

Decreasing Prosperity in the 1980's in Slovenia?

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By investigating living standards in Slovenia in the 1980's this article attempts to prove a hypothesis about the ambiguity of prosperity as far as possession of certain assets and housing standards are concerned. The author explores the subject by analyzing data collected through the "Quality of Life Survey" in 1984 and 1991 by random sampling. The results prove the ambiguity of prosperity by showing a substantial improvement in living standards on the one hand and a heightened perception of decreasing prosperity on the other.

Key words: LIVING CONDITIONS, MATERIAL WELL-BEING, MEASUREMENT OF LIVING CONDITIONS, QUALITY OF LIFE, PROSPERITY

Introduction

Human prosperity and well-being show manifold facets and as such arouse an enormous variety of scientific and political interest. The question of unequal access to actual living resources, observed in terms either of their subjective perception, for example in the quality of life surveys (e.g. Davis and Fine Davis, 1991; Douthitt, 1992; Groenland, 1990) or actual living conditions, for example in the level of living surveys (e.g. Erikson and Aberg, 1986; Social Report on Inequality in Sweden, 1983) attracted great interest in Slovene sociology (Svetlik, 1991). In addition, certain researchers are more interested in those social groups which experience substantially lower access to living resources and either permanent or temporary risk of impoverishment. A series of in-depth approaches has been developed, reflecting the specific capacities of certain societies and scientific communities. Townsend's approach, in particular, to relative deprivation and its 'echoing' in Ringen's advocating of a third stage in the measurement of poverty, which resulted in the concept of accumulation of deprivation (Ringen, 1985), are worth mentioning. In contrast to the surveys looking at unequal access to living resources, the latter has so far failed to achieve wide application in Slovene sociology. Certain attempts in economic science (Stanovnik, 1992) and the very recently emerging interest in sociology (Novak, 1992) will hopefully break the long-lasting 'dead sea' situation in this field. At the moment, any expectation of providing results comparable to the deprivation surveys is misplaced.

As said, certain empirical evidence is already available, collected either in the Quality of Life Survey (Svetlik, 1991) or the Household Survey (Stanovnik, 1992), but further steps in terms of statistical combination of data have not yet been undertaken. What puzzles an analyst is not the absolute absence of information, but the absolute isolation in which they are considered, which will not be transcended in the present analysis either.

Therefore, the primary intention of the analyst is to present the Quality of Life Survey results in order to provide some information about prosperity in the 1980s in Slovenia, considered from a sociological perspective by stressing the unequal access to everyday life resources. Unfortunately, the very beginning of this analysis will determine the conceptual framework, which is why the enormous variety of approaches available either in terms of conceptual and methodological problems or comparative perspectives will be left for some future attempt. No matter how poorly developed the analytical context, certain impacts of the Scandinavian Level of Living Survey can be observed. It has been applied to the specific

Slovene situation since 1984, when data collection by random sampling started. Drawing on empirical evidence, the unequal actual living conditions in the 1980s will be discussed from a temporal perspective with particular consideration of the population with money problems.

Dichotomized picture of prosperity

As far as welfare state studies are concerned, Slovene sociologists have recently been primarily interested in unequal access to resources. A few younger sociologists approach this welfare topic by applying the Scandinavian Level of Living Survey concepts and methodology, and analyzing the unequal access to the various resources necessary for daily life.

Although deeply involved in the Quality of Life Survey, they have not taken much interest in the social structure of those already living at the edge of conventional welfare standards. Thus an opportunity has arisen to take a new perspective by considering the structural features of those who, from year to year, experience a decline in their capacity to provide for their living expenses.

Measuring living conditions without income

As pointed out, Slovene sociologists have methodologically followed the Scandinavian approach, applying it to the particular Slovene conditions. Two surveys were carried out in Slovenia by random sampling of 2,471 respondents in 1984 and 1,395 respondents in 1991. The questionnaires were not exactly compatible. However, variables in the following analysis do not significantly differ in their measurement of phenomena observed.

Stein Ringen's analysis comparing the number of impoverished with the total respondent population (Ringen, 1985) and the Canadian analysis on poverty (Poverty Profile, 1988) comparing the poor living either alone or with a family, will help us to formulate an analytical framework. Both analyses specifically distinguish between those who live above the poverty line and those who live below it. Ringen applied the lower income parameter while the Canadian council applied an absolute poverty line, i.e. where only 58.8 per cent of the family earnings was spent on food, clothes and rent. Anyone who spends more than this percentage of their budget on daily living expenses lives below the conventional poverty line (Poverty Profile, 1988).

Unfortunately, the Slovene survey does not apply the same criteria, i.e. a strict statistical indicator for measuring the poverty line. Why not? The reason is very simple; the data collected in the Quality of Life Survey is not reliable enough in this respect. Respondents did not have a very clear idea as to their total earnings. This seemed to be in particular because of the high inflation rate during the 1980s (e.g. in the period 1989-90 the inflation rate was 552 per cent), but the considerable reduction in inflation and the introduction of income tax in the early 1990s will improve the situation in terms of producing a clearer picture of the total income.

Having been confronted with high inflation and shadow economy resources, it is analytically easier and more reliable to use the parameter 'living with money problems', which will help us distinguish the subpopulation of respondents with such problems from the total population. As mentioned earlier, the results of the analysis will be discussed in the following steps:

- firstly, the distribution of actual living conditions considered in terms of the social structure parameter,
- secondly, the social structure parameters of the subpopulation with money problems and the total population of respondents, and

- thirdly, the social structure of those having money problems regarding their pattern of living.

Before proceeding, the indicators for the parameters analyzed will be briefly described:

1. socio-demographic indicators:

- gender
- age cohort (years: 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-)
- family composition (living alone or with a family)
- completed course of education (pre-primary school, post primary school, lower secondary school, secondary school, college and university)
- place of residence (living in a rural area, small town, big town)
- migration status (immigrants, non-immigrants)
- employment status (unemployed, employed, manager)

2. actual living condition indicators:

- dwelling situation (owned accommodation, rented accommodation)
- dwelling conditions (own bath/shower in the home, 15m² of dwelling space per person in the family household, central heating, telephone, TV) and home appliances (oven, refrigerator, washing machine, dishwasher, microwave oven)
- possession of material assets (car, holiday home)

3. financial indicators:

- perception of current situation measured by reporting on "living with money problems"
- financial expectations measured by reporting on saving money and being able to obtain a certain sum of money in a week (the sum is equal to five times the average monthly salary)

4. bad health indicators:

- psychosomatic syndrome measured by reporting on exhaustion, sleeplessness and depression.

Actual living conditions

The 'Slovene' approach to depicting access to everyday life resources suffers from a lack of 'monetary' measure, i.e. disposable household income, that would grasp such resources in detail. Indicators measuring various living conditions as follows should make up for this lack:

1. (in)sufficient dwelling conditions measured by having one's own bath/shower in the home and sufficient space per person in the home (minimum 15m²)
2. access to material assets measured by possession of car and holiday home
3. perception of current financial situation and general life conditions measured by living with money problems in purchasing sufficient food and clothing, and paying the rent satisfaction with current living conditions
4. financial expectations measured by ability to: obtain a certain amount of money and save money.

The distribution of actual living conditions with respect to age class and education will help us answer the question of whether prosperity in Slovenia increased or decreased during the 1980s.

Following the indicators measuring dwelling conditions (Table 1) in terms of the lack of a bath/shower in the home and insufficient space (less than 15m² per person) and taking

Table 1: Insufficient dwelling conditions

	Without a bath/shower of one's own in the home		Less than 15 m ² per family member	
	1984	1991	1984	1991**
Total	17.6	8.5	33.8	29.3
Age class:				
15-24 years	16.1	5.4	36.3	31.8
25-34	15.8	10.1	42.9	43.1
35-44	11.2	5.4	30.7	31.6
45-54	15.9	8.8	27.4	22.8
55-64	23.2	—	22.9	—
65-	35.1	12.4*	20.0	9.7*
Completed course of education:				
before primary school	38.2	28.9	41.1	43.2
primary school	20.2	16.0	34.0	36.4
lower secondary school	11.9	5.5	33.3	32.5
secondary school	6.9	2.5	21.8	21.6
college, university	1.4	1.2	17.4	12.8

* Included respondents over the age of 55.

** Only household members considered.

Referring to Svetlik (1991:17).

into account the age and education categories of the population leads us to the following findings:

1. the dwelling conditions of the population definitely improved during the past decade;
2. the higher the education acquired, the better the actual dwelling conditions;
3. the younger the cohorts, the worse the dwelling conditions, particularly where cohorts aged 25-34 are observed. It is to be presumed that these cohorts represent young families with offspring but inadequate living standard measured by sufficient dwelling space.

Despite this last finding, the presented distribution of dwelling conditions in Slovenia follows the social structure features elsewhere: the higher the education the better the actual living conditions. Furthermore, the decreasing economic capacities of society in general observed in the economic crisis and high inflation rate were not reflected in the area of individual prosperity. This conclusion can be tested by looking at the distribution of the possession of material assets among various age and education categories of the population (Table 2). The results underline both the above analytical findings: the increase in individual prosperity over the last decade and improved access to material assets among the higher educated categories of the population.

The respondents report that access to material assets improved considerably during the 1980s, but how this improvement was achieved remains unknown. The data collected at the individual level applying objective and subjective indicators fails to show the 'macro' factor giving the impetus to the increase in 'micro' prosperity. This may be a result either of an improved financial situation - more disposable income in the household - or of better macro purchasing conditions - the higher the supply the lower price and the easier the access.

In contrast to improved living conditions during the 1980s the distribution of financial expectations (Table 3) shows the relatively unchanged financial situation in this period. Despite the decreasing macroeconomic capacities of society, the micro financial capacities remained almost the same in relative terms, i.e. constantly falling, except money savings, which began to approach the status of 'privileged' property.

Table 2: Distribution of material assets

	Car		Holiday home	
	1984	1991	1984	1991
Total	54.2	76.5	4.3	10.7
Age class:				
15-24 years	27.5	80.3	2.2	13.8
25-34	74.7	80.8	3.6	7.7
35-44	75.1	83.8	5.6	9.4
45-54	34.2	79.6	6.6	11.2
55-64	15.8	52.9	7.5	12.7
65-	15.8	52.9	1.1	9.2
Completed course of education:				
before primary school	28.2	38.9	2.6	10.5
primary school	40.7	61.7	3.1	4.4
lower secondary school	69.9	79.7	4.6	9.3
secondary school	74.0	90.5	6.4	15.7
college, university	82.3	92.7	23.0	21.8

Referring to Svetlik (1991:20).

Table 3: Financial expectations

	Unable to			
	obtain money*		save money	
	1984	1991	1984	1991
Total	61.7	63.8	61.9	73.2
Age class:				
15-24 years	58.5	65.3	61.3	65.9
25-34	53.1	53.7	60.7	77.5
35-44	58.1	54.1	65.2	70.5
45-54	61.5	71.2	61.2	77.0
55-64	70.9	72.1	58.3	77.9
65-	77.2	77.6	57.7	70.5
Completed course of education:				
before primary school	80.0	89.2	73.0	82.9
primary school	67.8	80.2	62.2	79.9
lower secondary school	56.5	63.7	54.7	74.9
secondary school	47.0	52.5	50.0	67.7
college, university	36.0	32.7	52.1	59.1

* The respondent is unable to obtain money equal to five times an average salary per month in a week. Referring to Svetlik (1991:22).

The discrepancy between the reported constant low financial capacity, and increased prosperity gives rise to many questions. What is the reason? Unreported second economy resources?

Perceived living conditions

The ambiguity of 'micro' prosperity is clearly revealed as soon as the perceived living conditions are investigated. The subjective perception of the current financial situation and

general living conditions 'undermines' totally the picture of increasing individual prosperity reflected in improved dwelling conditions and better access to certain material assets discussed in the previous subsection. Furthermore, the perceptions even contradict each other (Table 4).

Table 4: Perceived living conditions

	Living with money problems*		Satisfaction with current life conditions	
	1984	1991	1984	1991
Total	22.1	59.9	50.6	47.8
Age class:				
15-24 years	16.3	36.0	65.2	62.8
25-34	19.9	64.1	48.6	52.0
35-44	22.8	65.1	53.5	47.7
45-54	26.8	72.1	45.2	38.5
55-64	24.3	62.4	45.9	41.0
65-	21.2	62.2	—	—
Completed course of education:				
before primary school	35.7	68.4	29.4	26.3
primary school	23.5	75.4	43.8	32.5
lower secondary school	19.1	57.7	54.9	47.9
secondary school	15.0	46.8	65.1	62.8
college, university	9.8	45.2	76.3	67.9

* Only with great difficulty can the respondents obtain everything for everyday life with their current monthly income.

Referring to Svetlik (1991:22-3).

Following the first indicator, i.e. purchasing everyday life necessities with great difficulty, which actually means sometimes running out of money for food and clothes and rent, living standards were three times more endangered, at the beginning of the 1990s than in the middle of the 1980s. The middle cohort and the lower education category reported the biggest danger of such progress in their prosperity. On the other hand, the second indicator measuring the general satisfaction with current life, shows us a totally different picture. Moreover, age, level of education and time passed had little effect on the distribution of life satisfaction almost 'untouched'.

This dichotomised picture of prosperity in the 1980s puzzles any analyst assuming that the high inflation rate - near hyperinflation - should also push down the consumption capacities of the population. Looking at the indicators reveals an ambivalent picture: improved actual living conditions on the one hand and perceived worse financial situation on the other hand. Perhaps a detailed analysis of the category reporting on living with money problems can contribute to clear this 'living condition' puzzle. In this respect, Ringen's approach to the Norwegian level of living (Ringen, 1985) can help in selecting those dimensions which are particularly important in highlighting the social structure of this 'deprivileged' category of respondents. Indicators in the following analyses will follow both the temporal perspective (1984, 1991) and the structural perspective (Table 5).

From an annual structural perspective, it is difficult to distinguish the two populations (table 5). In 1984, there is virtually no statistical difference discerned between the total population of respondents and the subpopulation with money problems regarding gender, age, family pattern and immigration status. Both categories of respondents are, however,

Table 5: Perceived low prosperity in temporal perspective

	1984		1991	
	Total	Sub-population	Total	Sub-population
Male	49.0	48.7	48.4	45.4
Age — over 60 years	14.5	15.0	10.3	62.2
Families	90.8	91.9	95.0	94.4
Completed course of education				
primary school only	37.2	26.7	36.8	46.1
Living in a rural area	57.8	51.1	52.0	51.2
Immigrants	11.8	10.6	9.5	12.1
Dwelling:				
in rented accommodation	50.3	46.0	29.3	31.6
in owned accommodation	49.7	54.0	70.7	68.4
Living:				
in a poorly maintained home	49.7	67.8	—	—
without a bath/shower of one's own	—	—	8.5	11.4
Insufficient heating				
in cold weather	—	—	31.3	35.3
Bad health	20.8	30.5	13.0	17.6

Referring to Novak (1992:657).

statistically distinguishable as far as education, place of residence, dwelling conditions, and financial incapacity are concerned.

In 1991, certain shifts can be observed in indicators measuring age and education. A greater portion of the category with money problems is over the age of 60 and has a lower education. In view of these findings from a temporal perspective and in terms of the 'vicious circle' (Erikson and Aberg, 1986) of the 'lesser access to resources', the following features of a typical person with money problems may be constructed. He or she is over 60, has a lower education, has emigrated to Slovenia, and lives in lower quality accommodation. According to Ringen's conclusions (Ringen, 1985), these human conditions might also be labelled an 'accumulation of deprivation', where lower social origin is accompanied by fewer assets, lower quality of housing and food, psychosomatic syndrome and a lesser involvement in social and political activities.

What factors have led to these shifts? Is it the sampling or the questionnaires, which are not exactly related to each other, or is it the shifts in empirical social structures? At the moment no information as would render these methodological suspicions invalid is available, but the following notion might help. Basic indicators in the analysis, labelling parameters such as acquired education, dwelling status and financial incapacities, did not undergo any conceptual or methodological change. Furthermore, it might be assumed that the change in the figures discerned from a comparative perspective is mainly due to shifts in the empirical structures.

By contrast to Ringen's approach to the social composition of poverty, the Canadian Council's analysis, more administrative than scientific, limits its interest to the subpopulation of the poor (Poverty Profile, 1988). The Council observes the category of the poor with regard to the basic distinguishing parameter of living pattern. All parameters in the analysis are considered in this connection. In view of the limited methodological opportunities of the Quality of Life Survey, the same list of indicators, already presented, will reenter the analysis to cope with the category reporting on living with money problems with respect to their family pattern (Table 6).

Table 6: Life with money problems in terms of living pattern

Living pattern	1984		1991	
	Alone	Family	Alone	Family
Life with money problems	18.8	21.5	67.1	59.6
Gender:				
Female	28.6	50.5	14.9	46.9
Male	71.4	49.5	85.1	53.1
Age:				
15-25	19.5	10.3	0.0	11.0
25-64	56.1	84.0	57.4	80.4
65-75	24.4	5.7	42.6	8.6
Completed course of education:				
primary school	41.2	36.8	66.0	45.1
secondary school	32.4	37.6	25.5	46.0
college	26.5	25.6	8.5	8.9
Living:				
in a rural area	61.9	57.5	42.6	52.5
in a small town	26.2	26.7	27.2	27.1
in a big town	11.9	15.8	29.8	20.4
Immigrants	4.9	12.4	14.9	13.5
Dwelling:				
in rented accomodation	57.9	45.0	46.7	48.3
in owned accomodation	42.1	55.0	53.3	51.7
Bad health	23.8	21.6	21.3	17.4

Referring to Novak (1992:658-9).

A brief look at the table reveals that applying the comparative perspective of the family pattern brought fruitful analytical results. In 1984 the two living pattern types were scarcely distinguishable from each another as far as gender, age and employment status parameters were concerned. Seven years later significant shifts in internal structures can be observed. What are the factors on which this distinction depends? What parameters determine the overall picture of the category living with money problems in 1991? This low prosperity situation can be labelled as a characteristic of gender, but in contrast to certain other references (e.g. Poverty Profile, 1988) the 'feminization' of decreasing prosperity fails to join the

Table 7: Typical person with money problems

Indicators	1984	Alone	Families
Gender:		Male	
Age:		Middle	Middle
Education acquired:		Primary	Primary/Secondary
Place of residence:		Rural	Rural
Dwelling in:		Rented Accom.	Owned accommodation
	1991		
Gender:		Male	
Age:		Middle	Middle
Education acquired:		Primary	Primary/Secondary
Place of residence:		Rural	Rural
Dwelling in:		Owned Accom.	Owned accommodation

Referring to Novak (1992:659).

general pattern observed elsewhere. Shifts can also be discerned in the following parameters: education, place of residence, and migration status.

Regarding the living pattern in temporal perspective, the following typical characteristics of the category experiencing the life with money problems can be established (Table 7).

A closer look at the typical characteristics of persons confronting with money problems during the 1980s reveals that of those living alone, males approached this situation more frequently than females because of lower education attainment. 'Family' situations do not lead to any significantly different conclusions. Higher education and employment status usually means a fairly high income and a fairly good living standard. In view of the data presented, such an optimistic trend is missing, as both lower and middle education categories suffer a similar fate.

Concluding Assessment: The contrast between actual and perceived living conditions

Following the empirical results presented, a cleavage between certain findings appears. On the one hand, the respondents report a substantial decrease in prosperity, observed in living with money problems. Certain other sources (Cernak Meglic, 1994) support this subjective perception of making ends meet with great difficulty by the income distribution in the 1980s, which showed an increase in lower income categories. Apart from this, it was also empirically documented that earning average income or less (80 per cent of earners), means being pushed to the brink of decreasing prosperity (Novak, 1992). The Household Survey's outcomes also show a small range in variations in average real income (Stanovnik, 1992). The interviewed members of households reported a 'classical' reaction to lowering prosperity - lower prosperity aspirations. Instead of perceiving their actual situation as deprived, they look toward a more humble future. It seems like a desired better living today being postponed for tomorrow.

In contrast to the above observations, the Quality of Life Survey's respondents also report a considerable improvement in their actual living conditions, particularly those measured by indicators of dwelling standards and possession of material assets. However, the available information is insufficient for the interplay between 'macro' factors and their 'micro' reflection (determining conditions on the individual level) to be considered. It is perhaps too vague to ascribe this discrepancy between 'objective conditions' and 'subjective perceptions' to a better commodity supply and higher aspirations, having as its impetus the substantially higher living standard in neighboring societies, e.g. in Austria and Italy. People can earn less money in relative terms, but if they want either to maintain or to improve their living conditions they must redistribute their disposable household income, which means they spend more money for 'performing' their life-style than for everyday life necessities. As said, although this assumption remains empirically unproved, it could help in mapping out further analytical steps in the near future.

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SMANJIVANJE BLAGOŠTANJA U SLOVENIJI OSAMDESETIH?

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U članku se razmatra životni standard u Sloveniji tijekom osamdesetih godina. Autorica nastoji testirati hipotezu o dvoznačnosti blagostanja - posebice kada su imovina i standard stanovanja u pitanju. U radu se koriste podaci prikupljeni u sklopu "Istraživanja kvalitete života" provedenom na slučajnom uzorku 1984. i 1991. godine. Rezultati analize potvrđuju polaznu hipotezu ukazujući na istodobni porast životnog standarda i sve snažnije percipiranje smanjivanja blagostanja.