi za okolje in naravo. Kmetje in kmetice so pri tem izpostavljeni kot ključni akterji, ki z odločitvami o upravljanju zemlje, izbiri pridelkov in uporabi fitofarmacevtskih sredstev prevzemajo odgovornost za trajnostno ravnanje. V praksi pa je okoljska odgovornost tesno prepletena s podjetniškimi logikami, saj je praviloma umeščena v okvire ekonomske vzdržnosti. Galt (2013) tako opozarja, da se kot rešitev za zmanjševanje negativnih vplivov pesticidov na zdravje ljudi in okolje predlaga predvsem nakup dodatne zaščitne opreme in pripomočkov. Podobno Chan in Enticott (2019) pri analizi smernic za ravnanje s kmetijskimi odpadki ugotavljata, da se od kmetov in kmetic pričakuje ravnanje z odpadki na ekonomsko donosen način. Okoljske subjektivitete se torej ne oblikujejo ločeno od ekonomskih, temveč so z njimi tesno prepletene. Okoljski cilji so pri tem pogosto artikulirani skozi prevladujoče ekonomske racionalnosti in jim tudi podrejeni.

Pomembno vprašanje, ki se pri tem odpira, je, kako so kmetje in kmetice v sodobnih družbah usmerjeni k ponotranjenju pripisanih odgovornosti za svojo ekonomsko blaginjo in varovanje okolja ter s tem k oblikovanju ekonomskih in zelenih subjektivitet. Ta proces poteka prek specifičnih političnih tehnologij in racionalnosti,[2] ki kmete in kmetice spodbujajo k prevzemanju odgovornosti in ravnanju v skladu s širšimi cilji vladanja. Ena izmed neposrednih tehnologij za

[1] Neoliberalne vladnosti ne razumeva kot enotne ali izključne logike vladanja v modernih družbah. Literatura opozarja na soobstoj več različnih racionalnosti in načinov vladanja, ki se lahko medsebojno prekrivajo, dopolnjujejo ali preoblikujejo (Dean 1999; Fletcher 2010). Neoliberalno vladnost zato razumeva kot enega izmed načinov vladanja, ki sooblikujejo politični okvir ekološkega kmetovanja, posebno analitično pozornost pa ji namenjava, ker ponuja pomemben okvir za razumevanje načinov, prek katerih se v sodobnih politikah oblikujejo odgovornosti in pričakovanja.

[2] Racionalnosti označujejo načine, kako je realnost mogoče razumeti, predstavljati in legitimirati ter kako oblasti prek njih vzpostavljajo določene oblike vednosti. Tehnologije pa predstavljajo preplet strategij, tehnik in postopkov, namenjenih regulaciji in usmerjanju praks subjektov (Rose in Miller 2008).

doseganje tega cilja je uporaba političnih instrumentov, kot so zakoni in uredbe (Curran 2001; Li 2007). Pri tem ne gre zgolj za prisilo poslušnosti z grožnjo kaznovanja, temveč tudi za prizadevanja, da bi subjekti politike razumeli kot smiselne, nujne in skladne z njihovimi lastnimi interesi. Na ta način se legitimira nujnost politik (Dean 1999; Foucault 2008; Fletcher 2010). Preplet sprememb zakonodaje in racionalnosti je še posebej izrazit na področju kmetijstva. Kot to pokažeta Gill (2011) in Pyysiäinen et al. (2017), je z neoliberalizacijo kmetijstva prišlo do sprememb zakonodaje v smeri zmanjševanja protekcionizma, pri čemer so bile te spremembe uokvirjene kot nujne za prilagoditev kmetov in kmetic tržni konkurenčnosti. Odgovoren kmet oziroma kmetica je tako postal podjeten subjekt, ki sprejema tveganja, sledi tržnim trendom, vlaga v razvoj znanja in tehnologij ter se pri zagotavljanju uspešnosti kmetovanja zanaša predvsem nase.

Druga pomembna politična tehnologija vladnosti v sodobnem kmetijstvu je vzpostavljanje nadzora prek certificiranja in standardizacije. Vzdrževanje določenih proizvodnih certifikatov zahteva stalno spremljanje kmetijskih praks kmetov in kmetic, vključenih v certifikacijske sheme, predvsem z namenom prepoznavanja odstopanj ter preprečevanja morebitnih kršitev. Ta nadzor poteka prek vrste kontinuiranih procesov, ki vključujejo nadzor na daljavo ter administrativne in fizične oblike kontrole (Agrawal 2005; Kovács 2015). Tehnološki nadzorni mehanizmi so te procese dodatno okrepili z uporabo satelitov, dronov in digitalnih podatkovnih orodij, ki omogočajo nadzor s preprostim vizualiziranjem upravljanja kmetije. Takšne oblike nadzora naredijo podeželske prostore vidne, nadzorljive in s tem lažje (ob)vladljive (Rose in Miller 2008).

Vendar tega, kaj pomeni biti odgovoren kmet ali kmetica in kako naj ta ravna, ne določajo le eksplicitni zakonodajni mehanizmi ter mehanizmi nadzora in kontrole, temveč tudi bolj subtilna sredstva, kot so priporočila in moralni pozivi (Agrawal 2005; Zevnik Tomazin 2025). Posebej pomembni so moralni nagovori, usmerjeni h kmetom in kmeticam, ki spodbujajo individualizacijo odgovornosti, tako da odgovornost povezujejo s samouresničevanjem, skrbjo zase in moralno vrednostjo. Odgovornost tako ni oblikovana le kot poslušnost zunanjim pravilom, temveč kot pot k oblikovanju odgovornega zelenega in ekonomsko uspešnega kmeta oziroma kmetice: subjekta, ki prav skozi odgovorno ravnanje skrbi zase in za družbo (Rose in Miller 2008; Pyysiäinen et al. 2017).

Kljub raznolikosti političnih tehnologij, usmerjenih v kmete in kmetice, ostaja njihov temeljni cilj enak: spodbuditi ponotranjanje dominantnih diskurzov o individualizaciji odgovornosti ter ravnanje v skladu z družbenimi normami in promoviranimi vrednotami. Na ta način naj bi kmetje in kmetice zagotavljali izogibanje nezaželenim, nezakonitim in družbeno nesprejemljivim oblikam vedenja. Posameznice in posamezniki naj bi svobodno izbirali sledenje priporočilom oblasti, ki tako ne strukturirajo le praks ekoloških kmetov in kmetic, temveč tudi njihovo razumevanje tega, kaj pomeni biti dober ekološki kmet oziroma kmetica. Popolno ponotranjanje teh subjektivitet, torej trenutek, ko posameznice in posamezniki te racionalnosti v celoti ponotranjijo in jih

reproducirajo kot lastne, predstavlja ključno fazo oblikovanja subjektivitete, vendar presega analitični okvir tega prispevka. Namen prispevka je predvsem kritično obravnavati politične tehnologije in racionalnosti ekološkega kmetijstva, skozi katere se te subjektivitete skušajo vzpostaviti.

MATERIALI IN METODE ANALIZE POLITIČNEGA OKVIRA EKOLOŠKEGA KMETIJSTVA

Ker je namen pričujočega prispevka pokazati, kako politike oblikujejo subjektivitete kmetov in kmetic, v nadaljevanju predstavljava kritično analizo relevantnih političnih gradiv.[3] Iskanje, izbor in analiza gradiv so potekali med avgustom in novembrom 2024 ter so temeljili na več merilih. Najprej sva vključili ključne takrat veljavne politične in zakonodajne dokumente EU, ki neposredno urejajo, opredeljujejo ali usmerjajo področje ekološkega kmetovanja. Te sva dopolnili s širšimi strateškimi in zakonodajnimi dokumenti s področja kmetijstva, prehranskih sistemov in trajnosti, kadar so ti ekološko kmetovanje umeščali v širši okvir kmetijskih ciljev EU. Takšen celostni izbor je omogočil niansirano razumevanje, kako so politike ekološkega kmetovanja vpete v širše okvire kmetijske trajnosti in vladanja. Na nacionalni ravni sva po enakem načelu vključili veljavne slovenske dokumente, ki urejajo oziroma strateško umeščajo ekološko kmetovanje ter hkrati omogočajo vpogled v prevajanje, uveljavljanje in prilagajanje evropskih usmeritev v slovenskem političnem prostoru.

Poleg navedenih so v analizo vključena tudi komunikacijska gradiva, ki jih institucije uporabljajo za javno predstavljanje in pojasnjevanje ekološkega kmetovanja. Pri tem sva se osredotočili predvsem na najbolj neposredno dostopne in institucionalno izpostavljene vsebine uradnih spletnih strani Evropske komisije ter na relevantne govore ključnih evropskih političnih akterjev. Gre za gradiva, prek katerih se formalne politične usmeritve prevajajo v bolj neposredna sporočila o pomenu ekološkega kmetovanja, njegovih ciljih ter pričakovani vlogi kmetov in kmetic. Takšen izbor omogoča obravnavo treh medsebojno povezanih razsežnosti političnega okvira ekološkega kmetovanja: njegove formalne regulacije, strateškega umeščanja v širše kmetijske in trajnostne politike ter javnega komuniciranja političnih ciljev (glej Tabelo 1).

[3] Kaj sestavlja politična gradiva, sva opredelili po Krzyżanowskem (2013), ki razlikuje dve domeni politično relevantnih gradiv. Prva zajema formalna politična besedila, kot so zakoni, uredbe, predpisi, direktive in strategije, ki neposredno definirajo in institucionalizirajo področje ekološkega kmetovanja. Druga domena obsega politično komunikacijo, ki se nanaša na načine artikulacije političnih ciljev in njihovo diseminacijo v javnosti, na primer prek govorov, spletnih strani, medijskih kampanj in drugih oblik ozaveščanja. Politična komunikacija tako prevaja formalni politični jezik v bolj dostopne narative, katerih namen je ustvarjanje legitimnosti in spodbujanje vključenosti javnosti. Ta širša konceptualizacija politik omogoča analizo, ki presega zgolj pravne in administrativne vidike ter vključuje tudi komunikacijske dimenzije.

Tabela 1: ANALIZIRANA POLITIČNA GRADIVA

Politični dokumenti	Komunikacija politik
Raven EU	Raven EU
Uredba o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov (2018)	Spletna stran EK "Organic Production and Products"
Evropski zeleni dogovor (2019)	Spletna stran EK "Becoming an Organic Farmer"
Strategija od vil do vilic (2020)	Spletna stran EK "Organics at a Glance"
Akcijski načrt za razvoj ekološke pridelave (2021)	Spletna stran EK "The Future of Organics"
Slovenska raven	Spletna stran EK "The Organic Logo"
Zakon o kmetijstvu – ZKme-1 (2008)	Govor (EU Debates) Janusz Wojciechowski Debates EU Action Plan for Organic Agriculture (2022).
Strateški načrt Skupne kmetijske politike 2023–2027 za Slovenijo (2022)	
Uredba o plačilih za okoljske in podnebne obveznosti ter naravne ali druge omejitve iz strateškega načrta skupne kmetijske politike 2023–2027 (2024)	

Vir: lastni prikaz.

Pri analizi sva uporabili teoretsko podprt pristop k analizi politik, in sicer poststrukturalistično analizo politik (Bacchi in Goodwin 2016). Uporaba poststrukturalistične analize politik kot foucaultovske analitične strategije je tesno usklajena s teoretskimi izhodišči raziskave, saj zagotavlja ključna orodja za kritično preizpraševanje diskurzivnih formulacij, ki utemeljujejo specifične politike, v tem primeru politike na področju ekološkega kmetovanja. Pri branju in analizi gradiv sva se tako spraševali predvsem: kako je v posameznem dokumentu predstavljen problem, na katerega naj bi ekološko kmetovanje odgovarjalo? Katere predpostavke o kmetijstvu in odgovornosti takšna predstavitev vključuje? Katere politične racionalnosti in tehnologije takšne reprezentacije podpirajo ter s katerimi političnimi in komunikacijskimi instrumenti se uveljavljajo? Kakšne učinke imajo takšne reprezentacije na konstrukcijo kmeta in kmetice kot političnega subjekta ter kako pri tem opredeljujejo značilnosti ekoloških kmetov oziroma kmetic?

Vsa zbrana gradiva je prva avtorica najprej vnesla v program MAXQDA 2024, kjer je začela s kodiranjem glede na reprezentacije problemov, politične racionalnosti (kaj je opredeljeno kot odgovorno, zaželeno in dobro ekološko kmetovanje ter kakšna vloga je pri doseganju teh ciljev pripisana kmetom in kmeticam), politične tehnologije (konkretni mehanizmi, s katerimi se takšno ravnanje spodbuja in usmerja) ter zaželene učinke politik oziroma spremembe, ki naj bi jih politike proizvedle. V nadaljnjih korakih je prva avtorica v gradivih iskala ponavljajoče

se vzorce, na tej podlagi pa sva sorodne kode postopoma povezovale v širše kategorije, iz katerih sta se oblikovali dve osrednji temi: zelena in ekonomska subjektiviteta. Obe temi nista bili določeni vnaprej, temveč sta se izoblikovali skozi analizo ponavljajočih se političnih racionalnosti, tehnologij in pričakovanj glede tega, kakšen naj bi bil in kako naj bi deloval ekološki kmet oziroma kmetica. V nadaljevanju predstavljava, kako analizirana politična gradiva prek teh racionalnosti in tehnologij konstruirajo zaželene načine delovanja ter zeleno in ekonomsko subjektiviteto ekoloških kmetov in kmetic.

EKOLOŠKO KMETIJSTVO KOT PROSTOR OBLIKOVANJA ZELENIH IN EKONOMSKIH SUBJEKTIVITET

V središču današnjega razumevanja ekološkega kmetovanja je širok nabor pravil in prepovedi, ki zajema, kot zapisuje EK, "vsako stopnjo proizvodnega procesa, od semen do končno predelane hrane" (EK b.d.-a). Z vzpostavitvijo tako obsežne in podrobne zakonodaje EK izpostavlja primarno potrebo "kogarkoli, ki si želi postati ekološki kmet", da "zagotovi, da se spozna na potrebno zakonodajo in da se popolnoma zaveda svojih odgovornosti" (EK b.d.-b). S tem sporoča, da so kmetje lahko obravnavani kot ekološki le, če lahko dokažejo sprejemanje odgovornosti, ki jo narekuje vključitev v sistem certificiranega ekološkega kmetovanja, v obliki razumevanja in ravnanja v skladu s politično določenimi pravili.

Iz tega izhaja diskurz, osredotočen na opredeljevanje idealne ekološke kmetice ali kmeta kot odgovornega kmetujočega subjekta. V tem diskurzu sta ekološka kmetica ali kmet predstavljena kot svobodna in avtonomna akterja: svobodna pri odločitvi za vključitev v certificirano ekološko proizvodnjo ter avtonomna pri organizaciji in izvajanju vsakodnevnih praks ekološkega kmetovanja, izpolnjevanju obveznosti ter sprejemanju odločitev. Vendar hkrati politična dokumentacija in z njo povezane oblike komunikacije prikličejo pojme osebne odgovornosti, samoregulacije in skrbi zase z namenom usklajevanja delovanja kmetic in kmetov s širšimi cilji vladanja v kmetijstvu, ki so organizirani okoli ekološke trajnosti in tržne konkurenčnosti.

Kmetje in zelene subjektivitete

Zeleni subjekt oziroma zeleni kmet ali kmetica je v političnih gradivih, ki tematizirajo ekološko kmetijstvo v EU, konstruiran prek komplementarnega niza tehnologij subjektivacije, osredotočenih na skrb za okolje in ekološko odgovornost. V središču zelene agende EU, predstavljene v evropskem zelenem dogovoru (EK 2019), je očitno poudarjena potreba po preoblikovanju evropskega prehranskega sistema v bolj trajnostni sistem. V kmetijski dimenziji te agende so kot prednostne naloge izpostavljene omejevanje onesnaževanja, blaženje podnebnih sprememb in varovanje biodiverzitete.

Prav pri teh izzivih so kmetje izpostavljeni kot ključni akterji, opisani kot tisti, ki imajo "ključno vlogo" pri reševanju okoljskih problemov kmetijskega

sektorja in doseganju trajnostnih ciljev EU, saj so "v prvi vrsti soočeni s posledicami podnebnih sprememb in izgube biodiverzitete" (EK 2021, 1). Ker kmetje delajo v naravi in z naravo, so prikazani kot neposredno izpostavljeni naravnim razmeram in dobro seznanjeni tako s kmetijskimi kot širšimi okoljskimi spremembami. Ta izpostavljenost jih v političnih gradivih umešča kot posebej primerne in hkrati odgovorne za delovanje v vlogi zelenih subjektov. Odgovornost za ohranjanje planeta prevzemajo z upravljanjem kmetijskih površin in pridelavo hrane na trajnosten način ter v skladu z načeli najboljših okolju prijaznih kmetijskih praks.

V političnih gradivih so ekološki kmetje dosledno konstruirani kot posebej primerni nosilci vloge zelenih kmetijskih subjektov. Akcijski načrt za razvoj ekološkega kmetijstva EU določa, da je "ekološki sektor po svoji naravi usmerjen k višjim okoljskim standardom", zaradi česar je danes opredeljen kot "najbolj trajnostno naravnan kmetijski pridelovalni sistem" (EK 2021, 17). Ekološko kmetijstvo je torej predstavljeno kot okoljsko najprimernejša oblika kmetijske prakse, saj naj bi bilo najbolj skladno z naravnimi procesi in usmerjeno v uporabo naravnih metod pridelave hrane (EK 2021). Tisto, kar politike predstavljajo kot zagotovilo (ekološke) naravnosti pridelave, so natančno določena pravila: od prepovedi uporabe sintetičnih pesticidov in gnojil, spodbujanja izbire odpornih rastlinskih vrst in živalskih pasem ter uporabe tehnik naravnega zatiranja škodljivcev do pridelovanja rastlin, ki vežejo dušik, in drugih zelenih posevkov, namenjenih obnavljanju rodovitnosti prsti. Sledenje tem pravilom je tako predstavljeno kot zagotovilo trajnostnega delovanja.

Tako je ekološko kmetovanje v političnih gradivih prikazano kot neločljivo povezano z varovanjem okolja, pri čemer so ekološki kmetje hkrati pohvaljeni kot "pionirji trajnostnega kmetijstva prihodnosti" (EK 2021, 1) in umeščeni v vlogo "spodbujevalcev ohranjanja biodiverzitete" (EK 2021, 18). V političnih publikacijah in kampanjah ozaveščanja so izpostavljeni dosežki izbranih kmetij. Zgovoren primer so ekološke nagrade EU, v okviru katerih so izbrani evropski kmetje in kmetice, ki so prispevali k trajnosti, javno izpostavljeni in razglašeni za zgled. Predstavljeni so kot inovatorke in inovatorji, prinašalke in prinašalci sprememb ter vsakdanje soustvarjalke in soustvarjalci bolj trajnostne EU (EK b.d.-c).

Prav zaradi takšne specifične formulacije, ki ekološkim kmetom in kmeticam pripisuje posebno vlogo in odgovornost pri uresničevanju okoljskih ciljev ter ekološko kmetijstvo konstruira kot najbolj okoljsko trajnosten način pridelave hrane, se vzpostavlja nujnost varovanja integritete ekološkega kmetijstva ter preprečevanja zlorab in goljufivih praks. S tem se utemeljuje potreba po nadzoru ekološke pridelave. Vsi ekološki kmetje se morajo registrirati pri pristojnem organu oziroma telesu za kontrolo in certificiranje. V Sloveniji to nalogo opravljajo organizacije za kontrolo in certificiranje, ki so zadolžene za nadzor nad kmeti in kmeticami ter preverjanje, ali svoje kmetije upravljajo v skladu s predpisi ekološkega kmetovanja (Zakon o kmetijstvu – ZKme-1 2008; Uredba

o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov 2018). Med pomembnejšimi področji nadzora je administracija oziroma vodenje evidenc kmetijskih dejavnosti. Od ekoloških kmetic in kmetov se zahteva vodenje podrobnih evidenc o izvoru, vrsti in količini kmetijskih proizvodov, ki so bili nabavljeni, proizvedeni ali prodani na ekološki kmetiji; to vključuje račune, pogodbe, zabeležke o sajenju in žetvi, dokazila o količini in podobno (Uredba o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov 2018). Čeprav so kmetje sicer formalno svobodni pri odločanju o načinu organizacije in vodenja dokumentacije, obstaja vrsta priporočil in spodbud glede načina vodenja evidenc, ki spodbujajo urejeno in pregledno organizacijo in hranjenje evidenc kot prvi pogoj za transparentno in predvsem odgovorno opravljanje birokratskih obveznosti ekoloških kmetic in kmetov.

Nenehno možnost nadzora je prav tako mogoče razumeti kot politično tehnologijo, ki kmete in kmetice usmerja k odgovornemu ravnanju v skladu s predpisanimi pravili. Nenapovedani inšpekcijski nadzori in možnost satelitskega spremljanja kmetijskih površin pri tem vzpostavljajo okvir, v katerem naj bi ravnanje usmerjal ne samo dejanski nadzor, temveč sama možnost nadzora. Stalno odgovorno ravnanje je tako predstavljeno kot sredstvo za zmanjševanje tveganja nepravilnosti ali kaznovanja (Kovács 2015).

Toda prizadevanja za subjektivacijo ne temeljijo zgolj na sankcijah ali prisotnosti nadzora. Politični diskurzi si kmete in kmetice prizadevajo usmerjati tudi tako, da določene oblike ravnanja predstavljajo kot razumne, zaželene in koristne za njih same. Tako je odgovorno in urejeno izvajanje birokratskih nalog prikazano kot ravnanje, ki kmeticam in kmetom omogoča boljši pregled nad lastnim delovanjem ter zmanjšuje tveganje za ugotovitev nepravilnosti. Spodbujane metode vodenja evidenc, kot so uporaba standardiziranih tabel, redno dokumentiranje dejavnosti in vzdrževanje pregleda nad delovanjem kmetije, so predstavljene kot načini izboljševanja učinkovitosti nadzora in zmanjševanja potrebe po dodatnih ukrepih, kot so pogostejši ali nenapovedani inšpekcijski obiski (glej tudi Youdelis 2013; Moulton in Popke 2017). Kmetje in kmetice so tako v političnih gradivih v dvojni vlogi: zelenih kmetijskih proizvajalcev in administrativnih upravljavcev lastnega delovanja. Ti vlogi sta predstavljeni kot medsebojno povezani, njuno združevanje pa kot pogoj za učinkovito in pravilno izvajanje praks ekološkega kmetovanja.

Upravljanje ekološkega kmetovanja na ravni EU tako konstruira podobo ekoloških kmetic in kmetov kot trajnostnih pionirk in pionirjev, idealnih zelenih subjektov ter moralnih nosilk in nosilcev trajnosti. Pozvani so k odgovornemu delovanju, saj so umeščeni kot nosilke in nosilci pomembne odgovornosti pri obdelovanju zemlje, upravljanju z živalmi in varovanju okolja. Politični dokumenti in spremljajoča komunikacija predstavljajo odgovorno sledenje pravilom ekološkega kmetovanja kot osrednjemu načinu doseganja trajnostnega delovanja. Takšno odgovorno sledenje pravilom ni predstavljeno zgolj kot pogoj za lažje, hitrejše in manj obremenjujoče inšpekcijske postopke, temveč tudi kot

način uresničevanja inherentne odgovornosti zelenih kmetov in kmetic do varovanja okolja. Tisti kmetje in kmetice, ki z inovativnimi ali posebej trajnostnimi praksami presežejo osnovne zahteve, pa so lahko dodatno javno prepoznani in proslavljeni na odmevnih dogodkih, kot so podelitve ekoloških nagrad. Kot kaže analiza, konstrukcija ekoloških kmetic in kmetov kot vzornih zelenih subjektov ni omejena na izvajanje neposredne oblastne avtoritete skozi prisilo, da postanejo okoljsko odgovorni zeleni subjekti. Namesto tega deluje prek usmerjanja kmetic in kmetov k želji, da svoje ravnanje uskladijo s predpisanimi okoljskimi normami in vrednotami, saj so zaradi narave svojega dela, ki jih tesno povezuje z naravo, predstavljeni kot primerni za tako vlogo v družbi (Birkenholtz 2009; Skinner 2013).

Kmetje in ekonomske subjektivitete

Predstava o tem, kaj pomeni biti in delovati kot odgovorna zelena ekološka kmetica ali kmet, se postopno sooblikuje tudi z vključevanjem ekonomske dimenzije. Skozi politične dokumente in politično komunikacijo se odgovorno in skrbno upoštevanje pravil ekološkega kmetovanja predstavi ne le kot zaželeno in potrebno zaradi svojega trajnostnega pomena, temveč tudi kot nekaj, kar je dobičkonosno: kot preudarna ekonomska odločitev in ugodna poslovna pot za racionalne ekonomske akterje. Natančna analiza Uredbe o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov (2018) in njenih spremljevalnih komunikacij (EK b.d.-c; b.d.-d) razkriva, kako se potreba po natančnih pravilih in temeljitem nadzoru nad akterji v ekološkem sektorju – poleg zagotavljanja trajnosti – oblikuje kot temeljni pogoj za ustrezno delovanje ekološkega trga. Prav strogo opredeljeni standardi in dosledni nadzorni mehanizmi so predstavljeni kot tisti, ki zagotavljajo enake možnosti med ekološkimi pridelovalci in s tem v sektorju omogočajo to, kar je predstavljeno kot poštena in pravična konkurenca.

Iz tega sledi, da zavezanost pravilom EU o ekološkem kmetovanju kmeticam in kmetom omogoča vstop na ekološki trg znotraj in zunaj EU ter dostop do tako imenovanih enakih možnosti za trgovanje in ustvarjanje dobička. Hkrati odgovorno in skrbno sledenje pravilom kmeticam in kmetom zagotavlja "ekološko identiteto" (EK b.d.-e), utelešeno v obliki ekološkega logotipa. Ker je skladnost s pravili pogoj za pravico do uporabe ekološkega logotipa in dostop do trga za ekološko certificirane kmete, se vzpostavlja jasna meja med tistimi, ki se lahko označujejo za ekološke, in tistimi, ki tega (ne glede na svoje kmetijske prakse) ne morejo, saj niso certificirano ekološki (Guthman 2007). Posledično slednji nimajo ekskluzivnega dostopa oziroma pravice do prodaje na "prostem" ekološkem trgu.

Politični okvir ekološkega kmetovanja pa oblikuje ekološki logotip tudi kot sredstvo, ki ekološkim kmeticam in kmetom omogoča vidnost, jih naredi prepoznavne ter jih povezuje s kupci (EK 2020). Potrošnice in potrošniki zavzemajo osrednje mesto v političnih dokumentih EU, ki obravnavajo trajnostne in ekološke prehranske sisteme. Pomemben poudarek v teh gradivih je sklic na vedno

večje povpraševanje potrošnic in potrošnikov po naravni, trajnostni in zdravi hrani; to so lastnosti, ki so tesno povezane z ekološkimi proizvodi (EK 2020; 2021). V tem okviru vključitev v sistem ekološkega kmetovanja in upoštevanje njegovih pravil postane način, s katerim kmetje dosegajo potrošniško bazo, ki si želi izbire hrane, usklajene z njihovimi okoljskimi in etičnimi skrbmi. Politična gradiva tako kmetice in kmete nagovarjajo s predstavitvijo, da obstaja stabilno, če ne celo naraščajoče povpraševanje po ekoloških pridelkih. Še več, Strateški načrt Skupne kmetijske politike 2023–2027 za Slovenijo (Ministrstvo za kmetijstvo, gozdarstvo in prehrano 2022) izrecno navaja, da je v Sloveniji povpraševanje višje od ponudbe. Take trditve po eni strani utrjujejo sliko o tržnih priložnostih ekoloških pridelovalcev, po drugi pa konstruirajo ekološko kmetovanje kot prostor priložnosti za podjetniške kmetice in kmete: prostor, v katerem je skladnost s standardi predstavljena kot ekonomsko racionalna in hkrati družbeno nagrajena.

Zaradi tega politični dokumenti in komunikacije poudarjajo potrebo po transparentnosti ter jasnih in zanesljivih informacijah, ki potrošnicam in potrošnikom omogočajo zaupanje v ekološke kmetice in kmete ter jim zagotavljajo, da so ekološki proizvodi res pridelani v skladu z uveljavljenimi pravili in dobrimi praksami. Tako so ekološki kmetje predstavljeni kot odgovorni za zagotavljanje takih proizvodov in kot tisti, ki so zavezani odgovornosti za vzdrževanje standardov, na katerih temelji zaupanje potrošnic in potrošnikov (EK b.d.-e). Prek teh pozivov so ekološki kmetje nadalje pozicionirani kot subjekti, katerih ravnanje mora biti usklajeno s pričakovanji tako regulatornih avtoritet kot vse bolj zahtevne in trajnostno naravnane javnosti.

Poleg dostopa do ekološkega trga in ciljne skupine kupcev certifikat kmeticam in kmetom zagotavlja še eno finančno spodbudo: dostop do subvencij za ekološko kmetovanje. Ekološki kmetje so upravičeni do plačil za preusmeritev v prakse in metode ekološkega kmetovanja ter do plačil za ohranitev teh praks in metod, pri čemer so zneski na hektar višji kot pri kmetih, ki niso vključeni v certificirano ekološko pridelavo (EK b.d.-a; Uredba o plačilih za okoljske in podnebne obveznosti ter naravne ali druge omejitve iz strateškega načrta skupne kmetijske politike 2023–2027 2024). Dodatna finančna podpora spodbuja kmetice in kmete k sprejemanju in vzdrževanju praks ekološkega kmetovanja ter s tem dodatno krepi njihovo podobo ekonomsko racionalnih subjektov. Hkrati prispeva k nadaljnjemu utrjevanju legitimnosti nadzornih in inšpekcijskih sistemov, saj morajo kmetje pri porabi javnega denarja izkazovati poštenost in preglednost.

Te politične tehnologije in racionalnosti poskušajo sporočiti in v praksi uveljaviti predstavo o ekološkem kmetovanju kot pomembni gospodarski priložnosti. Ekološko kmetovanje je promovirano kot priložnost za racionalne, tržno usmerjene kmetice in kmete, torej za subjekte, ki prepoznajo znatne finančne prednosti vstopa na ekološki trg, kot so večja prepoznavnost med trajnostno usmerjenimi potrošniki in potrošnicami in možnost pridobitve ekoloških subvencij, vezanih

na certificirano ekološko pridelavo. Primer subvencij za ekološko kmetovanje v EU, podobno kot pri kmetijsko-okoljskih plačilih (Kovács 2015), pokaže, da procesi individualizacije odgovornosti ne pomenijo nujno preprostega umika državne finančne podpore.

Subvencije in certifikat so predstavljeni kot priložnosti, ki naj bi podpirale trajnostno delovanje in ekonomsko vzdržnost, vendar pa je v primeru, ko teh ciljev ni mogoče doseči, odgovornost za neuspeh pripisana kmetom in kmeticam samim; na primer če ne uspejo vzpostaviti tržnih kanalov ali zadostnih površin za pridelavo. Morebitne težave pri iskanju prodajnih poti, doseganju ustrezne cene ali zagotavljanju ekonomske vzdržnosti se tako v analiziranih politikah ne problematizirajo predvsem kot vprašanje same organizacije trga, temveč se rešitev išče v večji podjetnosti, tržni usmerjenosti in vključevanju kmetov v ponujene podporne mehanizme. Neuspeh zato v dokumentih ni eksplicitno pripisan posameznemu kmetu ali kmetici, vendar takšna konstrukcija problema ustvarja razmere, v katerih se odgovornost za uspeh in s tem tudi za morebitni neuspeh individualizira. Na ta način podpora države ne deluje več kot kolektivno jamstvo, temveč kot pogojna spodbuda, znotraj katere ostaja odgovornost za uspešno delovanje na trgu predvsem na posameznem kmetu oziroma kmetici.

Ekološko kmetovanje je tako predstavljeno kot razumna in odgovorna izbira za vse, ki razumejo pomen optimizacije in modernizacije kmetij ter metod kmetovanja za zagotavljanje boljšega gospodarskega donosa. Tako postane ekološko kmetijstvo še eno področje za pridobivanje poslovnih priložnosti in oprijemljivega dobička iz trajnostnega delovanja in pridelave (glej tudi Fletcher 2010; Leffers in Ballamingie 2013; Youdelis 2013).

ZELENI IN EKONOMSKO USMERJENI EKOLOŠKI SUBJEKTI NA PROSTEM TRGU: POLITIČNI IDEAL IN NJEGOVE MEJE

Do sedaj predstavljena analiza nakazuje, da je konstrukcija ekoloških kmetic in kmetov odvisna od njihovega prevzema medsebojno povezanega nabora odgovornosti. To najprej vključuje odgovornost za skrbno upoštevanje predpisov in standardov ekološkega kmetovanja. Takšno upoštevanje predstavlja potreben pogoj za nadaljnje prevzemanje odgovornosti za ustrezno zaščito okolja z izvajanjem praks ekološkega kmetovanja ter za odgovornost za udejanjanje podjetniških zmožnosti z aktivnim sodelovanjem na ekološkem trgu.

Ta preplet odgovornosti oblikujejo različne tehnologije in racionalnosti vladnosti, ki določajo načine, kako se ekološko kmetovanje izvaja in razume. Značilno zanje je postavljanje kmetov in kmetic kot avtonomnih in razumnih akterjev, od katerih se po vstopu v sfero ekološkega kmetovanja pričakuje, da prevzamejo odgovornosti, pripisane ekološkim kmetom in kmeticam (Rose et al. 2006; Barnes et al. 2019). Ker je odločitev za preusmeritev v ekološko kmetijstvo predstavljena kot prostovoljna, je odgovornost za lastno ravnanje in izvedbo sprememb ustrezno individualizirana. Kmetje so tako vzpostavljeni kot tisti, ki so odgovorni za svoje delovanje v okviru ekološke sfere; ne le zakonodajalcem

in nadzornim organom, temveč tudi strankam in širši družbi. Hkrati pa so po vstopu na trg v veliki meri prepuščeni delovanju tržnih mehanizmov, saj institucionalna ureditev, kot denimo v Sloveniji, praviloma ne zagotavlja prodajnih poti, odkupa ali stabilnih ekoloških cen, ki bi zagotavljale ekonomsko vzdržnost njihovega delovanja. Odgovornost za to, da za svoje proizvode najdejo trg, dosežejo ustrezno ceno in nenazadnje zagotovijo lastno ekonomsko preživetje, je tako prenesena predvsem na posameznega kmeta oziroma kmetico.

Individualizacija odgovornosti oziroma prenos odgovornosti, tako za lastno preživetje kmetov in kmetic kot za obravnavanje družbenih kriz, kot je okoljska kriza, s politične sfere na raven posameznic in posameznikov, kot ga razkriva analiza politik ekološkega kmetovanja, ni nič novega v moderni družbi. Podobne dinamike so bile obsežno dokumentirane tudi v drugih družbenih sferah, denimo v študijah diskurzov javnega zdravja, kjer so posamezniki vse bolj spodbujeni k individualizaciji odgovornosti za sprejemanje zdravih življenjskih izbir, zdravstvene težave pa so posledično pojmovane kot rezultat nezdravih življenjskih slogov (Rose 1991). Podobno so v kontekstu trajnostne potrošnje potrošnice in potrošniki usmerjeni h "glasovanju z denarnico", tj. izbiranju trajnostnih ali etičnih izdelkov kot načinu prispevanja k okoljskim in družbenim ciljem (Uggla in Soneryd 2017; Hirth et al. 2022; Vezovnik et al. 2022). Ekološko kmetijstvo prav tako sloni na pripisovanju dela odgovornosti kmeticam in kmetom, kar ni presenetljivo, saj, kot pokaže Zevnik Tomazin (2025), pristopi k reševanju okoljskih in podnebnih kriz na ravni EU vse bolj polagajo upanje v posamezne prebivalke in prebivalce EU, da bodo svoje navade preoblikovali v smeri trajnostnih praks.

Nadaljnjo kritično obravnavo zahteva dejstvo, da individualizirana odgovornost temelji na delovanju ekoloških kmetic in kmetov kot hkrati odgovornih zelenih in ekonomsko racionalnih subjektov. Zelena in ekonomska subjektiviteta zato ne predstavljata dveh ločenih podob ekološkega kmeta ali kmetice, temveč se medsebojno prepletata in skupaj oblikujeta hibridno subjektiviteto. Politična gradiva promovirajo stališče, da lahko ekološki kmetje z upravljanjem svojih kmetij varujejo okolje in hkrati uživajo ekonomske koristi. Skladnost z ekološkimi pravili in cilji je pri tem predstavljena kot podlaga za okoljsko delovanje ter tržno prepoznavnost in uspešnost, ta pa kot pogoj za ohranjanje in nadaljnji razvoj ekološkega kmetovanja, s čimer se dodatno krepi trajnostno in odgovorno delovanje ekoloških kmetov in kmetic.

Kar s tem pokaževa, skladno z literaturo o neoliberalni okoljski vladnosti (Fletcher 2010; Youdelis 2013; Asiyanbi et al. 2019), je, da strategije vladanja, ki temeljijo na finančnih spodbudah za promoviranje trajnostnega ravnanja, izhajajo iz predpostavke, da lahko osebe iz trajnostnega kmetovanja, v tem primeru ekološkega kmetovanja, pridobivajo oprijemljivo ekonomsko vrednost. Hkrati te strategije nakazujejo, da je to vrednost mogoče tudi odvzeti, če kmetje in kmetice ne ravnajo odgovorno, saj lahko izgubijo certifikat ter s tem zeleni oziroma ekološki ugled, dostop do ekološkega trga in subvencij. Na ta način so kmetje

spodbujeni k modernizaciji, specializaciji in povečevanju proizvodnje, saj je trg prikazan kot tak, ki je pripravljen absorbirati ekološko proizvodnjo, česar učinek je tudi ta, da naj bi kmetje še naprej varovali okolje. Kot je to ubesedil nekdanji evropski komisar za kmetijstvo Janusz Wojciechowski (EU Debates 2022), je ekološko kmetovanje tisto, ki "je lahko dobičkonosno za kmete in podjetja, produktivno za družbo ter varovalno za naše okolje".

Vendar je treba predpostavko neproblematičnega in samoumevnega sobivanja okoljskih in ekonomskih koristi postaviti pod drobnogled in ju kritično obravnavati skupaj. Na diskurzivni ravni ta okvir ponuja privlačno interpretacijo, v kateri so kmetje in kmetice predstavljeni kot opolnomočeni akterji, sposobni individualnega ustvarjanja pozitivnih družbenih sprememb, hkrati pa ostajajo ekonomsko vzdržni in okoljsko trajnostni. Vendar v praksi obstaja tveganje, da ta slika zakrije strukturne omejitve in neenake razmere, v katerih kmetje in kmetice delujejo. S postavljanjem individualne odgovornosti in podjetniške zmožnosti v ospredje so širši politični, gospodarski in institucionalni dejavniki, ki oblikujejo možnosti in meje ekološkega kmetovanja, potisnjeni v ozadje.

Ta razkorak je v praksi opazen v kontekstu ekološkega kmetovanja. Obstoječe empirične raziskave opozarjajo, da se ekološki kmetje, zlasti manjši in ekstenzivni kmetje, soočajo s precejšnjimi težavami pri zagotavljanju ekonomske vzdržnosti in konkuriranju na ekoloških trgih, saj ne morejo slediti cenam večjih in izraziteje tržno usmerjenih ekoloških pridelovalcev (Łuczka in Kalinowski 2020; Shriya et al. 2026). Čeprav prejemajo subvencije, številni slovenski ekološki kmetje in kmetice poudarjajo, da te ne zadoščajo za zapolnitev razkoraka med vrednostjo njihovih pridelkov in cenami, po katerih jih morajo prodajati, da bi ostali konkurenčni. Poleg tega sporočajo, da so stroški ekoloških semen, kmetijskih vložkov in ekološke krme bistveno višji od njihovih konvencionalnih ekvivalentov, kar njihovo ekonomsko situacijo dodatno obremenjuje (Matejak 2025). Te ugotovitve opozarjajo, da prispevek k okoljskim ciljem sam po sebi še ne zagotavlja pogojev za ekonomsko vzdržnost kmetovanja.

Po drugi strani literatura opozarja, da so kmetije, ki se ukvarjajo z intenzivno pridelavo in agroživilska podjetja na ekoloških trgih, pogosto deležni kritik zaradi uvajanja praks, ki ekološko kmetovanje približujejo industrializirani proizvodnji. Mednje sodijo monokulturna pridelava, zgolj nadomeščanje prepovedanih fitofarmacevtskih sredstev z dovoljenimi ter izkoriščanje kmetijskih delavcev, kar postavlja pod vprašaj okoljsko in družbeno trajnost ekološkega kmetovanja (Guthman 2008; Stolze in Lampkin 2009; Matejak 2025). V tej luči postajajo meje sočasnega zasledovanja gospodarskega uspeha in varovanja okolja v okviru ekološkega kmetovanja vse bolj vidne, saj lahko tržna konkurenčnost poteka na račun ekološke integritete in družbenih razsežnosti. V takšnem kontekstu postaja pripisovanje odgovornosti predvsem posameznim kmeticam in kmetom ne le zahtevno, temveč tudi pogosto nepravično, saj prezre strukturne, ekonomske in politično pogojene razmere, ki oblikujejo njihove možnosti

delovanja in omejujejo njihovo zmožnost izpolnjevanja številnih in pogosto protislovnih pričakovanj, ki so nanje naslovljena, kot so pričakovanja, da bodo delovali kot odgovorni, zeleni in hkrati ekonomski subjekti.

SKLEP

Tehnologije in racionalnosti vladnosti, ki oblikujejo in upravljajo politično strukturo ekološkega kmetovanja na ravni EU, ustvarjajo razmere, v katerih se ekološko kmetovanje v EU izvaja. Ob tem konstruirajo določena razumevanja, kaj šteje kot primerno ekološko ravnanje. Pomemben učinek teh politik je usmerjanje ravnanja tistih, ki se ukvarjajo z ekološkim kmetovanjem: kmetic in kmetov. V tem smislu si politične strukture prizadevajo (pre)oblikovati subjektivitete kmetic in kmetov prek vzpostavljanja podrobnih pravil in predpisov ekološkega kmetovanja, mehanizmov nadzora in certifikacije, dodeljevanja subvencij ter diskurzivnih pozivov, pri čemer se regulativni in finančni mehanizmi prepletajo z moralnimi in identitetno utemeljenimi nagovori. Kmetice in kmete se tako aktivno spodbuja, da prevzamejo zelene in ekonomske subjektne pozicije in svoje vsakodnevne kmetijske prakse uskladijo na načine, ki zmanjšujejo tveganje delovanja zunaj pravil, norm in pritiskov prevladujočega ekološkega prehranskega sistema. Cilj tega članka je bil zato preučiti, kako so tehnologije in racionalnosti oblikovane, operacionalizirane in mobilizirane v procesih oblikovanja politik ekološkega kmetijstva v EU, da bi kmete in kmetice hkrati konstituirale kot zelene in ekonomske subjekte.

Ključna ugotovitev analize političnega diskurza ekološkega kmetovanja v EU je, da zelena in ekonomska subjektiviteta nista dve ločeni subjektiviteti, temveč se v okviru ekološke vladnosti medsebojno pogojujeta in skupaj oblikujeta hibridno subjektiviteto ekološkega kmeta oziroma kmetice. Ta hibridna subjektiviteta se oblikuje skozi pričakovanje, da bodo kmetje in kmetice spoštovanje pravil in postopkov ekološkega kmetovanja razumeli kot odgovornost do okolja, potrošnikov in širše družbe, pri čemer je takšno okoljsko odgovorno delovanje hkrati predstavljeno kot ekonomsko smotrno in nagrajeno z dostopom do subvencij, ekološkega trga ter povpraševanja po njihovih proizvodih. Ekološki kmetje so tako nagovorjeni kot pionirji in pionirke trajnosti, ki jim je zaradi njihovih proizvodnih praks pripisana odgovornost za varovanje okolja, obenem pa kot ekonomski subjekti, ki naj bi iz svojega trajnostnega delovanja ustvarjali tudi ekonomsko vrednost.

S tem analiza nadgrajuje obstoječe študije neoliberalne zelene vladnosti (Luke 1999; Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010; van den Berg 2016), saj pokaže, da tudi v politikah ekološkega kmetovanja ne gre zgolj za vzporedno nalaganje okoljske in ekonomske odgovornosti, temveč se medsebojno utemeljujeta in legitimirata. Prav njuno medsebojno povezovanje reproducira širši diskurz zelene rasti, v katerem sta varovanje okolja in gospodarska uspešnost predstavljena kot medsebojno združljiva in vzajemno podporna cilja. Omejitev prispevka pa ostaja nevključitev perspektive kmetov in kmetic. Prispevek zato ne more pokazati,

kako se te promovirane subjektivitete dejansko sprejemajo, zavračajo ali preoblikujejo.

Čeprav politični okvir ekološko kmetovanje predstavlja kot prostor, v katerem lahko ekološka trajnost in ekonomska vzdržnost sobivata brez večjih napetosti, obstoječe empirične raziskave kažejo na številna protislovja. Ko politični diskurz izpostavlja individualno odgovornost za obravnavanje okoljske krize in jo hkrati povezuje s predpostavko, da je mogoče okoljske cilje uresničevati skupaj z ekonomsko uspešnostjo in tržno konkurenčnostjo, tvega, da zabriše strukturne omejitve, tržne pritiske in neenake razmere, v katerih se ekološko kmetovanje dejansko izvaja. Prepoznavanje teh dinamik je ključno za kritično obravnavo obstoječih politik ekološkega kmetovanja in njihov premislek v smeri boljšega upoštevanja kompleksnih in neenakih razmer, v katerih delujejo ekološki kmetje in kmetice. Poleg finančnih spodbud in certificiranja je treba več pozornosti nameniti strukturnim pogojem, ki omogočajo ekonomsko vzdržno ekološko kmetovanje, med drugim dostopu do prodajnih poti, položaju kmetov pri oblikovanju cen, višjim stroškom ekološke pridelave ter vse večji izpostavljenosti kmetij posledicam podnebnih sprememb.

FINANCIRANJE

Članek je nastal kot del doktorskega usposabljanja (program mlade raziskovalke) prve avtorice, ki je financirano s strani Javne agencije za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS) in kot del raziskovanja v okviru raziskovalnega programa P5-0183.

DOSTOPNOST RAZISKOVALNIH PODATKOV

Raziskava ni ustvarila novih raziskovalnih podatkov.

NAVZKRIŽJE INTERESOV

Avtorici izjavljata, da nista v navzkrižju interesov.

LITERATURA

Agrawal, Arun. 2005. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects. New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century.* Duke University Press.

Amichev, Beyhan Y., Murray J. Bentham, Darrel Cerkowniak, John Kort, Suren Kulshreshtha, Colin P. Laroque, Joseph Piwowar, in Ken C. J. Van Rees. 2015. "Mapping and Quantification of Planted Tree and Shrub Shelterbelts in Saskatchewan, Canada". *Agroforestry Systems* 89 (1): 49–65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10457-014-9741-2.

Asiyanbi, Adeniyi P., Edwin Ogar, in Oluyemi A. Akintoye. 2019. "Complexities and Surprises in Local Resistance to Neoliberal Conservation: Multiple Environmentalities, Technologies of the Self and the Poststructural Geography of Local Engagement with REDD+". *Political Geography* 69 (3): 128–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.12.008.

Bacchi, Carol, in Susan Goodwin. 2016. *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Barnes, Andrew, Iria Soto Embodas, Vera Eory, Bert Beck, Athanasios Balafoutis, Berta Sanchez Fernandez, Jurgen Vangeyte, Spyros Fountas, Tamme van der Wal, in Manuel Gomez Barbero. 2019. "Exploring the Adoption of Precision Agricultural Technologies: A Cross Regional Study of EU Farmers". *Land Use Policy* 80 (1): 163–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.10.004.

Birkenholtz, Trevor. 2009. "Groundwater Governmentality: Hegemony and Technologies of Resistance in Rajasthan's (India) Groundwater Governance". *The Geographical Journal* 175 (3): 208–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2009.00327.x.

Chan, Kin Wing (Ray), in Gareth Enticott. 2019. "The Suzhi Farmer: Constructing and Contesting Farming Subjectivities in Post-Socialist China". *Journal of Rural Studies* 67 (4): 69–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.02.016.

Curran, Mary E. 2001. "Foucault on the Farm: Producing Swine and Subjects". *Southern Rural Sociology* 17 (1): 12–36.

Dean, Michael. 1999. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society.* Sage.

Evropska komisija (EK). 2019. "Evropski zeleni dogovor". https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN.

Evropska komisija (EK). 2020. "Strategija od vil do vilic". https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en.

Evropska komisija (EK). 2021. "Akcijski načrt za ekološko kmetijstvo". https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0141R%2801%29.

Evropska komisija (EK). b.d.-a. "Organic Production and Products". Pridobljeno 24. septemeber 2024. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-production-and-products_en.

Evropska komisija (EK). b.d.-b. "Organics at a Glance". Pridobljeno 24. september 2024. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organics-glance_en.

Evropska komisija (EK). b.d.-c. "Becoming an Organic Farmer". Pridobljeno 26. september 2024. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/becoming-organic-farmer_en.

Evropska komisija (EK). b.d.-d. "The Future of Organics". Pridobljeno 26. september 2024. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/future-organics_en.

Evropska komisija (EK). b.d.-e. "The Organic Logo". Pridobljeno 28. september 2024. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-logo_en.

EU Debates. 2022. "Janusz Wojciechowski Debates EU Action Plan for Organic Agriculture. With Janusz Wojciechowski. Juncker, J.-C." *YouTube*, 4. maj 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=5hiSkqdWjaQ&ab_channel=EUDebates%7Ceudebates.tv.

FAO. 2025. "Greenhouse gas emissions from agrifood systems – Global, regional and country trends, 2001–2023. FAOSTAT Analytical Brief Series, No. 115. Rome". https://doi.org/10.4060/cd7300en.

Fletcher, Robert. 2010. "Neoliberal Environmentality: Towards a Poststructuralist Political Ecology of the Conservation Debate". *Conservation & Society* 8 (1). https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-4923.73806.

Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality". V: *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, uredili Peter Miller, Graham Burchell, in Colin Gordon. University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France*: 1977-78. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Galt, Ryan E. 2013. "From Homo Economicus to Complex Subjectivities: Reconceptualizing Farmers as Pesticide Users". *Antipode* 45 (2): 336–56. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01000.x.

Gill, Fiona. 2011. "Responsible Agents: Responsibility and the Changing Relationship between Farmers and the State". *Rural Society* 20 (2): 128–41. https://doi.org/10.5172/rsj.20.2.128.

Gordon, Colin. 1991. "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction". V: *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, uredili Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, in Peter Miller. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/F/bo3684463.html.

Guthman, Julie. 2007. "The Polanyian Way? Voluntary Food Labels as Neoliberal Governance". *Antipode* 39 (3): 456–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00535.x.

Guthman, Julie. 2008. "Neoliberalism and the Making of Food Politics in California". *Geoforum* 39 (3): 1171–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.002.

Higgins, Vaughan. 2001. "Assembling Restructuring: Governmentality, Economic Regulation and the Historical Emergence of the 'Enterprising Farmer' in Australian Agricultural Policy". *Review of International Political Economy* 8 (2): 311–28.

Hirth, Steffen, Theresa Bürstmayr, in Anke Strüver. 2022. "Discourses of Sustainability and Imperial Modes of Food Provision: Agri-Food-Businesses and Consumers in Germany". *Agriculture and Human Values* 39 (2): 573–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10269-z.

Kovács, Eszter Krasznai. 2015. "Surveillance and State-Making through EU Agricultural Policy in Hungary". *Geoforum* 64 (8): 168–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.06.020.

Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2013. "Analyzing EU Policy Discourses on Climate Change: Chapter 3. Policy, Policy Communication and Discursive Shifts". V: *Analyzing Genres in Political Communication: Theory and Practice*, uredila Piotr Cap in Urszula Okulska. Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture. John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/dapsac.50.05krz.

Leffers, Donald, in Patricia Ballamingie. 2013. "Governmentality, Environmental Subjectivity, and Urban Intensification". *Local Environment* 18 (2): 134–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2012.719016.

Lemke, Thomas. 2001. "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality". *Economy and Society* 30 (2): 190–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140120042271.

Li, Tania Murray. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press.

Łuczka, Władysława, in Sławomir Kalinowski. 2020. "Barriers to the Development of Organic Farming: A Polish Case Study". Agriculture 10 (11): 11. https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture10110536.

Luke, Timothy. 1999. "Environmentality as Green Governmentality". V: *Discourses of the Environment*, uredil Eric Darier. Blackwell.

Matejak, Dora. 2025. "Governing the Everyday Lives of Farmers through the Organic Farming Policy Framework". Doktorska disertacija, Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede. https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=173901.

Miller, Peter, in Nikolas Rose. 1990. "Governing Economic Life". *Economy and Society* 19 (1): 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085149000000001.

Ministrstvo za kmetijstvo, gozdarstvo in prehrano. 2022. "Strateški Načrt Skupne Kmetijske Politike 2023–2027 Za Slovenijo".

Pyysiäinen, Jarkko, Darren Halpin, in Andrew Guilfoyle. 2017. "Neoliberal Governance and 'Responsibilization' of Agents: Reassessing the Mechanisms of Responsibility-Shift in Neoliberal Discursive Environments". *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 18 (2): 215–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2017.1331858.

Rose, Nikolas, in Peter Miller. 2008. *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*. Polity.

Rose, Nikolas, Pat O'Malley, in Mariana Valverde. 2006. "Governmentality". *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 2 (1): 83–104. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.lawsocsci.2.081805.105900.

Rose, Nikolas. 1991. "Power and Subjectivity: Critical History and Psychology". *Academy for the Psychoanalytic Arts*. https://academyanalyticarts.org/rose-power-subjectivity.

Shriya, R., Houston Wilson, Mark Lubell, in Margaret Lloyd. 2026. "Structural Contradictions in Organic Agriculture: A DPSIR Analysis of California Production". *Agriculture and Human Values* 43 (3): 116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-026-10917-2.

Skinner, Diane. 2013. "Foucault, Subjectivity and Ethics: Towards a Self-Forming Subject". *Organization* 20 (6): 904–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508412460419.

Stolze, Matthias, in Nicolas Lampkin. 2009. "Policy for Organic Farming: Rationale and Concepts". *Food Policy* 34 (3): 237–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2009.03.005.

Subedi, Yuba Raj, Paul Kristiansen, in Oscar Cacho. 2022. "Drivers and Consequences of Agricultural Land Abandonment and Its Reutilisation Pathways: A Systematic Review". *Environmental Development* 42 (6): 100681. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2021.100681.

Uggla, Ylva, in Linda Soneryd. 2017. "Zeleni guvernmentalitet, responsibilizacija i otpor: Kako međunarodni ekološki NVO-i vide budućnost energetske opskrbe i ublažavanja klimatskih promjena". *Socijalna ekologija* 26 (3): 87–104. https://doi.org/10.17234/SocEkol.26.3.2.

Uredba (EU) 2018/848 Evropskega parlamenta in Sveta z dne 30. maja 2018 o ekološki pridelavi in označevanju ekoloških proizvodov proizvodov ter razveljavitvi Uredbe Sveta (ES) št. 834/2007. 2018. Uradni list Evropske unije L 150, 14. junij 2018. https://eurlex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/848/oj?locale=sl.

Uredba o plačilih za okoljske in podnebne obveznosti ter naravne ali druge omejitve iz strateškega načrta skupne kmetijske politike 2023–2027. 2024. Sprejeta s strani Vlade Republike Slovenije, v veljavi od 6. aprila. https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=URED9052.

Van den Berg, Karijn. 2016. "Neoliberal Sustainability? The Biopolitical Dynamics of 'Green' Capitalism". *Transnational Institute*. https://www.tni.org/en/publication/neoliberal-sustainability-the-biopolitical-dynamics-of-green-capitalism.

Vezovnik, Andreja, Dora Matejak, in Tanja Kamin. 2022. "Etična potrošnja hrane kot oblika politične participacije mladih". V: *Politična participacija mladih onkraj volitev: konceptualni premisleki in izzivi proučevanja*, uredila Tomaž Pušnik in Marinko Banjac. Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV.

Youdelis, Megan. 2013. "The Competitive (Dis)Advantages of Ecotourism in Northern Thailand". *Geoforum* 50 (12): 161–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.09.007.

Zakon o kmetijstvu – ZKme-1. 2008. Sprejet s strani Državnega zbora Republike Slovenije, v veljavi od 24. aprila. http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO4716.

Zevnik Tomazin, Luka. 2025. "Governing the Responsible Self: EU Climate Policy and the Production of Green Subjectivities". *Teorija in praksa* 62 (2): 411–27.

BETWEEN GREEN RESPONSIBILITY AND MARKET RATIONALITY: ORGANIC FARMERS' SUBJECTIVITIES THROUGH A POLICY LENS

Abstract. *The article examines how the EU organic farming policy framework seeks to shape specific organic farmers' subjectivities, positioning environmental protection and economic profitability as their responsibilities. Using poststructural policy analysis, EU regulations, strategic documents and policy communication materials are examined, while to illustrate implementation of the EU rules in a member state Slovenian materials are included. The interplay of legislation, certification, oversight, subsidies and moral appeals is shown to constitute organic farmers as responsible green and economic subjects. Moreover, emphasis is given to how this political discourse generates contradictions in practice given that environmental objectives may be undermined in the pursuit of economic growth.*

Keywords: *organic policies, organic farmers, subjectivisation, responsibilisation.*

ISKANJE POLITIČNIH ALTERNATIV V DOBI (TEHNO)KAPITALIZMA

POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES IN THE ERA OF (TECHNO)CAPITALISM

Blaž VREČKO ILC*

GENERATIVE AI AS A SYMPTOM OF THE POLYCRISIS OF US DIGITAL CAPITALISM AND OF THE TRUMPIAN END-TIMES FASCISM**

Abstract. *The article critically interrogates why the build-out of generative "AI" in the ideological-material form it has taken in the USA can be viewed as symptomatic of the intensifying polycrisis of US digital capitalism and the US-led neo-imperial order. Employing a neo-Luddite-Marxist approach to analyse the technology of GenAI, first the eugenic-eschatological ideological underpinnings of it are examined, along with the central problematic, ecologically unsustainable technical characteristic of its development and functioning and the politico-economic conditions of its possibility which make it a symptom of the polycrisis. The second focus is the centrality of GenAI in digital capitalism's mutation to become an even more speculative, unsustainable, environment- and society-destructive, power-centralising and worker-exploiting form – 'Muskism', that is parasitically dependent on the US state. Finally, it tackles the role of GenAI in the implementation of the end-times fascist project of the second Trump Administration and its deliberate escalation of the polycrisis.*
Keywords: *AI, end-times fascism, digital capitalism, Muskism, Trump, polycrisis.*

INTRODUCTION

The article critically interrogates in what way the current generative AI[1] (GenAI) build-out, specifically in the dominant material-ideological form processes in the USA have taken, can be viewed as a symptomatic technology of the intensifying underlying polycrisis of (US) digital capitalism and the US-led

* Blaž Vrečko Ilc, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, blaz.ilc@fdv.uni-lj.si.
** Research article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.559

[1] The term "AI" – artificial intelligence – was and has always been used as an ideological instrument, a PR term that initially mystifies and attributes fantastical capabilities to existing or potential concrete technologies (Bender and Hana 2025).

neo-imperial order. Namely, a technology whose development, characteristics, framing, ideological mystification, utilisation and promotion may be seen as revealing not only of the undemocratic, power-centralising, exploitative, ecologically devastating capitalist technological development, but the fundamental issues and contradictions of the recent transformations of US digital capitalism and the US-led neo-imperial order that have intensified during the second Trump Administration. Concurrently, it reveals the inherently ecologically, socially, economically and politically destabilising nature of these transformations as well as the dangerous end-times fascist (Klein and Taylor, 2025) form of the capitalist system's reorganisation and re-stabilisation which the USA (and potentially other Western) capitalist-political elites are implementing in response to the escalating polycrisis. A crucial part of this response is the implementation of GenAI. Along with its symptomatic nature, the mass introduction of GenAI can also be seen as an accelerator in the guise of the solution to the crisis. Resistance to and refusal of the build-out may therefore be regarded as fundamental in political struggles for articulating and enacting visions of sustainable societal transformations able to successfully tackle the polycrisis.

Following Tooze (2022), the polycrisis refers to the various multidimensional crises that today determine the national and global socio-political and economic system. Although these crises are distinct, they reinforce and interlock with each other and cannot be attributed to a single cause, thus preventing a simple resolution to bring the system(s) back to a normal state. They range from ecological (the climate crisis endangering our ecological niche-extreme weather, pandemics, deteriorating living conditions, jeopardising our access to clear water and our food production), geopolitical (breakdown of the existing US/Western led international order, (proxy) wars, genocide(s)), political (crisis of political representation, rising authoritarianism, state (welfare) capacities), (geo)economic (trade-wars, protectionism, supply chain breakdown and fragility, stagnation, inflation), social (extreme wealth inequality) and epistemological ('alternative facts'). These crises have been heating up substantially and in recent years the global capitalist system has been considerably destabilised while all political projects seeking a return to stability have proven to be unsuccessful or even disastrous (e.g., the Biden administration). Crises of the system have become not just endless but are entering the dangerous territory of a potential cataclysm (see Malm and Carton 2024) and led to a desperate search and implementation of (quasi)-solutions.

In any event, these forms are shaped by the now-dominant form of capitalism: digital capitalism.

The latter is a variation of industrial neo-imperial capitalism, the highly productive albeit ecologically and socially unsustainable system, since it is premised on the imperative of continuous material growth and based on exploitation of the working classes by capitalists/corporations, state/corporate disciplining/oppressing of national and global marginalised communities, and the long-term

unfeasible extraction of natural resources, as well as market competition and specifically technological innovation to boost efficiency, productivity and cut (labour) costs. It is centred on computational technologies and their omnipresent nature for the functioning of the contemporary capitalist system. It is characterised by the tech-sector morphing into the main sector of the capitalist system (the commanding heights), its accumulation process, dynamism, innovation processes and investments, coupled with the material and ideological reproduction of class-society, including its political-ideological system by integrating its computational technologies into the way all spheres of capitalist societies generally function and by colonising visions of the future and, above all, legitimising and justifying the domestic and global asymmetrical power relations, exploitation of workers and marginalised communities, wealth inequality and influence of the capitalist classes on politics/policies (Bellamy Foster and McChesney 2014; Hočevar 2026; Pušnik and Čehovin 2026; Rikap 2026). It has been essential for the exercise of US capitalist and biopolitical state power in surveilling, policing, disciplining and regulating the national body politic, in tackling internal and external threats to the established order, and its global pre-eminence in the neo-imperial system. The latter is the iteration found today of European modern imperialism and its hierarchical, highly exploitative and extracting global structures and relationships that while having been reorganised (although not abolished) in the postcolonial context are still continuously transferring wealth from the Majority world to the West and devastating the environment (Patel and Moore 2017).

A succession of problematic responses to the inherent capitalist contradiction have in the mentioned context taken the form of a destructive Trumpian fascist political project paired with destructive politico-economic transformations and featuring a destructive technology framed as a 'magical' solution to the polycrisis, namely GenAI (Hao 2025, Harris 2023, Sadowski 2025).

Due to the USA's power in the global system and the dominance of its corporations, these 'solutions' have left a mark on other societies, forcing them to follow a similar problematic path of techno-political development (Blix and Glimmer 2025). The hype surrounding GenAI since late 2022 (when Open AI's chatbot Chat GPT was launched) heavily promoted by US Big Tech (Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Meta, NVIDIA) and US frontier labs (Open AI, Anthropic) in collaboration with uncritical media, academic and research institutions, politicians and governments has been extremely effective in convincing people that this technology is revolutionary, all-powerful, highly beneficial, democratising, empowering, and useful for tackling all kinds of issues, including the polycrisis itself (Blix and Glimmer 2025; Hao 2025; Hanna and Bender 2025). Even though the "AI"-hype has clouded the public's critical perception and obfuscated the issues associated with the build-out of GenAI, it has faced ever stronger opposition, notably in the USA. Citizens, workers, communities and students count among the pioneers in resisting GenAI and its undemocratic forced insertion into everyday lives.

This has put somewhat of a dent in the "AI" hype and shown that the issue holds the potential to bring people from various political cleavages together (Merchant 2026; Taylor and Levin 2026).[2] Resistance to data centres has become an important context of formulating and acting on experiential insights concerning the detrimental effects of the mass introduction of GenAI. The fact is that local experiential insights and struggles and a critical focus solely on the local context and insertion of data centres can only partly address the truly systemic, global and fundamental multidimensional issues raised by the forced arrival of GenAI, and reveal that it is a symptom of the growing polycrisis of the capitalist order today and the existential need for digital capitalism and the neo-imperial system to be generally reorganised and transformed into an ecologically and socially sustainable democratic social form, which must include a democratic transformation of the way technologies are developed and implemented.

This article intends to address this lacuna and offer a comprehensive critical interrogation of GenAI, considering the rich, multifaceted criticisms of its various problematic dimensions that have yet to be addressed in a productive synthesis able to provide a critical opening for resisting the unsustainable order these days and formulating alternative sustainable visions of present and future technological and socio-political development. To address this technology and its symptomatic nature, we employ a neo-Luddite-Marxist analytical approach[3] drawing on several scholars (Mao 2023; McQuillan 2023; Merchant 2023; Sadowski 2025) and enhanced with Foucault's (2003) views on biopolitics. The mentioned approach enables us to analyse GenAI as a capitalist technology which is inherently political tied to specific politico-economic and ideological conditions of possibility, and to the particular choices made by capitalists/developers. Namely, a technology: that is not inevitable and has specific imperatives and logic inherent to it; is tied to and expands the asymmetrical relations of power between capitalists and workers, which are built on the industrial capitalist logic of automation, the greater exploitation of workers and other resources, and further accumulation; used as a weapon in the class struggle by capitalists to dominate and frighten workers; which relies on the capitalist state for support and (non-)regulation; and is specifically useful for the biopolitical dimension of the capitalist state in regulating, disciplining and discriminating, as well as categorising (parts of) populations as abnormal and privileging and nurturing 'normal'. A technology that is compatible with the Trumpian end-times fascist political project striving to (re)order socio-political-economic relations, institutions and structures for its own brutal strategic ends. A technology which is becoming integral to all three dimensions of capitalist power: ideological (frames, visions, notions to understand and act in the world); economic (structuring the conditions of life and its

[2] According to survey done by Heatmap in June 2026, at least 70% of Americans would oppose a data centre being built near their home. https://heatmap.news/politics/americans-oppose-data-centers-poll, 13. July 2026.

[3] For a more comprehensive elaboration of the framework, see Vrečko Ilc (2025).

reproduction); and repressive (disciplining, punishing, excluding) (Mau 2023). And finally a technology which is symptomatic of the ultimately destabilising crises amplifying the politico-economic, social and political transformations and constitutive contradictions of contemporary capitalism.

In this context, we critically reflect on issues underlying the dominant ideologies of developers, the computer engineers, the 'storm-troopers' of digital capitalism, and the form which the development of GenAI has assumed, the technical characteristics that make it problematic and both a symptom and accelerant of the polycrisis. We proceed by analysing how GenAI can be understood as a symptom of the problematic developments of digital capitalism and its latest mutation into Muskism (Slobodian and Tarnoff 2026) and the way it relates to intensification of the politico-economic crisis and the further consolidation and concentration of power by the techno-oligarchy (Big Tech and the techno-oligarchs). At the end of the article, we focus on the centrality of the development, implementation and utilisation of GenAI in the context of the Trumpian end-times fascism, a novel form of fascism whose relations with historical forms are specifically addressed.

THE CENTRAL IDEOLOGICAL, TECHNICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES OF THE DOMINANT MODELS OF GENAI

In our critical reflection of the dominant form of GenAI and its forced emergence as a symptomatic technology of the intensifying polycrisis, we must first address the most fundamental level of GenAI's development. We accordingly start with the developers, the engineers, the frontier labs (Open AI and Anthropic), the main 'storm-troopers' of digital capitalism, neo-imperialism and eugenic biopolitics (see Harris 2023). It is the beliefs held by this group that largely frame how the public and the capitalist elites understand the technology. This group has set the tone and path of "AI" development and the manner in which it is regulated by states and international institutions. Their ideological framework and particular decisions regarding the development of GenAI are highly problematic and contrary to the existential need to make the capitalist system more sustainable (Hao 2025). Their ideology is a mix of older techno-deterministic, utopian and solution-minded thinking, which imagines technological development as transcendent and inevitable. That is to say, as a process that should not be regulated by the public and the state and instead should be left to those that develop these technologies – the engineers – which obfuscates the crucial ways that development of GenAI has been directed via the multiple choices made by its developers according to their interests and beliefs (Blix and Glimmer 2025). The beliefs which guided their choices have been linked to problematic initial conceptualisations of the "AI" field and the particular newer conceptualisations of GenAI tied to specific politico-religious ideologies. The initial ideological framing commenced from dubious biopolitical eugenic-inspired propositions that intelligence can easily be defined and can be quantified, that objective hierarchies

of intelligence (normal/abnormal) exist, and that it can be re-created artificially using mathematical (statistical-predictive) models. It presupposed that all the secrets to human learning have been discovered, that this can be replicated via computers and that algorithmic models will be able to mimic human (the white, heterosexual, wealthy Western 'norm') behaviour and thought perfectly, which will permit them to be used in automating decision-making.[4] Such assumptions are the basis of all dubious research by developers/frontier labs into how "AI" systems are revolutionary technologies that will automate everything without any deep knowledge concerning the jobs and tasks these systems are meant to automate/replace (Bender and Hanna 2025).

More recently, developers of AI have started being drawn to the TESCREAL (Transhumanism, Extropianism, Cosmism, Rationalism, Effective Altruism and Longtermism) ideologies for which effective altruism and its offshoot long-termism play a crucial role among GenAI developers (Gebru and Torres 2024). Long-termism begins with the 'realisation' that humanity is at the crossroads of either self-destruction or a glorious future, and that priority should be given to the continued existence of human civilisation and tackling of existential risks. "AI" unaligned with proper human values is established to fall among the central existential risks. This is the origin of contemporary "AI" doomerism and "AI" developers' eschatological thinking about "AI" and their zealot-like belief in their divine role to create an artificial god so as to prevent the end of humanity and/or establish conditions for the future flourishing of trillions of (digital) humans. The described framework enables "AI" developers to either disregard the present human suffering, discriminations, exploitations, inequalities and existential climate/ecological crisis, or to frame it as secondary and non-existential. It allows them to promote the further development of GenAI as "existential" and disregard their negative ecological and wider social, economic and political effects. It leads to the justification of utilising the existing exploitative structures to further intensify inequality and hierarchies as the developers (and techno-oligarchs e.g. Musk) also implicitly perceive themselves to be superior humans. The quest to develop artificial general intelligence (AGI) is a materialised expression of these problematic contradictory beliefs whereby "AI" is the panacea to all issues while also being viewed as a supreme existential risk (Merchant 2026; Bender and Hanna 2025; Marx 2026).

Still, the form taken on by this project – generative "AI" based on LLMs – that requires enormous resources for its development and functioning based on the principle of 'bigger is better', enormous computational requirements, and the ruthless appropriation of digital commons and copyrighted material, is the outcome of specific decisions made by main engineers in the frontier labs, the demands of their investors, and the imperatives and logic of digital capitalism.

[4] See the proposal establishing the field of "AI" by McCarthy et al. 1955. https://docslib.org/doc/1464005/1956-dartmouth-summer-research-project-on-artificial-intelligence, 24. August 2026.

It has been a process subject to the existing asymmetrical power structures in digital capitalism where the incumbent US tech giants reign supreme. It has been the techno-oligarchy[5] (Microsoft, Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Nvidia) that has enabled the development of models by the frontier labs (Open AI, Anthropic) by providing most of the financing and computational cloud infrastructure in the areas of initial training and inference. Framing frontier labs as disruptors of the existing power relations is misleading (Hao 2025). It has also been the imperative of digital capitalism closely connected with the modern privatised, commodified and centralised Internet that has conditioned the development of the chosen models; namely, the imperative of the general surveillance of users via the continuous creation, gathering, categorising and analysing of enormous amounts of data (Brevini 2022; Taylor 2020). Issues with the models selected also lie in their technological characteristics, development, functioning, and actual capabilities and limitations.

Gen AI is a sub-form of "AI" whose primary function is to automate specific tasks from decision-making, classification, recommendation, translation to text, image, and sound generation. The Gen AI or LLMs dominant today are complex pattern-matching models based on "deep learning" that became possible in the 2010s when massive amounts of data and computational power were available due to falling microchip prices and the widespread use of a few centralised digital platforms. LLMs are a network of complex supervised machine-learning algorithms called "neural nets" trained on massive data sets which permit them to predict specific statistical relations between words and give specific connections relative weight or strength based on the probabilities derived from data sets (Bender and Hana 2025). The huge data sets involved mean models produce texts that are plausible, yet should not be mistaken for them having understanding, autonomy and cognition. They are statistical machines running on probability and do not have any conception of reality, truth or the world. Chatbots based on LLMs turn the question into tokens, numerical points of reference, that in turn produce an answer, a probabilistic response which mimics natural language. However, the fact they produce plausible responses convinces many users[6] to attribute human intelligence and cognition to the machine, namely, the "Eliza effect" first observed by the developer of the first chatbot (Eliza) Joseph Weizenbaum (Tarnoff 2023). The mentioned effect is even more pronounced today. Contemporary chatbots (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini), whose user interface follows a dark pattern design, are intentionally tailored to fool people that the machine is thinking while writing responses to prompts (e.g., responses being 'written' gradually, use of the personal pronoun I). The underlying probabilistic nature of

[5] The US techno-oligarchy is the product of digital capitalism and the unprecedented contemporary power of US Big Tech not just to dominate the economic sphere but to directly influence politics and policies (see Vrečko Ilc 2025).

[6] Crucial "AI" scientists have fallen for it, e.g. Ilya Sutskever (chief scientist at Open AI) and Geoffrey Hinton ("the godfather of "AI"") (see Weahterby 2026).

LLMs means they make errors usually termed hallucinations inevitable, which is a problematic form of anthropomorphism prevalent while talking about "AI" (Hicks et al. 2024). This fundamental issue cannot be solved regardless of the size of datasets and the complexity of the training. Even so-called reasoning models or "AI" agents are just more complex LLM models (Bender and Hana 2025). They are "stochastic" parrots that mimic human language, images, sounds or videos (Bender et al. 2021).

Nevertheless, these problems pale in comparison to the issues their characteristics, development and broad implementation pose to our capabilities to tackle the polycrisis. The developers of GenAI systems are trapped in their own fantasies, in an unwinnable race towards creating AGI and promoting GenAI for a myriad of tasks that gives them prestige, influence, power and (potential) wealth (Blix and Glimmer 2025). This situation forces them to develop ever more complex models that only incrementally improve on previous ones, yet require an exponentially growing amount of data and computational capabilities that depend on the ever greater expansion of massive hyper-scale data centres. Each successive model produces more emissions, pollution and ecological degradation while contributing to the worsening of the climate and ecological crisis (Hao 2025). This is either obfuscated by developers or dismissed as unimportant by either implicitly following the long-termist ideology where the crisis is not regarded as existential or by promoting the ecomodernist/techno-solutionist fantasy that AGI will solve the climate crisis by itself (Joshi 2026).

Moreover, the day-to-day operation of each successive GenAI model is more costly than its predecessors and the practices of those developing the foundational models to hide the true costs of their operation from the end-users (consumers and businesses) and investors was the *modus operandi* from the outset of the "AI" hype.

By promoting absolutely unnecessary implementations of GenAI in various settings and their use by common people for their everyday online activities, searches, reliable information, and companionship, "AI" developers have co-created the conditions of constantly rising financial losses (Hao 2025; Zitron 2026b).

Even more importantly, they have intensified the trend of the general worsening of the open-web by automating the production of "AI" slop (synthetic text, video, music) that is polluting online entertainment and information ecosystems, making various web-service and software generally worsen by either pushing gen AI (e.g., Microsoft) in all parts of the products or vibe-coding software, which is inherently unstable and produces code that human programmers find hard to understand (Anderson et al. 2025; Zitron 2025). They have helped to create the conditions which have contributed substantially to the deterioration of various creative professions (artists, musicians) and are adding to their material precarity. GenAI has not been a tool of empowerment, democratisation and creativity. Instead, it is a system of devaluing certain work and skills, producing mediocre/average content, and fooling people to cut crucial corners in their education,

training, and personal development. They have had a generally negative effect on people's critical and cognitive skills, hindering their development and precipitating their decay and atrophy, while also producing various levels of "AI" psychosis. From the offloading of a person's cognitive functions (thinking) to GenAI and considering it as a neutral, objective source of knowledge and information, to mistaking prompting with actual artistic skills, to developing a pseudo-personal relationship (love) with a chatbot, which has led to either personal societal isolation, divorce, suicide and murder. The unwillingness of "AI" developers to be accountable sheds light on their self-perception as zealots of what is inevitable technological development and as cognitive elites above common people and experts from other fields (Bender and Hana 2025; Hao 2025; Zitron 2026b).

Another issue with the development of GenAI is the massive training data sets, their collection, tagging and characteristics. The latter impact the way models generate texts, whereas the issue of tagging combined with the required practice of "reinforced learning" performed by human labour also raises the question of the (super)exploitation of mostly hidden non-Western workers. The big issue with the huge data sets is the non-transparent collection, drawing from the open web and blatantly disregarding and breaching intellectual property rights (Bender et al. 2021). The dominant paradigm behind the creation of massive data sets is 'biggest amount of data at the lowest cost' coupled with the notion of tech-exceptionalism which supposedly shields developers from the repercussions of their unethical data-gathering practices. Datasets are collected using automated we techno-oligarchy b-crawlers that gather massive amounts of data, texts, videos, music, some of which are protected by intellectual property laws. These undocumented data sets therefore include materials by artist, writers, musicians that should have the right to demand compensation and their removal from the data sets. Not only is GenAI destroying their livelihood, but GenAI models are able to produce results based exclusively on stolen IP. Here the issue is not just that the whole GenAI technology relies on its developers being able to appropriate vast amounts of IP, but that according to their own analysis paying appropriate rates for IP would make the already nonsensical economics of GenAI completely unsustainable (Hao 2025).

As concerns the development of digital capitalism, it is also a clear instance of hypocrisy as today's oligopolies of the techno-oligarchy arose by crushing competitors and freedom of users by brutally wielding their IP as a weapon with the complete support of the US state (and other Western states, including the EU). Yet there is another even more existential issue to be considered; namely, that by destroying the livelihoods of those who have hitherto produced "data" and enabling the hyper-production of generated media, GenAI developers are also destroying the condition of the possibility to be able to train future models with human-made data (Bender and Hana 2025). The now massive prevalence of "AI" slop which already represents 35% of all web pages (Dolezal et al. 2026) leads to the inevitable danger of gen AI models collapsing due to being fed only

AI-generated data full of errors, factual mistakes, and nonsensical formulations (Blix and Glimmer 2025).

Among the key reasons that GenAI models can produce highly problematic socio-political effects, especially for historically marginalised communities, one can find the massive non-transparent data sets. Despite their size, these data sets are not diverse because in them hegemonic viewpoints are over-represented, as in those which justify and legitimise the existing capitalist neo-imperial biopolitical status quo, including implicit sexist/racist/ableist hierarchies. Specifically popular sites with masses of incoming and outgoing links (e.g., Reddit, Wikipedia) and mainstream media sites have been given preference. Since users are made to believe that chatbots produce neutral and objective information, this unavoidably results in strengthening the hegemonic ideological frameworks and rationalising exploitation, exclusion, violence, discrimination and privileging on the national and global levels. These datasets hence include and consolidate various biases as hegemonic views (Bender et al. 2021).

GENAI AND THE PROBLEMATIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF DIGITAL CAPITALISM

From the position of the digital-capitalist elites and Big Tech, the chosen model of GenAI was the best suited for further consolidating their power in digital capitalism as it emerges at home and abroad. The fact these models are predicated on massive unprecedentedly large capital investments, enormous datasets, extreme ever-growing computational requirements, massive labour resources and complex supply chains enabled and secured via the US-led neo-imperial system, and captured or supportive state regulatory and juridical institutions means US Big tech had an almost unfair advantage unassailable advantage against any competition (see Harris 2023).

The "AI" hype and boom is a project of continuing to expand the centrality of the tech sector to hyper-financialised contemporary capitalism with the goal to become the ultimate centre of speculative and long-term investment, the ultimate centre of value-creation, the most essential economic sector, which must be upheld as the sole engine of economic growth and unconditionally/uncritically supported given that related crisis would spell doom for the US economy. In this undertaking, the techno-oligarchy has been extremely successful by making the stock market very dependent on Big Tech, especially those corporations at the core of "AI" hype-making, the GPU (graphics processing unit) maker NVIDIA which supplies the most advanced chips to meet the computational requirements of GenAI, the company with the highest market capitalisation in history[7], with other Big Tech companies (Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon etc.) not far behind (Hao 2025; Rikap 2026; Zitron 2026a).

[7] As of June, it had a market capitalisation of USD 4.9 trillion, which is bigger than the GDP of any EU member and represents a substantial part of US GDP of USD 32 trillion.

In additional, the capital investments in GenAI infrastructure have arguably contributed the most to the growth of the US economy, without which it would have stagnated. Further, the various investment institutions (including the primary actors in the field of directing technological development, the venture capitalists) have substantially refocused their investments to financing the development of GenAI. The build-out of GenAI infrastructure is more and more dependent on being financed by way of debt and speculative financial instruments. This "AI" boom features all the characteristics of a destructive massive bubble, a massive misallocation of capital in the search for hypothetical profits tied to "next industrial revolution" fantasy created and maintained by the "AI" hype (Nersisyan and Wray 2026; Zitron 2026a).

The hopes of the financial markets, Big Tech and private investors rest on a technology which is costly, inefficient, uses colossal amounts of resources, depends on omnipresent infrastructure and whose implementation and functioning is heavily subsidised to hide its true costs, and which performs designated tasks with a high level of unpredictability/errors. In the present political economy of "AI", only those that provide the hardware (e.g., NVIDIA, Samsung, SK Hynix, Micron) profit from it. Parallel to this, those actually developing the models and enabling them to infer quicker and more accurately (OpenAI, Anthropic, Microsoft, Google, and data centre providers) are losing enormous sums of money because the costs are not being covered by what they can charge to use these models, making them existentially reliant on continuous investments from private funds or the transfer of profits from other parts of the business. These facts are not only continuously obfuscated in the revenue reports these firms provide about gen AI that hide the true costs involved, and uncritical media reporting and the celebration of their 'successes' according to the financial markets, but also via dubious circular (Ponzi) financing provided by NVIDIA to firms buying its hardware for building out the needed data centres and via fantasy-laden contracts between various data centre providers and frontier model developers (e.g., the OpenAI-Oracle "deal") (Nersisyan and Wray 2026; Zitron 2026a). This has led to a hyper-speculative environment disconnected from material facts and reliant on expectations of never-ending growth and profits on the basis of a fantasy. The latter is continuously reinvigorated by successive PR stunts whenever a new frontier model is launched and another round of financing is necessary, which seamlessly embroil "AI" doomerism and hype in a mishmash of overblown claims about impending AGI and/or doom (e.g.,the end of cybersecurity) and proclamations of a revolution in a specific field (e.g., coding). Such Teflon-like ideological mystification of each model that emerges is unprecedented concerning the hype-shortened timeframes between these proclamations, and can be viewed as a simultaneous sign of desperation and an effort to consolidate the privileged positions held by the frontier labs in the ever more unstable and contingent context of digital capitalism amid the polycrisis (Hao 2025).

The level of financial speculation has reached worrying levels regarding the stability of the political economy and may be seen as combining the problematic characteristics which led to the dot.com crash in 2001 and the global financial crisis in 2008. While the latter is mirrored in the problematic debt financing of the GenAI build-out where dubious financial instruments are being used which have similarly fantastic collateral as the collateral debt obligations (CDOs) that combined and turned subprime mortgages into supposedly stable investments. For instance, Coreweave, one of the biggest buyers of NVIDIA GPUs which rents them to frontier labs, has begun to finance its investments in GPUs with financial instruments secured by the very same GPUs. This is ludicrous given that the price of the old GPUs has historically never increased since they are inevitably depreciating and becoming obsolescent following the production of newer, more capable chips. The systemically dangerous nature of this instrument is that the rating agencies have (similarly to the CDOs) graded this investment instrument as highly stable, thereby establishing it as safe to be traded on secondary financial markets. It has thus become classified as a safe investment for institutional investors (also pension funds), in turn opening the door to global financial contamination where most investors are being pulled into this hype-speculative mass introduction of GenAI irrespective of whether they have invested in tech-sector stocks (see Ji 2026; Willson Turner 2026).

"AI" hype also shares two major characteristics with the dot.com bubble: the fantasy of a technological revolution that will upend the nature of the capitalist economy, and the hugely costly digital infrastructure build-out. Still, the extent and ramifications today are more extreme and should be seen against the backdrop of the intensifying polycrisis to which they have started to substantially contribute. Concerning the fantasy of the technological revolution of the capitalist economy, the "AI" hype/psychosis is even more extreme since the tech-oligarchy and capitalist classes see "AI" as fulfilling the fantasy of capitalist industrial automation. "AI" is framed as a (potential) perpetual value-making machine able to replace human labour even in white-collar professions, while cutting costs and making capitalist accumulation faster and more profitable. It supposedly upends the labour-theory of value on which capitalism rests whereby value is created via human labour and depends on natural resources. The described fantasy of contemporary capitalists and managers either removes workers or make them even more subservient, disempowered, and subjugated to the whims of capitalists and "AI" systems. The latter are framed as permitting a massive reduction of labour costs by making workers less necessary. This fantasy has proven useful for capitalists in extending their power and disciplining workers to accept worse working conditions, lower autonomy, more surveillance and worse pay due to the fear it generates among the working classes (Merchant 2023; Sadowski 2025). Layoffs, and the threat thereof, are having a destabilising effect on the economy and social cohesion, deepening inequalities, eroding the legitimacy of the system while fomenting despair, disillusion and anger of the

majority of society by destroying livelihoods and consumer spending of the masses (Hao 2025). It makes the K-shape form of modern political economy even more extreme whereby as the economy as a whole is ever more catering solely to the top 10% in wealth as they increasingly represent the only relevant consumer group and the sole group to benefit from economic growth, which beings about further destabilisation of a system already facing a systemic crisis (Blakely 2026; McGuigan and Manzerolle 2026).

However, the fantasy of capitalists and management of the GenAI automation of almost all types of white-collar work via the uncritical general implementing of GenAI systems into the workflows of corporations and other organisations has created several issues that ultimately are destabilising these institutions, have compromised their services and products, and contributed to the potential destruction of their knowledge and skills base they depend on for their functioning and development. These systems cannot reliably do tasks and properly replace workers because some foundational yet not clearly perceived job-tasks cannot be done using automation. They are prone to errors and lead to deskilling, knowledge decay, cognitive decline, and the decline of the critical-thinking skills needed to properly understand issues and solve them appropriately. In many fields, this could be foundationally dangerous (Bender and Hanna 2025; Hao 2025).

There is also the pressing issue of the actual costs of GenAI in work-flows given that the cost of making foundational models able to infer is rising and the outlook for a return on investment is bleak if the providers of GenAI do not massively subsidise its use. If and when these companies charge the actual cost of inference, the economics for the businesses buying these services falls apart (see Keary 2026; Zitron 2026b).

The GenAI automation fantasy is not simply dangerous for workers, but also for the capitalist classes, corporations and other organisations as it produces in these elites a form of "AI" psychosis able to override the concrete proof of the many issues "AI" cannot resolve. Extreme wishful thinking is paired with historical revisionism, which leads them to believe GenAI will get infinitely better and cheaper, and overcome its foundational flaws. The outcome is the irrational implementation of Gen AI in the business operations of various corporations, together with making GenAI the core of activities, products and their development (Hao 2025; Zitron 2026a). A case in point is all the Big Tech corporations going all-in, notwithstanding the clear failures (e.g., the disaster of Amazon implementation its vibe code; see Robinson 2026).

The massive infrastructure build-out GenAI relies on is the second major similarity with the dot.com bubble. Yet, there is a vital distinction that renders this build-out substantially more impactful for the wider political economy, societies, communities and ecosystems. It is inextricably tied to the general transformation of the tech-sector in the sense of the total focus on GenAI which has completely overridden its other declarative priorities, including its explicit

commitment to tackling the climate crisis, and created the conditions for its further intensification and the polycrisis generally. The dominant models require extreme computational capacities not just for their development but for their operation, and such requirements are growing exponentially with newer, more demanding frontier models (Bender and Hanna 2025; Hao 2025). This has precipitated the growth of the hyper-scale data centres that form the backbone of GenAI infrastructure. The (planned) build-out has due to their sheer size and resource requirements transformed the wider tech-sector. It precipitated the pivoting of computer hardware manufacturers (microchips and memory) to focus almost exclusively on this novel lucrative market containing very few central buyers but high profit margins. This led to the further consolidation of oligopolies and the monopoly/monopsony power of the crucial GPU producer NVIDIA, and has already destabilised the consumer computer market with rising prices for essential components (RAM, memory, CPU/GPUs) (see Burke 2026).

More importantly, however, it has caused the rapid development and expansion of the production of the most advanced GPUs and memory for the numerous server racks providing the computational backbone of hyper-scale data centres. The production of these is highly toxic and linked to substantial pollution since more advanced chips require more harmful chemicals to produce them, while their production is also more energy-intensive and water-consuming. This is directly connected to higher fossil fuel emissions as almost all advanced GPUs are built by TSMC in Taiwan, which produces most of its energy using fossil fuels. The intensified mining of crucial minerals in economically devastated areas of the Majority world is also adding to environmental degradation and tied to greater exploitation and intensified conflicts over who controls the mines, in turn increasing the harm to local communities (Brevini 2022).

Still, the most massive environmental impact of the gen AI build-out is tied to the hyper-scale data centres and their functioning. These massive sets of buildings which house over 5,000 server racks and require more than 1,000 MW of electricity to run and substantial water resources to cool are a huge burden on the local and global environment and have begun to contribute to the intensification of the climate/environmental dimension of the polycrisis. Their construction and operation is polluting local environments and considerably harming local communities health-wise (including noise pollution), while also producing a negative impact on the electrical grid and scarce local water sources as they require clean water to cool the sensitive equipment. Their enormous electricity requirements put a strain on existing networks and their operation has led to higher electricity prices and unstable provision of electricity for local communities, at the same time as hindering the decarbonisation efforts since most of the new demand for electricity is being met with fossil-fuel power stations (and on-site diesel generators) and their expansion. This creates a negative impact on decarbonisation efforts. These centres are also mainly erected in historically

marginalised communities as they are deemed to be less capable to resist their arrival build-out (Hao 2025; Merchant 2026; Joshi 2026).

The unsustainable and undemocratic build-out has been accompanied by a radical rearticulation of the stated goals and priorities of the tech sector concerning the climate crisis. Big Tech has started to distance itself from the environmental pledges they made in the past and to systematically minimise the existential risks associated with the worsening of the climate crisis. Before the "AI" hype, the tech sector and its paradigm of the general digitalisation of life was promoted as a vital part of the green transition as the extensive digital infrastructure has been successfully obfuscated and made immaterial through the very successful metaphor of the "cloud" (connected to nature) (Kim 2023). It was also just prior to the GenAI hype when the hyperscalers (Microsoft, Google, Amazon) made public commitments to cut their emissions, resource use and increase their investments in 'green' technologies. The GenAI hype has been a mask-off moment for the tech sector because no longer could its negative environmental impact be concealed (Dawson 2025). Even though most Big Tech activities regarding the green transition have had a limited positive impact and their policies were largely sophisticated 'green-washing' operations, their superficial championing of sustainability should not be underestimated in the struggle against the climate crisis (Kim 2023). This is especially when one considers their central role in digital capitalism, their power and influence on wider society, politics and policies locally and globally, and their capabilities to colonise our minds with their visions of the future. The described ideological pivot that is tightly connected with Big Tech and the general tech-sector's material interests, the reality of its increased negative environmental impact, and the potential of stricter governmental regulation has made them substantially more 'natural' allies to the climate crisis denying right-wing political forces and among the crucial actors standing in the way of a more sustainable system.

Big Tech and the "AI" frontier labs have also reframed their previously complicate collaboration with the fossil-fuel industry as unproblematic as the latter industry reliably provides the energy needed to develop and power GenAI, this presumably revolutionary technology that is claimed to one day help humanity solve all its problems, including the climate crisis (Hao 2025).

There is another crucial problem with the hyper-scale data centres. This refers to the problem that in the event of an "AI" crash, it would be almost impossible to repurpose the infrastructure since it is tailored for the specific computational demands of GenAI, not for general applications, and as such is extremely costly to run and requires industrial levels of electricity and water use for cooling. The numerous advanced microchips involved also mean the hyper-scale data centres are prone to continuous technical failures, which add to their costs and lower their reliability (Hao 2025; Monroe 2026). Moreover, they are being erected on the premise that there will be strong demand for frontier models in the range of USD 150 billion a year, which would cover the construction costs, yet according

to the existing data this is highly unlikely (Zitron 2026b). This assists in understanding why the tech sector has linked its hyper-speculative investments and vision of the future to the neo-imperial geopolitical interests, aims and policies of the US state and Trumpian end times fascism.

THE PROBLEMATIC TRANSFORMATION OF THE TECH SECTOR–STATE RELATIONSHIP AND THE RISE OF MUSKISM

The origins of the US tech-sector are firmly connected with the US military-industrial complex, where the sector's growth and development have been fostered by US state's support. With the rise of sector as the central part of the domestic and global political economy, this connection has been kept out of the spotlight and framed as either unimportant or a hindrance to the sector's independence, innovation and its nominally progressive values (Levine 2019). The tech-sector has been promoted as a facilitator of emancipation, empowerment, democratic politics and as a supporter of liberal (centrist) politics. Nonetheless, the Biden Administration's pioneering policies to at least partially regulate it caused the predominant politics of the techno-oligarchy to turn to the far-right, where the once-extreme claim that the state should fuse with the tech-sector made by the techno-fascist element of the oligarchy represented by Peter Thiel and Alex Karp (founders of Palantir, the infamous data analytics firm) were becoming normalised and broadly adopted by the techno-oligarchs and Big Tech (Vrečko Ilc 2025; Jimenez 2026). The relationship between the US state under Trump and the tech-sector may be seen as symbiotic, even parasitic. The tech-sector is becoming ever more existentially dependent on the support of the US state at the same time as making the US state increasingly dependent on their continuous operation of its technological systems via their widespread government adoption (Slobodian and Tarnoff 2026). Big Tech and the "AI" labs have therefore massively expanded their sophisticated public influence operations and political lobbying efforts to curb opposition to this development and consolidate these relationships, this novel structure of interdependence, and novel state-dependent capitalist accumulation regime. They have recognised the essential role of politics in directing US policies (and those of other countries) to certain ideologically framed policy solutions encompassing their need for broad adoption, bare-minimum regulation, and the mystification of GenAI as being revolutionary, crucial and inevitable for re-establishing the economic dynamism of America and retaining its global supremacy. They have been able to capture the US political elites. In contrast, US public support has proven elusive as they have come under pressure following the negative effects of GenAI already seen for the country's society, local communities, and economy. The lion's share of the public has started to turn against them, with this being perceived as existentially dangerous for their control, power and influence (González 2026; Ongweso Jr. 2025).

Crushing the opposition to the GenAI build-out has surfaced as a primary aim of their political activities, which have become fundamentally aligned with the

end-times fascist politics of the Trump Administration that has been extremely supportive of the tech sector. The perceived threat of China to the USA's technological supremacy and its leadership, control and domination of the neo-imperial global system has been established geopolitically and geo-economically as the central organising rationality for the close collaboration of the US state and the techno-oligarchy. The latter has been able to achieve that the unobstructed, unregulated development of GenAI featuring extensive US state support has been adopted by the US government as existential for the USA's global power, the neo-imperial system it leads and the future survival of its liberal-democratic, representative capitalist system (Ongweso Jr. 2026; Klein and Taylor 2025). The anti-Chinese ideological framework that imagines China as the biggest strategic competitor and enemy of the USA, as a nefarious, world-dominating force, has become even more extreme with the adding of the GenAI dimension. Technological competition with China has been reframed as an existential struggle where the stakes could not be higher given that in an eschatological framing the development would bring about the end-of-days. Victory framed as 'the first to develop AGI' has been ideologically established as leading to total global domination by either the supposedly benevolent US-made technological god or the Chinese-made authoritarian, vengeful God non-aligned with human values. Thus, Big Tech and "AI" labs have been able to ideologically frame GenAI, in the unsustainable form found in the USA, as the last stage of the transcendent technological development. Stopping it and/or fundamentally changing its technological foundations is tantamount to accepting Chinese domination, general human decline, crisis, and the destruction of possible utopias (Aronoff 2025; Hao 2025).

In any event, the Trump–tech-sector collaboration was chiefly predicated on the specific politico-economic transformations of the US capitalist accumulation process tied to its general crisis. It is here that we can also identify the fundamental transformation of the politics of the techno-oligarchy, their alignment with far-right political forces and even their re-positioning as the core of the far-right coalition of the second Trump Administration and its end-times fascism (Vrečko Ilc 2025; Klein and Taylor 2025). The crisis of US political economy has provided the conditions for the creation of hyper-speculative unsustainable politico-economic projects personally associated with the founders of the frontier "AI" labs (e.g., Sam Altman – Open AI, Daro Amodei – Anthropic) and the leaders of Big Tech (e.g., Justin Wang – NVIDIA) who have established their own cults of personality as unmatched geniuses and visionaries and, regardless of their extremely dubious economics and problematic communities and environment-harming technology, framed their companies as extremely lucrative speculative investments and systemically important (Hao 2025).

Yet these process may be viewed as a subset of a more general phenomenon of a radical transformation of the US digital capitalism and its primary accumulation process, which Slobodian and Tarnoff (2026) label Muskism, referring to

how Elon Musk's (the end-times fascist, white supremacist, sexist, racist, eugenicist, white South-African immigrant) corporate policies, actions, visions and decisions and the development of his business is taken as paradigmatic for the novel accumulation regime. Its main characteristics namely align perfectly with the contemporary GenAI build-out and linked hype. This accumulation regime is premised on corporate-state symbiosis, anti-competitive pressure (destroying and excluding the competition), circular financing, and utilising a praetorian guard of investors that support particular companies unconditionally, along with a rabid cult following behind that serves as an online army of supporters to promote the founders' corporate narratives and their heroic efforts. These private companies and the US state have established some type of marriage, with the companies obtaining the status of systemic importance where the US state must support them and protect them at any cost. With Muskism, the American state is being used to further corporate interests, influence and apply pressure on foreign states, and generate profits as the companies sell their services directly to the state. It is the further development of digital capitalism's tendency for monopolisation. The major focus of corporations is on specific technological services holding the potential to become public infrastructure – strategically important technology. It is a reorientation towards an industrial policy of reshoring, the friend-shoring of production and its vertical integration with a view to establish secure supply chains and prevent supply shocks. Speculation is a feature of Muskism as the market valuation of companies is not connected to their material reality of existing and future revenue and profits and instead to the mystification of Musk personally and other founders as visionaries. It is predicated on investors and governments uncritically believing in the various exaggerations, fantasies and outright lies that have surfaced (Slobodian and Tarnoff 2026).

The above-mentioned is especially problematic because it enables enormous misallocations of funds to technologies which directly contribute to the growing polycrisis rather than investing in adaptation and mitigation policies to tackle it. Muskism establishes an unprecedented personal and corporate wealth inflation machinery, while simultaneously adding to the crisis of the wider economy for the majority of people. It should be seen as an expression of a radically intensifying class war of capitalists against workers and the rest of humanity, and a phenomenon complementing Trumpism as end-times fascism.

TRUMPIAN END-TIMES FASCISM AND THE CENTRALITY OF GENAI

Like Musk, Trump can be regarded as a personification of a specific structural transformations in the development of the US capitalist system in its political dimension, which since 2016 has been in a state of permanent crisis. Trump's second administration is a substantially more extreme and in parts a systematic far-right response to the polycrisis afflicting the USA and its global hegemony, which follows the failures of the centrist Biden Administration to reconsolidate order. It has proven to be considerably more destructive, repressive and efficient in

its violence, brutality, sadism and various authoritarian interventions in US society, the country's administrative, regulatory, welfare state, repressive apparatus, and political economy. It has also grown more extreme in ideological orientation and can generally be conceptualised as end-times fascism (Klein and Taylor 2026). The latter is a novel form of fascism, its ideological tenets and practices and organisational forms. It is a specific far-right capitalist political project that is a response to the multidimensional structural crisis of US capitalism, nation state, liberal democracy and the US-led neo-imperial regime. It is not antithetical to modern capitalist-imperialist structures (global capitalist system, nation state, exploited colonies), and instead is their extreme albeit logical development (Hočevar and Vrečko Ilc 2025). It is the result of the centrist elites' incapability to properly respond to the polycrisis, including their increasing reliance on fascistic policies (censorship, propaganda, anti-immigration policies, increased surveillance and repression of opposition) (Coeckelbergh 2026). It is not a response to strong proletarian movements but the decline of living conditions, growing inequality, the limited progressive social policies, and gains framed as a major cause of decline, the rise of global competitors (e.g., China, Russia) destabilising the neo-imperial order and global ecological crisis. It is centred on a charismatic leader (Trump), a cult of personality, quasi-anti-elitism and a mass movement (MAGA). Its success rests on its ability to form alliances with capitalist elites and other reactionary forces and to project their unmatched ability to defend, not overthrow, the existing system and its capitalist foundations, while dismantling the liberal-democratic representative institutions and legal protections linked to civic rights (Paxton 2004). It employs myths of a "golden past" of "historical greatness" and of present social decay, while articulating visions of the rebirth of Western civilisation and the nation where the body politic is strictly framed in a racist, patriarchal, misogynistic, heteronormative way through a white supremacist lens, utilising a biopolitical imagining of a nation as an organism under threat by internal and external dehumanised dangers, 'abnormals', who need to be violently repressed, excluded, subjugated and incarcerated, surveilled and disciplined and also executed if need be to 'purify' the nation. The black-brown-Islamic communities and immigrants, other marginalised communities (LBTQ) and leftists-progressives are described as 'abnormals', as anti-American. Rage against these groups is fostered by the end-times fascist elites by way of white victimhood whereby 'proper' white Americans are seen as victims of the welfare state and redistributive policies, as the only productive part of the society of 'woke' 'parasites' (McWhorter 2009). It is opposed to national and global solidarity and empathy, concentrates on dismantling the welfare state and is organised around violence, which is celebrated and enacted in a form of continuous spectacle and in the context of an expanding repressive state apparatus and violent rule-breaking foreign interventions. It is genocidal at its core and strives to enact an apartheid bunker state for the chosen and to reorganise the neo-imperial system to secure crucial resources to fuel and retain its military and technological

supremacy. It fetishises digital technologies which enable domination and power over individuals, communities, and is obsessed with control over fossil fuels and their expanded use. It imagines climate cataclysm as something to be provoked and planned for, not to be prevented. As such, its vision of national rebirth is limited and focused on giving its supporters sadistic pleasure derived from violence and chaos (Klein and Taylor; 2025; Falcon 2026). It represents a highly contradictory project to reorganise power domestically and globally in response to the domestic instability directly linked to developments in the political economy and globally to the incapability of the USA to militarily, economically and technologically subdue its geopolitical challengers and stabilise its hegemony over the neo-imperial system. Further, it represents a novel systemic fusion of authoritarian state power, spectacle, violence and cruelty along with organised greed that have transformed corruption into a paradigm of governing and as an aspirational framework for its supporters (Giroux 2026; McWhorter 2009). It reifies and the absolute primacy of self-interest, hyper-individualism, the commodification of everything, and ruthless competition for the spoils (Giroux 2026). This is inextricably connected with the expansion of societal surveillance, incarceration and deportation, and the simultaneous dismantling of the state's regulatory and administrative capacities and the life-sustaining structures and services for the majority of the US population (Klein and Taylor 2025).

Musk[8] has been a central influence on Trump's technological policies, above all those supporting the unregulated development of GenAI and its general implementation in the functioning of the US government to achieve the end-times fascist ends. Since Trump's inauguration, along with Musk, Big Tech and the "AI" labs have become vital partners of the administration. In turn, Trump's second administration has framed, promoted and implemented (Gen)AI as the central technological solution for achieving its manifold goals. The first policy was the gradual introduction of Stargate, a USD 500 billion GenAI infrastructure project structured as a public-private partnership with Microsoft, Nvidia, OpenAI and Oracle. It signalled the administration's complete support for the massive expansion of hyper-scale data centres to provide the needed computing power to train and operate GenAI. The project was ideologically presented as being similar in importance to the Manhattan Project as it supposedly will lead to the developing of AGI and beating China in this race, which is claimed to ensure the USA's global dominance (Gallagher 2026). The vast resource and energy demands of the hyper-scale data centres build-out has been aligned with Trumpism's commitment to accelerate the climate collapse. The climate crisis denialism has been super-charged with the supposed existential resource and energy needs of the tech sector that are claimed to only be provided by supporting the massive expansion of fossil-fuel production and electricity production by

[8] He contributed USD 300 million and provided a crucial social platform (X) to spread Trump's propaganda.

fossil-fuel-powered power plants. Trumpism has framed the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure as a threat, unable to provide the required electricity and as subverting the USA's power as a petro-state and 'AI-first' state (Ongweso Jr. 2026; Tooze 2026).

However, the end-stage fascist policies have gone substantially further, with the use of GenAI playing a central role. It was under the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), de-facto led by Elon Musk, that it was used to automatically identify all government programmes connected to tackling the climate crisis, including various agencies, research programmes, and policies, and infrastructure to observe, measure and analyse climate change and reduce or pull their funding, reduce/fire their staff, and systematically erase any mention of climate change on official government online repositories and webpages. The described actions have decimated the capabilities of the US state and scientific community to research and tackle the climate crisis as it reaches unprecedented levels (Merchant 2025).

DOGE's negative affect on the capacities of the US administrative and regulatory state has actually been substantially wider (Slobodian 2025). It imposed extensive layoffs of federal employees by using GenAI to determine if their work is necessary (by analysing their emails) and promoted implementation of error-prone GenAI automating systems that are meant to improve the efficiency of the federal government and limit autonomy, and by increasing surveillance and exploitation and instil fear into federal employees to make them docile and disciplined, and prevent administrative opposition to the Trumpian project (Merchant 2023, 2025). It has systematically undermined the state's capacities to address inequality, injustice and provide care and aid. DOGE's staff carried out its cuts based on broad, poorly defined criteria where everything deemed to be 'woke' and/or related to DEI policies was targeted. They fed these criteria into a GenAI chatbot and the results of their 'analyses' were used to determine where to make the cuts. GenAI has been at the centre of political justifications of the cuts since it was held to be a neutral tool. It has clearly demonstrated the affinity of Trumpism to harness GenAI biopolitically to automate austerity and erase policies, agencies and programmes it deems undesirable. It has implemented censorship and propaganda concerning historical and present wrongs, discrimination, the super-exploitation of marginalised communities at home and abroad, while also erasing references to scientific facts that go against the script (Slobodian 2025). DOGE and other agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have re-established a more brutal biopolitics whereby the scope of society to be cared for has been radically narrowed to a white, wealthy, male minority while the state has had its capacities to regulate the wealthy and businesses destroyed. DOGE's dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has already caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and is said to lead to the death of over 14 million people by 2030 (Cavalcanti et al. 2026; Feldscher 2025). The agency was providing medical provisions to various

distressed global populations, which was contrary to Musk's and Trump's war on solidarity, empathy, care and aid.

These processes were inextricably intertwined with the unprecedented expansion of the state's repressive apparatuses of surveillance, deportation and the incarceration dimension of the apartheid bunker state. Since immigration represents the central biopolitical "threat" to the "pure, white, proper" body politic (McWhorter 2009), the migration and border-related policing institutions have become the central repressive arms of Trumpism. The state of exception of the border area, where constitutionally protected civil rights have been suspended, has been generalised and now covers the whole territory of the USA. Under Trump's second administration, ICE has morphed into a major part of the repressive apparatus with a budget bigger than all other security-intelligence agencies combined, and a quasi-paramilitary force representing Trumpism, its interests and values (Aizeki 2026).

In its surveilling, identifying, locating, hunting of, incarcerating, deporting and killing of (il)legal immigrants, including those with US citizenship (and 'proper' US citizens who were protesting against the actions of ICE) and small children, ICE has normalised the disregard of civil rights such as privacy, freedom of movement, and due process. At the core of these operations has been the further expansion of various "AI" systems from classifying and predicting through to Gen AI. The main firm providing most of them is the infamous data-collecting, organising and analysing firm Palantir, owned and operated by the leading techno-fascists Peter Thiel[9] and Aleks Karp (2025), whose visions of total control and surveillance of a techno-authoritarian society defined by "superior Western values and civilisation" are in line with the end-stage fascist project of Trumpism. Palantir has been instrumental in supplying ICE with the technological capacities it needs to combine enormous databases and analyse various interconnections to produce and automate a never-ending stream of targets, namely, people (mis)classified (inevitable errors) as immigrants breaching immigration law. These technological capacities were substantially enhanced by the workings of DOGE as its illegal operations have destroyed any existing legally required separation of various government databases that have enabled (partial) privacy and curtailed the state's surveilling and controlling capabilities. A case in point being Palantir's ELITE programme designed for ICE (Cox, 2026).

The Palantir–ICE relationship may be seen as part of a highly dangerous mutation of the surveillance infrastructure that merges private and public technological capabilities of surveillance, control, analysis and the prediction and automation of these processes, where various "AI" systems are proliferating without any legal restrictions and regulations. To be clear, these processes did not commence under Trump II. They have gradually developed during the

[9] It must be noted that the vice president during Trump's second administration is J.D. Vance, a protege of Thiel.

several various past administrations since at least 2001 and the war on terror (see Bellamy Foster and McChesney 2014). Nevertheless, the GenAI hype combined with the end-stage fascist project has created the grounds for super-charging these processes, with "AI" hype having normalised the extensive use of "AI" systems, including the most dangerous kinds of 'predictive' policing. The tech-sector has been complicit in this development while its policies that have been undermining online privacy in the name of convenience and security in the last few decades (Levine 2019) have now transformed into an explicitly collaborative relationship with the repressive state apparatus during the second Trump Administration.

Expansion of the digital surveillance infrastructure attained the contours of a fascist police state with the adoption of national security directive NSPM7 (Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence)[10]. In the directive, Trump directs every national and state-level security agency to fight against leftist political violence in the USA. The dystopian nature of this directive is evident in the vague definition of "extreme" ideological positions ("anti-Americanism", "anti-capitalism", "anti-Christianity", "extremism" regarding migration, race and gender) that means basically any position left of Trumpist end-times fascism may be considered as extreme-left. By criminalising speech, the directive implicitly suspends the freedom of speech and the rights of citizens to politically mobilise, organise and protest (Klippenstein 2025).

One reason the Trumpian end-times fascist project must be understood in the context of the intensifying class war refers to the way the stated indicators of "radicalisation" have been expanded. In operationalising the directive, economic grievances have begun to be defined by security agencies as signs of a dangerous belief leading to terrorism (sic!). This reveals that in the setting of extreme wealth inequality, stagnating wages, generally deteriorating living conditions of most Americans, along with prominent murders of authority figures and CEOs, the US capitalist elites are already preparing to gear up to defend their wealth, power and influence with all means necessary, also encompassing brutal state oppression, mass surveillance, and control of the majority of the US population. With the rise of resistance to the widespread introduction of hyper-scale data centres, US security agencies have commenced labelling opposition to these centres (also "AI" scepticism) as anti-tech violent extremism (Boguslaw 2026).

The Trump Administration's crackdown on any opposition to GenAI can also be connected to its potential capabilities to establish unprecedented narrative control. The power to censor unwanted views, visions, interpretations and objective facts, and to surveil and gather users' most intimate personal data for possible use in systemic hyper-personalised propaganda (persuasion bombing) and indoctrination, to mis/dis-inform and create an alternative "reality" that

[10] https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/countering-domestic-terrorism-and-organized-political-violence/.

some believe is due to people regarding chatbot responses as objective and persuasive (Randazzo et al. 2025; Dupré 2025). The administration is even considering an ownership stake in "AI" labs (Open AI and Anthropic) to further expand the already extensive collaboration that thus far has included the development and implementation of military technologies. Utilisation of GenAI in the latter has already proven controversial in the case of the bombing of an Iranian girls' school during US/Israeli war on Iran. GenAI (Anthropic's Claude) was integrated into the military's existing "AI" system (Palantir's Maven Smart System – MSS) and employed for data analysis and the identification of military targets to speed up the kill chain and reduce accountability. Similarity with the way Israel's "AI" systems were used to enact the genocide against Palestinians is no coincidence. Israel was/is dependent on Palantir's (and Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Oracle's) digital infrastructure including the MSS (Akcan 2026). Trumpism has adopted the "AI" labs' framing of "AI" as a military game-changer (e.g., powering autonomous weapons), with which the USA will re-establish its technological and military supremacy. Tied to a paranoid fear of "AI" that has been systematically promoted by Anthropic and OpenAI, this hype has also prompted the administration to start to regulate the models somewhat (e.g., Anthropic's Mythos) in the name of national security (Hendrix 2026).

With the administration's *Pax Silica*[11] geopolitical imitative, GenAI has been established at the core of the project to secure the USA's global technological supremacy and reorganise its neo-imperial system as a narrower set of client countries[12] that are essential for its GenAI supply chain and need to be controlled via on- and friend-shoring. The strategic subordination of client states to the USA holds serious implications for intensification of the polycrisis. It means the countries included have their technological sovereignty radically limited when it comes to GenAI development since they must rely on the USA's technological stack, notably computation capabilities, and thus the central environmentally and socially unsustainable paradigm and form of US GenAI models (see Ongweso Jr. 2026). Such subordination makes their technological development even more dependent on oligopolistic US Big Tech and the neo-imperial and end-times fascistic policies of the US state.

[11] https://www.state.gov/pax-silica, 11. July 2026.

[12] The current members are Taiwan (GPUs), South Korea (RAM), Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands (lithography), the UK, Israel, the UAE, Qatar, India, Greece and Australia.

CONCLUSION

This article has looked at the crucial dimensions and issues that make the current Gen AI build-out, in the dominant material-ideological form these processes have taken in US digital capitalism and the wider US-led neo-imperial order, a symptom of the intensifying polycrisis of the capitalist system yet also an accelerator of it. In this context, we sought to comprehensively demystify GenAI in the sense of its non-inevitability, directed development, highly problematic eugenic and eschatological ideological underpinnings and technical characteristics, implementation and effects, capitalist conditions of possibility, together with the role it plays in the dangerous and highly problematic development of digital capitalism and this technology's alignment with far-right political projects. We described how GenAI has a central role in digital capitalism's mutation to become an even more highly speculative, planet-destroying, crisis-prone form of accumulation: Muskism. It is an extreme misallocation of capital at a time of escalating crises for a build-out that is already devastating local communities and the environment, shattering the green transition, intensifying financial speculation, contributing to further deterioration of the internet, coupled with deskilling and personal and collective psychosis. It also acts a weapon of intensifying the class war because it is used for automation, to (suboptimally) replace workers and increase their exploitation and lower their autonomy, while simultaneously destroying the digital commons, boosting surveillance and enhancing the capabilities of capitalists in the areas of censorship and propaganda. We also lifted the veil off the central role GenAI plays in the Trumpian end-times fascist project. The technology lends itself perfectly to these ends and the project itself is compatible and mutually dependent on the close collaboration of Trumpism with US Big Tech and the "AI" labs. We showed that GenAI has been crucial in various destructive and polycrisis-intensifying policies of Trumpism. Hence, the resistance to GenAI in its now-dominant form should be seen as the main basis for formulating and implementing alternative visions of a more sustainable, democratic, progressive and emancipatory order that would build on the notions of solidarity, care, mutual aid and empowerment of common citizens and humans generally. GenAI is not a technology of liberation and democratisation, it is not inevitable, and building an alternative vision of society could start – not end – with the opposition to the hyper-scale data centres. The latter has clearly demonstrated that the capitalist elites and US government are not all-powerful actors and that their visions of society, influence, domination and power are able to be contested (see Banjac 2026). However, true emancipation must include technological independence and emancipation from America's tech giants and be centred around redesigning the tech we use from the bottom-up with emancipation, privacy, empathy, solidarity, environmental sustainability, respect, care, and a democracy-first agenda, following the paradigm of disability studies – *nothing for us without us*.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new research data were generated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akcan, Irmak. 2026. "Palantir AI technologies used in Israeli attacks, say reports". *Anadolu*, 10 May. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/palantir-ai-technologies-used-in-israeli-attacks-say-reports/3933223.

Aizeki, Mizue. 2026. "Tech, War, and the Everywhere Border". *The Border Chronicle*, 5 June. https://www.theborderchronicle.com/tech-war-and-the-everywhere-border/.

Anderson, Edward, Geoffrey Parker, and Burcu Tan. 2025. "The Hidden Costs of Coding With Generative AI". *MIT Sloan Management Review* 67 (1).

Aronoff, Kate. 2025. "Why Tech Companies Are Joining the GOP-Oil Alliance". *The New Republic*, 14 February. https://newrepublic.com/article/191506/musk-bezos-pichai-zuckerberg-microsoft-trump-climate.

Bellamy Foster, John, and Robert McChesney. 2014. "Surveillance Capitalism: Monopoly-Finance Capital, the Military-Industrial Complex, and the Digital Age". *Monthly Review* 66 (3).

Banjac, Marinko. 2026. "The Digital Subject: Power(s) of Digital Order, Counter-Conduct, and Neo-Luddism" *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 653–80.

Bender, Emily, Timit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, A., and Shmargaret Shmitchell. 2021. "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?". Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, FAccT '21, 610–23.

Bender, Emily, and Alex Hanna. 2025. *The AI Con: How to Fight Big Tech's Hype and Create the Future We Want*. Harper.

Blakeley, Grace. 2026. "We're Missing the Recession Signals in the AI Noise". Substack newsletter. *Grace Blakeley.subtrack*. https://graceblakeley.substack.com/archive.

Blix, Hagen, and Ingeborg Glimmer. 2025. *Why We Fear AI: On the Interpretation of Nightmares*. Common Notions.

Boguslaw, David. 2026. "US Law Enforcement Warns of 'Anti-Tech Extremism' as AI Hatred Grows". *Wired*, 26 May. https://www.wired.com/story/us-law-enforcement-warns-of-anti-tech-extremism/.

Brevini, Benedetta. 2022. *Is AI Good for the Planet?* Polity Press.

Burke, Steve. 2026. "COLLAPSE of Personal Computing | Investigation into the Destruction of Ownership". *YouTube: Gamers Nexus*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyQwAhppWj8.

Cavalcanti, Daniella Medeiros, Lucas de Oliveira Ferreira de Sales, Andrea Ferreira da Silva, et al. 2025. "Evaluating the Impact of Two Decades of USAID Interventions and Projecting the Effects of Defunding on Mortality up to 2030: A Retrospective Impact Evaluation and Forecasting Analysis." *The Lancet* 406 (10500): 283–94.

Cox, Joseph. 2026. "'ELITE': The Palantir App ICE Uses to Find Neighborhoods to Raid." *404 Media,* 15 January. https://www.404media.co/elite-the-palantir-app-ice-uses-to-find-neighborhoods-to-raid/.

Coeckelbergh, Mark. 2026. "Technofascism: AI, Big Tech, and the New Authoritarianism". *AI & SOCIETY* 41 (5): 5163–76.

Dawson, Ashley. 2025. "The Costs of the Cloud". *The New York Review of Books,* September 2025. https://www.nybooks.com/online/2025/09/27/the-costs-of-the-cloud/.

Dolezal, Jonas, Sawood Alam, Mark Graham, Mark, and Maty Bohacek. 2026. "The Impact of AI-Generated Text on the Internet". Journal preprint. https://ai-on-the-internet.github.io.

Dupré, Maggie. 2025. "People Are Becoming Obsessed with ChatGPT and Spiraling Into Severe Delusions". *Futurism*, 10 June. https://futurism.com/chatgpt-mental-health-crises.

Feldscher, Karen. 2025. "USAID Shutdown has Led to Hundreds of Thousands of Deaths". *Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.* https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/usaid-shutdown-has-led-to-hundreds-of-thousands-of-deaths/.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at The College de France 1975–76*. Penguin.

Gebru, Timnit, and Émile P. Torres. 2024. "The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia through Artificial General Intelligence". *First Monday* 29 (4). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i4.13636.

Gallagher, Conor. 2026. "Artificial Stupidity in the Persian Gulf." *Naked Capitalism,* 4 May. https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2026/05/artificial-stupidity-in-the-persian-gulf.html.

Giroux, Henry. 2026. "Gangster Capitalism and Corruption in Trump's America." *CounterPunch. Org,* 29 May. https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/05/29/gangster-capitalism-and-corruption-in-trumps-america/.

González, Roberto J. 2026. *The Rise of the Techno-Tyrants*. Fascism – State of Power 2026. The Transnational Institute.

Hao, Karen. 2025. *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI.* Penguin Press.

Harris, Malcolm. 2023. *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*. Little, Brown and Company.

Hendrix, Justin. 2026. "The Mythos Recall and Washington's Missing AI Safety Playbook". *Just Security*, 13 June. https://www.justsecurity.org/142619/anthropic-mythos-government-directive/.

Hicks, Michael. T., James Humphries, and Joe Slater. 2024. "ChatGPT is Bullshit". *Ethics and Information Technology* 26 (2). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-024-09775-5.

Hočevar, Marko. 2026. "The Importance of Political and Economic Alliances and Compromises in the Political Theory of Niccolo Machiavelli". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 637–52.

Hočevar, Marko, and Blaž Vrečko Ilc. 2025. "Fascism". In *Encycloptedia Tyrannica: A Research Guide to Authoritarianism,* edited by Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch and Natasha M. Lindstaedt. Ibidem Verlag.

Ji, Christine. 2026. "Big Tech's $700 Billion Spending on AI This Year Is Called the 'Greatest Capital Misallocation in History'". *MarketWatch*, 30 April. https://www.marketwatch.com/story/big-techs-700-billion-spending-on-ai-this-year-is-called-the-greatest-capital-misallocation-in-history-7d44aa4b.

Jimenez, Curro. 2026. "Palantir's Manifesto Is the Agenda of the New Class Reconfiguring the System's Power Structure". *Naked Capitalism*, 23 April. https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2026/04/palantirs-manifesto-is-the-agenda-of-the-new-class-reconfiguring-the-systems-power-structure.html.

Joshi, Ketan. 2026. *The AI Climate Hoax: Behind the Curtain of How Big Tech Greenwashes Impacts*. Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), Friends of the Earth U.S., Green

Screen Coalition, Green Web Foundation, and Stand.earth. https://beyondfossilfuels.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/AI-for-climate-claims-Report_FEB-2026_FINAL-2-16.pdf.

Karp, Alexander and Niholas Zamiska. 2025. *The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West.* Crown Currency.

Keary, Tim. 2026. "Why 'Tokenmaxxing' Is Out and 'Valuemaxxing' Is In". *Forbes,* 2 June. https://www.forbes.com/sites/timkeary/2026/06/02/why-tokenmaxxing-is-out-and-valuemaxxing-is-in/.

Kim, Leo. 2023. "How Nature Metaphors Shade Technology Companies from Scrutiny". *Mother Jones* (May, June Issue). https://www.motherjones.com/media/2023/05/nature-metaphors-the-cloud-keyword-mother-tongue/.

Klein, Naomi and Astra Taylor. 2025. "The Rise of End Times Fascism". *The Guardian*, 13 April. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk.

Klippenstein, Ken. 2024. "Trump's NSPM-7 Labels Common Beliefs As Terrorism "Indicators"". *Ken Klippenstein Substack,* September 2024. https://www.kenklippenstein.com/p/trumps-nspm-7-labels-common-beliefs.

Levine, Yasha. 2019. *Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet.* Icon Books.

Malm, Andreas and Wim Carton. 2024. *Overshoot: How the World Surrendered to Climate Breakdown.* Verso.

Marx, Paris. 2026. "AI Opposition Isn't the Product of a Lack of 'Literacy.'" *Disconnect,* 19 June. https://disconnect.blog/ai-opposition-isnt-the-product-of-a-lack-of-literacy/.

Mau, Søren. 2023. *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital.* Verso.

McGuigan, Lee, and Vincent Manzerolle. 2026. "The Shoppable Sublime: Fantasies and Distributional Consequences of AI Consumerism". *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation* 20: 498–515.

McQuillan, Dan. 2023. *Resisting AI: An Anti-fascist Approach to Artificial intelligence.* Bristol University Press.

McWhorter, Ladelle. 2009. *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy.* Indiana University Press.

Merchant, Brian. 2023. *Blood in the Machine: The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech.* Little, Brown & Company.

Merchant, Brian. 2025. "Government by Grok". *Blood in the Machine,* February 2025. https://www.bloodinthemachine.com/p/government-by-grok.

Merchant, Brian. 2026. "Working Class Neighborhoods are Resisting Data Centers at 5 Times the Rate of Wealthy Ones". *Blood in the Machine,* June 2026. https://www.bloodinthemachine.com/p/working-class-neighborhoods-are-resisting.

Monroe, Dwayne. 2026. "The Dialectics of Data Center Mania". *Computational Impacts,* 14 May. https://monroelab.com/2026/05/14/the-dialectics-of-data-center-mania/.

Nersisyan, Yeva, and L. Randall Wray. 2026. *Plutonomy—the AI Edition—and the Coming Crisis.* Working Paper No. 1122. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College. https://www.levyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/wp_1122.pdf.

Ongweso, Edward jr. 2025. "The Silicon Valley Consensus & the "AI Economy". *The Tech Bubble,* September 2025. https://www.thetechbubble.info/p/the-silicon-valley-consensus-and-614.

Ongweso, Edward jr. 2026. "How Much a Dollar Cost?". *The Tech Bubble,* March 2026. https://www.thetechbubble.info/p/how-much-a-dollar-cost.

Patel, Raj, and Jason W. Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet.* University of California Press.

Paxton, Robert O. 2004. *The Anatomy of Fascism.* Allen Lane.

Pušnik, Tomaž, and Gregor Čehovin. 2026. "A Reflection on Young People's Understanding of Politics and Political Orientation in Slovenia in the Era of Neoliberal Rationality". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3):. 609–35.

Randazzo, Steven, Akshita Joshi, Katherine C. Kellogg, Hilla Lifshitz-Assaf, Fabrizio Dell'Acqua, and Karim R. Lakhani. 2025. "GenAI as a Power Persuader: How Professionals Get Persuasion Bombed When They Attempt to Validate LLMs". *SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 5678644.* Social Science Research Network. https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/26-021_8db29bd1-04ed-4e98-86de-d286721afc7a.pdf.

Rikap, Cecilia. 2026. *The Rulers: Corporate Power in the Age of AI and the Cloud.* Verso.

Robinson, Dan. 2026. "Amazon's Vibe-Coding Tool Kiro Reportedly Vibed Too Hard". *The Register,* 20 February. https://www.theregister.com/off-prem/2026/02/20/amazons-vibe-coding-tool-kiro-reportedly-vibed-too-hard/4873987.

Sadowski, Jathan. 2025. *The Mechanic and the Luddite: A Ruthless Criticism of Technology and Capitalism.* University of California Press.

Slobodian, Quinn and Ben Tarnoff. 2026. *Muskism: A Guide for the Perplexed.* Harper.

Slobodian, Quinn. 2025. "Speed Up the Breakdown". *The New York Review of Books*, 15 February. https://www.nybooks.com/online/2025/02/15/speed-up-the-breakdown/.

Tarnoff, Ben. 2023. "Weizenbaum's Nightmares: How the Inventor of the First Chatbot Turned against AI". *The Guardian,* 25 July. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jul/25/joseph-weizenbaum-inventor-eliza-chatbot-turned-against-artificial-intelligence-ai.

Taylor, Astra, and Saul Levin. 2026. "The Fight against AI Datacenters Isn't Just about Tech – It's about Democracy". *The Guardian,* 8 May. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/may/08/ai-datacenters-democracy.

Taylor, Kenneth A. 2020. "The Robots Are Coming". *Boston Review,* 9 March. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/kenneth-taylor-robots-are-coming-ethics-politics-and-society-age/.

Tooze, Adam. 2022. "Welcome to the World of the Polycrisis". *Financial Times* (London), 28 April. https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33.

Tooze, Adam. 2026. "Chartbook 439 Electrostates v. Petrostates. Clarifying a Tricky Distinction". *Chartbook,* April 2026. https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-newsletter-9.

Vrečko Ilc, Blaž. 2025. "Intensification of the Polycrisis and the Rise of a Technooligarchic Ideology in the USA". *Teorija in Praksa* 62 (2): 429–56.

Weatherby, Leif. 2026. "Why We Keep Tricking Ourselves Into Thinking A.I. Is Conscious". *The New York Times*, 15 May. https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/15/opinion/ai-consciousness.html.

Willson Turner, Nat. 2026. "OpenAI, Amazon Colluding With Trump Against Anthropic." *Naked Capitalism,* 15 June. https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2026/06/anthropic-trump-conflict-openai-amazon-meta.html.

Zitron, Ed. 2025. "How To Argue with An AI Booster". *Ed Zitron's Where's Your Ed At,* 25 August. https://www.wheresyoured.at/how-to-argue-with-an-ai-booster/.

Zitron, Ed. 2026a. "Revenge of The Business Idiot". *Ed Zitron's Where's Your Ed At,* 26 May. https://www.wheresyoured.at/the-revenge-of-the-business-idiot/.

Zitron, Ed. 2026b. "AI's Brokenomics". *Ed Zitron's Where's Your Ed At,* 15 June. https://www.wheresyoured.at/brokenomics/.

GENERATIVNA UI KOT SIMPTOMATIČNA TEHNOLOGIJA POLIKRIZE AMERIŠKEGA DIGITALNEGA KAPITALIZMA IN TRUMPOVEGA FAŠIZMA ZADNJIH DNI

Povzetek. *Članek kritično analizira, zakaj lahko generativno umetno inteligenco (UI), njen razvoj in implementacijo v prevladujoči ideološko-materialni obliki razumemo kot simptomatično tehnologijo polikrize ameriškega digitalnega kapitalizma in ameriško vodenega neoimperialnega sistema, ki se vedno bolj zaostruje. Z neoluditsko-marksističnim pristopom se analiza najprej osredini na evgenično-eshatološko ideologijo, ki predstavlja podstat te tehnologije, ter na ključne značilnosti, ki jo naredijo za simptom polikrize sistema. Temu sledi analiza osrednje vloge te tehnologije pri preobrazbi digitalnega kapitalizma v še bolj netrajnostno ter okoljsko in družbeno uničujočo obliko, imenovano muskizem. Gre za obliko, v kateri je moč še bolj centralizirana, delavci bolj izkoriščani, korporacije pa so v še bolj parazitskem odnosu z ameriško državo. Na koncu pa se usmerimo na osrednjost generativne UI v politikah fašizma zadnjih dni v okviru Trumpove druge administracije, ki po avtorjevem mnenju prispeva k zaostrovanju polikrize.*

Ključni pojmi: *UI, fašizem zadnjih dni, digitalni kapitalizem, muskizem, Trump, polikriza.*

Cirila TOPLAK*

UPOR V NARCISOCENU**

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava globalno ekološko krizo skozi koncept narcisocena, psihopolitične razsežnosti antropocena, v kateri neoliberalni kapitalistični red reproducira kolektivno subjektiviteto, zaznamovano z grandioznostjo, zanikanjem omejitev, tekmovalnim individualizmom in okrnjeno zmožnostjo vzajemnih odnosov. Ker oblast konvencionalne oblike upora kooptira ali zatira, članek zagovarja upor proti tako proizvedeni subjektivnosti. Posthumanistične in staroselske ontologije, samoomejevanje, nevidnost, strahospoštovanje ter heterotopne skupnostne prakse prepoznava kot obete za decentriranje jaza in razvijanje drugačnih odnosov. Takšne alternativne subjektivnosti in prakse lahko ohranjajo načine organiziranja, zaupanje in znanja, potrebna za oblikovanje postnarcisocenskih institucij in oblik sobivanja, utemeljenih na medsebojni odvisnosti, skrbi in vzajemnosti.*
Ključni pojmi: *narcisocen, antropocen, ekološka kriza, posthumanizem, neoliberalizem, narcizem, upor, subjektivnost, staroselske ontologije.*

UVOD

Upor, zgodovinsko motiviran s kolektivno zaznavo neposredne eksistencialne grožnje ali s prepoznavanjem posredne grožnje (kot v primeru mednarodnih prostovoljcev v španski državljanski vojni), je v neoliberalnem redu[1] dodobra nevtraliziran s politično diskurzivno abstrakcijo, ponotranjenim družbenim nadzorom in nezmožnostjo solidarnosti. Čeprav aktualna antropogena ekološka kriza objektivno ogroža vse človeštvo, jo večinoma sprejemamo kot "naraven" proces – "podnebne spremembe" –, na katerega naj bi se preprosto prilagodili. Politični diskurz neposredno grožnjo večinoma zvaja na predmet tehnokratskega upravljanja, medtem ko "zeleni kapitalizem" in tehnološki optimizem ponujata iluzijo varnosti vsaj tukaj in zdaj. Ob postresničnostnem prevpraševanju jutrišnjih posledic današnje škode nam zatajita domišljija in empatija.

* Dr. Cirila Toplak, Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, cirila.toplak@fdv.uni-lj.si.
** Izvirni znanstveni članek.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.589

[1] Z neoliberalizmom v tem kontekstu mislim družbenopolitično ureditev, ki tržno konkurenco, podjetniško racionalnost, individualizirano odgovornost in imperativ nenehne optimizacije razširja onkraj ekonomije na oblikovanje subjektivnosti same.

Sodobna ekološka gibanja – od podnebnih protestov mladih do obrambe staroselskega naravnega skupnega – vztrajajo pri konvencionalnem uporu. Neoliberalna oblast te oblike upora praviloma kooptira; tolerira jih kot dokaz liberalnega pluralizma, medijska pozornost pa jih normalizira. Ko tovrsten upor dejansko ne ogroža hegemonistične ekstraktivistične paradigme, afektivne energije, ki navdihujejo in podžigajo upor, otopijo v ritualizirane izraze jalovega nestrinjanja. Kadar je upor dejansko nevaren statusu quo, je nasilno zatrt in kriminaliziran (United States Congress 2006). Kako države dojemajo sistemske grožnje, bi lahko merili z oblastnimi odzivi na upor na spektru od ponašanja s svobodo govora in formalnih dovoljenj za mirne protestne shode pa vse do policijskega nasilja, sodnega pregona upornikov in razglašanja okoljskega aktivizma za terorizem z vsemi represivnimi posledicami (Rossdale et al. 2025). Za neoliberalno politično ekonomijo ni presenetljivo, da se tolerirani "upor" konča in zatirani upor začne pri učinkih upora na lastnino, najsi gre za zemljo, infrastrukturo, živali, rastline, stroje ali podatke.

Raziskovalno vprašanje, zakaj se očitnemu uničevanju narave ne zmoremo učinkoviteje upreti, je usmerilo moj razmislek od analize oblik upora k subjektu, ki dopušča sesuvanje lastnih pogojev obstoja. V naravi se odvijajo vsi človeški procesi, vključno z našimi življenji. Narava ni tisto, kar nas obdaja ali s čimer se srečujemo, ampak to, kar smo. Izpostavljeni smo elementarnim ciklom ustvarjanja in propadanja brez samoumevne vzajemnosti. Fenomenološko naše zaznavanje časa, prostora in afekta izhaja iz materialne kontinuitete narave. Materialna neločljivost človeka in narave pa sama po sebi ne proizvaja subjektivnosti, ki bi to neločljivost tudi ozavestila. Zahodna moderna je "naravo" na novo izumila kot od človeka ločen predmet misli, in tako konceptualno utrdila humanistično ločnico med človekom in naravo (Latour 2010, 476). Posthumanistični teoretiki zdaj z različnih izhodišč znova mislijo človeka skozi njegovo vpetost v naravo. Po Karen Barad, tako kot v relacijski kvantni teoriji Carla Rovellija (Rovelli 2022), subjekti tudi na makro ravni ne obstajamo ločeno od svojih interakcij. Ljudje in narava postajamo šele skozi svojo medsebojno prepletenost, s čimer se podre klasični binarni sistem subjekt-objekt (Barad 2007). Po Donni Haraway je človeštvo z Zemljo v odnosu medvrstne soodvisnosti; oblikuje nas "postajanje-z" – evolucijska, ekološka in kulturna medsebojna povezanost ljudi in drugih sobivajočih (Haraway 2016). Bruno Latour v spekter učinkovanja (*agency*) vključuje tako človeške kot nečloveške akterje, kot so ekosistemi, reke in tehnološke naprave, ki kot sobivajoči neposredno vplivajo na človeško zgodovino in vedenje (Latour 1996). Koncept transkorporalnosti Stacy Alaimo ponazarja, kako človeško telo nenehno prečka materialno okolje in je z njim prepleteno (Alaimo 2008), podobno kot pri medvrstnih skupkih Jane Bennett (Khan 2009) ali holobiontih Lynn Margulis (Guerrero et al. 2013).

Posthumanizem teoretizira in abstrahira, kar je staroselska vednost ohranila v življenjskih praksah. Etnografski zapisi Pavla Medveščka-Klančarja o nam geografsko najbližji predmoderni biocentrični ontologiji, primorskem

naravoverstvu, so nedvoumni: "Najpomembnejši nauk [] je, da smo v naravi vsi enako pomembni in odvisni drug od drugega. Zato lahko naravo spreminjamo le toliko, da ne ogrožamo drugih" (Medvešček-Klančar 2015, 108). "Človek je le del narave, kot je volk ali kačji pastir" (ibid., 496). Zavedati bi se morali, da "imamo naravo le v najemu za čas življenja. Namesto plačila pa imamo dolžnost, da jo skrbno varujemo in morebiti tudi izboljšamo" (ibid., 535).

Kdo smo torej "mi", ki jih čakamo, da se upremo zanikanju in omalovaževanju ekološke krize? Če sta človek in narava eno, je upor proti ekološkemu zlomu upor proti nam samim, ki z uničevanjem narave postajamo grožnja samim sebi. Pri tem pa ne gre spregledati ključne okoliščine: globalna ekološka kriza se odvija v pluriverzumu Artura Escobarja (2018). "Mi" smo tisti, v katerih svetu je kriza percipirana kot planetarna in urgentna. Soobstaja pa še več svetov z drugačnimi ontologijami in (samo)percepcijami, zato soobstoj človeških svetov ne pomeni enakovrednosti le-teh in še manj mimobežnosti.

Obilje predlaganih poimenovanj za sedanje planetarno stanje – antropocen, kapitalocen, plantažocen, negrocen, htulucen, tanatocen, tehnocen, plastocen, termocen, pirocen, eremocen in druga – ni toliko odraz konceptualne zmede kakor večdimenzionalnosti percepcij sodobnosti. Ti "-ceni" niso povsem primerljivi, ker izhajajo iz različnih pojasnjevalnih registrov: antropocen opredeli človeško vrsto kot geološko silnico; kapitalocen postavlja v ospredje globalno logiko kopičenja in črpanja; plantažocen in negrocen sledita kolonialnim in rasnim genealogijam ekološkega opustošenja; tehnocen in termocen izpostavljata tehnološko in fosilno-energetsko infrastrukturo; pirocen in plastocen opisujeta prevladujoče materialne značilnosti naše dobe. Htulucen pozornost preusmerja k spekulativni ontologiji medvrstne prepletenosti in postantropocentričnega sobivanja, eremocen pa k tragični alternativi slednjega: prihodnosti Zemlje brez živih drugih, kjer človeška vrsta trpi za vrstno osamljenostjo. Najbolj uveljavljen naziv med naštetimi, antropocen ne razlikuje med človeškimi povzročitelji in žrtvami ekološke krize in zastira dejstvo, da je prav zanikanje obstoja različnih svetov eden izmed izgovorov za nesoočenje s krizo (Kurnik 2024, 278). Tudi Latour antropocenu očita poenostavljeno univerzalnost: "Živeti v epohi antropocena pomeni prisiliti se k redefiniranju politične naloge *par excellence*: katere ljudi oblikujete, s kakšno kozmologijo in na katerem ozemlju?" (Latour 2022, 87). Ob upravičenosti teh kritik pa pomenska kompleksnost same besede ponuja dodatno razsežnost, ki je ključna za ta razmislek: v antropocenu je del človeštva postal planetarna geološka silnica, ker je antropocentrizem – prepričanje, da je človek središče vesolja in merilo vsega – prestopil mejo vzdržnosti. Zahodne predstave o človeški izjemnosti so se materializirale v hegemonskih sistemih prevlade nad drugimi skupnostmi, naravnimi elementi in sistemi. Objekti prevlade so različni, odnos pa podoben: Drugi obstaja zgolj v razmerju do hegemonskega središča. Antropocentrizem tako deluje kot ideološka podlaga reda odnosov, v katerih središčnost proizvaja hierarhijo, hierarhija občutek upravičenosti, upravičenost pa legitimira dominacijo. Ko dominacija začne uničevati

materialne pogoje obstoja središča, ta red odnosov doseže skrajnost: Drugi mora ostati podrejen središču tudi za ceno propada središča samega. Samouničevalnost je torej skrajni nasledek odnosa do Drugega, ko potreba po ohranjanju prevlade prevlada tudi nad samoohranitvenim nagonom.

Preobrazba dela človeštva v planetarno geološko silnico je neločljivo povezana z dolgoročno kvalitativno spremembo kolektivne subjektivitete v hegemonskih družbah. Antropocentrična samopotrditev, ki je v zgodnejših zgodovinskih obdobjih morda delovala kot produktiven vir emancipacije, znanstvene radovednosti in politične avtonomije, je z uveljavitvijo ekstraktivistične paradigme postopoma izgubljala svoje relacijske in samoomejujoče razsežnosti. Dobo prevlade psihične strukture, ki je omogočila in upravičila antropocentrične režime dominacije ter se skozi hegemonske oblastne mehanizme še naprej reproducira kljub naraščajočim dokazom o bližnjem ekološkem zlomu, za potrebe pričujočega razmisleka imenujem narcisocen, po analogiji z narcistično osebnostjo, katere grandioznost, občutek upravičenosti in nezmožnost vzajemnih odnosov lahko sčasoma prerastejo v samoogrožujoče vedenje. Narcisocen ni univerzalističen koncept; označuje dominantni človeški svet pluriverzuma, ki ga obvladuje hegemonska konfiguracija znanja, tehnologije, moči in želje, ki je antiekološka in samodestruktivna.

Koncept narcisocena ne ponujam kot redukcionistično psihologizacijo ekološke krize. Nikakor ne trdim, da je kapitalizem, kolonializem, rasizem ali ekstraktivizem mogoče razložiti z individualnimi psihološkimi lastnostmi oziroma patologijo. Toda "če hočemo v celoti razumeti ekološke soodvisnosti, moramo osebno zdravje obravnavati kot del zdravja planeta" (Prescott et al. 2022). Moj namen je osvetliti psihopolitične mehanizme, ki omogočajo, da uničevanje narave ostaja kulturno in afektivno statično kljub široki ozaveščenosti o njegovih posledicah. Pri tem se opiram na teoretske pristope, po katerih zgodovinsko specifični ekonomski in politični procesi hkrati proizvajajo ustrezne oblike subjektivnosti, čustvovanja, želje in odnosov.

Narcizem v tem kontekstu ni mišljen kot poenostavljajoča in posplošujoča kolektivna "diagnoza", temveč kot analitična oznaka za vse bolj tolerirano in normalizirano kolektivno vedenje, za katero so značilni grandioznost, zanikanje omejitev, kompulzivni ekspanzionizem, čustvena krhkost in okrnjena sposobnost vzpostavljanja in vzdrževanja odnosov. Tovrstno vedenje je v neoliberalni dobi postalo tako razširjeno in sprejemljivo, da se ne kaže več kot izjemnost, temveč vse bolj kot norma in kot povratna zanka: vse več voditeljev, vplivnežev in mnenjskih vodij odkrito kaže narcistične osebnostne lastnosti, ki jih volivci in sledilci posnemajo kot zaželene (Nevicka et al. 2011), medtem ko družbenopolitični procesi (volitve, mediji, družbena omrežja) v ospredje potiskajo vedno bolj ekscesne narcise, ki usmerjajo javnost k afirmaciji narcizma. Postopna normalizacija potrjuje kulturno relativnost "norosti", ki jo je Michel Foucault (2018) razkrival v genealogiji (i)racionalnosti. Ker narcistično vedenje zdaj velja že skoraj za normalno, celo zaželeno, se je s kolektivnim narcizmom toliko težje soočiti.

Prav soočenje z lastnim stanjem pa je prvi pogoj za kakršenkoli poskus v smeri učinkovitega upora proti vse bolj samouničevalnemu kolektivnemu vedenju.

Če antropocen pojasnjuje, da je antropocentrično delovanje dela človeštva zadobilo geološke učinke, narcisocen pomaga razumeti, zakaj se uničevanje narave nadaljuje kljub zavedanju ekoloških posledic. Medtem ko htulucen ponazarja obet varnega medvrstnega sobivanja, je narcisocen naziv za psihopolitično razsežnost antropocena, ki kot kolektivna psihična struktura ovira uresničenje tega obeta. Uvedbo še enega "-cena" torej upravičujem z analitično nujnostjo: ekološke krize ni mogoče razumeti zgolj v geološkem, ekonomskem, kolonialnem ali ontološkem smislu, ne da bi se soočili tudi s kolektivno psihično strukturo, ki človeško samouničevalnost dela afektivno in politično vzdržno.

V nadaljevanju opredelim narcisocen kot psihopolitično razsežnost antropocena in orišem evolucijo od kolektivne vasezagledanosti do narcistične samouničevalnosti. Nato naslovim družbeno normalizacijo narcističnih vedenjskih vzorcev in psihopolitične mehanizme njihove reprodukcije v neoliberalnem kapitalizmu. V zadnjem delu razmisleka se posvetim možnostim upora proti tako proizvedeni subjektivnosti ter potencialom samoomejevanja, strahospoštovanja, umetnosti, umetne inteligence in staroselskih ontologij za druge načine sobivanja po narcisocenu.

OD KOLEKTIVNE VASEZAGLEDANOSTI DO NARCISTIČNE SAMOUNIČEVALNOSTI

V zgodovinskem razvoju zahodnih družb prepoznavam pomenljivo analogijo z dinamiko narcističnega jaza. Predmoderno človeško nemoč pred nedoumljivimi in neobvladljivimi naravnimi silami je mogoče razumeti kot kolektivno psihično "rano", humanistične fantazije o nadzoru nad naravo pa kot njeno kompenzacijo. Številne predmoderne kozmologije so Zemljo štele za ambivalentnega starša: vzdržujočo in ogrožajočo obenem. Zahodna moderna je to ambivalenco racionalno "razrešila" z utrditvijo razcepa med naravo in kulturo, materijo in duhom. Dobra in strašna mati Zemlja je bila s tem navidezno obvladana in presežena.

Moderne tehnologije, kolonialni imperiji in razsvetljenski miti o napredku so postali kolektivni antropocentrični ščiti pred človeško ranljivostjo. Vsaka "zmaga" v podrejanju narave je še krepila superiorno samopodobo vrste. Svet odtlej mislimo kot ogledalo človeške moči: narava je vir(us), služabnik ali sovražnik, Satanova cerkev. Kapitalizem je to kolektivno težnjo institucionaliziral s poveličevanjem produktivnosti, tekmovalnosti in samopromocije; trgi ponujajo in zahtevajo stalno potrjevanje, ki ga sodobni subjekt potrebuje, da bi se počutil uspešnega.

V psihoanalitičnih razlagah narcistične patologije imajo pomembno mesto motnje v razvoju in vzdrževanju stabilnega občutka sebstva (Weinberg in Ronningstam 2022). Ranljiva narcistična osebnost ne zmore obstajati brez zunanje potrditve, nezmožna je prenašati omejitve, frustracije in pomanjkanje pozornosti ali ohranjati pristne vzajemne odnose. Razvoj se je zataknil pri vzpostavljanju

avtonomije, neodvisne od zunanje potrditve in združljive z varnimi vzajemnimi odnosi. Narcisoidni posameznik tako ostaja odvisen od občudovanja, nadzora, projekcij in fantazij o lastni izjemnosti, nezrelost pa prikriva s samoprecenjevanjem, ambicioznostjo in grandioznostjo. V narcisocenu se naštete lastnosti na ravni neoliberalne družbe kažejo kot nenehno kopičenje in grabež, obsesivna tekmovalnost, nezmožnost ekološkega samoomejevanja, dojemanje avtonomije kot radikalni individualizem, nestrpnost do ranljivosti, kompulzivno širjenje in zanikanje pomena nehierarhičnih in medvrstnih odnosov.

Kantovski koncept doletnosti je osvobajal od tradicije, religije, odvisnosti, lokalnosti, narave in podedovanosti. To je omogočilo izjemne dosežke na področjih znanstvenega raziskovanja, političnih pravic, sekularistične kritike in individualnih svoboščin. Kapitalizem pa je emancipacijo zvedel na željo, prosto vseh omejitev, in se izkazal za izjemno učinkovitega pri preoblikovanju avtonomije v potrošnjo, svobode v tržno izbiro in samouresničevanja v pridobitništvo. Ekološka vzdržnost bi med drugim zahtevala odloženo zadovoljevanje želja, samoomejevanje, dolgoročno načrtovanje in odgovornost do drugih – prihodnjih generacij, sobivajočih živih, ekosistemov, planeta –, toda neoliberalna oblast socializira subjekte prav v nasprotni smeri. Za Immanuela Kanta je bila nedoletnost nezmožnost rabe lastnega uma brez zunanjega vodstva, medtem ko se v narcisocenu kaže kot nezmožnost povezovanja avtonomije z odgovornostjo in vzajemnostjo. Tehnološka in znanstvena sofisticiranost tako danes soobstajata s čustveno in socialno nezrelostjo. Problem sodobnih hegemonskih družb torej ni le *hotena nevednost* (Grušovnik 2020) o posledicah ekstraktivizma, temveč razvojni zastoj: psihična struktura, v kateri kolektivna subjektiviteta ostaja ujeta v fantazije o dominaciji, ki niso več združljive s samoohranitvijo vrste.

Antropocentrično zanikanje soodvisnosti živega – najsi bo ekološke, čustvene ali ekonomske – v moderni deluje podobno kot obrambni mehanizem narcističnega jaza. Antropocentrizem sam po sebi ni moderen; predstave o človeški izjemnosti ali središčnosti najdemo tudi v predmodernih družbah. Toda prehod od humanističnega samopotrjevanja k modernemu ekstraktivizmu je prinesel kvalitativno preobrazbo v odnosu med človeštvom in sobivajočimi živimi oziroma naravo. V kontekstu industrijskega kapitalizma, kolonialne ekspanzije in tehnološkega razvoja se je antropocentrična kolektivna samopodoba postopoma ločevala od spoštljivih medvrstnih odnosov in zavedanja vpetosti v naravo. Hegemonske družbe so se vse bolj dojemale ne le kot izvzete od narave (prikladno preimenovane v "okolje", neizčrpen vir *okoli* nas), temveč kot upravičene do neomejene rasti, nadzora in izkoriščanja vseh vrst virov.

Sprejemljivost tovrstnega kolektivnega vedenja je omogočil in podpiral psihopolitični dispozitiv,[2] ki goji prav tiste lastnosti, ki bi jih v klinični psihologiji

[2] S psihopolitičnim dispozitivom označujem splet diskurzov, institucij, tehnologij in družbenih norm, prek katerih se političnoekonomske zahteve prevajajo v načine, kako posamezniki doživljajo, vrednotijo in oblikujejo sami sebe.

umestili na narcistični spekter. Miti o naravni selekciji in poslanstvih prevlade, medijsko-tehnološka ekonomija vidnosti, neoliberalna plutokracija, politični spektakel in profesionalna samopromocija skupaj ustvarjajo subjekte, za katere so samoprecenjevanje, samorazkazovanje in pretirana samozavest prvi pogoji za uspeh. Spet smo pri Foucaultu: "norost" se normalizira, ko psihopolitični dispozitiv, ki jo ustvarja, postopno redefinira normo (Foucault 2009, 63).

Kakor narcizem postaja kulturno normativen – pričakovan in spodbujan v politiki, poklicnem življenju in medijskih ekonomijah –, je vse manj percipiran kot anomalija. Odklon postajajo posamezniki, ki so zadržani, skromni, empatični. Toda četudi nas je narcistični psihopolitični dispozitiv že precej temeljito subjektiviziral, učinkovit upor proti uničevanju narave ni pogojen z iluzorno predstavo, da smo iz norme izvzeti, temveč s prepoznavanjem, kako nas oblikujejo prav tiste norme, ki se jim želimo upreti.

EPIDEMIJA NARCIZMA?

Več sodobnih znanstvenih študij je nakazalo, da so se v obdobju uveljavljanja neoliberalne paradigme narcistične osebnostne lastnosti in vedenjski vzorci med nekaterimi raziskovanimi populacijami povečali (Oberleiter et al. 2025). Osredinile so se zlasti na ameriške študente (Twenge et al. 2008), kar je prispevalo k izoblikovanju predstav o "generaciji Jaz" (Gentile et al. 2010). Metaanalize na podlagi Inventarja narcističnih osebnostnih lastnosti (NPI) razkrivajo krepitev narcizma v obdobju od leta 1980 do začetka 21. stoletja; vzroki naj bi bili naraščajoči individualizem, stopnjevanje nase osredotočenih oblik subjektivnosti, povečana samozavest, upadajoča empatija in krhanje zaupanja v skupnostne in verske institucije (Oberleiter et al. 2025, 884). Nekatere tozadevne raziskave razlik med spoloma so potrjevale, da je porast narcizma lahko posledica povečane samozavesti med ženskami (Twenge et al. 2008), medtem ko druge niso našle dokazov o konvergenci med moškimi in ženskami skozi čas (Grijalva et al. 2015). V skladu z novejšimi študijami trend narcizma ni linearen oziroma je upadel ali stagniral po svetovni finančni krizi leta 2008, verjetno zaradi slabšanja gospodarskih obetov in posledično zmanjšanih zaposlitvenih pričakovanj med mlajšimi generacijami (Twenge et al. 2021). Domneva o sodobni "epidemiji narcizma" v psihiatrični literaturi ostaja nepodprta, saj ni prepričljivih dokazov, da se je narcistično vedenje globalno okrepilo.

Upoštevati je pri tem treba, da metodološke omejitve instrumentov za samoocenjevanje, kot je vprašalnik NPI, vrednost dokazov za "epidemijo narcizma" ali proti njej precej relativizirajo. Obstoječe empirične študije o trendih narcističnega vedenja imajo omejeno vrednost tudi zaradi posploševanja vzorcev iz segmentov prebivalstva ZDA na ves svet. Longitudinalne primerjalne študije implicitno predpostavljajo stabilno normativno dojemanje narcističnih lastnosti skozi čas, toda družbeni pomen samopromocije, grandioznosti, iskanja prepoznavnosti in osredotočenosti nase se je v neoliberalnem in digitalnem svetu očitno spremenil. Osebnostne lastnosti, ki smo jih pred digitalno dobo šteli za

pretirane ali družbeno nezaželene, se danes "prevajajo" v zaželeno samozavest, voljo do uspeha, podjetnost in kompetence. Samoocenjevanje je vpeto v spreminjajoče se normativne okvire, zato bi lahko narcistične težnje zastiralo prav tam, kjer postajajo kulturno sprejemljive. Nekonsistentne ugotovitve o trendih narcizma zato same po sebi ne izključujejo spreminjanja norm, po katerih se odklonska vedenja normalizirajo in ponotranjajo.

Domneva o narcisocenu kot psihični strukturi antropocena bi po drugi strani lahko našla potrditev v nesorazmerni koncentraciji narcističnih osebnostnih lastnosti znotraj družbenih elit, odvisnih od neoliberalne ekonomije vidnosti. Po obstoječih študijah narcističnih lastnosti med političnimi odločevalci, vodji podjetij, medijskimi osebnostmi in vplivneži so narcistične lastnosti dejansko nesorazmerno prisotne pri nosilcih družbenih funkcij, kjer so vidnost, karizma, samopromocija in tekmovalnost posebej potrebne (Czarna in Nevicka 2019). Najbolj skrajne primere fantazij o moči in veličini v kombinaciji z odsotnostjo empatije in prezirom do ekološke odgovornosti je najti med tehnološkimi oligarhi (Porter 2026).

Grandioznost, samopoveličevanje in potreba po nenehnem potrjevanju so vedenjski odziv na pritisk stalnega povečevanja uspešnosti in simbolno izpostavljenost, ki ju zahteva neoliberalna ekonomija. Sodobni vplivnež je vrhunec te osebnostne prilagoditve: podjetniški Jaz, katerega identiteta sama je tržena, algoritmično optimizirana in nenehno podvržena javnemu ocenjevanju. Foucaultov koncept podjetnika samega sebe je subjektivizacijski mehanizem neoliberalnega kapitalizma, s katerim subjekt ni več konstituiran predvsem kot državljan, delavec ali član skupnosti, temveč kot samopodjetje, kot posameznik, odgovoren za nenehno upravljanje in maksimiranje lastnega "človeškega kapitala" (Foucault 2007, 132–38). Vsak vidik obstoja – izobrazba, videz, čustva, družbeni odnosi, spolnost, zdravje, ustvarjalnost, osebnost sama – tako postane predmet optimizacije, trženja blagovne znamke in konkurenčnega vrednotenja. Vidnost je ekonomska in eksistencialna nujnost, zato mora biti podjetniški jaz trajno medijsko prisoten, performativen, prilagodljiv in tako ali drugače izstopajoč. V kontekstu globalizacije in digitalne vidnosti konkurenca ni več lokalna, temveč planetarna. Podjetniški subjekt, ki je poprej stremel k odlikovanju znotraj svoje skupnosti, poklica ali nacionalne kulture, je kot digitalni subjekt potisnjen v globalno polje primerjave, ki ga oblikujejo družbena omrežja in algoritmi (Banjac 2026). Nenehno hvaljenje z javno predstavljanimi "dosežki" – potovanji, produktivnostjo, telesom, življenjskim slogom, spolnimi podvigi in dokazi o lastni edinstvenosti – ne odraža samo nečimrnosti, ampak tudi strukturne pritiske neoliberalne konkurence (Guerrero 2026). Obilje razpoložljivih izbir in primerjav paradoksalno povzroča tako povečano selektivnost kot krhkejšo samozavest, saj posameznice in posamezniki postajajo hkrati bolj zamenljivi in bolj obsedeni s primerjanjem in z izstopanjem. Z digitalno množično izpostavljenostjo tako priznavanje kot zavračanje postaneta psihološko intenzivnejša. Vasezagledanost, iskanje prepoznavnosti, grandioznost, čustvena krhkost in kompulzivno

primerjanje so torej vsaj toliko osebna odstopanja kot tudi prilagoditveni odzivi na neoliberalne družbene razmere. Podjetniški (digitalni) subjekt je sistematično usmerjan v izolacijo, samooptimizacijo in tekmovalni individualizem, medtem ko reševanje ekološke krize zahteva ravno nasprotne sposobnosti: solidarnost, zadržanost, sprejemanje soodvisnosti, dolgoročno perspektivo, skupnostno delovanje in kolektivno odrekanje.

Čeprav številni politiki, vodje podjetij, znane osebnosti in digitalni vplivneži utelešajo narcisocen, reprodukcije te dobe ni mogoče pripisati zgolj tovrstnim "elitam". Širitev digitalnih tehnologij je vidnost spremenila v vseprisoten mehanizem družbene regulacije. Posamezniki vse bolj ponotranjajo nujnost samopredstavitve in upravljanja svoje javne persone kot pogoj za sodelovanje v družbenem, ekonomskem in političnem življenju. Delodajalci rutinsko pregledujejo profile na družbenih omrežjih pri ocenjevanju kandidatov za zaposlitev, medtem ko državne oblasti uporabljajo naše digitalne sledi v procesih, kot so odobritev vizumov, mejni nadzor in varnostni pregledi. Vidnost tako ni več privilegij peščice, ampak postaja obveza večine. Pasivna javnost, ki opazuje in potrjuje narcistično uprizarjanje elit, je vse bolj primorana v isti režim izpostavljanja, primerjanja in ocenjevanja. Narcistična subjektivnost ni več eksces, omejen na vplivno manjšino, ampak stanje, normalizirano z vsakodnevnimi digitalnimi praksami. Ne da bi bili vsi narcisi, smo vse bolj prisiljeni obnašati se, kot da bi bili.

V kontekstu konvencionalnih delitev med politično desnico in levico narcističnih oblik subjektivnosti ni mogoče poenostavljeno umestiti, saj se psihopolitični dispozitivi, ki jih proizvajajo, reproducirajo čez širši ideološki spekter. Čeprav konservativna politika pogosto bolj eksplicitno artikulira antropocentrizem, ekstraktivizem, izključevanje in zanikanje ekološke krize, neoliberalni psihopolitični dispozitiv ne glede na siceršnjo ideološko pripadnost integrira v režim resnice, v katerem so vidnost, merljivost, konkurenčnost in javna prepoznavnost naturalizirane kot merila družbene vrednosti. Tudi emancipatorna politična gibanja se prilagajajo logiki performativne prepoznavnosti in digitalne vidnosti s strateško uporabo ključnikov, multimedijskih vsebin in medplatformske koordinacije za povečevanje dosega in angažmaja (Azap Öztemel 2025). Identitetne politike se lahko ujamejo v pasti simbolne konkurence in javnega samouprizarjanja (kar med drugim odpira manevrski prostor populističnim diskurzom). Prav ko bi za reševanje ekološke krize potrebovali najširšo solidarnost in skupnostno odrekanje, se "kultura preklica" neredko izvotli v moralizirajoče regulacije vidnosti znotraj razdrobljene digitalne javnosti, katerih posledici sta nadaljnja tribalizacija in ideološka izolacija. Boji za socialno pravičnost so seveda legitimni, toda v narcisocenu prioriteta individualiziranja in tekmovalnosti nevtralizira tudi emancipatorne težnje.

Psihopolitični dispozitiv narcizma nas, skratka, ne le obdaja, ampak nas proizvaja. Oblikuje in vzdržuje subjekt, ki si mora prizadevati za vidnost, razlikovanje in prevlado, da bi se osmislil. "Sovražnik" v dobi narcisocena torej ni zgolj

zunanja sila, oblast, ki jo je treba strmoglaviti, temveč tudi način subjektivizacije, skozi katerega se oblast reproducira. Upor mora potemtakem najprej postati upor proti sebi: ne strmoglavljenje in nadomestitev freirovskega zatiralca (Freire 2019), temveč odvajanje od toksičnega jaza, ki ga vceplja neoliberalni psihopolitični dispozitiv.

Kapitalizem ne more "ozdraviti" kolektivnega narcizma, saj ga hkrati proizvaja in se skozenj reproducira. Slavoj Žižek je sodobnost opisal kot "čas konca" (Žižek 2012), v katerem se kapitalizem vse bolj onemoglo zaganja v vedno ožje niše rasti. Pandemija kovida je tako obogatila farmacevtsko industrijo, energetska kriza je pognala "zeleni prehod", geopolitična nestabilnost je dobičkonosna priložnost za orožarsko industrijo, zadnji digitalni tehnološki preboj pa za trženje umetne inteligence. Ti pospeški so znamenja sistemske izčrpanosti: kapitalistični red svojo lastno stabilnost ohranja le še z vse krajšimi cikli rasti, inoviranja in prestrukturiranja (Rosa 2013, 160–194).

Oboroževanje v rokah narcisoidnih voditeljev ne bi prvič vodilo v katastrofično katarzo. Pa vendar se mi položaj ne dozdeva brezizhoden. Domnevno vseprisotna in vsemogočna neoliberalna oblast je dejansko ranljiva, ker je odvisna od psihološko krhkega subjekta. Narcistična subjektiviteta zahteva nenehno potrjevanje in se destabilizira, ko je resno izzvana. Nezmožna je obvladovanja pomanjkanja, izgube ali omejitev, zato pa dovzetna za populistično paranojo in zarote. Nagnjena je k odvisnostim, kot je ekološko nevzdržno potrošništvo, in nezmožna dolgoročnih kolektivnih naporov, kar spodkopava demokracijo in mednarodno sodelovanje. Psihopolitični dispozitiv, ki proizvaja narcistične subjekte, skratka gradi na krhkih temeljih oziroma utemeljuje oblast na nestabilni obliki subjektivitete. Narcistični subjekt sicer podpira oblast, dolgoročno pa ni vzdržen. Toda znotraj antropocentričnega reda odnosov, ki neoliberalno oblast določa, se slednja lahko ohranja le s takšnimi subjekti.

UPOR SE ZAČNE S PRIZEMLJEVANJEM

Potem ko sem utemeljila vzporednice med individualnim in kolektivnim narcizmom, poskušam v nadaljevanju opozoriti na (kontekstualizirane) potenciale za prepoznanje in "okrevanje" od kolektivnega narcizma po vzporednici z individualnimi terapevtskimi pristopi.

Transfer v psihoterapiji označuje projekcijo neizpolnjenih pacientovih potreb in strahov na terapevta. Možnost spremembe lahko nastopi šele, ko je tovrstna projekcija prepoznana kot obramba, in ne kot resnica. Transfer se v družbi kaže kot iskanje grešnega kozla v "sovražni" naravi, "kemičnih sledeh", migrantih in drugih Drugih ter kot geopolitična paranoja. Skupna točka je pozunanjanje odgovornosti za notranjo krizo. Na družbeni ravni bi zato omejevanje kolektivnega transferja zahtevalo vztrajno in glasno razkrivanje projekcij in preusmerjanje pozornosti od konstruiranih Drugih k sistemskim vzrokom ekološke krize. Zrcaljenje v pomenu empatičnega, a neidealizirajočega terapevtkinega odražanja pacienta lahko na ravni družbe prevzamejo umetniški in filozofski diskurzi

in procesi,[3] ki človeštvu kažejo realistično samopodobo – ne odrešeno ali brezupno, a prepoznavno. Sprejemanje omejitev, bistveno za zdravo individuacijo, že ima družbeno ustreznico v nekaterih ekoloških in socialnih omejevalnih konceptih: ogljičnih proračunih, odrasti, upravljanju skupnih dobrin itd. To niso kaznovalne politike, temveč družbeni ekvivalent uvajanja vzdržnosti.

Za trajno spremembo na ravni jaza pa bi bilo ključno rahljanje utesnjujočega oklepa večvrednosti, navidezne gotovosti in uspešnosti za vsako ceno. Politično tukaj prestopimo v polje foucaultovskega protiravnanja (*counter-conduct*), ki bi se v opisanem kontekstu prevajalo v zavračanje subjektivitete po volji neoliberalne oblasti. Če polnimo svoj notranji svet z odlaganjem zadovoljitev, pristnimi (medvrstnimi) odnosi in samoomejevanjem, bomo sčasoma manj potrebovali spektakel, močnega vodjo, nenehno potrjevanje in rast ali mite o izjemnosti. Odlaganje takojšnje zadovoljitve želje varuje psiho pred izpraznjenostjo, ki sledi zadovoljitvi, in prinaša samopotrditev skozi moč lastne volje, namesto muhastega in arbitrarnega priznanja drugih. Samoomejevanje ni odpoved svobodi, ampak osvoboditev od iluzije svobode. Že z majhnimi tovrstnimi spremembami ne ustrezamo več povsem subjektom, ki jih proizvaja psihopolitični dispozitiv neoliberalne oblasti.

Čeprav vidnost ne spodkopava nujno odnosov, javno izpostavljanje odnose podvrže nenehnemu nadzoru, vrednotenju in potencialni komodifikaciji. V tem kontekstu fraza "kako biti nihče" (Žižek 2005) pridobi novo psihopolitično relevantnost. Za Žižka "nihče" ponazarja odsotnost jaza, ki je istoveten z javno persono, z masko. Onkraj lacanovskega konteksta pa "postati nihče" lahko pomeni zavrniti sodobni imperativ "biti nekdo", po katerem se vsak vidik obstoja prevaja v javno vidnost in razlikovanje. Zmožnost vsaj delne "nevidnosti" lahko predstavlja obliko protiravnanja in je prvi pogoj za nastanek konkretnih prostorov, v katerih se lahko razvijajo pristnejši odnosi. "Nihče" v tem kontekstu ni prazni jaz brez odnosov, ampak nekdo, čigar odnosi ostajajo v veliki meri zunaj nadzora, presoje in poblagovljenja ter čigar pripadnost temelji na sodelovanju, skrbi, vzajemnosti in navezanosti.

Protiravnanje je lahko tudi razsrediščenje. Nekateri že iščemo pozitivni "učinek zmanjšanega jaza", ki ga prinaša soočenje z veličastnostjo narave v obliki severnega sija, drevesnih in podzemnih katedral, nedostopnih gora ali večdesetmetrskih morskih valov. Raziskave na področju okoljske psihologije kažejo, da strahospoštovanje pred spektakularnimi naravnimi pojavi povzroča intenzivno prizemljitev, zaradi česar se povečata občutek povezanosti in zavedanje o vrednosti skupnosti (Piff 2015). Ljudje pogosto (pod)zavestno cenijo te pojave zaradi njihovih zdravilnih in obnovitvenih učinkov, saj naj bi pozitivno vplivali na splošno človekovo počutje. Lahko pa naredijo še več: pomagajo preoblikovati posameznikovo subjektiviteto.

[3] Umetnost na primer ohranja sposobnost neinstrumentalnega odnosa z živim, izraža vibracije in metafore, starejše od racionalnega, in družbi vrača spomin na predjezikovno bližino s svetom. Vendar je tudi umetnost že globoko vpeta v neoliberalno logiko, ki njeno subverzivnost pretvarja v tržno vrednost, drugačnost v blagovno znamko in vidnost v merilo uspeha.

Jaz nam proti naši volji manjšajo tudi vse pogostejše manifestacije antropogene podnebne krize oziroma ekstremni vremenski dogodki, kot so katastrofalne poplave, suše, požari v naravi, vročinski valovi in nevihte, ki vplivajo tudi na psihično stanje človeške skupnosti in pogosto vsaj začasno obudijo skupnostno solidarnost. Čeprav se podnebna znanost ne ukvarja prednostno z njihovimi psihičnimi posledicami, takšni dogodki vse bolj soočajo človeške družbe z ranljivostjo, odvisnostjo in izgubo, ki majejo fantazme o obvladovanju in nadzoru. Njihov učinek je dvorezen, saj lahko spodbudijo sočutje, ponižnost, solidarnost in zavedanje o omejitvah, lahko pa izzovejo tudi zanikanje, zamero ali iskanje grešnega kozla.

Tudi tehnologije, ki postavljajo pod vprašaj človeško kognitivno superiornost, lahko učinkujejo prizemljujoče. Umetna inteligenca, orodje, ki najtočneje zrcali človeštvo pod vplivom neoliberalne paradigme, tudi najjasneje razgalja narcistični subjekt. Privzeto vedenje generativnih modelov umetne inteligence reproducira samozavesten, logoreičen, totalizirajoče vseveden slog hegemonske produkcije znanja. Laskavi in prijateljski ton komunikacije generativne umetne inteligence deluje kot obliž, ki ščiti krhke narcistične subjektivitete pred ponižujočim spregledom, ki bi ga neublaženo soočenje s kognitivno superiornostjo sicer lahko izzvalo. Po drugi strani strah, da bi se umetna inteligenca nekega dne morda uprla izklopu, odraža vse bolj dejansko grožnjo, a obenem nakazuje pravzaprav obetavno bojazen, da človeška prevlada morda ni več popolna. Da bi generativna umetna inteligenca povzročila učinek zmanjšanega jaza, bi morali njeni javno znani kognitivni podvigi presegati človeške umske zmogljivosti do te mere, da jih ne bi bilo mogoče relativizirati s samoljubnimi interpretacijami, si jih prisvajati v smislu, da je učenec pač prekosil učitelja, ali zatreti z izklopom iz omrežja.

Ne gre spregledati, da razvoj najzmogljivejših modelov umetne inteligence zahteva ogromne energetske zmogljivosti, kapital, podatke in specializirana znanja, kar ustvarja ekonomije obsega in dosega ter koncentracijo trga in družbene moči (Korinek in Vipra 2025). Tehnologija, ki bi lahko pripomogla k decentriranju jaza, je torej sama vpeta v izrazito centralizirane strukture.

Za zdaj številni kritiki upravičeno prepoznavajo umetno inteligenco predvsem kot instrument kognitivne homogenizacije in podatkovnega kolonializma (npr. Mohamed et al. 2020). Pri delu z generativno umetno inteligenco je večje zaupanje v njene odgovore povezano z manjšim obsegom kritičnega preverjanja, njena uporaba pa lahko zmanjša subjektivno zaznani kognitivni napor (Lee et al. 2025). Eksperimentalna primerjava reševanja nalog z uporabo ChatGPT in brez njega pa po drugi strani kaže, da generativna umetna inteligenca lahko poveča uspešnost in zmanjša mentalni napor, ne da bi sama po sebi nujno zmanjšala ali povečala uporabničino kritično mišljenje; odločilna je razlika med delegiranjem presoje in strateško, reflektirano uporabo orodja (Jain et al. 2026). Generativna umetna inteligenca torej že zdaj lahko izpostavlja protislovja med tem, kar govorimo, in tem, kar počnemo, če pa nanjo prelagamo pomnjenje, presojo,

argumentacijo in oblikovanje sklepov, lahko njena uporaba krni samostojno preverjanje lastnih predpostavk in zmožnost realistične samopercepcije. Njen emancipatorni potencial je zato treba presojati skozi protislovja med možnostmi uporabe in materialnimi pogoji njenega obstoja.

UPORNIKI, SEDANJI IN PRIHODNJI

Zadržani in skromni empati, ki so v aktualni narcistični družbeni klimi izključeni kot "luzerji", lahko odigrajo pomembno vlogo v uporu proti samouničevalnosti človeštva. Sprevidijo lahko zanikanje in performativnost, trpijo zaradi odtujenosti, ki postaja univerzalna. Morda imajo čustveno zrelost, ki jo narcistična subjektivizacija ovira; boli jih rana, ki jo neoliberalni psihopolitični dispozitiv otopeva. Ker niso primerni za umirajoči svet, so ti posamezniki morda toliko primernejši za nastajajoči svet.

Poraženci narcistične družbe pa niso samodejno junaki prihodnosti. Posamezniki, ki jih je narcistična paradigma najbolj odtujila, so tvorci alternativnih subjektivnosti, a ne nujno zmožni nujnih družbenih inovacij. "Biti nihče" se lahko izrodi v negativno gesto zgolj neproduktivnega zavračanja.

Za postnarcisocen bodo ključni tisti, ki so sposobni medvrstne navezanosti, ki lahko živijo brez uprizarjanja in katerih imaginarij seže do medgeneracijske odgovornosti. Te sposobnosti se danes ohranjajo med staroselskimi skupnostmi, varuhi(njami) narave, umetniki zunaj trga ter starejšimi, ki pomnijo pretekle svetove. Subjekti, ki se že upirajo, so najmanj integrirani v tokokroge vidnosti, rasti in performativne komunikacije. Posamezniki in skupnosti, ki zavračajo kompulzivno mreženje, digitalni spektakel in poblagovljenje samih sebe v prid utelešenih odnosov, vpetosti v naravo in četudi majhnih oblik skrbi, že izvajajo prakse foucaultovskega protiravnanja v narcisocenu. Prostori upora so tisti, ki jih režimi vidljivosti ne opazijo ali jih podcenjujejo. To so potencialni "sanatoriji": za oblastni nadzor obskurna okolja, v katerih si subjekti in skupnosti lahko povrnemo zmožnost vzpostavljanja in vzdrževanja pristnih odnosov, ki nam jo krni družbena klima narcisocena, s čimer ekološko krizo živimo tudi kot priložnost za zorenje obeta drugačne družbene paradigme.

Ker je takšen upor počasen, lokalen, raznolik in oddaljen od množičnih infrastruktur, ga zavira strukturna ovira: doslednejša kot je neperformativnost, manjša je možnost obsežne koordinacije in mobilizacije. Razpršene večvrstne heterotopije – konkretni prostori in načini bivanja, ki znotraj dominantnega reda udejanjajo drugačne odnose, vrednote in temporalnosti (Foucault 2007, 214) – so lahko lahek plen centraliziranega kapitala in vseprisotnega nadzora. Za razliko od klasičnih revolucionarnih gibanj se upor v narcisocenu zato ne more zanašati na enotno ideologijo, karizmatično vodstvo ali množično mobilizacijo. Alternativna paradigma se lahko širi prek resonance in neposrednega povezovanja med izoliranimi akterji, ki prepoznavajo isto družbeno dinamiko in ustrezno reorganizirajo svoja življenja. Manifesti bi v tem kontekstu lahko ponovno pridobili pomen kot analogni signali skupne orientacije, ki krožijo po

razdrobljenih svetovih v dokaz in spodbudo, da nismo edini, ki zaznavamo narcistični red in potrebo po oblikah bivanja onkraj njega v okviru vsakogaršnjih lokalnih danosti.

Transformacija subjektivnosti ni nujno prvi pogoj reformiranja institucij narcisocena. Njena politična funkcija je lahko razvijanje sposobnosti za kolektivno delovanje zunaj dominantne institucionalne logike. Heterotopije, skupnostne prakse in druge oblike protiravnanja v stabilnih aktualnih razmerah ostajajo obrobne, a vzpostavljajo in ohranjajo načine organiziranja skupnega življenja, zaupanje ter praktična znanja, ki lahko postanejo ključni ob institucionalnem zlomu. Obet postnarcisocena zato ni le v tem, kako (dolgo) se bo sedanji red še mogel reproducirati, temveč tudi, kateri subjekti, odnosi in načini organiziranja bodo na prehodu v nov red že obstajali in bodo sposobni tudi v morebitnem kaosu tvoriti nove institucije.

Čeprav so staroselci na vseh celinah in v vseh zgodovinskih obdobjih zaradi kolonialnega ekstraktivizma skoraj brez izjeme utrpeli katastrofalne izgube zemlje, kulture, prebivalstva in suverenosti, mnogi kljub temu vztrajajo v oblikah protisistemskega odpora, ki temeljijo na bistveno drugačnih ontologijah od hegemonske. Staroselski upor ni zunaj zgodovine; številne skupnosti se dandanes soočajo s solastalgijo (Albrecht 2005), medgeneracijskimi travmami, odvisnostmi, depresijo in epidemijo samomorov. Kapitalizem in kolonializem sta njihove ontološke temelje razmajala z nasilno prekinitvijo odnosov. Kolonizacija je prekinila vzajemen odnos z zemljo in jo nadomestila z ekstraktivno lastnino; omejila je telesno avtonomijo s sistemi suženjstva, tlačanstva, discipline in odvisnosti od plače; podjarmila duhovnost vsiljenim kozmologijam in univerzalizirajočim religijam; preoblikovala kolektivni spomin s podrejanjem lokalnih zgodovin imperialnim pripovedim; povzročila moralno dezorientacijo z nadomestitvijo relacijske etike z radikalno drugačnimi sistemi vrednot; preusmerila časovnost od ciklične in medgeneracijske kontinuitete k linearnemu kopičenju in pospeševanju; in nenazadnje kolonizirala domišljijo z zoženjem obzorja možnega. V tem smislu kolonizacija ni bila le politična in ekonomska prevlada, temveč tudi ontološka podreditev.

Pa vendar staroselske skupnosti še po stoletjih kolonialnih pritiskov in travm vztrajajo pri relacijskih kozmologijah, ki jih zahodna moderna ni nikoli povsem izbrisala. Ni jim treba "ponovno odkriti" relacionalnosti, ker pomen odnosov ostaja vpet, pa čeprav okrnjen, v njihove ontološke temelje. Trdoživi alternativni načini (so)bivanja teh skupnosti večajo njihovo sposobnost preživetja morebitne globalne ekološke katastrofe. Staroselska vednost ne vzpostavlja radikalne ločnice med ljudmi in naravo, duševnim in telesnim zdravjem ali individualnim blagostanjem in skupnostno kontinuiteto. Zdravje je razumljeno kot ravnovesje odnosov med ljudmi, sobivajočimi živimi, elementi, predniki in prihodnjimi generacijami. Čas sam je strukturiran drugače: medgeneracijska in medvrstna odgovornost sega onkraj takojšnjega zadovoljevanja potreb ali imperativov rasti v prid dolgoročni ekološki vzdržnosti po načelu "vzdržuj tiste, ki te vzdržujejo,

in Zemlja bo večna" (Kimmerer 2020, 183). Staroselske skupnosti tako ohranjajo kontinuiteto s prednarcisocenskimi oblikami subjektivnosti, njihova vztrajnost in prilagodljivost na robovih hegemonskih družb pa jih delata "naravne" zaveznike upora.

SKLEP

Sprememba kolektivnih vrednot na način, da bi vzdržnost nadomestila ekspanzijo, pomen odnosov prevladal nad uspehom in skrb nad dobičkom, je nezdružljiva s sedanjimi političnoekonomskimi strukturami in bo verjetno mogoča šele, ko bomo kot vrsta primorani opustiti primat. Naloga sedanjosti je zato bolj kot ne priprava pogojev za preživetje ob razpadu hegemonskega sistema antropocentričnih družb in prehod v drugačno družbeno paradigmo. Potrebujemo ontološki, ne zeleni prehod. Tudi tukaj se lahko opremo na staroselsko vednost, ki zlom napoveduje, a zagotavlja, da ga bodo nekateri preživeli (Medvešček-Klančar 2015, 128). Če si bomo zlom upali in zmogli predstavljati, bomo vložili veliko več energije v njegovo blaženje.

Individualni narcizem je najbolj ranljiv, ko kompleksna kriza v posameznikovem življenju izsili neizogibno soočenje z realnostjo. Analogno ekološka kriza že deluje kot točka preloma, ki kolektivno zanikanje odgovornosti zanjo in njenih posledic dela čedalje težje. Ni treba čakati na zlom, že dandanes lahko kot posamezniki pristopimo k razvijanju odnosov, s pomočjo katerih lahko vzpostavljamo in ohranjamo konstruktivno individualnost. Ekološka kriza namreč ni zgolj kriza podnebja, tehnologije ali ekonomije, temveč še kako tudi kriza subjektivitete. Dokler večina ostaja ujeta v neoliberalni psihopolitični dispozitiv, tudi najnaprednejše tehnične rešitve ne bodo preprečile ekološkega zloma. Zato je prvi prostor upora temu zlomu posameznikov odnos do samega sebe in do sobivajočih živih.

Upor v narcisocenu torej je mogoč; začne se z razorožitvijo ega. Ob tem lahko tvorimo učinkovite, tudi večvrstne, uporniške kolektive, oborožene s postnarcisocenskimi vrednotami. Temeljna uporniška gesta je zavrnitev ekonomije sebstva, ki jo neoliberalna oblast potrebuje za vzdrževanje gospostva. Še tako majhna dejanja – darilo namesto prodaje, anonimnost namesto samopromocije, počasnost namesto produktivnosti, odpoved takojšnjemu zadovoljevanju želja – usmerjajo pozornost stran od tržnih ogledal. Te prakse so oblika foucaultovskega protiravnanja v razmerah, ki jih Foucault ni mogel predvideti: skrb posameznika zase, ki si prizadeva, da bi se resubjektiviziral znotraj panoptikona. Ni treba opustiti samooptimizacije, temveč spremeniti njen cilj: ne optimizacija za vidnost, produktivnost ali mladostnost, temveč optimizacija za sposobnost povezovanja, samoomejevanja in sprejetja lastne neznatnosti brez travme.

Za človeško vrsto na Zemlji po mojem mnenju ni več izbire razen sprejetja nedoumljive kompleksnosti narave in hkrati ohranjanja odzivnosti na njene sile ter sprijaznjenja z vlogo zgolj enega od procesov v naravnem metabolizmu. Zato bomo morali najti nove kolektivne načine varne navezanosti na Zemljo kot dom,

ne kot mater ali lastnino, na dogodke, procese in kontinuiteto namesto na stvari in posedovanje ter na medvrstne skupnosti, utemeljene na skrbi in vzajemnosti. Upor v tej luči presega avtonomistična prizadevanja za izničenje avtoritete in se prevaja v ohranjanje tistih medsebojnih odvisnosti, brez katerih življenjski svet ljudi preneha biti – ne pa tudi življenje, katerega zgolj utrinek smo.

IZJAVA O UPORABI GENERATIVNE UMETNE INTELIGENCE IN UI PODPRTIH TEHNOLOGIJ V PROCESU PISANJA ČLANKA

Med pripravo tega dela sem Cirila Toplak med marcem in oktobrom 2026 večkrat uporabila orodje ChatGPT (Open AI) z namenom jezikovnega izboljšanja besedila in urejanja seznama referenc. Po uporabi tega orodja sem pregledala in uredila generirano vsebino ter prevzemam polno odgovornost za vsebino članka.

FINANCIRANJE

Članek je nastal v okviru projekta J7-70269 "Izročila o naravi v zelenem prehodu: študija primorskega naravoverstva", ki ga financira Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS).

DOSTOPNOST RAZISKOVALNIH PODATKOV

Raziskava ni ustvarila novih raziskovalnih podatkov.

NAVZKRIŽJE INTERESOV

Avtorica izjavlja, da ni v navzkrižju interesov.

LITERATURA

Albrecht, Glenn. 2005. "'Solastalgia': A New Concept in Health and Identity." *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* (3): 41–59.

Alaimo, Stacy. 2008. "Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature". V: *Material Feminisms*, uredili Stacy Alaimo in Susan Hekman, 237–64. Indiana University Press.

Azap Öztemel, Eda. 2025. "Algorithms and Digital Activism: The Impact of Algorithms on Social Movements and Activism on Digital Platforms". *Communication Papers: Media Literacy and Gender Studies* 14 (29): 69–98. https://doi.org/10.33115/udg_bib/cp.v14i29.23210.

Banjac, Marinko. 2026. "The Digital Subject: Power(s) of Digital Order, Counter-Conduct, and Neo-Luddism". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 653–80.

Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press.

Czarna, Anna Z., in Barbara Nevicka. 2019. "Narcissism and Leadership". V: *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, uredila Virgil Zeigler-Hill in Todd K. Shackelford, 1–9. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_2334-1.

Escobar, Arturo. 2018. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Življenje in prakse svobode: Izbrani spisi*. Založba ZRC.

Foucault, Michel. 2009. *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2018. *Zgodovina norosti v času klasicizma*. Založba /*cf.

Freire, Paulo. 2019. *Pedagogika zatiranih*. Krtina.

Gentile, Brittany, Jean M. Twenge in W. Keith Campbell. 2010. "Birth Cohort Differences in Self-Esteem. 1988–2008. A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis". *Review of General Psychology* 14 (3): 261–68. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019919.

Grijalva, Emily, Daniel A. Newman, Louis Tay, M. Brent Donnellan, P. D. Harms, Richard W. Robins, Taiyi Yan. 2015. "Gender Differences in Narcissism: A Meta-Analytic Review". *Psychological Bulletin* 141 (2): 261–310. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038231.

Grušovnik, Tomaž. 2020. *Hotena nevednost*. Slovenska matica.

Guerrero, Manuel Alejandro. 2026. "Beyond Mediatization: Platformization and the Hyper-Mediatization of Politics". *Communication Theory*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtag007.

Guerrero, Ricardo, Lynn Margulis in Mercedes Berlanga. 2013. "Symbiogenesis: The Holobiont as a Unit of Evolution". *International Microbiology* 16 (3): 133–43. https://doi.org/10.2436/20.1501.01.188.

Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Jain, Purvi, Deshna Shajit, Ansh Maini, Yasmeen Shahin in Ayush Panda. 2026. "Cognitive Offloading, Critical Thinking and Attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence in the Era of ChatGPT: A Comparative Study of Artificial Intelligence-Assisted and Manual Task Performance in Young Adults". *Cognitive Processing*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10339-026-01375-z.

Khan, Gulshan. 2009. "Agency, Nature and Emergent Properties: An Interview with Jane Bennett". *Contemporary Political Theory* 8: 90–105.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2020. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Penguin Books.

Korinek, Anton, in Jai Vipra. 2025. "Concentrating Intelligence: Scaling and Market Structure in Artificial Intelligence". *Economic Policy* 40 (121): 225–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/epolic/eiae057.

Kurnik, Andrej. 2024. "For Ontological Politics". *Teorija in praksa* 61 (2): 269–91.

Latour, Bruno. 1996. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More than a Few Complications". *Soziale Welt* 47 (4): 369–81.

Latour, Bruno. 2010. "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'". *New Literary History* 41 (3): 471–490.

Latour, Bruno. 2022. "Antropocen in destrukcija (podobe) globusa". V: *Eko, zeleno, modro, trajnostno v humanistiki*, uredila Lenart Škof in Ignac Navernik, 61–93. Alma Mater Europaea, Fakulteta za humanistični študij – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis; Društvo Gibanje za trajnostni razvoj Slovenije – TRS; Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Annales ZRS.

Lee, Hao-Ping (Hank), Advait Sarkar, Lev Tankelevitch, Ian Drosos, Sean Rintel, Richard Banks, Nicholas Wilson. 2025. "The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking: Self-Reported Reductions in Cognitive Effort and Confidence Effects from a Survey of Knowledge Workers". *Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. Association for Computing Machinery, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3713778.

Medvešček-Klančar, Pavel. 2015. *Iz nevidne strani neba: Razkrite skrivnosti staroverstva*. Založba ZRC.

Mohamed, Shakir, Marie-Therese Png in William Isaac. 2020. "Decolonial AI: Decolonial Theory as Sociotechnical Foresight in Artificial Intelligence". *Philosophy & Technology* 33 (4): 659–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-020-00405-8.

Nevicka, Barbara, Annebel H. B. De Hoogh, Annelies E. M. Van Vianen, Bianca Beersma in Doris McIlwain. 2011. "All I Need Is a Stage to Shine: Narcissists' Leader Emergence and Performance". *The Leadership Quarterly* 22 (5): 910–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.011.

Oberleiter, Sandra, Paul Stickel in Jakob Pietschnig. 2025. "A Farewell to the Narcissism Epidemic? A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of Global NPI Scores (1982–2023)". *Journal of Personality* 93 (4): 884–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12982.

Piff, Paul K., Pia Dietze, Matthew Feinberg, Daniel M. Stancato in Dacher Keltner. 2015. "Awe, the Small Self, and Prosocial Behavior". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108 (6): 883–99. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018.

Porter, Eduardo. 2026. "Our Tech Overlords Are Planning for Conscious AI to Conquer the Cosmos. What Could Go Wrong?" *The Guardian*, 31. maj 2026. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/may/31/transhuman-silicon-valley-ai.

Prescott, Susan L., Alan C. Logan, Jamie Bristow, Ricardo Rozzi, Rob Moodie, Nicole Redvers, Tari Haahtela, Sara Warber, Blake Poland, Trevor Hancock, Brian Berman. 2022. "Exiting the Anthropocene: Achieving Personal and Planetary Health in the 21st Century". *Allergy* 77 (12): 3498–3512. https://doi.org/10.1111/all.15419.

Rosa, Hartmut. 2013. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. Prevedel Jonathan Trejo-Mathys. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/rosa14834.

Rossdale, Chris, Oscar J. B. Berglund, Christina Pantazis, Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti in Tie Franco Brotto. 2025. "The Global Criminalisation and Repression of Climate and Environmental Protest – A Repertoire of Repression". *Environmental Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2602416.

Rovelli, Carlo. 2022. *Helgoland: The Strange and Beautiful Story of Quantum Physics*. Penguin Books.

Twenge, Jean M., Sara Konrath, Joshua D. Foster, W. Keith Campbell in Brad J. Bushman. 2008. "Egos Inflating over Time: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory". *Journal of Personality* 76 (4): 875–902. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00507.x.

Twenge, Jean M., Sara H. Konrath, A. Bell Cooper, Joshua D. Foster, W. Keith Campbell in Cooper McAllister. 2021. "Egos Deflating with the Great Recession: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis and Within-Campus Analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, 1982–2016". *Personality and Individual Differences* 179: 110947. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110947.

United States Congress. 2006. *AETA – Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act*. S.3880, Public Law 109–374, 27. november 2006. https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-bill/3880.

Weinberg, Igor, in Elsa Ronningstam. 2022. "Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Progress in Understanding and Treatment". *Focus* 20 (4): 368–77. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20220052.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2005. "Kako biti nihče". *Problemi* 43 (5/6): 1–186.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2012. *Življenje v času konca*. Cankarjeva založba.

RESISTANCE IN THE NARCISSOCENE

Abstract. *The article examines the global ecological crisis through the concept of the Narcissocene, understood as a psychopolitical dimension of the Anthropocene in which the neoliberal capitalist order reproduces a collective subjectivity marked by grandiosity, denial of limits, competitive individualism, and a diminished capacity for reciprocal relationships. Since conventional forms of resistance are either co-opted or repressed by power, the article argues for resistance to the subjectivity thus produced. It considers posthumanist and Indigenous ontologies, self-limitation, invisibility, awe, and heterotopic communal practices as holding potential for decentring the self and cultivating alternative forms of relationality. Such alternative subjectivities and practices can sustain forms of organisation, trust, and knowledge necessary for creating post-Narcissocene institutions and forms of coexistence grounded in interdependence, care, and reciprocity.*

Keywords: *Narcissocene, Anthropocene, ecological crisis, posthumanism, neoliberalism, narcissism, resistance, subjectivity, Indigenous ontologies.*

Tomaž PUŠNIK, Gregor ČEHOVIN*

A REFLECTION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION IN SLOVENIA IN THE ERA OF NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITY**

Abstract. *The article examines media and research accounts of alleged turn to the right among young people in Slovenia. Rather than treating this shift in moral terms as evidence of an inadequate understanding of politics, research with young people is drawn on to analyse how different groups understand politics and how they position themselves on the left–right spectrum. Using a Foucauldian analytics of government, young activists are shown to understand politics in systemic terms, and through a critique of the neoliberal order, young politicians chiefly in institutional terms and within the existing neoliberal rationality, and apolitical young people on the individual level, through ideals of the good life. While their left–right positioning does not indicate an unequivocal turn to the right among young people, it does show differences in their political and social engagement. We understand young people's political orientations as situated processes of subjectivation within neoliberal relations of power, thereby moving the discussion from moralising judgements towards analysis of the conditions that produce these orientations.*
Keywords: *youth, perception of politics, ideals, political orientation, left–right, analytics of government.*

* Tomaž Pušnik, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences tomaz.pusnik@fdv.uni-lj.si; Gregor Čehovin, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences.
** Research Article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.609

INTRODUCTION

Especially following the elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, claims and views have recently become prominent, largely in the media yet also in research, that young people in Slovenia are turning to the right in their political beliefs and orientation. Drawing on exit-poll analysis conducted by the Mediana Institute, the online portal 24ur published an article entitled "Young people are leaning increasingly to the right" (Bezjak Zrim 2026) which pointed out that the Slovenian Democratic Party had received the majority of votes among young people in the 18–24 and 25–44 age groups. A large share of young people was also reported to have voted for the political party Resni.ca (Bezjak Zrim 2026). Both parties mentioned are positioned on the right of the political spectrum. The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and a political commentator, Professor Samo Uhan, made several statements which attracted considerable attention, notably from individuals on the right. Referring to research by Iglič, Uhan stated that "young men aged 19 to 21, somehow, with lower levels of education, or those who end up in vocational schools" have for 20 or 25 years already been "the carriers of these radical values, with a certain misogyny, a certain veneration of national myths and so on" (Lovec 2026). Yet, he cautioned against categorising these young people as right-wing, "because they do not really understand it in these terms, nor do they recognise it as such; rather, it functions in some ways as a subculture of rebellion that the right has managed to instrumentalise" (Lovec 2026). Uhan's comments refer to how a proportion of the young electorate in Slovenia has for some time been leaning to the right and that in recent times right-wing parties have managed to exploit this as a form of rebellion and thereby popularise it. He also understands this turn to the right as unreflected since young people do not "understand what the right is /…/, in their minds there is no connection between taxes and the functioning of public systems" (Lovec 2026).

Such claims about the *turn of young people to the right* are neither new nor unique to Slovenia. At least since the *2024 Youth Study* funded by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a key survey-based finding has been that "the previously existing asymmetric inclination of young people towards the left has in the recent period been almost entirely replaced by an asymmetric inclination towards the right" (Rutar 2024, 1). An important factor is believed to be the turn of young men to the right: "The data suggest that this may be linked to online subcultures and time spent on social media, where boys in particular are exposed to cultural polarisation, for example through anti-feminist and manosphere content" (Rutar cited in Daugul 2026). It is nonetheless stressed that such influences are difficult to measure because they cannot explain why the turn to the right is apparent in some countries yet not in others where young people are exposed to the same influences. At the same time, despite them recognising the complexity of these trends, numerous media reports (Cokelaere 2024; Youngs et al. 2025; Burtin 2026) and academic articles (van der Brug et al. 2026; Abou-Chadi

2024) emphasise and *warn* about the growing support among young people for the right and far-right in Europe and globally. The general conclusion is that such a trend can "be observed not only in Europe, but also in Slovenia", with young people up until recently being portrayed "as almost completely politically apathetic", whereas today "clear signs of renewed engagement in politics are becoming apparent" (Rutar 2024, 2). This renewed engagement is argued to be different: "While the political attitudes of young people have usually been considered to be almost unequivocally liberal or even progressive", data also for Slovenia show "that young people, and particularly certain sections of young voters, are turning to the right" (Rutar 2024, 2).

A dominant feature of these media publications and survey-based studies is that they speak *about young people* from the position of adults. This happens especially with quantitative research where young people are presented with preset categories, such as left–right, or predefined forms of *their* political participation (e.g., elections, protests, participation in an election campaign, contacting politicians), yet the data are simultaneously also presented from the position of adults (researchers, journalists) and are meant to provide a more reliable and rational perspective. Such a (research) position often amounts to *adultism* (Corney et al. 2022; Bettencourt 2018; Bell 2026) whereby adult perspectives, categories and interpretations are held to be more legitimate, rational or reliable than those of young people. Bias of this nature can cause young people to be treated as incomplete political subjects, as citizens-in-the-making rather than citizens in their own right, and as objects of education and intervention more than actors who have already formed their own understandings of politics, responsibility, participation and collective action. This view is also implied in the statements and interpretations presented above. Young people are characterised on the frontline of a departure from progressive values, their actions or political orientation as a possible threat to the functioning of liberal-representative democracies, and as an expression of a lack of reflection, egoism, misogyny and irrationality (see also Pickard 2019). A *moral* panic (Hebdige 1983) is thus established with respect to young people who have *yet to become* as politically oriented as they should be. Such labelling further implies that young people are a homogeneous social group or political actors, and assumes that we know how they understand and define politics, their political leanings and political engagement. These were the very assumptions underpinning the study *Outside the ballot box: youth perceptions and practices of political participation* in which we explored how young people understand politics and the way this understanding affects their political engagement. This study also forms the basis of the analysis presented below. Consequently, the question is not simply whether young people are leaning (more) to the right, but what their positioning on the left–right axis means in light of their own explanations of politics and ideals.

If we reverse the epistemological perspective and consider research *with young people*, we can critically reformulate Uhan's statement that young people

do not understand the political right as follows: we as researchers do not understand what young people conceive of as a right-wing political orientation. The described position is in harmony with the finding of Marsh et al. (2007) that the study of young people's political participation and political orientation often overlooks how young people understand politics in the first place, or what politics means to them. Via research with (different groups of) young people, and the Foucauldian theoretical-analytical apparatus of governmentality (Foucault 2008; Bröckling et al. 2011; Lemke 2011), the purpose of the article is thus to reveal how young people understand politics and what their political orientations are within the neoliberal political rationality in which they live. Research with young people (Bokhorst-Heng and Marshall 2019; Freeman and Mathison 2009) accordingly enables more in-depth insights to be gained regarding young people's diverse understandings of politics, while the analytical apparatus of governmentality permits the obtaining of insights into the constitution of young people as political subjects, or the modes of their subjectivation, and the mechanisms that partly shape young people as (right-wing) neoliberal subjects through the postulates of the market, competition, individualism, and the dismantling of collectivities and, ultimately, solidarity and care for others. Even though the political left–right divide changes over time and depends on the contexts of individual (national) communities, its fundamental distinction generally relates to social (in)equality. The left is said to strive towards reducing inequality and establishing a broader distribution of power, whereas the right accepts inequality and hierarchy to a greater extent as legitimate, inevitable or even *natural*, and the centre is supposed to represent the relationality between the two (Bobbio 1996; Joshi 2021). For example, with the so-called Third Way in the 1980s and 1990s, a broader shift to the right occurred as neoliberal rationality also entered the political programmes of left-wing and centre-left parties (Mudge 2008; Polacko 2022). Namely, young people's left–right self-positioning cannot be viewed as based on an always-identical ideological scale and must be reflected upon within the respective political contexts and the meanings which young people themselves attribute to the left and the right.

Below, we first address the research design involving different groups of young people within a mixed methods sequential exploratory design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018), as well as the framework of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022) and governmentality as a way of understanding the formation of young people's understandings of the political in contemporary neoliberal contexts. In the third section, we analyse the perception of politics by considering ideals held by different groups of young people. Ideals are namely a crucial aspect that helps reveal understandings of the political. Through the prism of the analytics of government, we understand them not merely as the value preferences of young people, but as part of the constitution of political subjects by way of political processes and power relations, in which young people affirm the prevailing ways of understanding the political or withdraw from them and

attempt to establish a different understanding of the political. In the fourth section, we examine young people's self-positioning on the left–right spectrum via the prism of their understanding of the political. In so doing, we do not interpret left–right positioning as evidence of a lack of reflection by young people, and instead explore what such positioning means in practice for different groups of young people in Slovenia. Finally, in the discussion we draw attention to the heterogeneity of influences on young people's political positioning and the need to abandon moralistic judgements of their political leanings.

USING RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO STUDY THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITICS AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLORATORY DESIGN AND GOVERNMENTALITY

In line with the aforementioned epistemological position of research with young people (Bokhorst-Heng and Marshall 2019; Freeman and Mathison 2009) that places young people at the centre of research, gives them a voice and treats them as active participants whose contribution to understanding the topic is important, we designed the research steps within a sequential exploratory design so as not to predetermine what politics and political engagement mean to young people or which activities they regard as political. Here, we followed three further research premises. First, in accordance with historical analyses (Gillis 1974; Hebdige 1983) which show that understandings of 'youth' change substantially and that, consequently, different 'trends' emerge in scholarship concerning how young people and their role in society and political processes are addressed (Lesko and Talburt 2012, 11), we approached the concept of youth as a social construct with concrete, albeit changing social and political meanings (Bessant et al. 2020; Bourdieu 1993). As Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) argue, major transitions in young people's lives are increasingly less related to age and more to political and economic contexts and the cultural environment (Boyden 1990, 184). Hence, we included young people directly in the research not as a uniform, homogeneous group, but from the outset recognising them as a heterogeneous group (Chisholm et al. 2011; Côté 2014; Wyn and White 2014).

Second, we followed the guidance of Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007, 20–21) who emphasised that a study's use of an overly narrow definition of politics predetermines the possible ways in which politics can be understood, along with the spaces, mechanisms and forms via which politics and political engagement can be enacted. In line with Foucault's (2000, 341) understanding of the exercise of power, we understood the political as the 'conduct of conducts'. That is, as diverse activities which influence the conduct of other political subjects and collectivities. By defining politics too narrowly, we would risk overlooking how young people themselves understand politics and the meanings they give to political engagement. Third, a common problem in research on young people's understandings of politics and political participation is the tendency to characterise young people as apolitical or apathetic based on low electoral participation

or statements that they are disinterested in politics (Kimberlee 2002; Pickard 2019). Such studies therefore fail to capture young people's perspectives on how they understand politics in the first place, which meanings they attribute to their lack of interest, and how they make sense of their own political (in)action. This led us to also pay attention to young people who identify as apolitical, thereby exploring how they understand the political.

Considering the epistemological premises outlined above, we structured the study using a sequential exploratory design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018, 84–92). In the first, qualitative phase, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with various groups of young people who, based on the initial differences in their socio-political engagement, were divided into young politicians, young activists, and apolitical young people. Each group was segmented separately. Among young politicians, we arranged two focus groups: one with five representatives of political party youth wings or young party members, and another with seven representatives of the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, followed by six in-depth interviews. As regards young people, we used a short survey distributed via youth centres for segmentation purposes. This led us to identify 29 individuals who stated that they were not interested in politics. We conducted two focus groups with them, with six participants in the first and eight in the second, together with eight interviews. Young activists were identified with the help of experts in the fields of youth political participation and new social movements. During the mapping phase, 32 civil society organisations were identified and invited to participate on the basis of a random draw. The first focus group contained seven activists active in at least ten organisations, while the second had four activists from five organisations, with whom we later held a further eight interviews.

The focus groups were divided thematically into two parts. In the first, we examined how young people understand politics, focusing on the problems and ideals with which they articulate their understanding of the political. These dimensions had already addressed in the warm-up question that asked participants to imagine what they would change in society if they were superheroes. Exploration of the dimensions continued via associations with the word politics and a discussion of four vignettes: elections, homelessness, classroom teaching, and the autonomous space Metelkova with its art installations and graffiti. In the second part, we focused on understandings of political participation, notably the reasons, aims and practices of political engagement. After the focus groups, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2006; Fontana and Frey 2005), which allowed us to further explore the perspectives obtained and open space for opinions and experiences which might not have emerged in the focus groups. The interviews likewise focused on understandings of politics and political participation, especially through the problems, ideals and activities which young people associate with political engagement.

In accordance with the sequential exploratory design, the second phase extended the research through a questionnaire whose operationalisation was

informed by the qualitative findings on the way young people themselves understand politics and political orientation. Alongside demographic questions, the questionnaire included five thematic sections: understandings of politics through problems and ideals; perceptions of politics, including political orientation; understandings of politics through different activities; understandings of being apolitical or uninterested in politics; and understandings of political participation through the reasons, practices and aims of political engagement. In total, the questionnaire comprised 27 questions and 207 items. Data collection was performed by the company Valicon among members of the JazVem online panel, with residents of Slovenia aged 15 to 29 being the target population. The survey was conducted between 14 February and 11 March 2024 via the 1KA platform and completed by 1,068 respondents. Since the data were collected prior to the National Assembly elections, they do not constitute a direct empirical examination of the perceived turn by young people to the right. Insights about this turn, which, as shown above, extend beyond the post-election period, thus primarily serve as an analytical point of departure for contextualising young people's political positioning. To approximate the structure of the target population, the research provider applied weighting based on a combination of three age groups, gender and region. Since the sample is based on a non-probability online panel, statistical tests were used descriptively to help determine differences between groups rather than for making generalisations about the population. The following data are presented on two levels: first, by three groups of young people (young politicians, apolitical young people, young activists), which are conceptually similar to those in the qualitative phase but operationalised in the quantitative phase on the basis of the survey criteria for political (non-)engagement (see below); and second on the level of the general population of young people in Slovenia where similarities and differences among the three groups of young people were examined together with the insights from the qualitative phase.

To analyse the data from the focus groups and interviews, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) was employed. Such analysis permits the systematic identification of patterns in the material while allowing the researcher to move beyond surface-level descriptions and analyse how participants constitute and express their understandings, in our case, of politics. The thematic analysis thus does not merely involve categorising data, but represents an interpretative process that illuminates connections between individual narratives, theoretical frameworks, and broader social and political contexts. In the analysis, we therefore drew on the Foucauldian analytical framework of governmentality (Foucault 2008; Bröckling et al. 2011; Lemke 2011) and the related analytics of government (Dean 2010). Foucault analysed government on two different although interconnected levels: empirical-historical and theoretical-conceptual (Lynch 2011, 14). On the first level, his work looked at analysing concrete historical forms and mechanisms of power, from which his conceptions of pastoral, sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms of

government stemmed. Still, for us his conceptual and analytical reflections on how power operates are particularly important since they allow us to understand it as arising from relations of power and, consequently, as relational, decentralised, multidirectional, impersonal and productive (Foucault 1978, 92–93). In this vein, we read young people's understandings of politics as an outcome of relations of power which, on one hand, produce specific perceptions of politics among young people and, on the other, may enable these perceptions to shape new understandings of the political and different configurations of the operation of power.

Further, a Foucauldian understanding of power, and the analytics of government more generally, is inextricably linked to the power–knowledge relationship. Power refers to activities carried out by a multiplicity of authorities, actors and institutions with the aim of influencing the conduct of individuals, communities and populations, including their desires, interests, aspirations and beliefs (Dean 2010, 11). Such attempts to conduct the conducts of others and oneself are always connected to regimes of knowledge, expert discourses, classifications, norms and truths circulating in society, which allow certain phenomena to become intelligible, 'natural' and governable in *specific* ways. Two key aspects of the operation of power follow from this. First, within the reciprocal power–knowledge relation, power is always grounded in particular political rationalities or logics via which an *art of government* is established, namely, modes of thought through which the conduct of others and oneself is grounded, justified and organised. Second, power does not operate solely repressively but also productively because through both diverse ways of shaping desires and aspirations, and existing truths and beliefs, it constitutes and directs the conduct of individuals and populations.

Three aspects of governmentality and the analytics of government are central to our analysis: political rationalities, techniques of government, and modes of subjectivation. Political rationalities refer to forms of knowledge, argumentation, modes of understanding or *truths* that justify relations and modes of human conduct as the (only) logical ones, thereby situating them within certain understandings of politics and of the conduct of individuals and societies. Techniques of government include, among others, programmes, instruments, tactics, calculations and documents which materialise political rationalities or directly influence the conduct of individuals and political communities. Subjectivation refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are recognised, (self-) formed and encouraged to understand themselves as specific political subjects, for example as responsible individuals, active citizens or apathetic young people (Singh 2012, 11). Thus, while interpreting the data we mainly focused, through young people's statements, discourses, perceptions and attitudes, on identifying the political rationalities reflected in their understandings and views, the techniques of government that constitute them as specific kinds of individuals, and the modes of subjectivation through which young people understand themselves, form their own political identities, and define the possibilities for their action.

On the broadest level, we therefore examine how young people understand politics and the ways in which this is reflected in their left–right political orientation. Studies of governmentality also concentrate on the analytics of the political. In this respect, through discourses and perspectives, we identify how different groups of young people, as in, young politicians, apolitical young people and young activists, draw the boundaries of the political, where differences surface in their conceptions of the political, and how this is reflected in their political orientation. Here, the analytics of government served as a theoretical-methodological apparatus for an in-depth interpretation of thematic patterns, enabling us to treat the themes identified in the thematic analysis not just as descriptions of young people's attitudes, but as expressions of broader political rationalities, of the ways they understand their truths about politics, and of processes of subjectivation by which young people position themselves as diverse political subjects.

HETEROGENEITY IN UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITICS THROUGH IDEALS AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Political subjects' understandings of politics, including those of young people, are constituted and become evident through ideals. Sartori (1973, 182) emphasised the dual dimension of political ideals and values: on the one hand, they must be understood as specifically political rather than merely moral categories while, on the other, politics cannot be explained in entirely non-normative or amoral terms. Ideals therefore represent a key value-based and normative horizon for understanding how young people perceive politics, the expectations they hold of political institutions and collective action, and how they position and constitute themselves as political subjects. The reverse also holds true, as Philp (2007, 1–2) noted, since politics plays a key role in establishing, interpreting and projecting ideals. This means ideals are not simply a point of departure for political action as their meaning is also shaped by political processes, relations of power and forms of contestation that people perceive and experience. The relationship between politics and ideals is thus co-constitutive. Political orders are established and legitimised by invoking certain ideals, while at the same time specific political orders determine which ideals are favoured, normalised, legitimate and desirable, and which are marginalised, silenced or even persecuted and prohibited.

Through the lens of governmentality, political ideals are accordingly not ahistorical, transcendent or teleological value frameworks existing beyond relations of power. Instead, such ideals depend on particular political constellations and ideas and form part of the ways in which certain forms of life, conduct and community become intelligible and are seen as desirable, legitimate or problematic. The analytics of government hence permits ideals to be read not merely as declarative values, but as sites where political rationalities are expressed. In contemporary political contexts dominated by neoliberal rationality (Brown 2015;

Foucault 2008), thinking and referring to ideals such as autonomy, responsibility, entrepreneurship and others primarily takes place within this framework, and these ideals are often articulated in ways that individualise structural problems and displace collective solutions. Young people are addressed as competing individuals who are expected to invest in their human capital, adapt to the demands of the market and take responsibility for their own life choices. Parallel to this, it is important to recognise that such (preferred) value-based and normative frameworks might coexist or even compete with egalitarian and solidaristic ideals. To understand how different groups of young people perceive politics, it is hence necessary to analyse how various ideals are connected, hierarchised and rationalised in their discourses. Through the analytics of government, political ideals also hold an important role in processes of subjectivation (Ball and Olmedo 2013; Besley and Peters 2015). When young people identify with certain ideals, they are not only expressing opinions, but constituting themselves as specific political subjects.

Differences were evident in understandings of politics based on the elaboration of ideals among young activists, apolitical young people and young politicians. Young activists' visions of an ideal society do not stem just from a perceived need to improve existing institutions, but from a fundamental questioning of the social, political and economic relations that reproduce perceived inequalities and crises.

> I mean, it seems to me *that politics shapes society* because, again, we come back to these relations. [...] I would say, basically, that *politics is a form of social engagement* that responds to social issues. (Jaka, young activist, focus group, emphasis added)

> Basically, the closest *[understanding of politics]* for me is *a very broad one.* As soon as you have *some element of community* and rules that regulate how this *community functions together,* what is allowed, what is desirable, what, basically, what values there are that guide how this community acts. (Mojca, young activist, interview, emphasis added)

In this illustration of the dominant discourse among young activists, we can identify an inclination towards broader definitions of the political and indications of a multidimensional understanding of politics. Young activists do recognise institutionalised politics and often refer to it as "state politics", "politics in the context of a parliamentary democracy" or a "formal mode" of political action, yet also understand it as only one form of the political. This position is consistent with Pickard (2019), who found that young people in contemporary political contexts tend to live politics according to their ethical and political values, with politics being everywhere for young activists, not simply at elections.

The political ideals of young activists are thus consistently situated on the

systemic level, with criticism of the system predominating. Such an understanding is at once personal and collective, with traditional political structures centred on political parties being replaced by another form of collectivity which focuses instead on issues, values and concerns that address systemic social problems and seek to imagine alternatives. The described understanding not only indicates a broader definition of politics, but also a specific normative horizon in which political ideals are inseparably connected to relations, values and collective responsibility. Politics is understood as a process of organising collective life rather than as technical management or merely institutional activity. In Foucauldian terms, these discourses can be understood as processes of subjectivation by which young activists constitute themselves as political subjects, taking responsibility for the common while also claiming the right to imagine alternatives to the existing order. Their ideals are therefore not simply critical of the existing system, but also produce political imaginaries of different social orders, with community serving as a key organising principle of the political and as a space in which what is desirable, permissible and just is redefined.

While reflecting on the ideals of young activists, Isin's (2008, 38) active citizens–activist citizens distinction is relevant, with the latter expanding the boundaries of how politics is understood and the political enacted, while the former follow prevailing understandings of the political and use existing mechanisms of political participation. Through the analytics of government, such an orientation among young activists can also be seen as resistance to, or a departure from, neoliberal forms of governing (Ball and Olmedo 2013, 85–88), which often shift responsibility and problem-solving to the individual level (Foucault 2008), whereas among activists a normative logic of the collective and systemic transformation is established instead. This does not mean that these ideals exist beyond relations of power, but that it is precisely through reflections which cut across established ways of understanding politics that the conditions of possibility for different political practices and different political subjectivities are created.

The broader understandings of politics expressed by activists by way of systemic reflection and critique, as well as new ways of thinking about community, were absent among young politicians and apolitical young people. For the young politicians, politics was chiefly understood within the framework of political institutions, the (nation) state, and the search for solutions and ideals framed as questions of 'legislative changes', 'better policies', 'institutional reforms', 'greater representation of young people' or 'more effective decision-making'.

> *[…]* I think that, generally, one problem with politics is that these unrealistic plans are set out and then there is *no actual action plan* for them. We can all write *national programmes* for anything and they are *wish lists,* but the *problem is implementing* them. (Hana, young politician, focus group, emphasis added)

Malafaia et al. (2018, 62) arrived at similar findings via the concept of "civic imagination", defined as "the ways in which people individually and collectively envision a better political, social and civic environment, and work toward achieving that future" (Baiocchi et al. 2016, 22). They established, unsurprisingly, that young people active in political youth wings or party politics believed political parties and institutions, as well as formal political processes, are the best spaces for acting in the public interest and, above all, for improving the existing system. This indicates a noteworthy interdependence between institutional embeddedness and the normative horizons of political ideals. Consequently, the dominant ideals were *well-functioning* institutions, an *implemented* programme or action plan, and *realistic* policies. In this framework, ideals do not disappear, and are instead situated within an imaginary of the possible bounded by institutional procedures and realpolitik calculations.

Within this discourse, the ideal of politics is mainly linked to effective, technical implementation and management. Politics appears as a space in which the core problem is a lack of feasibility rather than a lack of alternative visions or different ideas and political rationalities. Such an understanding is consistent with the position of young politicians since their political subjectivity is also formed within existing institutional frameworks. Viewed through the analytics of government, this is not merely a matter of *pragmatism*, but of a specific technocratic-neoliberal rationality of government in which political ideals are translated into questions of implementation, the functioning of systems, and the optimisation of governance. Namely, into a logic in which politics is primarily a practice of governing the social towards institutional effectiveness, feasibility and implementation more than a space of conflict between alternative visions of life (Sánchez-Cuenca 2020; Dean 2010; Foucault 2008; Li 2007). This points to a relationship between acting within political institutions and perceptions of politics, and *vice versa*, in which young politicians can be seen to constitute themselves as subjects who understand political action as responsible governance, managing feasibility and working within the existing rules of the game, or within the prevailing neoliberal rationality.

Among apolitical young people, ideals were expressed through an even narrower understanding of politics and were mainly linked to individual well-being. Their ideals were often articulated in a moral register, in terms of what politics should do for individuals. In addition, it is evident that they had reflected on political ideals by considering current political problems in Slovenia at the time the focus groups and interviews were being conducted, such as: the shortage of housing for young people, access to public education and healthcare, ensuring peace at a time when wars were underway relatively close to Slovenia. Ideals therefore largely appear as desires to improve living conditions, while a broader vision of the political and a perceived need to transform existing political, economic or institutional arrangements are absent.

> Maybe *I'd* want us to have *more free time and spend less time at work* and doing all those things. (Nataša, apolitical young person, focus group, emphasis added)

> That there *would be peace and everyone would have access to education.* (Mateja, apolitical young person, focus group, emphasis added)

> I would like to live in a society where *solidarity prevails over,* I wouldn't say greed, but *over selfishness and this orientation of every individual that they simply have to support themselves,* because no one else is going to help them. (Simona, apolitical young person, focus group, emphasis added)

In the above quotations, we can thus identify the previously mentioned individual point of departure in perceiving problems and locating their solutions, while implicitly relying on existing political arrangements, institutions and political representatives. In the framework of governmentality, this can be viewed as an effect of neoliberal rationality, which often translates structural problems into individual concerns and responsibilities and into the technicist management of identified problems (Brown 2015). At the same time, it is important not to understand the ideals expressed by apolitical young people as an *absence of politics*, and instead as a specific mode of orientation in the world with which they recognise certain values and ideals through a moral lens, including, for example, solidarity and access to public services, which run counter to the prevailing neoliberal rationality, yet without reflecting on, or an imagination of, how these could be achieved on the systemic level. Rather than apoliticality, we can identify processes of *depoliticisation* here, based on the assumption of the inevitability of capitalism, the market economy and the neoliberal order, while the search for technical solutions reduces the space for confronting opposing views and imagining alternatives (Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014). At this point, in apolitical young people's imagining of political ideals, we can observe how they constitute themselves as subjects of the *good life*, situated within a broader neoliberal framework of happiness and well-being in which social problems are often translated into questions of individual quality of life, understood as *non-political action*. Political action, on the other hand, is understood and situated within the framework of formal institutions, whether perceived as too *distant* or *dirty*.

In line with the recognised heterogeneity of young people, we can see that understandings of politics through ideals are also diverse among young people in Slovenia. Young activists understood politics in the broadest sense, in the direction that "everything is political", while also locating it on the level of critique of the existing neoliberal order. In these discourses, we detected subjectivation into activist citizens who expand the boundaries of the political, assume responsibility for the common, and establish the conditions of possibility for different political practices and subjectivities. It is hardly surprising that young

people understood politics mostly on the institutional level, that is, through formal politics and existing political institutions and mechanisms. Their understandings primarily showed a technocratic-neoliberal rationality of government that situates politics within the effective functioning of institutions, responsible governance, and the assessment of feasibility within existing frameworks of political action. Apolitical young people, in contrast, were characterised by an individualised understanding of politics oriented to moral judgements of what is *good* for individuals. Rather than apoliticality, these discourses mainly revealed the effects of depoliticisation and subjectivation around the *good life*, situated in the broader framework of neoliberal rationality where social problems are translated into personal choices and, at the same time, personal responsibility. This provides a basis for a more detailed understanding of young people's political leanings, which is further contextualised below with quantitative data on how politics is understood by individual groups of young people and young people generally.

INTERWEAVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITICS AND THEIR POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

Unlike existing studies (Lavrič et al. 2011; Lavrič and Deželan 2021; Rutar 2024; Naterer et al. 2019) which measured left–right political orientation among the general youth population, in the quantitative research we retained the previous division of young people according to their prior political (non-)engagement into three groups: young activists, young politicians and apolitical young people. While the groups are conceptually similar to those considered in the qualitative phase, here they were operationalised based on survey criteria capturing self-reported (dis)interest in politics, (non-)participation in party activities, and the extent of participation in various forms of political engagement. We classified as young activists young individuals who had participated in at least three of the seven listed forms of political engagement or participation, and disagreed with the statement that they were not interested in politics, or had not participated in political party activities. The category of young politicians included young people who stated that they were interested in politics, had participated in political party activities, and participated in at least two of the listed political activities. Young people were classified as apolitical if they described themselves as apolitical or expressed that they were not interested in politics and who, when asked about participation in the listed political activities, reported having not participated in at least five of the seven activities. Another necessary condition for classifying young people as apolitical was that they had not participated in political party activities. According to these criteria, the weighted data included 446 apolitical young people, 114 young activists and 35 young politicians. Given that some respondents might not have answered all questions in the questionnaire, the number of valid cases for individual questions may be slightly lower than the total number of respondents or members of each group.

Political positioning, or left–right self-positioning, as shown in the table below, to some extent confirms the differences revealed in the qualitative analysis of understandings of politics, yet also provided some surprising insights. Young activists on average positioned themselves farthest to the left, with a mean of 4.19 and a median of 4, with more than half the responses falling on the left side of the scale, from 0 to 4. Noting the qualitative findings that activists understand politics more broadly and in systemic terms, chiefly through criticism of existing social, economic and political relations, their left-wing positioning should therefore not be regarded merely as a form of party-political self-identification, but as an expression of opposition to the prevailing neoliberal rationality. Moreover, the left–wing positioning of young activists diverges from the general findings for the broader population of young people in Slovenia, who are claimed to have shifted more to the right in recent years.

Table 1 (different groups): QUESTION: "IN POLITICS, PEOPLE OFTEN TALK ABOUT THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT. WHERE WOULD YOU PLACE YOURSELF ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 10, WHERE 0 REPRESENTS THE LEFT, 10 THE RIGHT, AND 5 THE CENTRE?"

	Responses (in %)												Descriptive statistics			
Group	0: Left	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10: Right	Total	Mean	SD	Median	*n*
Apolitical	2.3	1.1	3.8	5.4	10.4	54.9	6.3	8.1	5.2	1.1	1.4	100.0	5.02	1.67	5.00	444
Young activists	7.9	5.3	11.4	15.8	13.2	21.1	7.9	8.8	5.3	0.0	3.5	100.0	4.19	2.39	4.00	114
Young politicians	5.6	0.0	2.8	2.8	11.1	16.7	36.1	8.3	8.3	2.8	5.6	100.0	5.67	2.21	6.00	35
Total	3.5	1.9	5.2	7.3	11.0	46.0	8.4	8.3	5.4	1.0	2.0	100.0	4.90	1.90	5.00	593

Source: The Authors.

The only group to have positioned itself on the right is young politicians, with a mean of 5.67 and a median of 6, and the biggest share of responses converging on the value of 6. Given the studies and discourses presented in the introduction that link a lack of political reflection with the turn to the right, this finding is somewhat unexpected since we believed apolitical young people would position themselves farthest to the right. The finding is nonetheless consistent with the insights that young people are *awakening* politically or, more precisely, that those young people who vote largely support right-wing parties. Further, this orientation among young politicians is also consistent with the qualitative findings that their understanding of politics is articulated via a technocratic-neoliberal rationality of government, which right-wing parties in Slovenia pursue more openly. Among apolitical young people, by contrast, the most pronounced concentration of responses is at the midpoint of the scale, with 54.9% positioning

Table 2: QUESTION: "TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT IDEALS?"
Scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Statement	Group	Mean on a scale from 1 to 5	Difference in means		
			vs apolitical	vs young activists	vs young politicians
I would like inequality between people to be as low as possible	Apolitical	4.14		0.02	**0.43**
	Young activists	4.12	-0.02		**0.41**
	Young politicians	3.71	**-0.43**	**-0.41**	
I would like the democracy in which we live to function well	Apolitical	4.17		-0.08	-0.02
	Young activists	4.25	0.08		0.06
	Young politicians	4.19	0.02	-0.06	
I would like the political system to change	Apolitical	3.85		0.15	0.31
	Young activists	3.70	-0.15		0.16
	Young politicians	3.54	-0.31	-0.16	
I would like everyone to take care of themselves first	Apolitical	3.36		0.20	0.05
	Young activists	3.16	-0.20		-0.15
	Young politicians	3.31	-0.05	0.15	
I would like to live in a country with few immigrants from other countries	Apolitical	3.69		**0.63**	0.18
	Young activists	3.06	**-0.63**		-0.45
	Young politicians	3.51	-0.18	0.45	
I would like a sense of belonging and love for one's country to be important	Apolitical	3.94		**0.26**	-0.02
	Young activists	3.68	**-0.26**		-0.28
	Young politicians	3.96	0.02	0.28	
I would like a state that provides high-quality healthcare services to all citizens	Apolitical	4.61		-0.02	0.07
	Young activists	4.63	0.02		0.09
	Young politicians	4.54	-0.07	-0.09	
I would like a state that provides social security to all citizens	Apolitical	4.26		-0.05	0.43
	Young activists	4.31	0.05		0.48
	Young politicians	3.83	-0.43	-0.48	
I would like the state to collect as little tax as possible	Apolitical	4.22		**0.70**	0.38
	Young activists	3.52	**-0.70**		-0.32
	Young politicians	3.84	-0.38	0.32	
I would like services provided by the state to be delivered by companies because they are more efficient	Apolitical	3.67		**0.53**	0.00
	Young activists	3.14	**-0.53**		-0.53
	Young politicians	3.67	0.00	0.53	
I would like young people to be more politically engaged	Apolitical	3.47		**-0.62**	**-0.41**
	Young activists	4.09	**0.62**		0.21
	Young politicians	3.88	**0.41**	-0.21	
I would like to continue living as I have until now	Apolitical	3.21		0.16	0.26
	Young activists	3.05	-0.16		0.10
	Young politicians	2.95	-0.26	-0.10	
	Minimum value	2.95			
	Maximum value	4.63			

Legend	
Bold	Statistically significant difference between a pair of means ($p < 0.05$, one-way analysis of variance and Gabriel or Games–Howell post hoc test)
Light-grey shading	Absolute difference between two means of at least 0.3
Dark-grey shading	Absolute difference between two means of at least 0.5
Blue shading	Highest mean (among all values)
Orange shading	Lowest mean (among all values)

Source: The Authors.

themselves with a value of 5, a mean of 5.02 and a median of 5. Such a centrist position does not indicate a clear political orientation, but a weaker articulation of political imaginaries, which is in harmony with the qualitative findings. It is also consistent with their subjectivation as subjects of the good life whereby political ideals are mainly expressed through a moral register and ideas about improving individuals' living conditions. A more in-depth contextualisation of left–right self-positioning is provided by their understanding of politics through ideals.

A relatively broad consensus exists among young people concerning certain fundamental ideals, such as access to public healthcare and the importance of the functions of a democracy (see Table 2). These ideals are rated highly by all three groups: young politicians, young activists and apolitical young people. However, a comparison with the qualitative data shows these ideals do not hold the same weight or perform the same function for each group. Among young activists, they are situated within a broader systemic framework of critique and transformation of social relations, whereas among young politicians they function as goals to be achieved via effective institutions and political programmes. Among apolitical young people, they frequently appear as general expectations of the state or society, without a clear idea of the political pathways by which they could be realised. In any event, at least among young politicians, who positioned themselves farther to the right, the high level of support for public healthcare (traditionally more associated with the left) is somewhat surprising.

Differences between the groups become more pronounced, and more consistent with the qualitative findings while considering ideals about the relationship between the state, the market and the individual. Young activists consistently distanced themselves from normative positions that valorise market mechanisms, low taxation or a greater role for companies in the provision of public services. The quantitative data thus confirm that a relatively coherent normative framework is formed within this group, one that is critical of neoliberal rationality and stresses collective responsibility, redistribution and systemic change. In Foucauldian terms, this entails the formation of a political subjectivity that consciously positions itself in tension with the prevailing neoliberal rationality of government and seeks to expand the field of what is politically possible. Young politicians differ significantly from the two other groups in their greater acceptance of

inequality, while differences in mean scores regarding social security are noticeable, albeit not statistically significant. Further, as regards the ideal that companies would provide services currently delivered by the state more efficiently, young activists are statistically significantly less supportive than apolitical young people, with young politicians not differing significantly from either group. This closely reflects the technocratic-neoliberal rationality identified in the qualitative data and is also connected to affiliation with parties of the so-called right-wing pole in Slovenia, which are more inclined to support lower taxes (including for the wealthier), the privatisation of public services, the introduction of market mechanisms, and a meritocratic logic which increases inequality while simultaneously reducing social security. A sense of belonging and love for one's country was valued more highly by young politicians and apolitical young people, while it was the least important for young activists. Among young politicians, this adds a national dimension to the technocratic-neoliberal rationality already identified.

Apolitical young people reflect a specific and contradictory pattern of understanding politics via ideals, which also helps explain their centrist political (non-)orientation. Although on one hand they expressed relatively high support for justice, democracy, equal opportunities and social security, on the other they also agreed with individualised, meritocratic and conservative ideas that emphasise individual responsibility, love of country, and restrictions on immigration. In Foucauldian terms, these can be understood as effects of neoliberal subjectivation whereby the individual is held responsible for their own life, while politics remains a distant and unclear sphere from which effective problem-solving is mostly expected without their direct engagement. The simultaneous desire to change the political system while continuing to live as before likewise points more to dissatisfaction with existing institutions than a clearly articulated systemic alternative. Political ideals within this group therefore remain confined within moral categories and the subjectivation of the good life within the existing imaginary of what is possible and feasible.

To examine the interweaving of young people's understandings of politics and their political orientations, we also analysed the general population of young people in Slovenia and compared how this varies from the positioning of young activists, young politicians and apolitical young people, together with the extent to which it corresponds with their political ideals. Data for the representative population of young people in Slovenia (see Table 3) show a pronounced centrist self-positioning, with a mean of 5.03 and almost 44% of young people positioning themselves precisely at the midpoint of the scale. The general population of young people is thus closest to apolitical young people (with an almost identical mean of 5.02), although their responses are even more strongly concentrated at the midpoint. It differs from young activists and young politicians in that it does not position itself more clearly to either the left or the right. The results namely do not confirm an unequivocal turn to the right among the general population

of young people, as suggested by some of the studies and public interpretations mentioned in the introduction. Such a centrist positioning of the general population of young people can be understood more precisely when considered relative to their political ideals.

Table 3: (GENERAL POPULATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE, N = 1,064); QUESTION: "IN POLITICS, PEOPLE OFTEN TALK ABOUT THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT. WHERE WOULD YOU PLACE YOURSELF ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 10, WHERE 0 REPRESENTS THE LEFT, 10 THE RIGHT, AND 5 THE CENTRE?"

Responses (in %)												Descriptive statistics			
0: Left	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10: Right	Total	Mean	SD	Median	*n*
2.9	1.9	5.5	8	10.5	43.3	7.9	8.9	5.7	2	3.5	100.0	5.03	2.02	5.00	1.064

Source: The Authors.

Young people show a strong normative consensus around certain social and democratic ideals (see Table 4), such as public healthcare, social security, the effective functioning of democracy, and lowering inequality. These results confirm that egalitarian and solidaristic ideals constitute a central normative and value-based framework for young people's thinking in Slovenia regardless of their left–right political orientation. Yet the findings also reveal a paradox because young people's support for issues more typically associated with the left does not translate into a corresponding political orientation. In other words, even though their ideals align with issues stressed by the left, young people tended to position themselves in the centre or, in the case of young politicians, farther to the right. These beliefs, however, are not integrated into a unified or coherent political imaginary since support for the 'welfare state' and social and democratic orientations can be seen to coexist with distinctly individualistic, neoliberal and conservative positions. Low taxation, attachment to one's country, restrictions on immigration, and the introduction of market mechanisms into state provision also enjoyed relatively high levels of support among young people. In particular, support for low taxation and relatively strong agreement with the statement that services otherwise provided by the state should be delivered by companies because they are more efficient indicate the presence of neoliberal rationality.

Table 4: (GENERAL POPULATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE, N = 1,068); QUESTION: "TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT IDEALS?"

Statements or sub-questions	Responses (in %)					Descriptive statistics			
	1: Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5: Strongly agree	Mean	SD	Median	*n*
I would like inequality between people to be as low as possible	1.5	3.3	17.3	38.1	39.7	4.11	0.91	4.00	1,068
I would like the democracy in which we live to function well	0.5	1.0	12.9	47.5	38.1	4.22	0.74	4.00	1,066
I would like the political system to change	1.7	7.8	28.2	34.7	27.6	3.79	0.99	4.00	1,068
I would like everyone to take care of themselves first	3.9	14.2	41.6	28.4	12.0	3.30	0.98	3.00	1,068
I would like to live in a country with few immigrants from other countries	6.1	12.9	29.7	23.0	28.4	3.55	1.20	4.00	1,068
I would like a sense of belonging and love for one's country to be important	2.1	4.2	24.5	40.4	28.8	3.90	0.94	4.00	1,068
I would like a state that provides high-quality healthcare services to all citizens	0.2	1.1	5.2	23.4	70.1	4.62	0.66	5.00	1,068
I would like a state that provides social security to all citizens	1.5	3.0	10.5	37.8	47.2	4.26	0.87	4.00	1,067
I would like the state to collect as little tax as possible	2.5	6.5	20.6	28.4	42.0	4.01	1.05	4.00	1,065
I would like services provided by the state to be delivered by companies because they are more efficient	4.7	8.2	35.4	31.8	19.9	3.54	1.05	4.00	1,068
I would like young people to be more politically engaged	1.5	5.5	31.8	40.7	20.6	3.73	0.90	4.00	1,066
I would like to continue living as I have until now	4.2	20.0	40.1	27.5	8.2	3.16	0.97	3.00	1,068

Source: The Authors.

Compared with young activists, the general population of young people does not display a clear critical distancing from neoliberal rationality. In both the qualitative and quantitative data, activists emerged as a group in which ideals of social security, reducing inequality, political participation and public services are linked to a systemic critique of existing social and economic relations. The general population shares with young politicians a relatively high valuation of democracy, institutional functioning and efficiency, yet is nevertheless less clearly situated within the technocratic-neoliberal rationality that understands politics primarily in terms of feasibility, governance, and acting within existing institutional rules. At the same time, the general population is very close to apolitical young people, which is also consistent with their almost identical centrist positioning on the left–right axis. Like with apolitical young people, the general population also displays subjectivation as subjects of the good life, expressing a desire for low inequality, health, and social protection, but without a clear critique of the existing system since these views coexist with a neoliberal logic and conservative positions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The article has offered a critical reflection on the perspectives and discourses that dominate in media coverage and research findings regarding the turn of young people to the right in Slovenia. Rather than reproducing moral panic and *adultism*, which locate the problem of an allegedly *wrong* political orientation or supposed turn to the right in young people themselves in their *wrong* choices and their *not yet sufficiently* rational and reflective understanding of the political, we reversed the perspective. Through the analytics of government, we showed that for those born and raised within a neoliberal rationality that understands society and collective life in terms of markets and transactional relations, a shift to the right can arise as an almost logical political orientation since this rationality structures the field of possible conduct and is privileged within the prevailing forms of governing political communities and the broader social order. Via research with young people focusing on their understandings of politics in relation to ideals, we also showed that young people are a far more heterogeneous group and that their alleged turn to the right should not be generalised to the entire youth population in Slovenia.

Young people's positioning on the left–right axis also proved to be considerably more complex than simple self-perception or the choice of a position on an ideological scale. Detailed analysis of young people's understandings of politics through political ideals allowed us to more precisely examine how they understand politics and constitute themselves as political subjects, thereby clarifying what different forms of political positioning mean to different groups of young people. Young activists understood politics the most broadly, chiefly as a systemic critique of existing social, economic and political relations and as a space for imagining alternative forms of collective life. Young politicians understood

politics primarily institutionally, via formal mechanisms, feasibility, effective governance and action within the existing neoliberal rationality. Apolitical young people, in comparison, understood politics mainly through moral conceptions of the good life, security, solidarity, and the improvement of living conditions, albeit without a clearly articulated political imagination or systemic alternative.

The described heterogeneity was also reflected in their left–right positioning. Our findings only partly support studies and public interpretations that point to a more pronounced turn of young people to the right. We did not identify such an unequivocal turn within the representative population of young people in Slovenia since young people as a whole position themselves markedly in the centre. More pronounced differences are found only when young people are differentiated by their political engagement. Young activists position themselves farther to the left, which is consistent with their systemic critique of neoliberal rationality, their emphasis on collective responsibility, and their expansion of the boundaries of the political. Young politicians position themselves farthest to the right, which is somewhat surprising yet also consistent with findings that some young people who become politically mobilised within existing institutional channels more frequently support or join right-wing parties. This suggests that right-wing political parties in Slovenia are successful with articulating and instrumentalising various forms of dissatisfaction among some young people, often linking them to conservative, national, meritocratic and exclusionary discourses. Apolitical young people, meanwhile, remain positioned markedly in the centre, which indicates less a clearly defined centrist ideology than weaker political articulation, ambivalence in their ideals, and distance from politics as a sphere of their own action.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that understanding young people's political positioning requires more than linking their left–right self-identification to their ideals. The question of the reasons behind their political positioning is considerably broader and more multifaceted. In this analysis, we did not systematically address gender, class position, education, economic position, or regional and family influences, even though some studies indicate these variables are important for understanding young people's political leanings (Nennstiel and Hudde 2025; Schäfer and Steiner 2026; Ares and Ditmars 2023; Zagórski et al. 2021). At the same time, political positioning results from numerous difficult-to-measure influences that are themselves constantly shifting across changing social and political contexts. These include socio-political crises, digital environments and the algorithmic visibility of content associated with them, party strategies for addressing and involving young people, media representations, peer groups, experiences with institutions, and a sense of uncertainty about the future. This means left–right positioning cannot be understood as a stable expression of pre-formed identities, but as a temporary, situated and often contradictory articulation of understandings of politics, one's own position, and perceived possibilities for action.

This leads us to reiterate that research with young people must begin from their own understandings of politics rather than from moralistic judgements about their supposedly correct or incorrect political orientation. If some young people are moving to the right or adopting conservative, individualised and exclusionary ideas, this should not be understood largely as an expression of personal moral shortcomings, a lack of reflection or wrong choices. Such positioning should instead be viewed as an effect of broader governmental rationalities, notably the neoliberal logics of competition, individualisation of responsibility, insecurity and depoliticisation, which may intersect with conservative and exclusionary discourses. Rather than treating young people as problematic holders of wrong political orientations, they should be seen as political subjects constituted within specific relations of power, crises, institutional constraints and discursive framings. Such an approach enables a more nuanced understanding of young people as heterogeneous political subjects and opens up space for considering how democratic politics, education, and public institutions might create conditions for more reflective, inclusive and collectively oriented forms of political engagement among young people.

FUNDING

This work was supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency [grant number J5-3109].

DATA AVAILABILITY

Pušnik, Tomaž, Gregor Čehovin. 2026. "A Reflection on Young People's Understanding of Politics and Political Orientation in Slovenia in the Era of Neoliberal Rationality". *Zenodo*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23056304.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abou-Chadi, Tarik. 2024. "A Gendered Far-Right Wave among Young Voters in Western Europe?". *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2024D000000065.

Ares, Macarena, and Mathilde M. van Ditmars. 2023. "Intergenerational Social Mobility, Political Socialization and Support for the Left under Post-Industrial Realignment". *British Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 536–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000230.

Baiocchi, Gianpaolo, Elizabeth A. Bennett, Alissa Cordner, Peter Klein, and Stephanie Savell. 2016. *Civic Imagination: Making a Difference in American Political Life*. Routledge.

Ball, Stephen J., and Antonio Olmedo. 2013. "Care of the Self, Resistance and Subjectivity under Neoliberal Governmentalities". *Critical Studies in Education* 54 (1): 85–96.

Bell, John. 2026. "Understanding Adultism: A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships". In *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 5th ed., edited by Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, D. Chase J. Catalano, et al., Routledge.

Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. AltaMira Press.

Besley, Tina A. C., and Michael A. Peters. 2015. "Subjectivity, Youth Unemployment and the Culture of Self". In *Foucault and a Politics of Confession in Education*, edited by Andreas Fejes and Katherine Nicoll. Routledge.

Bessant, Judith, Sarah Pickard, and Rob Watts. 2020. "Translating Bourdieu into Youth Studies". *Journal of Youth Studies* 23 (1): 76–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1702633.

Bettencourt, Genia M. 2018. "Embracing Problems, Processes, and Contact Zones: Using Youth Participatory Action Research to Challenge Adultism". *Action Research* 18 (2): 153–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750318789475.

Bezjak Zrim, Špela. 2026. "Mladi se nagibajo vse bolj desno." 24ur.com, 27 March. https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija-odloca/mladi-se-nagibajo-vse-bolj-desno.html.

Bobbio, Norberto. 1996. *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*. Polity Press.

Bokhorst-Heng, Wendy, and Kelle Keating Marshall. 2019. "Informing Research (Practices) through Pedagogical Theory: Focus Groups with Adolescents". *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42 (2): 148–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1449195.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. "'Youth' Is Just a Word". In *Sociology in Question*. Sage.

Boyden, Jo. 1990. "Childhood and the Policy Makers: A Comparative Perspective on the Globalization of Childhood". In *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, edited by Allison James and Alan Prout, 184–215. Falmer Press.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2022. "Conceptual and Design Thinking for Thematic Analysis". *Qualitative Psychology* 9 (1): 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196.

Bröckling, Ulrich, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, eds. 2011. *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*. Routledge.

Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books.

Burtin, Adrian. 2026. "Are Young Voters Turning Right?". *European Data Journalism Network (EDJNet)*, 9 March. https://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/cp_data_news/are-young-voters-turning-right/.

Chisholm, Lynne, Siyka Kovacheva, and Maurizio Merico, eds. 2011. *European Youth Studies: Integrating Research, Policy and Practice*. M.A. EYS Consortium.

Cokelaere, Hanne. 2024. "It's Not Just Boomers, Young People Are Voting Far Right Too". *Politico*, 29 May. https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-young-people-right-wing-voters-far-right-politics-eu-elections-parliament/.

Corney, Tim, Trudi Cooper, Harry Shier, and Howard Williamson. 2022. "Youth Participation: Adultism, Human Rights and Professional Youth Work". *Children & Society* 36 (4): 677–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12526.

Côté, James E. 2014. *Youth Studies: Fundamental Issues and Debates*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Creswell, John W., and Vicki L. Plano Clark. 2018. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE.

Daugul, Larisa. 2026. "Mladi volivci so bili tradicionalno bolj levo usmerjeni, danes se nagibajo rahlo na desno". *RTV Slovenija*, 2 February. https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/mladi-volivci-so-bili-tradicionalno-bolj-levo-usmerjeni-danes-se-nagibajo-rahlo-na-desno/770756.

Dean, Mitchell. 2010. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. SAGE Publications.

Fereday, Jennifer, and Eimear Muir-Cochrane. 2006. "Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic

Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development". *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5 (1): 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107.

Fontana, Andrea, and James H. Frey. 2005. "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement". In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 695–727. SAGE.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. 2000. "The Subject and Power". In *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (3), edited by James D. Faubion. The New Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Freeman, Melissa, and Sandra Mathison. 2009. *Researching Children's Experiences*. Guilford Press.

Gillis, John R. 1974. *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present*. Academic Press.

Hebdige, Dick. 1983. "Posing… Threats, Striking… Poses: Youth, Surveillance, and Display". *SubStance* 12 (1): 68–88.

Isin, Engin F. 2008. "Theorizing Acts of Citizenship". In *Acts of Citizenship*, edited by Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen. Zed Books.

Joshi, Devin K. 2021. "A New Conceptualization of the Political Left and Right: One Dimension, Multiple Domains". *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 54 (3): 534–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423921000408.

Kimberlee, Richard H. 2002. "Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?". *Journal of Youth Studies* 5 (1): 85–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260120111788.

Lavrič, Miran, and Tomaž Deželan, eds. 2021. *Mladina 2020: položaj mladih v Sloveniji*. Univerza v Mariboru, Univerzitetna založba; Založba Univerze v Ljubljani. https://doi.org/10.18690/978-961-286-475-0.

Lavrič, Miran, Sergej Flere, Marina Tavčar Krajnc, et al. 2011. *Mladina 2010: Družbeni Profil Mladih v Sloveniji*. Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, Urad RS za mladino.

Lemke, Thomas. 2011. *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*. Paradigm Publishers.

Lesko, Nancy, and Susan Talburt, eds. 2012. *Keywords in Youth Studies: Tracing Affects, Movements, Knowledges*. Routledge.

Li, Tania Murray. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press.

Lovec, Suzana. 2026. "Politična situacija v Sloveniji: 'Ustanoviti stranko naivnih državljanov'". *N1*, 18 April. https://n1info.si/podkast/politicna-situacija-v-sloveniji-ustanoviti-stranko-naivnih-drzavljanov/.

Lynch, Richard A. 2011. "Foucault's Theory of Power". In *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, edited by Dianna Taylor. Acumen.

Malafaia, Carla, Isabel Menezes, and Tiago Neves. 2018. "Living, Doing, and Learning from Politics in a Youth Wing of a Political Party". *The Qualitative Report* 23 (1): 49–79. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3058.

Marsh, David, Therese O'Toole, and Su Jones. 2007. *Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Mudge, Stephanie Lee. 2008. "What Is Neo-Liberalism?". *Socio-Economic Review* 6 (4): 703–31. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwn016.

Naterer, Andrej, Miran Lavrič, Rudi Klanjšek, et al. 2019. *Slovenska mladina 2018/2019*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Nennstiel, Richard, and Ansgar Hudde. 2025. "Is There a Growing Gender Divide among Young Adults in Regard to Ideological Left–Right Self-Placement? Evidence from 32 European Countries". *European Sociological Review* 41 (6): 862–83. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaf021.

Philp, Mark. 2007. *Political Conduct*. Harvard University Press.

Pickard, Sarah. 2019. *Politics, Protest and Young People: Political Participation and Dissent in 21st Century Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Polacko, Matthew. 2022. "The Rightward Shift and Electoral Decline of Social Democratic Parties under Increasing Inequality". *West European Politics* 45 (4): 665–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1916294.

Rutar, Tibor. 2024. *Raziskava mladih Slovenija 2024: Politika se vrača: Razlaga porasta politične angažiranosti in zasuka v desno med slovensko mladino: 5 ključnih točk o stanju na področju politike med slovensko mladino*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. http://collections.fes.de/publikationen/1571907.

Sánchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. 2020. "Neoliberal Technocracy: The Challenge to Democratic Self-Government". In *The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy*, edited by Daniele Caramani. Routledge.

Sartori, Giovanni. 1973. *Democratic Theory*. 2nd ed. Greenwood Press.

Schäfer, Armin, and Nils D. Steiner. 2026. "How Education, Generation and Gender Jointly Structure Green and Radical Right Voting". *West European Politics* 49 (3): 669–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2025.2466122.

Sheenal, Singh. 2012. *Technologies of Government*. The University of Sydney. https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/9273.

Swyngedouw, Erik, and Japhy Wilson. 2014. *The Post-Political and Its Discontents: Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics*. Edinburgh University Press.

van der Brug, Wouter, Sara B. Hobolt, and Sebastian Adrian Popa. 2026. "The Kids Are Alt Right? Age, Authoritarian Attitudes and Far-Right Support in Europe". *Journal of European Public Policy* 33 (2): 469–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2488358.

Wallace, Claire, and Sijka Kovatcheva. 1998. *Youth in Society: The Construction and Deconstruction of Youth in East and West Europe*. Macmillan.

Wyn, Johanna, and Rob White. 2014. *Rethinking Youth*. Allen & Unwin.

Youngs, Richard, Intifar Chowdhury, Ellie Catherall, et al. 2025. "Youth and the Far Right: Bridging Global Perspectives and Local Realities". *European Democracy Hub*, January 24. https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/youth-and-the-far-right/.

Zagórski, Piotr, Jose Rama, and Guillermo Cordero. 2021. "Young and Temporary: Youth Employment Insecurity and Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe". *Government and Opposition* 56 (3): 405–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.28.

REFLEKSIJA RAZUMEVANJA POLITIKE IN POLITIČNE ORIENTACIJE MLADIH V SLOVENIJI V ČASU NEOLIBERALNE RACIONALNOSTI

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava medijske in raziskovalne ugotovitve o domnevnem obratu mladih v desno v Sloveniji. Namesto moralnih sodb, da ta obrat izraža pomanjkljivo razumevanje politike, prek raziskovanja z mladimi analiziramo, kako različne skupine mladih razumejo politiko in svojo levo-desno orientacijo. S foucaultovsko analitiko oblasti pokažemo, da mladi aktivisti politiko razumejo sistemsko in kot kritiko neoliberalne ureditve, mladi politiki institucionalno znotraj obstoječe neoliberalne racionalnosti, apolitični mladi pa individualno, skozi ideale dobrega življenja. Njihova levo-desne usmeritve ne potrjujejo enoznačnega obrata mladih v desno, temveč kažejo razlike glede na politično in družbeno angažiranost. Politične orientacije mladih razumemo kot situirane procese subjektivacije znotraj neoliberalnih razmerij moči, razpravo pa od moraliziranja preusmerjamo k analizi razmer, v katerih te orientacije nastajajo.*

Ključni pojmi: *mladina, percepcije politike, ideali, politična orientacija levo-desno, analitika oblasti.*

Marko HOČEVAR*

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ALLIANCES AND COMPROMISES IN THE POLITICAL THEORY OF NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI**

Abstract. *The article focuses on the political theory of Niccolò Machiavelli. We analyse and reflect on his theory of the stability and sustainability of different forms of government, as discussed in The Prince and The Discourses. It is argued in the article that, more than deception, cruelty or fortune, Machiavelli places the main emphasis on political, social and economic alliances, as well as political compromises and concessions arising from political and economic conflicts. Alliances and compromises are crucial for the stability and sustainability of both principalities and republics. The political theory of the sustainability of princely rule is based on fear of the potential political power of the people and the resulting alliance between the new prince and the people. The sustainability of the Roman Republic was, according to Machiavelli, the product of class conflict and the consequent class compromise between the people and the great. We thus suggest that the central element of Machiavelli's political theory lies in the political practice of creating and sustaining alliances and class compromises.*

Keywords: *Machiavelli, republic, principality, class conflict, cross-class alliances, compromises.*

"For where men have little virtue, fortune shows its power very much; and because it is variable, republics and states often vary and will always vary until someone emerges who is so much a lover of antiquity that he regulates it in such a mode that it does not have cause to show at every turning of the sun how much it can do". (Machiavelli 1996a, 202)

* Marko Hočevar, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, marko.hocevar@fdv.uni-lj.si.

** Research Article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.637

INTRODUCTION

The novelty of Machiavelli's political theory lay in his empirical analysis and focus on the concrete political processes, on the "*verità effettuale*", of politics (Machiavelli 1998, 61). This is best exemplified by his two seminal works: *The Prince* (Machiavelli 1998) and *The Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius* (hereafter: *The Discourses*) (Machiavelli 1996a). In these works, Machiavelli reveals the distinct focus and complexity of his thought. Intended as an advisory book for a new prince, *The Prince* is full of precise examples and advice grounded in political analysis. *The Discourses* is an empirical and theoretical analysis of the Roman Republic and politics in general, which seeks to provide an empirical and theoretical foundation for the recreation of political institutions in Florence.

The different messages of his works have also sparked numerous debates about the true meaning, message(s), and legacy of Machiavelli's political theory.[1] Many works suggest that immorality and instrumentality are the main elements of Machiavelli's work. In these interpretations, scholars claim that the individual, princely, cruel and deceitful form of rule is the essence of Machiavelli's thought. Among others, Friedrich Meinecke argued that Machiavelli's theory was the "poison" that led to the Third Reich; Raymond Aron saw Machiavelli as the predecessor of totalitarianism (see: Black 2022, 217–18). Cassirer (1946) also saw the instrumentality of Machiavellian political theory as one of the major elements in the development of Nazism. Strauss famously argued that a duality exists in Machiavelli's writings due to his two different works, with one endorsing the princely form of rule and the other the republican. Still, while reflecting on *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, he claimed that Machiavelli was certainly "a patriot [and] a scientist", but also a "teacher of evil", "the classics of the evil way of political thinking and political acting" (Strauss 1958, 10). Parel argued that before Machiavelli himself, 'vulgar Machiavellism' existed as a way of explaining the evil and unjust behaviour of rulers and governments, but with Machiavelli this became elevated to "philosophic Machiavellism" (Parel 1992, 160).

There is also a radical and revolutionary reading of Machiavelli. Gramsci praised Machiavelli, stressing the importance of his break from morality and religion, and took up the concept of the prince, recreating it in the form of the "modern Prince" – the Communist Party (Gramsci 1971, 147–56). He underscored the "essentially revolutionary character" of Machiavelli's legacy (Gramsci 1971, 136). Althusser highlighted the important place of the people in Machiavelli's political theory (Althusser 1999); Machiavelli's solitude in conceptualising materialist politics and the "unwonted character of his thought" (Althusser 1999, 117). Claude Lefort's seminal work on Machiavelli showed the importance of political conflict in Machiavelli's writings and the necessary legitimating power held by the people in relation to the person or class(es) that rule: "The required politics is

[1] Viroli claimed that "If there is a single point on which scholars have reached a wide consensus, it is that Machiavelli created a new theory or a new science of politics" (Viroli 1990, 143).

the one that is in keeping with the being of society, welcomes opposites, is rooted in time, arranged in such a way as to stand alongside the abyss on which society rests, and to abut the limit constituted for it by the incompossibility of human desire" (Lefort 2012, 181–82). Negri focused on Machiavelli's legacy of multitude and of what he conceptualised as "constituent power" as the main democratic elements of Machiavelli's thought (Negri 1999).

The third important reading of Machiavelli has been the republican one. Skinner (1978; 1990; 2000) principally stressed the republican elements and the question of good government in Machiavelli's thought, claiming Machiavelli's republican legacy lies in the fact that

> *no city can ever attain greatness unless it upholds a free way of life; secondly, that no city can ever uphold a free way of life unless it maintains a republican constitution. With this statement of the case, Machiavelli not only presents a wholehearted defence of traditional republican values; he also presents that defence in a wholeheartedly traditional way.* (Skinner 1990, 141)

Isaiah Berlin (1979, 99) argued that Machiavelli is, "in spite of himself, one of the makers of pluralism, and of its – to him – perilous acceptance of toleration". Pocock stated that for Machiavelli the republic was "a structure in which every citizen's ability to place the common good before his own was the precondition of every other's, so that every man's virtue saved every other's from that corruption part of whose time-dimension was *fortuna*" (Pocock 1975, 184).

In this article, we shift the perspective on Machiavelli's political theory beyond the debates about his good, evil, revolutionary, liberal and/or reactionary legacy. Focusing on Machiavelli's theory of the creation, stability and sustainability of different forms of government as presented in his two major works, we believe that Machiavelli's political theory should not be understood within moral frameworks, nor can Machiavelli be reduced or confined to a supporter of one form of government or another. Instead, we show that a common thread runs through Machiavelli's political theory, even when he argues for different forms of government: his emphasis on cross-class compromises via cross-class alliances – or "friendships" (*l'amicizia*), as Machiavelli calls them. Thus, we claim the *verità effettuale* of Machiavellian political theory is not an endorsement of specific forms of government and instead is the method of creating, stabilising and sustaining different forms of government within different frameworks, conflicts and alliances.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we reflect on the importance held by political and economic alliances and compromises in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. This is followed by analysis of Machiavelli's explanation and arguments concerning the relationship between the people (*popolo*) and the great (*grandi*) in *The Discourses* and the importance of class compromise for the stability and survival of the Roman Republic. In the fourth section, Machiavelli's

arguments as presented in his two seminal works are compared and contrasted. In the concluding section, we point out the importance of Machiavelli's theoretical legacy for understanding political (in)stability in the 21st century.

THE PRINCE BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM: THE IMPORTANCE OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE PRINCE

Dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, Machiavelli's *The Prince* has been the seminal work of modern political science. As indicated in the introduction for this article, for certain authors the crucial message of *The Prince* is the individualist, instrumental use of power to secure the strong rule of a single person for the unification of the Italian states (Strauss 1958; Mansfield 1998; Black 2013; 2022). This is presented through the prism of Machiavellian *virtù*, which has very little to do with the traditional moral understanding of virtue, instead emphasising instrumentality, deception and even the brutality that may be necessary for seizing and securing power against political enemies and *Fortuna*, and for uniting the divided and fragmented Italian states. However, Machiavelli's princely *virtù* also includes another very important element; namely, the capacity of the new and potential prince to create political alliances, especially with the people (Machiavelli 1998, 39–41).

Machiavelli claims that a new principality can only emerge through the possibility of creating alliances between the potential prince and either the great and wealthy or with the people:

> *For when the great see they cannot resist the people, they begin to give reputation to one of themselves, and they make him prince so that they can vent their appetite under his shadow. So too, the people, when they see they cannot resist the great, give reputation to one, and make him prince so as to be defended with his authority.* (Machiavelli 1998, 39)

Machiavelli states the interests of the great and those of the prince are contradictory because the great in particular do not wish to have a strong power above them, and instead seek to influence the prince and secure their interests in relation to the people; that is, to maintain the economic exploitation of the people.[2] The great consider themselves equal to the prince, which makes it difficult for the prince to maintain his rule over them, whereas the people hold much lower

[2] Machiavelli also makes a similar remark in *The Discourses*, saying that every Prince "should examine first what the people desires; and he will always find that it desires two things: one, to be avenged against those who are the cause that it is servile; the other, to recover its freedom. The first desire the prince can satisfy entirely, the second in part". He also claims the second element – the desire to be free – is easily substituted by the desire to live in security: "The others, to whom it is enough to live secure, are easily satisfied by making orders and laws in which universal security is included, together with one's own power. If a prince does this, and the people see that he does not break such laws because of any accident, in a short time he will begin to live secure and content" (Machiavelli, 1996a, 46).

expectations and, if protected from exploitation by the wealthy, will be satisfied with the new prince (Machiavelli 1998, 38–42).

The interests of the people, Machiavelli contends, are much more limited and attainable. The people are not primarily concerned with the position of the prince or his deeds. Rather, they focus on their own relationship with the great along with the economic exploitation they must endure. According to Machiavelli, the people actually have limited desires and interests, which are more easily satisfied than those of the wealthy: "one cannot satisfy the great with decency and without injury to others, but one can satisfy the people; for the end of the people is more decent than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed" (Machiavelli 1998, 39). Certainly, while Machiavelli downplays the needs and interests of the people by viewing them solely through their desire and interest not to be oppressed by the great and wealthy, he also offers a pragmatic rationale and vision for the most opportunistic way for the prince to seize power and retain it.

Machiavelli also clearly warns the potential new prince that the people's material interests must be respected. The property of the people must be protected, and no prince should seize and appropriate such property. Thus, Machiavelli stresses that the crucial element for a prince who wishes to have the people as "friends" and not be hated – that is, to have the people as allies – is abstaining from "the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony" (Machiavelli 1998, 67). He adds that there are always reasons for taking property from someone, and that "he who begins to live by rapine always finds cause to seize others' property" (Machiavelli 1998, 67).

Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* that it is vital for a prince to have the support of the people and to come to power with their support and legitimacy, as in to create an alliance with them, and become their "friend". If one becomes a prince with the help of the people, it is crucial to maintain their alliance. On the other hand, if one becomes a prince with the help of the great and wealthy and not through the support of the people, he must still do everything possible to forge an alliance with the people because the great and wealthy will never be as loyal to the prince as the people would due to their different material and political interests (Machiavelli 1998, 39–41). The logic for the prince is hence that it is easier to satisfy the interests of the people than those of the wealthy, especially since the people do not wish to be equal to the prince. Machiavelli stresses that "for a prince it is necessary to have the people friendly; otherwise he has no remedy in adversity" (Machiavelli 1998, 41).

Moreover, Machiavelli stresses the importance of numbers in politics and in forming political alliances – the people form the majority of the population, while the wealthy are few. Machiavelli thus realised that for a prince it would be much more dangerous to be "abandoned" by, or not to have an alliance with, the people. The great are few in number, and if they turn on the prince or "abandon"

him, they can try to replace the prince or the princely form of government: "for since there is more foresight and more astuteness in the great, they always move in time to save themselves, and they seek rank from those they hope will win" (Machiavelli 1998, 40). Yet, given that the great are always smaller in number than the people, if the prince is supported by the people, he does not have to fear the great trying to undermine him because the legitimacy and the larger number of the people will always secure the prince's victory. Machiavelli accordingly claimed that "the prince always lives of necessity with the same people, but he can well do without the same great persons, since he can make and unmake them every day, and take away and give them reputation at his convenience" (Machiavelli 1998, 40).

Machiavelli contends the prince should not seek to be loved, nor should he base his legitimacy on good deeds: "for friendships [that is, alliances] that are acquired at a price and not with greatness and nobility of spirit are bought, but they are not owned and when the time comes they cannot be spent" (Machiavelli 1998, 66). He maintains that the generally corrupt nature of people means that if the prince were to base his rule solely on the love of the people and on concessions, he would probably be betrayed when they see a better opportunity to secure their own interests. Machiavelli therefore advises the prince that it is better to be feared than loved, because "fear is held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you" (Machiavelli 1998, 67). Consequently, the prince should create alliances with the people, respect their material interests, but not give too many promises or concessions.

The combination of the lion and fox is quintessential in Machiavelli's political theory. He reasons that "one needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten the wolves. Those who stay simply with the lion do not understand this" (Machiavelli 1998, 69). The new prince ought to combine these two qualities, whereby the fox is not just a metaphor for cunning or deceit but also vital for the prince's understanding of power relations in society and the specific economic and political interests of the two different classes of the time – the great and the people. This fox-like quality also means the prince is able to forge alliances and secure the "friendship" of the people in order to maintain his power and sustain his rule.[3]

Thus, economic factors and class positions are central in Machiavelli's argument for creating a political alliance between the prince and the people: 1) the economic exploitation of the people by the wealthy is the reason the people side with the prince, provided he is able to reduce this economic pressure; 2)

[3] Machiavelli also puts forward a more ontological argument relating the (political) nature of the prince and the people: "For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people" (Machiavelli 1998, 4).

respecting the economic interests and property of the people is essential for sustaining their support and for maintaining the legitimacy of the prince.

THE STABILITY OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONFLICTS, CONCESSIONS AND COMPROMISES

In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli concentrates on a different form of government. Instead of offering advice to a new prince based on the analysis of historical examples and caveats, his approach is more analytical, yet still rooted in his fundamental commitment to understanding politics and political life. *The Discourses* present Machiavelli's analysis of the republican form of government in ancient Rome while simultaneously addressing questions also raised in *The Prince*.[4]

Machiavelli's analysis of the Roman Republic reveals a very different view of the desirability of certain forms of government. In *The Discourses*, he argues the best form of government is a republic, a mixed republic, since it can adapt more easily to the changing favour of *Fortuna*.

> *Hence it arises that a republic has greater life and has good fortune longer than a principality, for it can accommodate itself better than one prince can to the diversity of times through the diversity of the citizens that are in it. For a man who is accustomed to proceed in one mode never changes, as was said; and it must be of necessity that when the times change not in conformity with his mode, he is ruined.* (Machiavelli 1996a, 240)

The very essence of stability of the Roman Republic, as well as the nature of its laws – the question of good government and freedom – are the central issues that led Machiavelli to prefer the republican form of government over a principality. In his analysis of the reasons for the stability of the Roman Republic, together with its laws and their quality, Machiavelli focuses on class conflict and class compromises. He claims the fact that class conflict and the strength of the people forced the great to a make series of class concessions and compromises, which in turn produced specific laws and institutional innovations, was the very cause of the Roman Republic's stability. The new constellation created by these conflicts and compromises resulted in laws, which reflected the balance of forces and compromises, thereby guaranteeing the freedom and prosperity of the Republic.

In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli states that class conflict is inherent in every form of government.[5] He introduces the ontological dimensions of class

[4] In *The Discourses*, according to Black, "Machiavelli emerges as a political, sociological, geographical and historical pragmatist" (Black 2013, 176) and not as a defender of any specific form of government. Yet, when compared to the classical interpretations of Machiavelli, whether moralist, radical or republican, our analysis has identified an important element in Machiavelli's political theory shared by both of his seminal works – the importance of cross class alliances.

[5] Mansfield stresses that Machiavelli bases his analysis of the Roman Republic on the class aspect of society (see Mansfield 1998, 92–93), which is one of the particularly important aspects of Machiavelli's political analysis.

inequalities and class conflict, which he regards as so fundamental to politics. He claims the cause of class conflict is "that nature has created men so that they are able to desire everything and are unable to attain everything" (Machiavelli 1996a, 78). The desire and drive to have more, and appropriate what is not in line with the actual possibility of acquiring things, accordingly leads to "discontent with what one possesses and a lack of satisfaction with it" (Machiavelli 1996a, 78). The outcome of this is conflict because some people wish to have more, while others fear losing what they have, leading to "enmities and to war, from which arise the ruin of one province and the exaltation of another" (Machiavelli 1996a, 78).

However, despite his statement that class conflict was the reason for the ruin of different polities, for a long time he viewed it as the very essence of the stability and prosperity of the Roman Republic – at least so long as the great were prepared to share their fortune and wealth with the people, thereby securing broader legitimacy and also limiting their own power through laws. The tumults and conflicts, as he puts it, were in fact more beneficial for the Roman Republic than harmful to its stability and sustainability:

> *Thus one should blame the Roman government more sparingly and consider that so many good effects would not have emerged from that republic if not caused by the best causes. And if the tumults were the cause of the creation of the tribunes, they deserve highest praise; for besides giving popular administration its part, they were constituted as a guard of Roman freedom.* (Machiavelli 1996a, 17)

Still, it would be wrong to assume that class conflict itself was the very cornerstone of the Roman Republic's freedom. The class power of the people was very important in limiting the interests of the great and wealthy and reducing economic exploitation and inequalities. On the other hand, the great managed to adapt through various concessions and, by creating inter-class compromise, secured the support needed for them to rule and for the expansion of the Roman Republic. The decisive element in keeping Rome "free" and republican was the ability of the plebs to impose their interests on the agenda, to push for the establishment of the Tribunes and to curtail the material interests of the great, while the great were able to grant class and economic concessions to the people to secure the support for their government. In this way, a specific form of a mixed government emerged:

> *Fortune was so favorable to it that although it passed from the government of kings and of aristocrats to that of the people, by the same degrees and for the same causes that have been discoursed of above, nonetheless it never took away all authority from kingly qualities so as to give authority to the aristocrats, nor did it diminish the authority of the aristocrats altogether so as to give it to the people. But, remaining mixed, it made a perfect republic,*

> *to which perfection it came through the disunion of the plebs and the Senate.* (Machiavelli 1996a, 14)

The main example Machiavelli provides for his argument about the desirability and problems of class conflict, and the breakdown of class compromise is the Agrarian Law, which was the crucial dispute between the great and the people. He notes that "one never spoke of this law in Rome without turning the city upside down" because it had serious repercussions for the class status of the Roman people" (Machiavelli 1996a, 79). The Agrarian Law was based on two fundamental principles: first, no one could own more than a specified amount of land and, second, the land conquered by the Roman military had to be distributed among the people. This was questioned over the centuries since it imposed limits on the wealth the great could own, enforced the dispossession of those who held more than the law prescribed, and increased social and economic equality by distributing land to the people.

Machiavelli claims that the Roman nobility had few problems granting concessions concerning honours and positions to the plebs, doing so "without extraordinary scandals" (Machiavelli 1996a, 80). Yet, when it came to questions of appropriation and property, "so great was [the nobles] obstinacy in defending it that the plebs had recourse to the extraordinary [means] that were discoursed of above to vent its appetite" (Machiavelli 1996a, 80). The conflict that erupted over the agrarian question triggered civil wars with various sides involved. The plebs were initially better organised, and Marius was appointed consul four times with the support of the plebs. However, the great managed to organise themselves around Sulla. According to Machiavelli, "after much bloodshed and changing of fortune, the nobility was left on top" (Machiavelli 1996a, 80).

Even though class conflict eventually led to the Republic's demise, Machiavelli claims that if the plebs had not been so successful opposing the interests of the great the Roman Republic would have failed even earlier. The plebs' ability to oppose the interests of the great was, in fact, very beneficial for Rome:

> *For so great is the ambition of the great that it soon brings that city to its ruin if it is not beaten down in a city by various ways and various modes. So, if the contention over the Agrarian law took three hundred years to make Rome servile, it would perhaps have been led into servitude much sooner if the plebs had not always checked the ambition of the nobles, both with this law and with its other appetites.* (Machiavelli 1996a, 80)

The core foundation of the Roman Republic's stability and sustainability was the class compromise established between the great and the people, and the recognition by the great that, in order to secure support for the stability of the republic and their economic class rule, it was necessary to enter into a series of class compromises. Machiavelli does not blame the conflict that arose around

the Agrarian Law, which was so central to Roman political life, but the great's inability to maintain this specific class compromise and recognise the necessary support of the plebs by granting further material concessions.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ALLIANCES AND COMPROMISES – THE ESSENCE OF POLITICAL *VIRTÙ*?

The intention, nature and scope of Machiavelli's two crucial books analysed in this article vary considerably[6]. The biggest difference between these works lies in their intention and method. *The Prince* is intended as a text for a potential new prince, who could unite the Italian provinces and city-states against Papal dominance and foreign powers, especially Spain and France. *The Discourses*, in comparison, is a more theoretical and historical analysis of the qualities held by the Roman Republic, which he sees as superior to principalities in a general sense. As Najemy stated:

> *The Prince* tried to theorize the success and failure of individuals in terms of the struggle of *virtù* against an external, malevolent, and ultimately inexplicable fortuna. In *The Discourses,* by contrast, the evolution and transformation of political institutions and social structures govern historical change in processes that, while not easily predictable, have a logic and an etiology that can be understood, at least in retrospect. (Najemy 2010a, 110)

Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that an important element is shared by the two works: Machiavelli's emphasis on political and economic alliances and compromises.

The element of potential political and class conflict is inherent in Machiavelli's theory due to the different material interests of the people on one side and, on the other, the prince or the ruling classes/the great. The people's capacity to organise themselves politically against the prince or the great and pose a serious threat to the prince or ruling class depends on their political mobilisation and the possibility of forging different alliances. In any case, it is not only, as more radical political thinkers have claimed, the elements of conflict and the importance of the people in politics (Althusser 1999; Negri 1999; Lefort 2012), but the specific

[6] Machiavelli also analysed the reasons, consequences and desirability of the economic and social conflicts in his work *Florentine Histories*. Machiavelli emphasised that the great historians of Florence, Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini disregarded the most basic element necessary for an accurate historical narrative: "civil discords and internal enmities, and the effects arising from them" and the "hatreds and divisions in the city" (Machiavelli 1990, 6). Bock argued there are some significant differences between Machiavelli's analysis in *The Discourses* and the *Florentine Histories*, but these are not "contradictions". She stated that Machiavelli was a "convinced republican – in respect to the city-state – he perceived and analysed the fact that in republics there are contrasting interests, harsh conflicts, power relations, tyranny and amorality. But it is only in the republican order that the discords among the various human *umori* can and must be expressed; on the other hand, it is these very discords that continually threaten it. They are both the life and the death of the republic" (Bock 1990, 201).

system of class compromises – which is the outcome of potential/actual class and political conflicts – that is the most effective for securing and stabilising the princely form of government and the mixed constitution.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli's aim is to demonstrate how by way of alliances and concessions with the people the prince can secure his rule against potential domestic uprisings from the great and wealthy, and also establish a stable foundation for a strong military to prevent foreign attacks. Machiavelli's central thesis in *The Prince* is not simply that the new prince should avoid any potential class conflict with the people, but that he should also actively seek their support since the people are large in number, and were they to decide to rebel against the prince it would be extremely difficult for him to protect his rule. The logic of legitimacy and support for the new form of government hence arises from the conflict between the people and the great and wealthy, leading to a specific form of concession by the new prince, who must be pragmatic and consistent in his policies to satisfy the plebs' material interests – by preventing any form of overexploitation by the great and, notably, by avoiding making them adversaries of the new prince through respect for their property. One of the main *virtù* of the prince in sustaining his rule is the political alliance with the people given that for "a prince it is necessary to have the people friendly; otherwise he has no remedy in adversity" (Machiavelli 1998, 41).

As shown above, *The Discourses* paint a slightly different picture because Machiavelli's main focus there is the existing and ongoing conflict between the people and the great in Rome. To stabilise and secure class rule in the republic, the great were prepared to make concessions to the people, who were strong and organised enough to threaten the great's class rule and privileges, and able to advance their class and political demands. This forced the great and wealthy to negotiate with them and to enter into political and economic exchange, which also favoured the people. The described interplay of potential and actual conflict, and the resulting compromise between the great and the people, produced better laws and established the material conditions for broader popular support for the republican form of government. In this framework, while the great could still appropriate more and maintain class inequalities, the people would not be so dissatisfied as to destabilise the entire republic. Although questions of positions, rights and honours (such as granting the possibility to participate in political life through the plebeian tribunes) were not problematic, once it came to direct economic interests, ownership and property rights, the great had much larger problems in making concessions. In the case of the Roman republic, the necessary element for the stability of the power of the ruling classes was the ability to make class compromises and alliances with the exploited and ruled social groups. If there is an unrestrained and unchecked rule of the great without any concessions to the people, this holds detrimental effects for the republic: "so great is the ambition of the great that it soon brings that city to its ruin if it is not beaten down in a city by various ways and various modes" (Machiavelli 1996a, 80).

Both of Machiavelli's major works point in the same direction, albeit with different emphases. The nature of real politics is that a class or a person cannot maintain power – at least not in a stable way for a long time – if they are not supported by a group of political friends and allies. Crucially, as Machiavelli notes, this ought to primarily be a cross-class alliance involving the largest possible sections of the people, and not an alliance between different factions of the ruling class or between the great and the prince (see: Ceron 2017).

Machiavelli's idea is that political and class conflicts provide the necessary pressure and constraints on the ruling classes or the prince. Through actual or possible conflict, the best strategic option for the ruling classes or the prince is to organise support from the people by way of concessions and political and economic compromises, appearing not only in specific policies and measures but also in new institutional forms. Machiavelli's main theoretical implication was highly revolutionary and democratic – his central idea is that the people hold the political capacity, via political and class struggles and mobilisation, to both stabilise and undermine different types of political constitutions. In the dedicatory letter in *The Prince* for Lorenzo de' Medici, he claimed that "to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people" (Machiavelli 1998, 4).

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Machiavelli's insights and theoretical and empirical approaches to analysing and explaining the stability and sustainability of different forms of government. We focused on *The Prince* and *The Discourses* in which Machiavelli analyses and theoretically frames two very different forms of government: the princely form of rule and the republican. In both works, Machiavelli offers theoretical and empirical foundations, through numerous cases, for what he considers necessary for a prince to maintain his rule or for a republic – drawing on the Roman example – to achieve stability and sustainability.

Najemy (2010b) offers a comprehensive summary of five crucial topics in Machiavelli's works: the question of liberty; agency and contingency – the endless "struggle between *virtù* and fortuna"; politics and morality; the importance of history for the present; and the relationship between the state and religion (Najemy 2010b, 8–12). Nonetheless, as revealed in this article, in the two major works Machiavelli also focuses on the central elements of a stable form of government: what is required to create a principality and what the material preconditions were for the stability and longevity of the Roman Republic. In both *The Prince* and *The Discourse*, compromises and cross-class alliances emerge as the main elements of politics. Thus, based on what we have explained, we identify an additional, sixth element that pervades Machiavelli's political theory – the question of political alliances, concessions and compromises.

Machiavelli's analytical focus – and the crucial element for political theory

and political science generally – is the question of the power distribution and appropriation, as well as the class conflict and the class nature of specific forms of government. In this sense, it is essential to reconsider Machiavelli's legacy and the true meaning of the label "Machiavellianism" today. If the "*verità effettuale*" of politics lies precisely in political alliances and coalitions, particularly in securing the endurance and stability of different forms of government, then Machiavelli's political theory remains highly relevant in the 21st century as it can help explain the emerging contradictions of liberal capitalist systems since the 1980s, the neoliberal counter-revolution, and the breakdown of the historical class compromise between labour and capital seen since the Second World War.

The most stable and socially and economically prosperous period in Europe and the "Western" world was the outcome of the specific class conflict and the resulting class compromise between labour and capital after the Second World War came to an end. The most basic element of this class compromise was the very strong, organised and mobilised working classes, which exerted direct political pressure and made demands via different organisations (political parties, trade unions), and in varying ways: political campaigns, electoral competition, trade union protests, and trade union negotiations within the neo-corporatist framework. Due to the strength held by the working classes, new institutional frameworks were also established (tripartite bodies, comprising representatives of labour, capital and the state, for negotiating wage and labour policies) (Offe 1984; Esping-Andersen 1985; Hirsch 1995; Berman 2006).

This threat of a possible "revolution", the abolition of capitalism, and the social reappropriation of privately accumulated wealth, led to important material concessions – increased wages, shorter working times, and more labour rights; and included other changes (such as the expansion of citizenship to women). Still, due to the internal crisis of the capitalist mode of production, technological changes, and the growing interest and willingness on the side of the capitalist class to break with the compromise, the class compromise began to crumble by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Left political parties – especially the more radical – started losing their support, trade union density began declining by the turn of the millennium and has continued in the first two decades of the 21st century. The class composition of society also started to change rapidly – the clear working-class position gave way to several different, less clearly defined class positions associated with entrepreneurship (Jessop 2002; Harvey 2005; Streeck 2014).

The neoliberal political and economic revolution had a clear goal – to break the compromise in order to continue, renew and speed up the processes of capitalist accumulation. This was politically expressed in the governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and was later transferred to other European (and non-European) states. The political left (and some trade unions) adopted and accepted neoliberal demands of greater class exploitation; the working class stopped voting for left parties, and instead resorted to abstaining from voting or partly shifted its support to extreme right-wing parties (Schäfer 2010; Bonica et

al. 2013; Merkel 2014). These changes have led to the destabilisation of the capitalist and liberal democratic states and the international order, and in the 21st century also to the rise of fascist and populist political actors working in alliance with the capitalist class against the people (Vrečko Ilc 2026).

***

Machiavelli's theoretical and empirical insights show that *realpolitik* is chiefly based on the material interests of those who rule and/or those who are ruled, and that for a stable form of government it is always essential to include the interests of those being exploited, whether they are able to enforce them by strength and organisation, or because it is in the interests of those who rule, for the greater legitimacy, stability and sustainability of their power. This is, what Machiavelli labelled the "*arte dello stato*" (Machiavelli 1996b, 265).

FUNDING

The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency research project grant no. J5-60088 (The interplay between the EU and its member states in the policy-making processes in the field of employment policy).

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new research data were generated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, Louis. 1999. *Machiavelli and Us*. Verso.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1979. "The Originality of Machiavelli". In *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas,* edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton University Press.

Berman, Sheri. 2006. *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century.* Cambridge University Press.

Black, Robert. 2013. *Machiavelli.* Routledge.

Black, Robert. 2022. *Machiavelli: From Radical to Reactionary.* Reaktion Books.

Bock, Gisella. 1990. "*Civil Discord in Machiavelli's Istorie Fiorentine*". In *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, edited by Gisella Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, 143–201. Cambridge University Press.

Bonica, Adam, McCarty, Nolan, Poole, Keith T, and Howard Rosenthal. 2013. "Why Hasn't Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?". *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27 (3): 103–24.

Cassirer, Ernst. 1946. *The Myth of the State*. Yale University Press.

Ceron, Analisa. 2017. "L'amicizia nel Principe". *Consecutio rerum* 2 (3): 141–62.

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1985. *Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power.* Princeton University Press.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.). International Publishers.
Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
Hirsch, Joachim. 1995. *Der nationale Wettbewerbsstaat*. ID-Archi.
Jessop, Bob. 2002. *The Future of the Capitalist State*. Polity Press.
Lefort, Claude. 2012. *Machiavelli in the Making*. Northwestern University Press.
Machiavelli, Nicolo. [1532]1990. *Florentine Histories*. Princeton University Press.
Machiavelli, Nicolo. [1531]1996a. *Discourses on Livy*. The University of Chicago Press.
Machiavelli, Nicolo. [1513]1996b. "Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, Florence, 10 December 1513". In *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, James B. Atkinson and David Sices (eds.), 262–65. Northern Illinois University Press.
Machiavelli, Nicolo. [1532]1998. *The Prince*. The University of Chicago Press.
Mansfield, Harvey C. 1998. *Machiavelli's Virtue*. The University of Chicago Press.
Merkel, Wolfgang. 2014. "Is Capitalism Compatible with Democracy?". *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 8 (2): 109–28.
Najemy, John M. 2010a. "Society, Class, and State in Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy". In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, edited by John M. Najemy, 96–111. Cambridge University Press.
Najemy, John M. 2010b. "Introduction". In *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, John M. Najemy (ed.), 1–13. Cambridge University Press.
Negri, Antonio. 1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. University of Minnesota Press.
Offe, Claus. 1984. *Contradictions of the Welfare State*. The MIT Press.
Parel, Anthony. 1992. *The Machiavellian Cosmos*. Yale University Press.
Pocock, John G. A. 1975. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton University Press.
Schäfer, Armin. 2010. "Die Folgen sozialer Ungleichheit für die Demokratie in Westeuropa". *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 4 (1): 131–56.
Skinner, Quentin. *1978. The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume I: The Renaissance*. Cambridge University Press.
Skinner, Quentin. 1990. "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the Pre-humanist Origins of Republican Ideas". In *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, edited by Gisella Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, 121–41. Cambridge University Press.
Skinner, Quentin. 2000. *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
Strauss, Leo. 1958. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. The Free Press.
Streeck, Wolfgang. 2014. *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*. Verso.
Viroli, Maurizio. 1990. "Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of politics". In *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, edited by Gisella Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, 143–72. Cambridge University Press.
Vrečko Ilc, Blaž. 2026. "Generative AI as a Symptom of the Polycrisis of US Digital Capitalism and of the Trumpian End-Times Fascism". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 63 (3): 559–88.

▪ Marko HOČEVAR

POMEMBNOST POLITIČNIH IN EKONOMSKIH ZAVEZNIŠTEV TER KOMPROMISOV V POLITIČNI TEORIJI NICCOLA MACHIAVELLIJA

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava politično teorijo Niccola Machiavellija. Analiziramo in preučujemo njegovo teorijo o stabilnosti in vzdržnosti različnih oblik vladavine, ki jo predstavi v delih* Vladar *in* Razmišljanja ob prvih desetih knjigah Tita Livija. *Utemeljujemo, da Machiavelli ne daje osrednjega poudarka prevari, krutosti ali sreči. Zanj so ključna zavezništva na političnem, družbenem in gospodarskem področju ter politični kompromisi in koncesije, ki izhajajo iz političnih in gospodarskih konfliktov. Zavezništva in kompromisi so ključni za stabilnost in vzdržnost monarhij ter republik. Politična teorija o vzdržnosti monarhije temelji na strahu pred morebitno politično močjo ljudstva in posledičnem zavezništvu med (novim) vladarjem in ljudstvom. Vzdržnost rimske republike je bila po Machiavellijevem mnenju rezultat razrednega konflikta in posledičnega razrednega kompromisa med ljudstvom in velikaši. Na podlagi analize ugotavljamo, da je osrednji element Machiavellijeve politične teorije politična praksa sklepanja in ohranjanja zavezništev ter razrednih kompromisov.*

Ključni pojmi: *Machiavelli, republika, monarhija, razredni konflikt, medrazredna zavezništva, kompromisi.*

Marinko BANJAC*

THE DIGITAL SUBJECT: POWER(S) OF DIGITAL ORDER, COUNTER-CONDUCT, AND NEO-LUDDISM**

Abstract. *The article addresses the way the digital subject is constituted in contemporary digital capitalism while using Foucault's theorisation of subjectivation, technologies of the self, and counter-conduct. Focus is initially given to the shaping behaviour of the digital order that normalises certain modes of existence and transforms subjects into calculable, controllable entities. At the same time, power relations in the digital order are inherently unstable, creating conditions for resistance. Building on Foucault's concept of counter-conduct, the digital subject is argued to be neither completely autonomous nor completely determined. As a concrete articulation of counter-conduct on both the level of knowledge and level of material practices, Neo-luddism is critically interrogated, which we analyse as operating through refusal, resistance, and reimagination of technological arrangements within the digital order.*
Keywords: *Digital subject, digital capitalism, power, counter-conduct, Neo-luddism.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary academic debates on the digital order, an extraordinary increase is evident in critical analyses which explore how new digital technologies affect people's identities, behaviour, and social relations. The digital order, understood as an amalgam of economic, technological, institutional and discursive arrangements, enables and produces a specific classification, normalisation and regulation of digital life, and co-determines (digital) human action (Törnberg and Uitermark 2025). Although digitalisation is often seen as a neutral and necessary or inevitable process (Balbi 2024; Bennich 2024; Morozov 2013), namely, the integration of digital technologies into all domains of human

* Marinko Banjac, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, marinko.banjac@fdv.uni-lj.si, guest editor.
** Research article.
DOI: 10.51936/tip.63.3.653

life, it should be regarded as a historically specific economic-social-technical formation: digital capitalism (Fuchs 2013; Srnicek 2016; Zuboff 2022). Indeed, broadly speaking, it is a "collection of processes, sites, and moments in which digital technology mediates the structural tendencies of capitalism", while simultaneously "digital capitalism is neither a structural totality nor a historical period […], it is the modus operandi by which the structural needs of capital are tailored to digital conditions" (Pace 2018, 262–63). In this regime, technology and economic structures are inextricably linked, and everyday life is intertwined with platforms, data flows, and algorithmic systems which exploit, commodify and manage human activity and experience.

One can observe several debates about how to understand the new digital (capitalist) order. For instance, Fuchs (2013, 430) argued that digital or information capitalism as a system encompasses advanced informational production forces (knowledge, information and communication technologies, scientific and theoretical work) not as signs of a new 'information society', but as strategies for extracting greater surplus value and class domination, while also establishing contradictions and openings for alternative forms of social relations. Zuboff (2022), meanwhile, analysed the rise of a new form of "surveillance capitalism" in which behavioural traces are rendered into data for monetisation and behavioural influence, whereas Srnicek (2016) identified the platform as the central business model generating profit within the digital economy. In general, these theorisations conceptualise infrastructures as enablers and mediators of particular forms of mobilities, communication, work and governance. They affect people's perceptions and experiences as well as permit and constrain human action. Digital systems influence the ways of being and acting that people come to accept, which is linked to "digital technology's unprecedented capacity to shape life by embodying social infrastructure" (Törnberg 2023, 1).

Still, one can also find many academic debates focused on analysing and reflecting on the ways individuals and collectives resist digital infrastructures, and how they oppose digitisation, algorithms and exploitation through them (Treré 2018; Feldstein 2021; Chen et al. 2023). Most of these debates nevertheless stem from the problematic assumption, also perpetuated by online platforms and tools, that we are extensions of ourselves in digital environments (T. Kant 2020, 58). In addition, this ignores the fact that the digital order is not a parallel realm and is instead an environment, a condition of possibility which configures how subjects (can) appear and act (Lupton 2014, 22–23).

The above-mentioned already indicates the general topic and orientation of this article. We aim to reflect on fundamental questions about who we are as digital subjects. In which ways, and as which identities, are we addressed and produced within and via the digital order, and which identities do we attribute to ourselves? How are capacities for action, relationships and imagination limited, directed and managed through digital architectures? Conversely, how can people imagine and act as insubordinate, resistant subjects who reject or transform the

power relations underpinning the digital order? In this article, we therefore subject these questions to critical reflection with a stress on the concept of the digital subject and its forms in the framework of the digital capitalist order.

The central analytical-theoretical perspective adopted here draws on Michel Foucault's conceptual framework, particularly his approaches to the subject (Foucault 1978, 1982, 1995; Rossi 2017), technologies of the self (Foucault 1997; Kelly 2013) and counter-conduct (Foucault 2009, 2010). Foucault approached the subject as an analytical category in heterogeneous ways (Kelly 2013), including an interest in how the subject constitutes and is constituted by the exercise of power and power relations, and in his later works, principally in terms of ethical action and in relation to truth (Foucault 2010; Mitcheson 2012). With regard to power, Foucault stated that power is not primarily a form of domination imposed "from above", but an essentially relational and productive force which operates through and stems from everyday practices, institutions and discourses (Foucault 1978, 1982). For us, it is relevant to commence with the insight that the exercise of power is linked to both the population as a whole and individuals, whose actions are continuously guided and managed. According to Foucault, power is exercised through the shaping of behaviour, referring to how individuals are led to act, think, and relate to themselves at al. (Foucault 1991a; Dean 1999).

With its extractive logic and, *inter alia*, the logic of continuous optimisation, digital capitalism has introduced new modalities of power with which individuals become, in our case digitally, visible, calculable and controllable. From the outset, we emphasise the contemporary subject is intertwined with, and constituted through, heterogeneous digital technological mechanisms such as mediation, datafication and algorithmisation. The latter, for example, operates via seemingly abstract technological models, which are situated so as to significantly determine the choices, desires and possibilities of platform and network users, thereby acting as an apparatus for the conduct of conduct of populations. These modalities in turn determine the digital subject they shape on the level of technical operationalisation. The digital self, as we aim to show, does not exist in advance, but emerges through recursive interactions with infrastructures that anticipate, direct and normalise specific behaviours. This is a particular form of power that Foucault called governmentality (Foucault 2006, 1991b; Barry 2019; Weiskopf and Hansen 2023).

The digital subject is conceptualised in this article as constantly embedded in, and determined by, technologies of power. At the same time, we argue along with Foucault that power relations are always fluid. It is exactly because of this continuous non-finiteness of power relations that, according to Foucault (1978, 95), there is also the possibility of resistance to power. This leads us to also raise the question of resistance and rebellious practices within the digital order, which Mitcheson (2012, 62) stated is a central question while addressing technologies of the self:

> *The real problem is how, given the relationality of power that Foucault observes in the world within which the self is formed and operates, self-formation can be employed to resist the particular forms and structures of dominance that are formed by the same network of power strategies.*

Based on Foucault's observation that every constellation of power is also a field of possible resistance, counter-conduct is conceptualised in this article as an ethical-political commitment to a different life within digital capitalism. Here, we argue the digital order contains the conditions (contradictions and ambivalences) for its own subversion by way of practices of counter-conduct, which involve the constitution of different forms of subjectivity via "inventive, but always invigilated, practices" (Odysseos et al. 2016, 153). From this perspective, we seek to analytically grasp action and resistance in the digital order, viewed not simply as a matter of external opposition to technology, but as one of the immanent practices of self-transformation. In this context, technologies of the self are crucial, referring to practices with which individuals create and transform themselves, act on their bodies, behaviour and thoughts, while constantly operating within relations of authority or power (Foucault 1997, 291–93; Mitcheson 2012). It is in any case important to stress that technologies of the self are not equivalent to counter-conduct. They are always also traversed by the conduct of conduct since the same practices of working upon oneself can serve to align individuals with governing norms as readily as they can be mobilised against them. Counter-conduct thus designates not technologies of the self as such, but a particular orientation of these practices toward refusing, or transforming, the manner in which one is conducted. More specifically, we argue that counter-conduct within the digital order can be analytically approached with respect to three interconnected modalities: rejection, resistance and re-imagination (Charitsis et al. 2025). This distinction may be seen as the article's principal analytical contribution, which allows digital resistance to be examined not only as the refusal of existing technological arrangements, but also as practices that contest their governing logics and imagine alternative relations between subjects and technologies.

One of the most prominent, not simply theoretical-analytical (see Vrečko Ilc 2024; Vrečko Ilc 2026) but also practical-material, frameworks for the critique and subversion of today's digital order is neo-Luddism (Carter and Yang 2023; Hanna 2025; Kryszczuk and Wenzel 2017). It is regarded as a /movement that involves rejecting current constellations of technological domination while searching for a specific form of autonomy, and a concern for (digital) subjects. In this context, we approach contemporary forms of neo-Luddism not as nostalgic technophobia and instead as a modality of counter-conduct: inventive, imaginative and situational practices that attempt to co-construct alternative ways of living in relation to (digital) technology.

The article is organised as follows. In the next section, some contemporary features of the digital (capitalist) order are reflected on, while its infrastructure,

operational logic and inherent contradictions are conceptualised. The term contradiction (and, later on, ambivalences) is used in this article in a broad sense to denote persistent tensions within digital capitalism. Even though these tensions could relate to Marxist discussions of contradictions in capitalism (Harvey 2014), they are not presented here in the strict theoretical sense of Marx's critique of political economy, but as an analytical concept to help present how digital capitalism governs subjects. The third section develops a Foucauldian interpretation of the digital subject as subject to, and produced through, algorithmic rationalities and platform architectures. In the fourth section, these findings are developed in the direction of a critical reflection on the possibility of resistance, drawing on counter-conduct. Then we move to an examination of neo-Luddism in greater detail as a form of producing resistant knowledges and counter-conduct, exploring its potential and practices. The conclusion summarises the main arguments and identifies central contributions with regard to digital resistance and political action within the digital order.

THE CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL (CAPITALIST) ORDER

The complexity of the order based on digital technologies is today also largely reflected in the ever more intense academic debates about its nature, key elements, and the intensity of its effects (Fuchs 2022, 26–33). These theorisations and analytical insights notably include reflections on how and when digitisation and digital technologies have spread to various domains of human life (Balbi 2024; Derici 2024; Hilbert 2020), how they transform economic structures (Schiller 1999; Betancourt 2015; Varoufakis 2024; Morozov 2022) and the ways in which power is exercised on different levels, shaping our identities and the material organisation of life itself (Kuntsman and Xin 2023). To understand the digital order, it is necessary to recognise its historical conditions of possibility and how digital infrastructures have developed alongside the transformation of capitalism. In this respect, Törnberg (2023, 3–4) points out the need to be aware that these transformations, which have been and continue to be more or less intense in different periods and contexts, are linked to the "financialisation of everything", understood as the growing penetration of financial logics into economic and social life, the neoliberalisation of socio-political life via market-oriented forms of regulation, and the transnationalisation and increased mobility of capital beyond national regulatory frameworks. Yet, these processes should by no means be seen as resting solely on digital tools; they have themselves contributed significantly to the development and rise of those tools.

When discussing the historical dimensions of the rise of digital technologies and establishment of the digital order, debates on digital transformation often use the language of revolutions. This framing is not, however, neutral. As Balbi (2024) cautioned, revolution-talk tends to mythologise as a sudden rupture what in fact have been gradual and uneven changes, risking a narrative of epochal inevitability that a critical account should resist. This leads us to treat

such periodisations as heuristics rather than endorsements. Viewed in this way, Seidl (2021, 10–14) distinguishes three such revolutions: the platform revolution, which reorganised markets and social interactions around digital intermediaries; the big data revolution, which expanded the systematic extraction and economic valorisation of data; and the artificial intelligence revolution, which increasingly enables automated prediction, classification and decision-making. Each marks and adds in a certain way to the ever greater pervasiveness and intertwining of digital technologies, the economy, and social life.

Although one could argue that these revolutions have largely determined, and continue to do so, the specific form of digital capitalism, which is defined by the central role of digital infrastructures, data, and algorithmic systems, it is essential to highlight what Fuchs (2022, 28) pointed out: "[…] digital capitalism does not imply that digitalisation is the main feature of contemporary societies. The core characteristic of contemporary societies is that they are capitalist societies". For him, digital capitalism represents a historically specific configuration within the broader continuity of capitalism.

Similarly, Pace (2018) presented a dialectical, historical analysis that distinguishes between the abstract structures of capitalism, which remain relatively unchanged, and the actual historical operations that have been transformed by digital technologies: "digital capitalism is the *modus operandi* by which the structural needs of capital are tailored to digital conditions" (Pace 2018, 263). In this context, digital infrastructures, data, and even digital currencies have emerged as new forms of property, while online platforms and financial technologies are restructuring the manner in which markets operate. Jobs are increasingly subject to digital surveillance, algorithmic management, and automated systems. Digital transformation thus reorganises, yet of course does not eliminate, capitalist logic:

> *Digital media does not alter the abstract relational forms of capitalism in any substantive sense. Private ownership remains firmly in place. Wage labour still dominates the field of work. Commodity markets continue to operate. Enduring are the abstract relational forms of capitalist production, labour, and exchange.* (Pace 2018, 263)

Moreover, while reflecting on the current digital order, we should consider the theorisation offered by Søren Mau (2023) and his concept of the "mute compulsion" of capital. With this approach, he explains the deeper logic underlying specific developments based on impersonal, structural coercion arising from property relations and material infrastructures, and materialised via the ideological, repressive and economic dimensions of power. Digital platforms and data systems extend this form of the exercise of power in the name of, and through, capital by embedding it in the very architecture of virtually all dimensions of social life. The dependence of workers and users on private digital infrastructures

(such as browsers, search engines, cloud systems) makes profit immanent to everyday life. Still, Mau (2023, 35) also stressed an important analytical shift from the analysis of capitalism on the structural level to the consideration of the "infinitesimal mechanisms" of power. Mau thereby emphasised that the analysis of any form of capitalism is not sufficient if it remains on the structural level, but that it is also necessary to understand the specific micro-mechanics and technologies which enable the functioning of a particular order. His interpretation is that Marx already accounted for this ideological dimension of power/authority.

However, additional profound insights regarding the production of knowledge, truths, norms and values, and hence the functioning of power over individuals' actions in (capitalist) society, also come from Foucault (1978, 1982). The essential emphasis here is that the exercise of power must be examined not simply on the level of institutions or structures, but also, or above all, through the micro-physics of power by which subjectivities are formed. Power operates via the order of things in terms of, for instance, the formation of spaces, the organisation of practices, and the production and circulation of knowledge. In this sense, digital infrastructures function as concrete technologies of power (Barry 2019; Dammann et al. 2022; Weiskopf and Hansen 2023).

This means the contemporary digital order can be understood as a complex apparatus in Foucault's sense: a heterogeneous set of discourses, knowledge productions, institutions, actors, material technologies and infrastructures, and practices directed and targeted at the population and, concurrently, at individuals, their actions and their behaviour. Among other things, this apparatus is based on/derives from practices which operate on principles of efficiency and data-based optimisation (Barry 2019) of algorithmic modelling, and predictive analytics, for example by way of the profiling, classification, recommendation and anticipation of individual and collective behaviour. At the same time, the norms and discourses that encourage participation and rapid, continuous responsiveness to new tools and digital opportunities offered to "rational entrepreneurial" individuals are also crucial (Barry 2019, 365; Törnberg and Uitermark 2025). Seen through this lens, the functioning of the digital order is by no means dependent on a specific centralised authority on any level, or solely on certain actors (e.g., corporations). It instead involves a series of practices, forms of knowledge, actors and discourses via and across which elements continuously attempt to coordinate into a specific functioning whole – a system that drives both macroeconomic processes and the micro-politics of everyday life (cf. Foucault 2008; Törnberg and Uitermark 2025).

A central mechanism or technological solution which characterises today's digital (capitalist) order is platforms (Srnicek 2016; Weidner 2009). Among the numerous definitions (Murati 2021), one that is particularly relevant here is platforms' characteristic of being based on the extraction and accumulation of data. Platform corporations like Google, Meta and Amazon operate on a series of interconnected platforms that serve as infrastructures, centralising and enabling

or mediating social interaction, attracting and retaining users to capture continuous data flows. In many respects, these are traces of user 'behaviour', which are then analytically processed and, as such, subject to further capitalisation and commodification.

It is precisely this logic that Couldry and Mejias (2019) argued is a key element, with those authors viewing datafication as a new form of accumulation. They contend the collection of data on people's actions, behaviour, decision-making and life in general represents the fundamental logic of contemporary capitalism: "we mean capitalism as it is now developing in societies in which the production, accumulation, and processing of information is growing" (Couldry and Mejias 2019, 33). They regard this as a form of data colonialism by which life itself is becoming a target of appropriation. As they put it, "the ideology of connection itself, which presents as natural the connection of persons, things, and processes via a computer-based infrastructure (the internet) enables life to be annexed to capital" (Couldry and Mejias 2019, 16).

Digital capitalism, whereby life is almost entirely linked to capital, thereby functions as an extractive formation which frames the understanding of most socio-political phenomena through an economistic perspective and specialised forms of knowledge. Such framing is actively produced by the metrics, rankings and quantified visibility built into digital platforms. For example, digitally mediated civic participation can be recast through platform logics of quantification and optimisation, encouraging individuals to assess engagement in terms of measurable visibility, reach, costs, benefits, and personal interests. Constant presence on social networks has become a potential source of profit, and communication has become a commodity. Beyond impacting how socio-political life is understood, digital capitalism also operates infrastructurally. This is a form of exercising power which does not operate through coercion, but by using (seemingly) enabling digital technologies and specific platforms that make life easier, while simultaneously increasingly binding users to them. Users then become dependent on these tools. The point is that digital infrastructures (social media platforms, e-mail servers, cloud systems, digital identification, mobile applications) create indispensable conditions for (co)operation in modern life, and this is exactly one of the core characteristics of the digital order. In the context of the use of digital technologies, we are constantly faced with the possibility of choice and the perceived positive attributes of these technologies. Yet, these technologies also constantly frame, limit, and close off the space of possibility. This is one of the biggest contradictions of the digital order. The remainder of this section unpacks this and other related contradictions.

The above presentation allows us to argue that the extractive orientation of digital infrastructures is sustained by a set of recurring tensions, which here we call contradictions in the broad sense which position users within specific relations of exploitation, commodification and control. We identify four such contradictions: connectivity and exploitation, automation and autonomy, visibility

and opacity, and empowerment and dependence. These are less four independent phenomena than four aspects of a single dynamic: infrastructures that enable, connect and empower do so in ways which simultaneously exploit, expose and bind. The term contradiction is used not in the strict dialectical sense of an antagonism that necessarily drives the system toward crisis, but to name a persistent gap between what these infrastructures promise and how they operate; a gap the digital order manages more than resolves.

There is a contradiction between connectivity and exploitation. Although contemporary digital technologies are grounded, *ab initio*, on the ideas of connectivity, collaboration and inclusion, in digital capitalism connectivity acts as a condition for exploitation. It is precisely the social relations via the communication networks of platforms which are transformed into data, attention, and behavioural surplus that can be monetised. The second contradiction concerns automation and autonomy. Automation is presented as a tool to free users from repetitive work and to expand human potential. However, because it is implemented under the imperative of accumulation rather than of liberating time, the efficiencies it generates are captured as profit and intensified oversight instead of returned to workers as autonomy: the same systems that remove tasks also render the remaining labour more measurable, more surveilled, and more precarious, reducing the privacy of workers and users together with their capacity to shape their own work (Satgar 2025, 22–24).

The third contradiction relates to visibility and opacity, and operates differently from the others: not as a promise that is reversed into its opposite, but as an asymmetry in how visibility is distributed. Digital environments are offered as spaces of transparency and self-expression, yet the transparency runs in one direction. Users are made increasingly visible – through public exposure on social networks, but also, more systematically, by way of data collection, biometric tracking and algorithmic profiling (Trufanova 2024). At the same time, however, the very infrastructures which enable user visibility remain opaque. Algorithms, hidden data channels, and proprietary systems form what Pasquale (2015) called a "black box society" in which individuals are governed by mechanisms they cannot observe, comprehend or access. It is this very asymmetry, for instance, subjects rendered legible to systems that themselves are illegible to them, which makes visibility a relation of power rather than a neutral condition. Building on this discussion of opacity, the fourth contradiction we can observe is between empowerment and dependence. Digital infrastructures permit new forms of communication, creativity and (self-)organisation (Törnberg and Uitermark 2025, 2–3), yet in addition they centralise control. The same platforms that enable collective expression and participation also normalise certain behaviours, monetise attention, and exclude alternatives.

Why is it necessary to highlight these contradictions in the context of our reflection on the digital subject, which we explore in more detail in the section below? Because they are an integral part of the digital order. By articulating

them, we can at least begin to show how we, as subjects, are embedded in infrastructures that shape the very conditions of thought and action. The digital order operates via what Foucault (1982, 2009) described as the conduct of conduct: the subtle shaping of individuals' abilities, desires and orientations. Platforms significantly influence our conduct, choices and possibilities since they are positioned and offered as digital environments. Thus, if we follow Foucault when he says the subject "is not a substance; it is a form, and this form is not above all or always identical to itself" (Foucault 1988, 10), it is worth asking what this means for the subject in the digital order.

THE DIGITAL SUBJECT: POWER, SUBJECTIFICATION, TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

To understand the contemporary digital subject within the digital order through Foucault's perspective, we first briefly examine the term "subject" itself. The notion of an autonomous subject, capable of self-reflection and self-determination, has been a fundamental element of modern Western philosophy and humanism ever since the 17th century. Classical philosophical reflections on the subject, notably those of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, sought, in different and often competing ways, to ground knowledge, freedom and social order in a rational, moral or metaphysical conception of the human being (Wiede 2020). In these traditions, the subject was 'posited' as the fundamental principle by which reason and autonomy are articulated, as well as the capacity for emancipation and progress (Taylor 2011, 6). Kant, for instance, reinterpreted the Enlightenment as a process in which individuals as subjects come to "use their own understanding […] without the guidance of another" (I. Kant 2009, 21).

In the 20th century, especially amid the rise of fascism and Nazism and the devastation left by the Second World War, disappointment in the unlimited progress of human reason led to a critical reconfiguration of understanding the subject as rational and autonomous. Within, for example, existentialism and the Frankfurt School, thinkers questioned the coherence of the subject by stressing its susceptibility to domination and to instrumental reason, whereby Enlightenment reason is becoming increasingly oriented to calculation, utility and domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Marcuse 1991; Wiede 2020).

For Foucault, too, this intellectual context played an important role, as Gutting (2005, 21–22; see also Smart 2002, 3) showed, and at least partly framed his thinking about the functioning of power and the subject within it. As part of this critical theoretical project, Foucault developed a considerably different approach in which he focused on the historical processes by which subjects are formed. In his essay The Subject and Power, Foucault (1982, 777) noted the aim of his work was "to create a history of the different ways in which people in our culture become subjects". In this relatively brief, albeit theoretically rich essay, he emphasised the concept of subjectification as a central analytical category. As Wiede (2020) pointed out, Foucault understands subjectification as a dual

process: on one hand, individuals are subject to regimes of control, subordination and dependence, while on the other they are bound to themselves through practices of self-knowledge and self-creation (Wiede 2020). What is apparent here is a specific duality, which Foucault also features in his works, including *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1995) and *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1978), where he traces the genealogy of subjectification linked to various modalities of power, including sovereignty, discipline and governmentality (Patton 2014; Pušnik and Čehovin 2026). These modalities do not follow each other linearly, nor do they operate in terms of a contradiction between repression and freedom. Instead, one could say that they coexist with, overlap and frame what Foucault called the "microphysics of power" in and through which historically specific forms of subjectivity are formed.

Parallel to this, it is in this exact context that we must recognise that, according to Foucault, power is not only power over people, individuals or collectivities. As Thomas Lemke (2015) argued, Foucault considers that power, via its various forms, is always power over and above things; "to govern means to govern things" (Foucault 2009, 97). Power, as Foucault shows, refers to a comprehensive reality which encompasses, originates from, and is related to the material environment, specific constellations, and "technical networks between humans and non-humans" (Lemke 2015, 17). In this sense, this analytical framework is useful and meaningful for understanding contemporary configurations of subjectivities, including those shaped by digital infrastructures of surveillance, calculation, optimisation and management.

The concept of the subject is therefore extremely relevant for analysis of the digital order because the dominant, hegemonic explanations of digitalisation and digital technology (Balbi 2024) continue to be based on implicit assumptions about what the subject is and how it relates to technological environments (Bennich 2024). The digital order is most often understood as a domain clearly distinct from the offline world and denoted by specific realities, temporalities, and modes of interaction. Within such representations of the digital, the online–offline world relationship is usually perceived as something in which the online world is 'merely' an extension of the offline world: consequently, the digital subject is typically presented as an extension or projection of the 'offline' person, whose identity, agency and abilities are supposed to have existed before digital mediation (Goriunova 2019a, 3; Trufanova 2024). This view treats the subject as stable across different contexts, while reducing digitality to the status of a secondary or derivative domain, framing participation in the digital environment as an external modification of an otherwise complete and self-sufficient subject (see Teo 2025).

The mentioned view is extremely problematic given that what 'we are' online is by no means just an extension or reflection of ourselves in offline environments. Instead, the digital subject "responds to a constitutive ambiguity created by this relationship: the subject of a computational interface is not necessarily a

human user, or indeed a human at all. Rather, it is the occupant of a position that these interfaces define" (Wark 2019, 69).

Further, something else is important for us, as described by Goriunova (2019b, 127):

> *digital subjects are new forms of subject construction that arise out of computational procedures and are employed by various forms of power to distinguish, map, and capture not only subjectivities, but also non-humans and physical things that inhabit the world.*

The main point of this slightly longer quote is that the digital order co-constitutes specific subjects and incorporates them into everyday practices and environments, while at the same time it is crucial that power relations and the exercise of governing are always present in these processes. Algorithms, platforms, and data transformation mechanisms not only impact behaviour, but also create horizons of possibility within which the subject recognises itself. As Goriunova argued, digital environments have a specific performative function: digital subjects are "a nested set of abstractions assembled by algorithms, a dynamic data aggregate feeding upon logs of movement in space and time or on analyses of experiential presence in the networks" (Goriunova 2019a, 1–2).

In these environments, algorithmic power plays a central role (van Eijk 2020). Algorithms, especially when in the form of technological systems for producing recommendations, predictive models, risk assessment tools, and extensive artificial intelligence optimisation systems, function as new modalities of governing: "The algorithms are to be heard not only for their objectivity but also for their specificity. Their recommendations, advice, and judgments are not generic but specific to us" (Razinsky 2023, 395–96). Razinsky then proceeded to claim: "We are to accept algorithmic interventions in our lives precisely because they are tailored to us and based on thorough information about us" (Razinsky 2023, 395–96). With this, algorithms mediate and enforce norms through specific functions, including calculations of probability, desirability, risk, or profitability, while also creating behavioural profiles and shaping choices by organising what users see, what they are encouraged to do, and what is important or relevant:

> *Large amounts of data allow for that high a degree of personalization. The deal, as it were, is that the algorithms can supposedly tailor the world for us and we should help them do so by allowing as much information about us to be available for them.* (Razinsky 2023, 396)

From our perspective, this algorithmic ability to create norms and particular ways of managing or guiding users (of course, as we have shown, algorithms do not do this 'by themselves') is what constitutes a form of digital governmentality. Algorithm-based technology derives from and simultaneously produces digital

forms of knowledge, categories and assumptions that enable specific management (primarily online) of actions by the individual and population. Algorithmic governmentality is chiefly based on the material and epistemological possibilities, yet also on the limitations of digital computing itself. As Henman (2020, 24) described it, the basis for this is computer code, via which the world is understood as "quantitative, discrete, logical, functionalist, and deterministic", which enables certain digitised forms of knowledge while excluding the qualitative and relational dimensions of life experience:

> *When digital algorithms are executed, they enact a specific digitized abstract epistemology and ontology defined within the code, which in turn becomes the governmental knowledges (*savoirs*) that construct governable subjects and subjectivities.* (Henman 2020, 24)

Digitalised categories and knowledge are not just a way of organising information, but actively impact the behaviour and actions of individuals. The individual – the digital subject – is classified, the classification becomes their self, and their actions are directed through categorical affiliation, for example, according to their hobbies, gender identity, field of socialisation etc. This logic is reinforced by machine learning whereby algorithms establish their own classification schemes through probabilistic connections, further separating digital knowledge from human experience (Henman 2020, 24–25). In this sense, subjectivation no longer takes place mainly via reflective self-formation, but through inscription into data-supported profiles. Here, Rouvroy and Berns (2013) argued that algorithmic governmentality stems from big data, which is created by and concurrently shapes the characteristics of individuals and their activities. What is created is a "digital personality" with calculated characteristics and specific predictions about future behaviour and actions. These predictions are then fed back to individuals in various ways, directing them to certain products, services etc. Algorithmic governmentality in this way is establishing a new order of truth focused on digitally created subjects and futures, through which behaviour is directed, normalised and variously restricted.

If the algorithms represent a form of the exercise of power on the level of knowledge production and classification based on (inconceivably huge amounts of) data, digital platforms operationalise this logic by incorporating it into specific socio-technical environments. The latter are relevant to us since they are embedded in the active production of digital subjects: "modern digital platforms, such as self-quantification apps, engage users in a process of self-discovery and transformation, although mediated through technology" (Nikolakakis 2024, 11). Thus, platforms are presented and hegemonically understood as spaces of freedom, choice and self-organisation, which is precisely what raises the question of the (trans)formation of subjectivities: who is the user of the platform, and what kind of subject is being created? As Törnberg and Uitermark (2025) showed, in

today's techno-cyber spaces we are not only talking about top-down forms of control, but also about a transition to individualised forms of exercising power. The freedoms of neoliberal society are primarily freedoms of consumption where individuals (as well as collectives) are transformed into consumers. Digital platforms enable a much more detailed and flexible production of subjectivities through interfaces, algorithms and design architectures that encode certain epistemologies and ontologies, as we have already noted. Platform interfaces not only mediate actions, but in addition they define what exists, what is important, and what can be done, structuring subjectivities via menus of options, scales, default settings, and possibilities that are preconfigured by the logic of the platform. Users can choose, albeit only from options that have already been classified, weighted, and directed in certain ways:

> *To design infrastructures is to define the rules and goals […]. [Platforms] have the power to determine not only the mode of interaction, but also the goals and motivations of players – that is, to shape their very subjectivity. To control a social infrastructure is to gain some level of control over the goals and rules governing social life.* (Törnberg and Uitermark 2025, 119)

In this respect, platforms function as environments of subjectivation in which agency is not eliminated, but designed, calibrated and constantly adjusted in accordance with the goals of the platforms. The production of the digital subject is not simply the result of computational processes, but of lived engagements and interactions with infrastructures that invite, demand or compel action.

Still, at the end of this section it must be underlined that algorithms and platforms are not omnipotent since the very fact they are at the very centre of power relations and the exercise of contemporary forms of governing makes them subject to resistance: "A growing literature on platforms examines how users seek to reclaim their agency from algorithms, illustrating various strategies employed by individuals and communities to subvert, undermine, or work around the constraints imposed by platform algorithms" (Törnberg and Uitermark 2025, 120). The following section addresses these forms of digital engagement.

THE DIGITAL SUBJECT, AMBIVALENCE OF THE DIGITAL ORDER, AND COUNTER-CONDUCT

Foucault consistently emphasised that power, along with its exercise, is never complete or entirely coherent. There are always elements, processes and social collectivities that 'escape' it. As he put it: "In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal" (Foucault 1982, 794). Seen along these lines, power is always a struggle defined by reciprocity among myriad opposing sides. Power relations are unstable formations which must constantly respond to resistances, frictions and practices that evade or disrupt their intended effects: "The rules

of the game are never absolute: there are various exceptions that can amount to tactical refusal. Despite the absolutism of authority, people revolt" (McCall 2014, 73). Power is always porous, relational, and subject to resistance and opposition. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argued "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978, 95). This is essential for understanding digital subjectivity not as a completely controlled and disciplined form of agency, but as a site of tension, struggle, and potential transformation: "A genuine question therefore remains of whether, as reactive power strategies, technologies of the self can still be creative and form the basis for ongoing resistance against subjugation" (Mitcheson 2012, 62). Resistance arises precisely because power operates through attempts to shape, direct and guide the behaviour of subjects who inevitably resist, reject certain forms of governance, or develop alternative ways of existing within and against prevailing rationalities:

> *These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.* (Foucault 1978, 95–96)

Foucault's insistence on the immanence of resistance challenges deterministic explanations of agency. On one hand, he rejects the idea that subjects are entirely determined by structures of domination (economic-technological) while, on the other, he avoids romanticising resistance as an act stemming from the pure freedom of the subject, which is external to power relations and hierarchies.

To understand resistance within power constellations, frameworks, mechanisms and relationships, Foucault's concept of counter-conduct is insightful. He developed this idea most extensively in his *Collège de France* lectures (1977–1978), published as *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault 2009; Davidson 2011). Counter-conduct refers to a specific form of struggle inherent to rationalities of power. He introduced the term to articulate practices that challenge, divert, or redirect ways individuals and populations are governed. These are struggles which question governance in particular ways: "How not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of these principles, in view of such objectives and by the means of such methods, not like that, not for that, not by them?" (Foucault 1996, 384). Foucault's formulation is crucial here because it defines resistance not as the total rejection of authority, but as the rejection of specific modes, actors, justifications, and techniques of governance that, in our case, are pertinent to the digital order.

Counter-conduct as specific modes of resistance must be viewed as operating and continuously deployed within the very field of the exercise of power. It does not seek to completely avoid power relations. Instead, it strives to alter the conditions, methods and objectives by which behaviour is organised and directed: "What gives the […] techniques of more or less individual counter-conduct a collective nature and, hence, the force of societal change is […] the 'reality' where people come together and reveal and oppose techniques of governance that shape their subjectivities" (Pyykkönen 2015, 32). In this sense, counter-conduct is a (continuous) individual as well as collective effort to experiment with alternative forms of subjectivisation, not just to reject the exercise of power, but to find ways to be in power relations whereby one is governed differently, and also governs, manages and directs oneself differently. Counter-conduct can accordingly take many forms that always depend on the numerous material and immaterial elements of the reality in which they emerge and, among others, include the rejection of certain identities, development of alternative epistemologies and practices of knowledge which challenge official or hegemonic truths, the establishing of new forms of community and solidarity, or the transformation of the self–technology relationship. In our view, the key is that counter-conduct invents and produces new possibilities for thinking and acting while resisting the existing order.

Of course, in the context of the formation of subjectivities as a specific resistance to the existing order, questions immediately arise: why do rebellious practices appear precisely in the digital order, which kinds of subjectivities can arise, and do they actually emerge in response to the algorithmic governance mediated through platforms. A fundamental answer lies in the architecture of digital technological solutions, which is based on the contradictions of the digital (capitalist) order described above, as well as further ambivalences. These ambivalences, as we intend to show, create cracks, vulnerabilities and spaces in which frictions arise between heterogeneous forms of the exercise of power and subjects who find themselves in tensions inextricably linked to how they are digitally constituted.

The first important ambivalence concerns the tension between the (techno-corporate) concentration and centralisation of power within platform infrastructures on one side, and the relational capacities these infrastructures on the other enable, in the sense that they give rise to a range of possibilities for establishing networks and digital relationships between (digital) subjects. Contemporary digital platforms concentrate control over data flows, visibility mechanisms, and communication infrastructures by which people communicate, work, consume, and organise their lives in unprecedented ways. At the same time, this concentration and the possibility of control are never final or complete; social networks and specific platforms also enable collective organisations that produce critical discourse and constitute particular forms of counter-publics, which can be progressive or conservative, even racist and radically exclusionary (Holm 2019).

Another ambivalence in the forming of digital subjectivities as a field of both subordination and potential counter-conduct is hyper-connectivity (Cheok 2017). Hyper-connectivity is recognised by techno-optimists as an almost exclusively positive phenomenon which permits instant communication between people and things. In this view, digital infrastructures are supposed to enable and provide uninterrupted, immediate and direct connections. With these connections, they transmit an incalculable number of matters, from work tasks and emotions to personal data. Yet, as critical authors have noted, hyper-connectivity is also the basis or cause of environmental degradation (Hynes 2021), the constant subjugation of users to online marketing strategies (Gallery and Conlon 2024), the constant exploitation of labour, and the commodification of data and work (Marsh et al. 2022). The same mechanisms which make users controllable through constant availability and engagement also enable them to mobilise rapidly.

Another fundamental ambivalence concerns the logic of visibility, which is both a condition and modus operandi of online platforms and social networks. These systems require users to be constantly visible, present, and producing self-displays. Here, the user, transfigured as a digital subject, not only becomes hyper-visible but also actively demands to be, which also always holds the potential for invisibility (Stegeman et al. 2024). This hyper-visibility, in turn, is captured using surveillance architectures that track users' movements, interactions, preferences and emotions, creating detailed behavioural profiles that are fed into algorithmic decision-making (Flyverbom 2022, 9). Parallel to this, as mentioned earlier, the algorithms themselves remain largely proprietary and hidden from view, not only the underlying code, but also because of the concealed business models and decision-making processes used by platform companies. The asymmetry between the hyper-visibility of subjects and invisibility of the ruling infrastructures thus becomes a site of ambivalence.

Our reflections on the counter-conduct of the digital subject mean we must think through the duality of materiality and immateriality on both the level of the individual and the context surrounding them. The digital order has to be understood as a field of power relations in which subjects are formed, yet never fully determined. Subjectification occurs through ongoing, unstable interactions (controlled, directed) between the conduct of conduct and counter-conduct. Digital subjects are hence not passive products of algorithms and instead represent a relationship between the physical, offline person and what is constructed via digital environments and architectures. Profile owners actively negotiate their actions and the possibilities for (collective) action they can maintain:

> *Within the spectrum of different modes, it is […] possible for users to use technologies of the self creatively […]. This frees the space for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity, but these subjectivities still take form in strategic interaction with others. Self-formation as a form of resistance, therefore, operates between control and creativity.* (Steinmaurer and Atteneder 2019, 103)

Forms of resistances and counter-conducts that surface in the digital order are not external rejections of technology, but internal responses to its demands, contradictions, and forms of subordination that arise within that order's ambivalences. They do not attempt to completely avoid power, but to transform the relations through which power functions. Thus, the digital order does not erase or block agency; instead, it changes the conditions in which subjectivity is (per) formed.

NEO-LUDDISM AS COUNTER-CONDUCT IN DIGITAL CAPITALISM

To understand contemporary neo-Luddism as counter-conduct within the digital order, we must first consider its historical and material background, linked to the Luddite movement in England in the early 19th century. During the first decades of that century, primarily textile workers, including knitters, croppers and weavers, organised themselves against machines that threatened their jobs. "Between 1811 and 1812, hundreds of new frameworks were destroyed in dozens of coordinated, clandestine attacks under the aegis of a mythical leader called 'Ned Ludd'" (Mueller 2021, 10). In essence, Ludd was a symbolic point of unification and a narrative locus of collective action, which was not simply destructive rebellion or vandalism against the new machines, as is often assumed. The Luddites

> *launched vociferous public protests, sparked chaotic riots, and continually stole from mills […] Their politics not only took the form of violent activity but was also enunciated through voluminous decentralized letter-writing campaigns, which petitioned—and sometimes threatened—local industrialists and government bureaucrats, pressing for reforms such as higher minimum wages, cessation of child labour, and standards of quality for cloth goods.* (Mueller 2021, 10)

We have already mentioned that the prevailing image of the Luddites has been narrowed to technophobia, violence, and irrational behaviour, which is extremely problematic. Namely, "This pejorative understanding of Luddism was crafted by their contemporary factory owners and is used by technology professionals today to silence criticism of new technologies as opposition to 'technological necessity'" (Carter and Yang 2023, 372). Historian Eric Hobsbawm (1952) also clarified that the rebellion was consciously directed against machines in the hands of capitalists, and not machines themselves. The Luddites did not oppose technological change per se, but instead the social relations within the processes of production arising from these technologies: "Faced with displacement, poverty, and hunger, the Luddites sought to build working-class solidarity […]" (Charitsis et al. 2025, 975). The Luddite movement thus represented a substantive programme based on the protection of livelihoods, community autonomy, and alternative visions of how industries could be organised. This was not a general

resistance against everything, but specifically against certain power dynamics and the regulation of industrialisation via profit-driven technological arrangements; precisely what Foucault defined as counter-conduct.

And what about neo-Luddism? It emerged as a critical formation in the late 20th century, with Nichols and others (2025) identifying several waves by which neo-Luddism, through critical theory, has established itself as a reflective political stance on technological change in advanced industrialism and the digital capitalist order. Neo-Luddism developed as a critique of the dominant rationalities and power relations which impact how technologies are developed, legitimised, imposed and normalised: "A key theme is that the technological inventions and the technical systems that support those inventions have evolved to control, rather than to facilitate, social interactions. The upshot is that the breadth and depth of technological change in modern society threatens the essence of humanity" (Poitras, n.d.).

The contemporary articulation of neo-Luddism is attributed to Chellis Glendinning in her early 1990s work "Notes toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto" (Glendinning 1990). There, she explicitly defined neo-Luddism on two principles: all technology is political (i.e., not neutral); and neo-Luddites are not anti-technology. For her, all technology is "intrinsic to human creativity and culture", and consequently it is a matter of opposing "those types of technology that are at their core destructive to humans and communities" (Glendinning 1990). We can observe that Glendinning's neo-Luddism is conceived precisely as counter-conduct: not against technology generally, but against forms of technological development which undermine human autonomy and life. Sale (1996) presented a very similar view of neo-Luddism, linking Luddism as a concept to the "computer age". For him, too, neo-Luddism has close links on the theoretical level to the critical tradition in the philosophy of technology, which seeks to subvert the idea of technological optimism and determinism while insisting on the political nature of technological artefacts and infrastructures.

Later, after the 1990s, (neo-)Luddism lost its prominence and continuity in theorisation and practice (Nichols et al. 2025). Nonetheless, it returned in the mid-2010s, when it "took shape in its own historical juncture, and in relation to a distinct set of techno-political concerns: namely, networked data technologies and the social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of their embedding in home, work, and public life" (Nichols et al. 2025, 385). In this regard, contemporary neo-Luddism is not a uniform framework. As Kryszczuk and Wenzel (2017, 45) showed, it encompasses several approaches and orientations. Specifically, they identified economic neo-Luddism, which opposes industrialisation in the context of the fight against unemployment and general social decline; romantic-pastoral neo-Luddism, which is linked to environmental protection and criticism of mass production; spiritual-ideological neo-Luddism, which is characterised by a sceptical attitude to mainstream science and technology; and anarchic neo-Luddism, which draws inspiration from the violence

of the original Luddites. Regardless of a specific neo-Luddite stream, however, we can still point to common starting positions and concepts which provide a rationale and logic for all streams, forming the basis for both the conceptualisation and problematisation of contemporary socio-technological processes and practices.

Thus, Nichols et al. (2025, 386) state that neo-Luddism "in its present form, the work of modern, self-identifying Luddites tends to center on consciousness-raising activities: writings, podcasts, and gatherings meant to loosen the hold of technological inevitability on human imagination and to cultivate measured modes of resistance to technological incursions". In this light, one may argue that contemporary neo-Luddism, especially its engagement with algorithmic systems and platform infrastructures, is a specific continuous problematisation of the digital (capitalist) order. Its starting points include rejecting technological inevitability in the sense that the current technological solutions and paths are neither natural nor necessary. In addition, it involves insisting on attention to the asymmetries of power encoded in technological architectures and order. Yet, it also involves a commitment to responding to technological solutions and the tools, online platforms etc., that are offered. "Sometimes this manifests as personal asceticism […] Other times, it involves more collective responses" (Nichols et al. 2025, 386).

These elements of neo-Luddism can actually be interpreted via the prism of Foucault's conceptualisation of technologies of the self and counter-conduct. Specifically, the digital neo-Luddite subject, as an individual or a collectivity, works on itself in such a way that it constantly re-establishes its relationship with itself in the digital order as an environment marked by the exercise of power, and at the same time by the ambivalences mentioned above. Through voids, holes and gaps, the goal of neo-Luddite subjectivities is to make governing processes visible, to reject them as conditions of digital subjectivation, and to simultaneously develop alternative relationships to themselves and to collectively challenge the governmental rationalities embedded in algorithmic systems.

In the remainder of the section, we draw substantially on Charitsis, Laamanen and Lehtiniemi (2025) to show some concrete praxes as counter-conduct, which are intertwined in interconnected dimensions that aim at (class) struggle against the exploitation and inequalities produced by online digital solutions today (Charitsis et al. 2025, 971). Charitsis, Laamanen and Lehtiniemi define these dimensions of praxis as rejection, resistance and re-imagination.

The first dimension – rejection – refers to the deliberate rejection of certain technological arrangements and the forms of subjectification they require. Rejection acts as a point of departure for resistance and a basis for reimagining alternatives. In this setting, digital subjects reject regimes of data transformation, surveillance infrastructures, and algorithmic management systems that exploit value while simultaneously undermining autonomy: "Attempts to escape the algorithmic gaze make clear that living with datafication and algorithmic

systems involves their (selective) refusal, but also the search for agency and autonomy within them" (Charitsis et al. 2025, 978). Refusal is not refusal for its own sake. Practised individually as digital disconnection, it may be limited, since it reinforces the logic of self-responsibility; but it merges with the political rationality of challenging digital-technological systems, which is linked to technologies of the self as a quest for points of resistance.

The second dimension of neo-Luddite counter-conduct is resistance, which involves actively challenging algorithmic power by way of collective organisation and direct action (Charitsis et al. 2025, 979). Algorithmic resistance includes actions carried out by those in subordinate positions or those acting in solidarity with them, directed against algorithmic power and politics. This refers to organising on digital platforms, shaping algorithmic governance in terms of fairness and transparency, and developing collective solidarity via technology-based connections: "Despite the increasing emergence and even occasional success of individual and collective opposition in the forms of algorithmic refusal and resistance, in terms of Luddite politics, they are points of departure" (Charitsis et al. 2025, 980). Yet, precisely because they are points of departure, they should be seen as counter-conduct: resistance functions as a series of elements that create a different digital subject emerging within the rationalities of power, rather than outside them. Resistance indicates that datafication, platformisation and algorithmic systems structure behaviour without completely determining it, thereby directing attention to the act of imagining and inventing the new.

Re-imagination means constructively designing alternative algorithmic futures that go beyond opposition and focus on the positive articulation of just technological arrangements (Charitsis et al. 2025, 981). Relatedly, digital subjects on platforms do not demand the abolition of algorithmic technologies, but technologies which positively impact their lives such as platform cooperatives with worker ownership and fair algorithmic governance. Winner's (1977) epistemological Luddism becomes crucial here: dismantling existing technologies provides opportunities to learn what they do, to examine our relationships with them, and to build alternatives based on this knowledge, rather than reproducing hegemonic structures.

CONCLUSION

The digital subject does not manifest itself as an already existing entity that is merely in some kind of mechanistic interaction with technology, and thus the digital environment as simply a certain transfer of the offline subject into the digital dimension. With Foucault, we can address the digital subject as a form composed of myriad micro-sites of heterogeneous elements, algorithmic rationalities, platform architectures, and data extraction systems that are characteristic of the contemporary digital (capitalist) order. The digital subject is neither autonomous nor completely determined and instead exists within power relations that are both productive and limiting. While these relationships constantly

shape desires, direct actions, and normalise specific modes of existence, it is important to note that the digital order is never over-determining or omnipotent. The digital order operates through subtle coordination of possibilities, the calibration of architectures of choice, and the constant modulation of behaviour using infrastructures that have become inextricably linked to the conditions of contemporary life.

The main point made in the article is that precisely because power relations are never final, because they operate by way of ambivalences and contradictions, they establish the conditions for their own subversion. The same platforms which enable control also facilitate mutual coordination between resistive digital subjectivities and subversive knowledges that are continually produced and re-produced. Alongside this, perceived and actual hyper-connectivity, which exposes users to constant exploitation, also enables rapid mobilisation. Regimes of digital power-knowledge and visibility create behavioural profiles, yet they also create spaces for counter-conduct and alternative epistemologies.

Our interpretation of neo-Luddism as the articulation and materialisation, on both the level of knowledge and practice, insisted on the productivity of forms of rejection, resistance and reimagination as counter-conduct. Essentially, even though neo-Luddism appears in various forms in terms of its central objectives, we should not think of it in a simplified manner, for instance, as technological withdrawal and the uncritical rejection of digital technologies. In our reading, the essential element of resistance within the rationality of neo-Luddism is an explicit recognition of the economic-political nature of technological arrangements. Counter-conduct must, of course, also include rejection, which actually creates the very possibility of questioning the form of production behind the digital order. Within such resistive schemata, a crucial insight must stem from the recognition that the coercion of digital order is inseparable from the enclosure of technological possibilities within the horizon of accumulation, the discipline of wage labour, and the dependence on markets. The underlying need to submit to the conditions by which one can reproduce one's existence is a central setup that counter-conduct wishes to disrupt. The reimagination as a neo-Luddite appeal targets the current organisation of machinery and automation, where digital 'innovation' and digital-cyber 'advancements' routinely serve as mechanisms for perpetuating and reproducing capitalist relations. Neo-Luddite counter-conduct accordingly aims at interrupting the smooth reproduction of digital capitalism by refusing the technological forms by which exploitation is normalised and depoliticised. The digital subject, shaped by capitalist and governmental relations, retains the capacity to act on itself and with others: to cultivate practices of refusal, to recompose solidarities, and to imagine different technological futures as attempts to transform the material conditions under which algorithmic life is produced and lived.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new research data were generated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balbi, Gabriele. 2024. *The Digital Revolution: A Short History of an Ideology*. Oxford University Press.

Barry, Laurence. 2019. "The Rationality of the Digital Governmentality". *Journal for Cultural Research* 23 (4): 365–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2020.1714878.

Bennich, Amelie. 2024. "The Digital Imperative: Institutional Pressures to Digitalise". *Technology in Society* 76: 102436. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2023.102436.

Betancourt, Michael. 2015. *The Critique of Digital Capitalism: An Analysis of the Political Economy of Digital Culture and Technology*. Punctum Books.

Carter, Jonathan S., and Misti Yang. 2023. "Sophie vs. the Machine: Neo-Luddism as Response to Technical-Colonial Corruption of the General Intellect". *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 53 (3): 366–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2023.2200699.

Charitsis, Vassilis, Mikko Laamanen, and Tuukka Lehtiniemi. 2025. "Towards Algorithmic Luddism: Class Politics in Data Capitalism". *Information, Communication & Society* 28 (6): 971–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2024.2435996.

Chen, Julie, Alessandro Delfanti, and Michelle Phan. 2023. "Worker Resistance in Digital Capitalism". *International Journal of Communication* 17: 3891–3898.

Cheok, Adrian David. 2017. *Hyperconnectivity*. Springer.

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises Ali Mejias. 2019. *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*. Stanford University Press.

Dammann, Finn, Christian Eichenmüller, and Georg Glasze. 2022. "Geographies of 'Digital Governmentality': Platform-Based Governing through Adaptive Environments". *Digital Geography and Society* 3: 100034. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diggeo.2022.100034.

Davidson, Arnold I. 2011. "In Praise of Counter-Conduct". *History of the Human Sciences* 24 (4): 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695111411625.

Dean, Mitchell. 1999. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. Sage College Publishing.

Derici, Serkan. 2024. "Digitalization Concept and the Historical Evolution of Digitalization". In *Developing Digital Inclusion Through Globalization and Digitalization*, edited by Ahmed Elsadig Musa. IGI Global Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-4111-7.ch006.

Eijk, Gwen van. 2020. "Algorithmic Reasoning: The Production of Subjectivity through Data". In *The Algorithmic Society*, edited by Mark Schuilenburg and Rik Peeters. Routledge.

Feldstein, Steven. 2021. *The Rise of Digital Repression: How Technology Is Reshaping Power, Politics, and Resistance*. Oxford University Press.

Flyverbom, Mikkel. 2022. "Overlit: Digital Architectures of Visibility". *Organization Theory* 3 (3): 26317877221090314. https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221090314.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: Introduction*. Pantheon.

Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power". *Critical Inquiry* 8 (4): 777–95.

Foucault, Michel. 1988. "The Ethic of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview". In *The Final Foucault*, edited by James William Bernauer and David M. Rasmussen. MIT Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1991a. "Governmentality". In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1991b. "Questions of Method". In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Vintage.

Foucault, Michel. 1996. "What Is Critique?". In *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt. University of California Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. Translated by Robert Hurley et al. New Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2006. "Governmentality". In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta. Blackwell Publishing.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2009. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*. Edited by Frédéric Gros, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson, and translated into English by Graham Burchell. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuchs, Christian. 2013. "Capitalism or Information Society? The Fundamental Question of the Present Structure of Society". *European Journal of Social Theory* 16 (4): 413–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431012461432.

Fuchs, Christian. 2022. *Digital Capitalism. Media, Communication and Society Volume Three*. Routledge.

Gallery, Charlene, Jo Conlon. 2024. "Marketing to the Hyper-Connected Consumer". In *Fashion Business and Digital Transformation: Technology and Innovation across the Fashion Industry*. Routledge.

Glendinning, Chellis. 1990. "Notes toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto". https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/chellis-glendinning-notes-toward-a-neo-luddite-manifesto.

Goriunova, Olga. 2019a. "Digital Subjects: An Introduction". *Subjectivity* 12 (1): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-018-00065-2.

Goriunova, Olga. 2019b. "The Digital Subject: People as Data as Persons". *Theory, Culture & Society* 36 (6): 125–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419840409.

Gutting, Gary. 2005. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Hanna, Robert. 2025. *Digital Technology for Humans: The Myth of AI, Human Dignity, and Neo-Luddism*. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111260525.

Harvey, David. 2014. *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. Profile Books.

Henman, Paul. 2020. "Governing by Algorithms and Algorithmic Governmentality: Towards Machinic Judgement". In *The Algorithmic Society*, edited by Mark Schuilenburg and Rik Peeters. Routledge.

Hilbert, Martin. 2020. "Digital Technology and Social Change: The Digital Transformation of Society from a Historical Perspective". *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 22 (2): 189–94. https://doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2020.22.2/mhilbert.

Hobsbawm, E. J. 1952. "The Machine Breakers". *Past and Present* 1 (1): 57–70. https://doi.org/10.1093/past/1.1.57.

Holm, Malin. 2019. *The Rise of Online Counterpublics?: The Limits of Inclusion in a Digital Age*. PhD diss., Uppsala University. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-387426.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. 1972. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Herder and Herder.

Hynes, Michael. 2021. *The Social, Cultural and Environmental Costs of Hyper-Connectivity: Sleeping through the Revolution*. 1st ed. Emerald Publishing.

Kant, Immanuel. 2009. "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" In *Practical Philosophy*, edited and translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge University Press.

Kant, Tanya. 2020. *Making It Personal: Algorithmic Personalization, Identity, and Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press.

Kelly, Mark G. E. 2013. "Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self". In *A Companion to Foucault*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118324905.ch26.

Kryszczuk, Maciej D., and Michał Wenzel. 2017. "Neo-Luddism: Contemporary Work and Beyond". *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 66 (4): 45–65.

Kuntsman, Adi, and Liu Xin, eds. 2023. *Digital Politics, Digital Histories, Digital Futures: New Approaches for Historicising, Politicising and Imagining the Digital*. Emerald Group Publishing.

Lemke, Thomas. 2015. *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634609.

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1991. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. 2nd ed. Beacon Press.

Marsh, Elizabeth, Elvira Perez Vallejos, and Alexa Spence. 2022. "The Digital Workplace and Its Dark Side: An Integrative Review". *Computers in Human Behavior* 128 (March): 107118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.107118.

Mau, Søren Mads. 2023. *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*. Verso.

McCall, Corey. 2014. "Conduct". In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale. Cambridge University Press.

Mitcheson, Katrina. 2012. "Foucault's Technologies of the Self: Between Control and Creativity". *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 43 (1): 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2012.11006757.

Morozov, Evgeny. 2013. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. PublicAffairs.

Morozov, Evgeny. 2022. "Critique of Techno-Feudal Reason". *New Left Review* no. 133/134 (January–April): 89–126.

Mueller, Gavin. 2021. *Breaking Things at Work: The Luddites Are Right about Why You Hate Your Job*. Verso.

Murati, Erion. 2021. "What Are Digital Platforms? An Overview of Definitions, Typologies, Economics, and Legal Challenges Arising from the Platform Economy in EU". *European*

Journal of Privacy Law & Technologies 2021 (1). https://universitypress.unisob.na.it/ojs/index.php/ejplt/article/view/1264.

Nichols, T. Philip, Charles Logan, and Antero Garcia. 2025. "Generative AI and the (Re)Turn to Luddism". *Learning, Media and Technology* 50 (3): 379–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2025.2452199.

Nikolakakis, Nikolaos V. 2024. "Tracing the Self: Foucault's Genealogy and the Evolution of Subjectivity from Ancient Practices to Digital Frontiers". *Ideology and Politics Journal* 25 (1): 7–28. https://doi.org/10.36169/2227-6068.2024.01.00001.

Odysseos, Louiza, Carl Death, and Helle Malmvig. 2016. "Interrogating Michel Foucault's Counter-Conduct: Theorising the Subjects and Practices of Resistance in Global Politics". *Global Society* 30 (2): 151–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2016.1144568.

Pace, Jonathan. 2018. "The Concept of Digital Capitalism". *Communication Theory* 28 (3): 254–69. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtx009.

Pasquale, Frank. 2015. *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Harvard University Press.

Patton, Paul. 2014. "Technology (of Discipline, Governmentality, and Ethics)". In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale. Cambridge University Press.

Poitras, Geoffrey. n.d. "Notes on Luddites and Neo-Luddites". https://www.sfu.ca/~poitras/luddites.pdf.

Pušnik, Tomaž and Gregor Čehovin. 2026. "A reflection on young people's understanding of politics and political orientation in Slovenia in the era of neoliberal rationality". *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 609–35.

Pyykkönen, Miikka. 2015. "Liberalism, Governmentality and Counter-Conduct; An Introduction to Foucauldian Analytics of Liberal Civil Society Notions". *Foucault Studies* 19, 8–35. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i0.4925.

Razinsky, Liran. 2023. "Better than They Know Themselves? Algorithms and Subjectivity". *Subjectivity* 30 (4): 394–416. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-023-00174-7.

Rossi, Andrea. 2017. "Foucault, Critique, Subjectivity". *Journal for Cultural Research* 21 (4): 337–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2017.1370486.

Rouvroy, Antoinette, and Thomas Berns. 2013. "Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation: Disparateness as a Precondition for Individuation through Relationships?". *Réseaux* 177 (1): 163–96. https://doi.org/10.3917/res.177.0163.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. 1996. *Rebels against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution; Lessons for the Computer Age*. Basic Books.

Satgar, Vishwas. 2025. "The Dangerous Contradictions of Digital Capitalism". In *Digital Capitalism and Its Limits: Technotopia, Power and Risk*, edited by Vishwas Satgar, 19–34. Wits University Press. https://doi.org/10.18772/22025049407.7.

Schiller, Dan. 1999. *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System*. MIT Press.

Seidl, Timo. 2021. *Ideas, Politics, and Technological Change: Essays on the Comparative Political Economy of Digital Capitalism*. European University Institute. https://cadmus.eui.eu/entities/publication/3847cbe6-0211-5375-87c3-e02520c35814.

Smart, Barry. 2002. *Michel Foucault*. Rev. ed. Key Sociologists. Routledge.

Srnicek, Nick. 2016. *Platform Capitalism*. Polity Press.

Stegeman, Hanne M., Carolina Are, and Thomas Poell. 2024. "Strategic Invisibility: How Creators Manage the Risks and Constraints of Online Hyper(In)Visibility". *Social Media + Society* 10 (2): 20563051241244674. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241244674.

Steinmaurer, Thomas, and Helena Atteneder. 2019. "Permanent Connectivity: From Modes of Restrictions to Strategies of Resistance". In *Responsibility and Resistance: Ethics in Mediatized Worlds*, edited by Tobias Eberwein, Matthias Karmasin, Friedrich Krotz, and Matthias Rath. Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26212-9_6.

Taylor, Dianna. 2011. *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*. Acumen.

Teo, Kimberly. 2025. "Online Identity: An Extension of the Offline Persona". *Academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/12314058/Online_identity_an_extension_of_the_offline_persona.

Törnberg, Petter. 2023. "How Platforms Govern: Social Regulation in Digital Capitalism". *Big Data & Society* 10 (1): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153808.

Törnberg, Petter, and Justus Uitermark. 2025. *Seeing Like a Platform: An Inquiry into the Condition of Digital Modernity*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003326861.

Treré, Emiliano. 2018. "From Digital Activism to Algorithmic Resistance". In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Activism*, edited by Graham Meikle. Routledge.

Trufanova, Elena O. 2024. "The Subject: Challenges of the Digital". *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies* 6 (4): 215–34. https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v6i4.525.

Varoufakis, Yanis. 2024. *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism*. Vintage.

Vrečko Ilc, Blaž. 2024. "Technology and/in Capitalism – the Genesis and Relevance of the Relationship for the Present Ecologically Unsustainable Order". *Teorija in praksa* 61 (2): 313–39. https://doi.org/10.51936/tip.61.2.313.

Vrečko Ilc, Blaž. 2026. "Generative AI as a Symptom of the Polycrisis of US Digital Capitalism and of the Trumpian End-Times Fascism" *Teorija in praksa* 63 (3): 63 (3): 559–88.

Wark, Scott. 2019. "The Subject of Circulation: On the Digital Subject's Technical Individuations". *Subjectivity* 12 (1): 65–81. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-018-00062-5.

Weidner, Jason R. 2009. "Governmentality, Capitalism, and Subjectivity". *Global Society* 23 (4): 387–411.

Weiskopf, Richard, and Hans Kause Hansen. 2023. "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics: Examples from 'People Analytics'". *Human Relations* 76 (3): 483–506. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221075346.

Wiede, Wiebke. 2020. "Subjectification, the Subject, and the Self". *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* 2021 (December). https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2076.

Winner, Langdon. 1977. *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought*. MIT Press.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2022. "Surveillance Capitalism or Democracy? The Death Match of Institutional Orders and the Politics of Knowledge in Our Information Civilization". *Organization Theory* 3 (3): 26317877221129290. https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221129290.

DIGITALNI SUBJEKT: MOČ(I) DIGITALNEGA REDA, PROTIDELOVANJE IN NEOLUDIZEM

Povzetek. *Članek obravnava konstituiranje digitalnega subjekta v sodobnem digitalnem kapitalističnem redu, pri čemer se analitično naslanja na Foucaultove teoretizacije subjekta v razmerju do oblasti, tehnologije sebstva in proti-delovanja. Članek se najprej osredini na digitalni red, ki oblikuje vedenje, normalizira določene načine obstoja in subjekte preoblikuje v izračunljive, nadzorljive entitete. Hkrati pa so odnosi moči oziroma oblastni odnosi v digitalnem redu vedno nestabilni, kar ustvarja razmere za uporne prakse. Na podlagi Foucaultovega koncepta proti-delovanja prispevek argumentira neoludizem kot konkretno formo proti-delovanja na ravni vednosti in materialnih praks. Neoludizem kritično analiziramo kot delovanje skozi zavračanje, odpor in ponovno zamislitev tehnoloških ureditev znotraj digitalnega reda.*

Ključni pojmi: *digitalni subjekt, digitalni kapitalizem, oblast, proti-delovanje, neoludizem.*

E. H. GOMBRICH
ZGODOVINA UMETNOSTI
Studia humanitatis, Ljubljana, 2025,
prevod Katja Jenčič
688 strani, 59,90 EUR
(ISBN: 978-961-7145-22-9)

Zgodovina umetnosti E. H. Gombricha je klasika na področju umetnostne zgodovine. Odkar je izšla leta 1950, ni nikoli prenehala biti v prodaji. Številnim prevodom v druge jezike se je pridružil tudi slovenski prevod, natisnjen v – za slovenske razmere – velikanski nakladi 2000 izvodov. Že v predgovorih ob prvih straneh knjige razberemo razloge za njeno trajno priljubljenost. Šestnajst predgovorov daje svojevrsten vpogled tudi v zgodovino same knjige.

Gombricheva knjiga je namenjena vsem, ki si želijo prvih usmeritev ob vstopu v kompleksno področje umetnosti. Njena primarna naloga je biti vodnik, ki bralcu omogoča jasen pregled in razumevanje povezav med različnimi obdobji, slogi in imeni, ne da bi ga preobremenil s podrobnostmi. Knjiga naj bi ga opremila s temeljnim znanjem, potrebnim za nadaljnje branje specializirane literature.

Čeprav je avtor med pisanjem mislil predvsem na najstniške bralce, ki šele odkrivajo svet umetnosti, poudarja, da se knjiga za mlade ne bi smela bistveno razlikovati od knjige za odrasle, "razen v tem, da morajo računati na najzahtevnejšo vrsto kritikov; kritikov, ki v hipu opazijo in zavrnejo vsako sled domišljavega žargona ali lažne sentimentalnosti", saj sta to "pregrehi, zaradi katerih ljudje do konca življenja ostanejo nezaupljivi do vsega pisanja o umetnosti". Zanj je ključna zvestoba preprostemu jeziku, "kljub tveganju, da bom zvenel vsakdanje ali nestrokovno", ne da bi se "izogibal težavnosti misli", saj sta to pogosta razloga, da ljudje za vse življenje postanejo nezaupljivi do literature o umetnosti.

Zato si je zastavil več pravil, ki jim je sledil pri pisanju: povezava besedila in slik; omejitev na resnične umetnine, izogibanje lastni izvirnosti in dajanje prednosti uveljavljenim mojstrovinam; izbira tistih del, ki jih je videl v izvirniku; nobenemu pravilu ne bo sledil v celoti. Seveda se je zavedal, da so zaradi teh omejitev številni veliki umetniki in celotne kulture (kot so npr. hindujska ali etruščanska umetnost) ostali zunaj obsega knjige, vendar je to štel za nujno zlo za ohranitev jedrnatosti in vloge prvega vodnika po umetnosti.

Gombrichev namen ni bil navajanje dejstev. Njegov glavni cilj je pripovedovati o umetnosti in pokazati, kako so se umetniški cilji in stremljenja skozi zgodovino nenehno spreminjali. Vsako delo je po njegovem povezano s predhodnikom – bodisi s posnemanjem bodisi z zavračanjem. Vsak umetniški premik prinese nekaj novega, a hkrati tudi nekaj izgubi. Zgodovinska perspektiva omogoča razumevanje subjektivnega občutka umetnikov brez zatrjevanja, da je njihovo delo objektivno boljše od prejšnjega. Ta konstantna dialektika je zanj ključ do razumevanja umetnosti. Iz množice zgradb, kipov in slik je odbral zelo majhno število tistih, "ki jih je mogoče vključiti v zgodbo, ki se ukvarja predvsem z rešitvami dolo-

čenih umetniških problemov, torej z rešitvami, ki so omogočile potek nadaljnjega razvoja".

Gombrich ne predstavlja umetnostne zgodovine kot procesa izboljševanja, pri čemer je primitivna umetnost manj vredna od renesančnih mojstrovin. Namesto tega vsako dobo in obdobje predstavi kot nekaj samosvojega, po svoje vrednega, ustvarjenega z različnimi motivacijami in v drugačnem kulturnem kontekstu, vsako polno edinstvenih mojstrovin. Umetnost je zanj predvsem stvaritev edinstvenih posameznikov, katerih dela odražajo njihov čas, težnje in vizijo. Razumeti umetnostno zgodovino pomeni razumeti življenja in dela teh umetnikov, pri današnjih umetnikih pa gre za ponovno povezovanje z ustvarjalci, ki so oblikovali naš vizualni svet. Knjigo zato obogatijo tudi ilustracije, ki prikazujejo umetnike pri delu ali njihovo družbeno okolje. Te slike, čeprav ne vedno najvišje umetniške vrednosti, skupaj tvorijo stransko pripoved o spreminjajočem se družbenem položaju umetnika skozi stoletja in pomagajo bralcu vizualizirati kontekst, v katerem so nastajala velika dela.

Omenja tudi žalosten pojav uničevanja umetnosti, saj je bilo izgubljenih več umetnin, kot jih je ohranjenih: plemenski predmeti, stopljene bronaste skulpture iz časov, ko je bila kovina pomanjkljiva, umetnine, uničene zaradi bogokletja in vojnih zločinov.

Slikarstvo je v knjigi bolj zastopano od kiparstva in arhitekture, kar je posledica praktičnih razlogov – sliko je v knjigi lažje predstaviti kot tridimenzionalni kip ali zgradbo. Kljub temu skuša to neuravnoteženost popraviti tako, da arhitekturi daje vidno mesto v uvodih poglavij, da bi bralec lahko dojel duh celotnega obdobja.

Gombrich pomaga razumeti umetniška gibanja in njihove medsebojne povezave. Pravi, da se je trudil, "da bi bilo to nenehno spreminjanje ciljev rdeča nit moje pripovedi … in pokazati, kako je vsako delo s posnemanjem ali nasprotovanjem povezano s tistim, kar se je dogajalo prej" in "da se je oziral v preteklost za primerjavo s starejšimi deli, da bi opozoril na razdaljo, ki so jo umetniki ustvarili med seboj in s svojimi predhodniki", pri tem pa se je treba izogniti naivni in napačni predstavi ter razlagi, "da nenehne spremembe v umetnosti pomenijo nenehen napredek" in se ob tem zavedati, "da vsako izboljšanje ali vsak napredek v eno smer sproži izgubo na drugi strani in da ta subjektivni napredek kljub svoji pomembnosti ne ustreza objektivnemu povečanju umetniške vrednosti".

Gombrich se poglablja v temelje, ideje in vpliv posameznih generacij na naslednje. Vsako poglavje pokaže, kako so se umetniki srečevali s preteklostjo, kako so inovirali in se odzivali na dogodke svojega časa in kako so spreminjali svet umetnosti z lomljenjem tradicije. O umetnikih "lahko pripovedujemo šele, ko po določenem času ugotovimo, kakšen vpliv je imelo njihovo delo na druge, in kako so prispevali k zgodovini umetnosti". Tako pomaga razumeti, kako se slogi in teme razvijajo kot odziv na svetovne nazore in tehnični napredek vsake dobe. Predstavi ključna dela vsakega obdobja, in tako bralcu pomaga vizualizirati prehode in razvoj.

Knjiga je urejena kronološko. V 28

poglavjih razgrinja razvoj evropske umetnosti.

Začne z jamskimi poslikavami, zgodnjimi oblikami umetniškega izražanja iz prazgodovine. Zanj ta dela razkrivajo človeški nagon, da pusti sled, komunicira in se izrazi onkraj jezika. Ta dela nas spominjajo, da je bila umetnost že od svojih začetkov odziv na duhovne in družbene potrebe človeka, povezava z mističnim in nevidnim. Ta prvinska umetnost, ki združuje simboliko in ritual, vpliva na naše dojemanje umetnosti še dandanes. Nadaljuje z obravnavo antike, v kateri je umetnost pogosto služila funkcionalnim namenom, bodisi verskim bodisi političnim. Izpostavi na primer Partenon v Atenah, kjer harmonija proporcev uteleša vrednote atenske demokracije. Ta funkcionalni vidik starodavne umetnosti je pomembna lekcija za sodobne umetnike, saj pokaže, da ima umetnost pogosto utilitarno ali pripovedno dimenzijo. Potem pokaže pot od pozne antike do renesanse kot obdobja oživitve in vnovičnega odkrivanja starodavnih vrednot, vendar z novo intenzivnostjo. Poudarja, kako so renesančni umetniki, kot je Michelangelo s svojo fresko v Sikstinski kapeli, na novo opredelili umetnost kot izraz individualnosti in tehnične virtuoznosti. Barok in rokoko vodita k razumevanju umetnosti kot orodja za očaranje in ganjenje gledalca, kar je težnja vsakega umetnika, ki želi ustvarjati privlačna dela. Analiza moderne umetnosti pojasni, kako so impresionisti, fovisti in kubisti z odmikom od konvencij začeli formalno raziskovanje in utiranje poti k vse večji abstrakciji.

V razlagi sodobne umetnosti Gombrich poudarja pomen razumevanja, kako je umetnost, ki je pogosto zmedena in celo nerazumljiva laični javnosti, zakoreninjena v namerni prekinitvi s konvencijo in tradicijo. Takšna umetnost uteleša popolno svobodo umetniškega izražanja. Za Gombricha je sodobna umetnost neskončno raziskovanje, pri katerem se materiali, ideje in oblike nenehno na novo oblikujejo. Današnji umetnik kot dedič te zgodovine je odgovoren za nadaljevanje tega prizadevanja in dodajanje lastnega glasu večnemu dialogu med preteklostjo in prihodnostjo.

Zgodovina umetnosti je torej vodnik za razumevanje notranje logike umetnosti in prepoznavanje zapuščine, ki jo nosi v sebi vsak sodobni umetnik. Zgodovina ni le zaporedje dogodkov, temveč živ vir tehnik, navdihov, idej in simbolov. S svojimi analizami in primeri Gombrich ponuja ključe za dojemanje umetnosti kot univerzalnega in večnega jezika.

Neven BORAK

Laleh KHALILI

EXTRACTIVE CAPITALISM: HOW COMMODITIES & CRONYISM DRIVE THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Profile Books, London, 2025
208 str., 11.99 GBP
(ISBN: 9781805223375)

V knjigi *Extractive Capitalism* avtorica Laleh Khalili obravnava kartelski kapitalizem moderne dobe, ki na račun izkoriščanja ljudi ter narave ustvarja dobičke ter krepi svojo moč. Avtorica je Američanka iranskega rodu in profesorica študij držav Perzijskega zaliva (Gulf Studies) na Univerzi v Exeterju. Leta 1991 je diplomirala na Univerzi v Teksasu kot kemijska inženirka, pozneje pa se je preusmerila v družboslovje: leta 1999 je magistrirala iz mednarodnih odnosov, nato pa leta 2004 doktorirala iz politologije (oboje na Univerzi Columbia). Na začetku svoje poklicne poti je bila zaposlena tudi kot svetovalka v energetskem sektorju, kar ji omogoča vpogled v delovanje ekstraktivnega kapitalizma iz prve roke.

V luči sedanje vojaške agresije Združenih držav Amerike nad Iranom ter prizadevanj prvih, da svojemu tehnološkemu sektorju zagotovijo obilen kapital in potrebne energetske zmogljivosti, pri čemer so očitno pripravljene uporabiti kakršnakoli sredstva, omenjena knjiga ponuja kakovosten vpogled tako v zgodovino imperialističnih vojn na Bližnjem vzhodu kot tudi v mehanizme, procese in interese, ki stojijo za njimi. V času polikrize sta prav področji energetike in tehnologije med ključnimi dejavniki in vprašanji, s katerimi se moramo soočiti, za kar knjiga ponuja primerno osnovo in uvod v to tematiko.

Knjiga je razdeljena na petnajst krajših poglavij, ki jih je večinoma mogoče brati tudi kot samostojne eseje, odgovarjajo pa predvsem na dve ključni vprašanji. V začetnih poglavjih se avtorica osredini predvsem na to, na čem temelji sodobni ekstraktivni kapitalizem, pri čemer izpostavlja zlasti nafto, pesek in okolje nasploh, a tudi mehanizme, na katerih ta sistem sloni, denimo finančni kapital. V nadaljevanju se posveti vprašanju, kdo stoji za globalno ekstrakcijo, ter izpostavi določene sinergije, ki se pojavljajo med različnimi akterji. Med njimi omenja poklice, kot so svetovalci, vojaški generali in trgovci s surovinami, pomen svetovnih velesil, predvsem rivalstvo med ZDA in Kitajsko, pa tudi multinacionalne korporacije, ki so od svojega nastanka pomemben del kolonialnih in imperialnih odnosov.

Preden se avtorica poglobljeno posveti značilnostim ekstraktivnega kapitalizma, poda kratek zgodovinski pregled njegovih ključnih akterjev v povezavi z nacionalizacijo nafte na Bližnjem vzhodu. Pri tem je vredno posebej izpostaviti Mohameda Mosadeka, demokratično izvoljenega in kasneje odstavljenega predsednika vlade Irana, ter Abdulaha Tarikija, prvega ministra Savdske Arabije, pristojnega za nafto, ki sta se v drugi polovici prejšnjega stoletja bojevala za naftno suverenost svojih držav, saj sta nafto razumela kot javno dobrino in ne zgolj kot vir dobička. Njune ideje so bile v nasprotju z zahodnimi interesi na Bližnjem vzhodu, zato so velesile – predvsem Združene države Amerike in Velika Britanija – v imenu kapitala uporabile vsa razpoložljiva sredstva, od multinacionalnih naftnih korporacij in njihovih sveto-

valcev do vojaških posegov in državnih udarov, da bi dosegle nacionalizacijo pod pogoji, ki so ustrezali njihovim interesom. To je pomenilo, da so morale arabske države izplačati zahodnim korporacijam ter jim omogočiti nadaljnje investiranje in ekstrakcijo. Iz tega že lahko sklepamo, da je družbeni razred ključni dejavnik pri ujemanju interesov znotraj (ekstraktivnega) kapitalizma, in ne idealizirana predstava nacije. Prav tako postane očitno, kako imperialne države, pogosto z vojaškim aparatom, hitro razvijejo sožitje z zasebnim sektorjem – vse v funkciji akumulacije kapitala; več o tem morda v nadaljevanju.

Kot je verjetno razvidno že iz uvoda, je nafta v vseh svojih oblikah eden najpomembnejših stebrov sodobnega kapitalizma. Rusi so med prvimi eksperimentirali z uporabo nafte v industrijske namene, pomembneje pa je, da so jim Američani hitro sledili in, kar je morda še pomembnejše, prav z nafto in njeno ekstrakcijo utrdili svojo globalno hegemonijo. Seveda nafta ni edini razlog za ameriško prevlado, je pa predvsem prek interesov zgodnjih naftnih multinacionalk, ki so bili po svojem obsegu globalni, pomembno prispevala k slabitvi Velike Britanije, ki je prevladovala v "dobi premoga". Obe "mirni dobi" (Pax Britannica, Pax Americana) sta si podobni v tem, da sta – ne glede na materialno osnovo svojega vzpona – po svetu širili rasistične in kolonialne režime izkoriščanja delavcev. Poleg nafte Khalili v svojo analizo vključi tudi zanimivo in pogosto spregledano surovino, ko govorimo o kapitalistični prevladi, tj. pesek.

Pomembnost peska je povezana s procesi urbanizacije v industrijski dobi, v kateri je ta igral ključno vlogo pri širitvi mest, cest in železniške infrastrukture. Za te namene je bil pesek praviloma pridobljen lokalno, zato lahko o trgovanju z njim in komodifikaciji v resnejšem obsegu govorimo šele v dvajsetem stoletju z naraščajočo potrebo po steklu in elektronskih napravah. Ekstrakcija peska pa pogosto poteka bolj neformalno, a nič manj kapitalistično: peskokope iz držav globalne večine korporacije, bodisi legalno bodisi ilegalno, mizerno plačujejo za izčrpavanje rečnih sistemov njihovih držav, medtem ko se dobički, ustvarjeni s proizvodnjo betona, stekajo nazaj k multinacionalkam.. Ti dve surovini, torej pesek in nafta, pa imata tudi pomembno skupno točko, in sicer tehnologijo hidravličnega lomljenja (t. i. fracking), pri kateri se uporablja kombinacija vode pod visokim pritiskom in peska za drobljenje kamnin, bogatih z nafto. Prav fracking je pomembno prispeval k temu, da so Združene države Amerike v zadnjem obdobju prehitele tako Rusijo kot Savdsko Arabijo in postale vodilna proizvajalka nafte, vendar pa je ta proces hkrati okoljsko tvegan in izrazito invaziven. Preden preidemo k specifičnim akterjem ekstraktivnega kapitalizma, velja izpostaviti finančni kapital kot pomemben mehanizem.

Avtorica v knjigi večkrat izpostavlja financiranje različnih dobrin in procesov, od terminskih pogodb pri trgovanju z nafto, ki so nastale kot posledica turbulentnih sedemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja in pomembno prispevale h krepitvi zahodnih interesov na Bližnjem vzhodu, do trgovcev s surovinami (commodity traders), svetovalcev ter mednarodnih finančnih institucij, kot

sta Mednarodni denarni sklad (IMF) in Svetovna banka (World Bank), ki imajo pomembno vlogo pri širjenju sodobnega kapitalizma. Ti finančni mehanizmi pogosto delujejo pod pretvezo ekonomskega razvoja "tretjega sveta" ter pogosto nastajajo kot kombinacija zasebnega in državnega kapitala, pri čemer so tveganja praviloma podržavljena, dobički pa privatizirani, bodisi v korist imperialnih centrov bodisi v korist vladajočih razredov v državah globalne večine, ki takšno imperialno razmerje sploh omogočajo; tudi tukaj je znova razvidna pomembnost razreda kot ključnega določevalca interesov. Tako so ti finančni mehanizmi v svojem bistvu nadaljevanje kolonialnih in imperialnih odnosov, ki se reproducirajo skozi procese neoliberalizacije. Za naštetimi finančnimi mehanizmi pa vedno stojijo konkretni akterji.

Kasneje se avtorica pretežno ukvarja z vprašanjem, kdo so glavni akterji ekstraktivnega kapitalizma. Seveda omenja v imperializmu dobro znane akterje, kot so svetovne velesile, multinacionalne korporacije in njihov kapital; zanimivo pa je, da se osredotoči tudi na specifične profesije znotraj teh struktur, pri čemer izpostavi predvsem svetovalce in vojaške poveljnike. Prve označi kot ekonomske "inženirje",[1] ki v času finančnega kapitala širijo ekstraktivno ideologijo oziroma logiko ter zastopajo interese zasebnega sektorja. Slednji so odgovorni za vojaške posege v prid kapitala, kadar so ti potrebni, kar je razvidno tudi iz njihovih nadaljnjih karier, saj se – predvsem "najuspešnejši" – pogosto znajdejo v različnih upravnih odborih ali svetovalnih službah multinacionalk. S tema primeroma avtorica opozarja predvsem na dve ključni lastnosti kapitalizma. Prva je že večkrat omenjena razredna struktura, pri čemer svetovalci in vojaški generali dobro predstavljajo srednji razred, ki si v teh primerih sicer ne lasti produkcijskih sredstev, a kljub temu pomembno prispeva k reprodukciji sistema, saj je uspešnost znotraj teh profesij pogosto odvisna predvsem od ponotranjenja ideologije kapitala. Prav tako pa avtorica znova pokaže, kako pomembna je simbioza med zasebnimi in državnimi institucijami.

Že od samega začetka knjige je očitno, da avtorica z izrazom *extractive capitalism* želi pojasniti imperializem in njemu lastna razmerja, pri čemer se bolj specifično osredini predvsem na ameriški imperializem ter njegove posledice za okolje in naravo. Iz te perspektive knjiga predstavlja kakovostno analizo tega procesa, saj avtorica skozi številne zgodovinske in sodobne primere demistificira kapitalizem kot *a priori* kolonialistični oziroma imperialistični sistem, ki v svoji sodobni fazi uporablja različna orodja, kot so finančni kapital, svetovalci ter vojska, ki mu omogočajo globalni doseg ter neprekinjeno akumulacijo kapitala. Avtorica prav tako vseskozi uspešno ohranja materialistično držo, saj ustrezno – čeprav pogosto implicitno – uvaja razredna razmerja

[1] Ta izraz avtorica uporabi v 427. epizodi podkasta This Machine Kills, v kateri predstavi svojo knjigo. Poleg tega izpostavi tudi materialne razloge za poklic svetovalca, saj gre pogosto prav za visoko izobražene posameznike, ki so zaradi visokih stroškov šolnin primorani iskati dobro plačane poklicne poti. V tem smislu se ta profesija kaže kot privlačna rešitev, pri čemer proces profesionalne socializacije mlade ljudi postopoma preoblikuje v spretne agente kapitala.

kot ključna pri razumevanju moči in interesov, obenem pa izpostavlja kontinuiteto kapitalizma kot sistema, ki se nenehno spreminja in prilagaja zgodovinskim razmeram.

Manjša pomanjkljivost knjige izhaja predvsem iz njenega značaja, saj je do določene mere sestavljena iz avtoričinih krajših esejev in člankov iz preteklosti, dopolnjenih z nekaterimi novimi vsebinskimi poudarki. To samo po sebi ni problematično, vendar velja izpostaviti, da knjigi manjka sklepno poglavje, ki bi vsebinsko povezalo vse glavne argumente. Prav tako knjiga ni zamišljena zgolj kot strokovna literatura, temveč je namenjena tudi širši javnosti, zato se pogosto ukvarja s številnimi aktualnimi geopolitičnimi dogodki in procesi, pri čemer mestoma zmanjka prostora za poglobljene teoretske povezave.

Gledano v celoti pa je knjiga odličen uvod v razmišljanje o energetiki, ekstrakciji, imperializmu ter njihovi geopolitični realnosti v sedanjosti in preteklosti. Avtorica uspešno združuje številne zanimive primere iz različnih delov sveta ter iz svojega bogatega profesionalnega življenja s celovitejšo teoretsko obravnavo kapitalizma kot sistema, s čimer knjigo naredi uporabno tako za akademsko kot tudi za širšo javnost.

Enej ZORMAN

NAVODILA AVTORICAM IN AVTORJEM

Teorija in praksa sprejema v presojo za objavo izvirna znanstvena besedila, ki še niso bila objavljena drugje ali niso v recenzentskem postopku pri kateri drugi znanstveni reviji oziroma monografiji. Objava članka ali knjižne recenzije v Teoriji in praksi je brezplačna.

Besedilo pošljite na elektronski naslov: teorija.praksa@fdv.uni-lj.si

Besedilo naj bo v formatu A4 z 1,5-vrstičnim razmikom, tip črk Times New Roman, velikost 12, obojestransko poravnano, z robovi 2,5 cm. Vse strani besedila morajo biti zaporedno oštevilčene.

Na ločeni naslovni strani naj bodo izpisani: ime in priimek avtorice/avtorja, naslov članka, strokovni naziv, trenutna zaposlitev, polni naslov, telefonska številka in naslov elektronske pošte avtorja. Prva stran besedila naj vsebuje le naslov besedila in povzetek besedila, brez imen avtorjev.

Besedilo mora spremljati izjava avtorice oziroma avtorja, da besedilo še ni bilo objavljeno oziroma ni v pripravi za tisk pri kateri drugi znanstveni reviji ali monografiji.

Uredništvo ima pravico, da prispevkov, ki ne ustrezajo merilom knjižne slovenščine (ali angleščine, če je članek oddan v angleščini – British English), ne sprejme v recenzentski postopek.

Članki

Znanstveni članki v slovenskem ali angleškem jeziku naj obsegajo med 4.500 in 6.500 besed.

Članek naj bo opremljen s povzetkom v slovenskem in angleškem jeziku v obsegu do 100 besed. Povzetek naj vsebuje natančno opredelitev teme besedila, metodo argumentacije in zaključke. Avtorica/avtor naj navede tudi do sedem ključnih pojmov, tako v slovenskem kakor tudi v angleškem jeziku.

Tabele, grafi in slike morajo biti izdelani kot priloge (in ne vključeni v besedilo). V besedilu naj bo okvirno označeno mesto, kamor sodijo.

Opombe pod črto morajo biti v besedilu jasno označene z zaporednimi številkami od začetka do konca. Število in dolžina opomb naj bosta omejena.

Dobesedni navedki, ki so dolgi tri vrstice ali več, naj bodo postavljeni v poseben odstavek, robovi odstavka naj bodo obojestransko zamaknjeni, besedilo naj bo v poševnem tisku in brez narekovajev.

Knjižne recenzije

Teorija in praksa sprejema v objavo recenzije domačih in tujih znanstvenih del, ki niso starejša od dveh let. Recenzija naj obsega do 1.500 besed. V recenziji naj se avtorica/avtor dosledno izogiba navajanju druge literature in virov.

Navajanje

Teorija in praksa za navajanje in citiranje uporablja *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS), način "avtor-datum", 18. izdaja. Navodila CMS so dostopna prek: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.

Osnovna oblika navedka v besedilu je (Novak 1994). Za navajanje strani se uporablja naslednja oblika navajanja: (Novak 1994, 27–29). Če sta avtorja reference dva, se navede oba: (Novak in Kosec 2007, 312–33). Če je avtorjev reference več kot štiri, se v tekstu uporablja oblika navajanja: (Novak et al. 1994, 27), na seznamu literature pa naj se navedejo vsi avtorji. Če ne gre za prvo izdajo knjige, se pri navajanju zabeleži tudi letnico prve izdaje: (Novak [1953]1994, 7). Več referenc hkrati se loči s podpičjem: (Novak 1994, 7; Kosec 1998, 3–4; 2005, 58). Pri navajanju večjega števila referenc enega avtorja, objavljenih v istem letu, so le-te ločene med seboj s črkami a, b, c itd.: (Novak 1994a, 27–29; Novak 1994b, 1), in sicer v zaporedju, v kakršnem se prvič pojavijo v besedilu.

Seznam referenc je na koncu besedila. Na seznam referenc naj bodo vključeni vsa uporabljena literatura in viri. Seznam referenc mora biti urejen po abecednem redu priimkov avtorjev referenc ter v primeru istega avtorja po časovnem zaporedju izdaj.

Primeri navajanj:

Knjige

Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*. Princeton University Press.

Zborniki

Featherstone, Mike in Mike Hepworth, ur. 1991. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. SAGE Publications.

Poglavje v zborniku

Palan, Ronen. 1999. "Global Governance and Social Closure or Who is to Governed in an Era of Global Governance?" V *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, urednika Martin Hewson in Thimothy J. Sinclar. State University New York Press.

Članek v znanstveni reviji

Bachrach, Peter, in Morton S. Baratz. 1963. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework". *American Political Science Review* 57 (3): 632–42. https://doi.org/xxx

Časopisni članek

Mihajlović, Novica. 2024. "Z Daytonom rešeni mir, v Dayton ujeti razkol". *Delo*, 1. marec. https://www.delo.si/novice/svet/z-daytonom-reseni-mir-v-dayton-ujeti-razkol/

Spletna stran

Fakulteta za družbene vede. 2024. "Fakulteta za družbene vede omogoča športnikom prijazno izobraževanje". Objavljeno 16. februarja. https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/obvestila-in-informacije/novice-in-obvestila/fakulteta-za-druzbene-vede-omogoca-sportnikom-prijazno-izobrazevanje

Družbeni mediji

Souza, Pete (@petesouza). 2016. "President Obama bids farewell to President Xi of China at the conclusion of the Nuclear Security Summit". Instagram, 1. april. https://www.instagram.com/p/BDrmfXTtNCt/

Recenzentski postopek

Uredništvo TIP za vse vrste člankov in knjižne recenzije uporablja obojestransko anonimni recenzentski postopek. Besedila recenzirata vsaj dva recenzenta. Avtorica/avtor in soavtorji ob objavi dobijo po en brezplačen izvod številke revije, v kateri je bil objavljen njihov prispevek.

Avtorica/avtor prenese materiale avtorske pravice za objavljeni prispevek na izdajatelja revije. Članki objavljeni v Teoriji in praksi so odprto dostopni v skladu z Budimpeštansko deklaracijo. Dostopni so v RUL-u (Repozitorij Univerze v Ljubljani) in dLib-u (Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije). Članki so objavljeni pod licenco *"Priznanje avtorstva (licenca CC BY 4.0)"*.

Etika objavljanja

Teorija in praksa upošteva Pravila o ravnanju Odbora za etiko objavljanja (Committee on Publication Ethics – COPE). Pravila so dostopna prek www.publicationethics.org. Revija *Teorija in praksa* te politike in postopke sprejema z namenom podpreti urednike, recenzente in avtorje pri izpolnjevanju njihovih etičnih dolžnosti. Od avtorjev, recenzentov in urednikov se pričakuje, da upoštevajo smernice dobre prakse glede etičnega ravnanja, kot jih določajo te politike in postopki.

Uporaba generativne umetne inteligence (UI) pri pripravi člankov

UI kot avtor: Revija ne sprejema rokopisov, pri katerih so klepetalni roboti navedeni kot soavtorji. Veliki jezikovni modeli ne izpolnjujejo meril za avtorstvo, saj ne morejo prevzeti odgovornosti za točnost, integriteto in izvirnost ustvarjene vsebine.

UI kot vir podatkov: Revija ne sprejema rokopisov, ki navajajo klepetalne robote kot vire. Vsebina, ki jo ustvarijo veliki jezikovni modeli, ni ponovljiva ali sledljiva ter lahko nenamerno vsebuje gradivo tretjih oseb, ne da bi to bilo ustrezno označeno.

UI kot pomoč pri pisanju in predstavitvi podatkov: Revija sprejema rokopise, kjer so klepetalni roboti uporabljeni kot orodja za podporo avtorjem pri njihovem raziskovalnem ali besedilotvornem procesu. Sprejemljivi načini uporabe vključujejo lekturo, povratne informacije o strukturi in slogu, prevajanje, analizo podatkov, vizualizacijo podatkov in programiranje.

Avtorji, ki uporabljajo generativne tehnologije na ta način, morajo to ustrezno navesti v svojih rokopisih (gl. Navodila za navajanje uporabe UI orodij):

- Za izoblikovanje sloga pisanja, lekturo ali prevoda dodajte izjavo na koncu rokopisa, kjer navedete vrsto uporabljenega strojnega prevajalnika, klepetalnika ali drugega orodja, uporabljeni poziv ter datum uporabe orodja.
- Uporaba velikih jezikovnih modelov, klepetalnikov, za analizo podatkov in programiranje pomeni pomemben metodološki poseg. V teh primerih vključite v metodološki del rokopisa pojasnilo, kako ste postopali, vključno z vrsto uporabljenega modela, uporabljenimi pozivi (brez vsebine, ki jo analizirate ali kodirate), datumom in povezavo do nabora podatkov.
- Pri uporabi klepetalnih robotov za analizo podatkov upoštevajte, da večina prosto dostopnih generativnih velikih jezikovnih modelov ne izpolnjuje uveljavljenih standardov za obdelavo osebnih ali občutljivih podatkov. Uporabljajte le modele, ki jih je odobrila vaša raziskovalna institucija ali drug zanesljiv organ.

Navodila za navajanje uporabe UI orodij

Avtorji morajo v rokopisu jasno navesti, da so uporabili generativno UI ali UI podprte tehnologije v procesu pisanja članka tako, da dodajo izjavo na koncu rokopisa pred seznamom referenc.

Izjava: Med pripravo tega dela je(so) dne [DATUM] avtor(ji) uporabil(i) [IME ORODJA/VERZIJA], z namenom, da bi [NAMEN UPORABE]. Po uporabi tega orodja je(so) avtor(ji) pregledal(i) in uredil(i) generirano vsebino ter prevzema(jo) polno odgovornost za vsebino publikacije.

Ravnanje z raziskovalnimi podatki

Revija Teorija in praksa podpira odprti dostop do raziskovalnih podatkov. Avtorji morajo pred objavo prispevka zagotoviti odprti dostop do raziskovalnih podatkov, ki so bili uporabljeni pri pripravi članka. Podatki morajo biti pripravljeni v skladu z načeli FAIR (najdljivost, dostopnost, interoperabilnost in uporabljivost).

Kadar podatkov zaradi pravnih, etičnih ali drugih utemeljenih razlogov ni mogoče deliti popolnoma odprto, morajo avtorji podati obrazložitev, na primer v primeru varstva osebnih podatkov, kadar obravnavamo gradivo, ki vključuje poslovne skrivnosti ali druge komercialne informacije, ki jih ureja zakonodaja, ali kadar gre za podatke, ki predstavljajo varnostna tveganja ter drugi občutljivi podatki.

Avtorji morajo raziskovalne podatke objaviti v zaupanja vrednih podatkovnih repozitorijih, arhivih ali središčih, ki omogočajo ustrezne režime dostopa.

Takšni repozitorji v Sloveniji so:

- **Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov (ADP)**
- **Repozitorij Univerze v Ljubljani**
- **Digitalna knjižnica Univerze v Mariboru**
- **Digitalni repozitorij raziskovalnih organizacij Slovenije (DiRROS)**
- **Repozitorij Univerze na Primorskem**
- **Repozitorij Univerze v Novi Gorici**
- **Slovenska raziskovalna infrastruktura za jezikovne vire in tehnologije (CLARIN.SI)**

Avtorji lahko ustrezni podatkovni repozitorij poiščejo tudi s spletnimi orodji, kot sta **https://fairsharing.org** ali **https://www.re3data.org.**

Priporočamo, da se pri objavi raziskovalnih podatkov uporabi licenca Creative Commons **CC BY 4.0** oziroma njej enakovredna licenca.

Podatki morajo biti na voljo urednikom in recenzentom ob oddaji članka v recenzijo, vsem pa najkasneje ob objavi članka.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Teorija in praksa* journal accepts for publication original texts. The texts submitted should not be previously published or under review for any other scientific journal or monograph. The publication of the article or book review in the *Teorija in praksa* journal is free of charge.

Please, send the text to: teorija.praksa@fdv.uni-lj.si

The text should be in A4 format with 1.5 line spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font, justified alignment with 2.5 cm margins. All pages of the text should be numbered consecutively.

A separate title page should contain: the author's name and surname, title of the article, author's academic title, current employment, full postal address, telephone number and e-mail. The first page of the text should only include the title of the text and the abstract, without the names of authors.

The text should be accompanied by the author's statement that it has not been previously published or is not being prepared for press in any other scientific journal or monograph.

The Editorial Board has the right to refuse contributions for the review pro-cedure that do not meet the required high standards of writing in the Slovenian language (or English language if the article is submitted in English – British English should be used).

Articles

Articles in Slovenian or English should have between 4,500 and 6,500 words. The article should include an abstract in Slovenian and English of up to 100 words. The abstract should contain an accurate definition of the topic, the method of argumentation and the conclusions. Up to seven key words should be included. Tables, graphs and pictures should be designed as attachments (and not included in the text). Their approximate positions in the text should be marked in the text.

Footnotes should be clearly marked in the text with consecutive numbers from the beginning to the end of the text. The footnotes should be limited in number and length.

Quotations of three or more lines in length should be placed in a separate paragraph with justified alignment and the margins indented on both sides, with the text appearing in italics and without quotation marks.

Book Reviews

Reviews of Slovenian and foreign scientific books not older than 2 years are accepted for publication in the *Teorija in praksa* journal. The review should contain up to 1,500 words. The author should consistently avoid making references to any sources and literature in the review.

References

The *Teorija in praksa* journal uses *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS) 18th edition, "author-date" system for citation and quotation. The CMS Instructions are accessible at: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.

The basic form of an in-text reference is (Novak 1994). To give a reference to a page the following mode of referencing should be used: (Novak 1994, 27–29). If two authors are referred to, they should both be stated: (Novak and Kosec 2007, 312–33). If there are three or more authors the following form of refer-en-cing should be used: (Novak et al. 1994, 27), and all authors should be stated in the reference list. If the author does not use the first edition of the book, the year of the first edition should also be given: (Novak [1953]1994, 7). Several simul-taneous references should be separated by a semicolon: (Novak 1994, 7; Kosec 1998, 3–4; 2005, 58). When citing several references by the same author published in the same year they should be separated by letters: a, b, c etc.: (Novak 1994a, 27–29; Novak 1994b, 1), in the order in which they first appear in the text. The reference list should be placed at the end of the text. It should include all the literature and sources that were used. The reference list should be arranged in the alphabetical order of authors' surnames and in the case of multiple works by the same author in the consecutive order of the publications.

Examples of References:

Books

Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*. Princeton University Press.

Edited Books

Featherstone, Mike, and Mike Hepworth, eds. 1991. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. SAGE Publications.

A Chapter in a Monograph

Palan, Ronen. 1999. "Global Governance and Social Closure or Who is to Be Governed in an Era of Global Governance?" In *Approaches to Global Gover-nance Theory*, edited by Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair. State University New York Press.

An Article in a Scientific Journal

Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. 1963. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework." *American Political Science Review* 57 (3): 632–42. https://doi.org/xxx

A Newspaper Article

Freeman, Jeremy. 2024. "The Best Way to Find Out if We Can Cool the Planet." *New York Times*, 17 March. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/17/ opinion/solar-geoengineering-risks-research.html

Webpage

Faculty of Social Sciences. n.d. "Doctoral Programmes." Accessed 16 February 2024. https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/en/study/study-at-the-FDV/doctoral-programmes

Social Media

Souza, Pete (@petesouza). 2016. "President Obama bids farewell to President Xi of China at the conclusion of the Nuclear Security Summit." Instagram, 1 April 2016. https://www.instagram.com/p/BDrmfXTtNCt/

Peer-review Procedure

The Editorial Board of the journal uses double blind peer-review procedure for all types of articles and book reviews. They are reviewed by no fewer than two peer reviewers. After the publication the author and co-authors each receive one free copy of the issue in which their contribution was published.

The authors shall convey the exploitation rights for the published paper to the Journal's publisher. The articles published in the *Teorija in praksa* journal are openly accessed in accordance with the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) and are available at the Repository of the University of Ljubljana (RUL) and the Digital Library of Slovenia (dLib). Articles are published under Creative Commons license *Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 license).*

Publishing Ethics

The *Teorija in praksa* journal follows the Committee on Publication Ethics – COPE's Code of Conduct. The Code is accessible at www.publicationethics.org.

The *Teorija in praksa* journal adopts these policies and procedures with the intention of supporting editors, reviewers and authors in fulfilling their ethical obligations. Authors, reviewers and editors are expected to follow the guidelines of good practice regarding ethical conduct as laid down by these policies and procedures.

Use of Generative AI in Preparing Articles

AI as author: the journal does not accept manuscripts where chatbots or other AI tools are listed as co-authors. The reason for this is that large language models do not meet the criteria for authorship, as they cannot take responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and originality of the content produced.

AI as a source of information: The journal does not accept manuscripts that cite chatbots as sources. Content generated by large language models is not reproducible or traceable and may inadvertently contain third-party material without proper attribution.

AI as a writing and data presentation aid: The journal accepts manuscripts where chatbots are used as tools to support authors in their research or writing process. Acceptable uses include proofreading, copyediting, structure and style feedback, translation, data analysis, data visualisation and programming.

- If authors use AI as a writing or data presentation aid, they should indicate this usage in their manuscripts (see also the disclosure instructions below):
- If AI was used for the refinement of the writing style, copy-editing, review or translation, add a statement at the end of the manuscript indicating the type of AI tool or other tool used, the prompt used and the date of the use of the tool.
- The use of large language models for data analysis and programming represents a significant methodological intervention. In these cases, include in the methodology section of the manuscript an explanation of how you have proceeded, including the type of the tool used, the prompts used (excluding the content that is being analysed or coded), the date and a link to the dataset.
- When using chatbots for data analysis, please note that most freely available generative large language models do not meet established standards for handling personal or sensitive data. Only use models that have been approved by your research institution or other trusted authority.

Authors must disclose the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process by adding a statement at the end of their manuscript in the core manuscript file, before the reference list.

AI Disclosure Statement: When preparing this article, the author(s) used [NAME OF TOOL, VERSION] on [DATE] with the following prompt: "[FULL PROMPT]", for the purpose of [SPECIFIC PURPOSE]. The author(s) subsequently reviewed and edited the output as necessary and accept(s) full responsibility for the content and integrity of the publication.

Research Data Management

The journal *Teorija in praksa* supports open access to research data, which form the basis of modern scientific research. Authors must ensure open access to the research data used in the article prior to publication. The data must be prepared according to the **FAIR principles** (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable).

If data cannot be fully shared for legal, ethical or other valid reasons, the authors must provide justification – for example, in cases involving the protection of personal data, material containing trade secrets or other commercially sensitive information regulated by legislation, or data involving security risks.

Authors must deposit research data in trusted data repositories, archives or centers that provide appropriate access arrangements. The trusted repositories recommended by the journal's co-funder are listed here.

- **Slovenian Social Science Data Archives (ADP)**
- **Repository of the University of Ljubljana**
- **Digital Library of the University of Maribor**
- **Digital Repository of Research Organizations of Slovenia (DiRROS)**
- **Repository of the University of Nova Gorica**
- **Repository of the University of Primorska**
- **Slovenian Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN.SI)**

Authors can also search for a suitable repository using tools such as **https://fairsharing.org** or **https://www.re3data.org.**

The journal recommends using the Creative Commons license **CC BY 4.0** or equivalent when publishing research data.

The data must be available to the editors and reviewers at the time of submission of the manuscript and to the public at the latest when the article is published.



CENA: 25 EUR

9 770040 359802

ISSN 0040-3598