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PROSTITUTION IN
CROATIA AND SLOVENIA
Sex Workers' Experiences**

Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar and The Peace Institute, Zagreb, 2017, 196 pages.

This book reports on a valuable exploratory study into sex workers' experiences and the impact of law and social policy on their day to day lives in Croatia and Slovenia. Debates over prostitution policy tend to polarize over representations of sex work as either forced or freely chosen, and to depend more on ideological commitments than consideration of the evidence. This book avoids such simplistic dichotomies, offering a fine-grained qualitative analysis of sex-work law, policy and the views of sex workers and people who work with them. The editors' backgrounds in law and social sciences strengthen the book's analysis, which highlights the diversity of sex workers' experiences and situates them in terms of both the global and local economy.

The research underpinning this book consists of in-depth qualitative interviews with sex workers and people who have direct contact with sex workers such as NGO workers who provide services and support to sex workers, a client, intermediaries, and members of the legal profession. Additionally, the researchers analysed prostitution cases before the courts for socio-demographic data on sex workers and in-

termediaries, data on arrests, offences and the interpretation of offences, judgements and penalties. There was an interesting contrast between the two states: while many cases concerning prostitution were heard in Croatia in 2015/16, the researchers found no such cases in Slovenia.

It is difficult to know how much the differences between sex worker experiences in Slovenia and Croatia are to do with the different methods of recruitment used in each location. The Slovenian researchers had previously done research with sex worker participants so could draw on previous contacts; they also had success recruiting through online advertisements. The Croatian researchers did not have such previous contacts, although they did have a member of the team with some insider experience, and depended more on NGOs to provide contacts. Thus this research should not be treated as a systematically comparative analysis. Nevertheless, it has great value as a qualitative exploratory study of an under-researched field.

The book is organized into two major sections each consisting of several chapters, with an introduction and conclusion by the editors which draw their findings together. Each section consists of six chapters organized around similar themes: sex work policy and practice; how sex workers organize and experience their work; sex workers' relationships with clients; sex workers' relationships with intermediaries; sex workers' relationships with police; and recommendations for improvements. This structuring of information provides the reader with a variety of different lenses on the topic, helping to build up a nuanced picture of the diversity of experiences of sex work in Croatia and Slovenia.

The legal situation for sex workers is quite different in each state. In Croatia, sex work is criminalized as a misdemeanour against public order and peace while in Slovenia, offering sexual services for money is not a crime, although offering sexual services in a public space can be prose-

cuted as indecent behaviour. Furthermore, in Slovenia the law does not clearly distinguish between sex trafficking and sex work, leaving sex workers in a legal grey area. Purchasing sexual services is not an offence in either state except in the case of minors or victims of trafficking. 'Exploitation of prostitution' is an offence in both states, however, in Croatia this law criminalizes any form of organizing prostitution regardless of the level of 'exploitation,' which can mean women who work together, for example, can be criminalized for helping to organize the sex work of another person.

These differences in the legal and policy framework may partly explain the very different experiences of the sex workers interviewed, although, since this was a small exploratory study, we cannot generalize the findings. Nevertheless, it was striking how the Croatian sex workers were much more vulnerable to violence and harassment from intermediaries, clients and police. The constant risk of arrest and having to pay fines made the Croatian sex workers' lives particularly precarious. The Slovenian sex workers were better positioned to work independently and in groups; they had much less need for third parties who offered 'protection' in exchange for a cut of their earnings. They were also better positioned to screen clients and mentioned problems with violent clients less often. Still, in each case some workers had positive and negative experiences of sex work and saw it as a better option than other precarious employment available.

In both cases economic need provided the main explanation for why women went into sex work. Both Croatia and Slovenia have seen reduced social spend-

ing, rising unemployment and an increase in precarious and low-paid employment. These changes have hit women harder than men, particularly women with health problems, low levels of family support, fewer skills and less education. Many had experience working in other feminized fields of employment such as service work or caring for the elderly and disabled. They contrasted the insecurity and low pay of such work with their ability to make a better, more reliable living from sex work.

This research complicates stereotypes of the exploitative 'pimp.' While some sex-workers, in particular the Croatians, had terrible past experiences with violent and exploitative intermediaries, most also had positive experiences with intermediaries. Sex workers often needed intermediaries to provide transport, premises and security and spoke of coming to reasonable economic arrangements with people who helped with their business. The Croatian section of the book includes interviews with men who had acted as intermediaries and understood themselves to have played a positive role by doing so.

The different legal frameworks in each case clearly impacted on sex workers' relationships with the police. Arrest and having to pay fines was an on-going risk for Croatian sex workers, who could be arrested when out in public regardless of whether they were working or doing their grocery shopping. Furthermore, some reported police demanding free sexual services and using abusive language toward them. Slovenian sex workers did not report such overt abuse from the police, but did experience discriminatory attitudes. Sex workers in both cases did not trust the police or feel able to report crimes.

The researchers asked sex workers for recommendations about how to improve their lives. All agreed on the need for legal reform to protect their rights. Such legal reform, either decriminalization or legalization, was seen as a necessary step in order to improve their relationship with

the police. In turn, improved relations with police would be necessary in order for sex workers to enjoy the same legal protection as other citizens. Legal reform is also necessary for sex workers to make economic provision for their own social security, for example to be able to legally put their earnings toward retirement savings. All the sex workers spoke of the devastating impact of stigma, which usually meant they had to hide their occupation. Thus stigma is closely associated with social isolation which increases the vulnerability of sex workers. Finally, sex workers wanted targeted social services and a sex worker organization which could provide them with education and support as well as advocate for their rights.

An important contribution of this book is that it illustrates how human rights abuses against sex workers are facilitated by the criminalization of sex work. The book also shows how the feminization of poverty in Croatia and Slovenia has made sex work the best option for some women. The authors do not celebrate sex work as 'empowering' or freely chosen, nor do they condemn it. Rather, their argument against criminalization is well supported by their findings which show that current sex work laws and social policy make life harder for women who are already struggling in the face of cuts to welfare and family support programmes, and the 'flexible' labour policies favoured by contemporary economic policy makers. Thus, this book provides important evidence about the social realities of sex work in Croatia and Slovenia; it should be read by anyone interested in sex work policy and sex work more generally.

Carol Harrington

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Slaven Ravlić LIBERALNA DEMOKRACIJA Izazovi i iskušenja

Zagreb, Plejada, 2017., 318 str.

Knjiga *Liberalna demokracija: izazovi i iskušenja* autora prof. dr. sc. Slavena Ravlića, profesora sociologije i političke znanosti na Katedri za sociologiju Pravnoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu i leksikografa u Leksikografskom zavodu Miroslav Krleža, bavi se u današnje vrijeme vrlo važnim pitanjem razvitka liberalne demokracije, njezinim konstitutivnim elementima i problemima koji pred liberalnom demokracijom stoje u trenutku jačanja suvremenoga vala populizma i nacionalizma.

Knjiga je podijeljena na uvod, tri dijela u kojima su po tri poglavlja, sažetak na engleskom jeziku i kazalo pojmova i imena.

U uvodnom poglavlju, *Izazovi demokracije u globaliziranom svijetu*, Ravlić polazi od dva poznata "demokratska paradoksa" – Churchillova, o demokraciji kao najgorem obliku vladavine, osim svih ostalih, i Dahlova, o rascjepu između povjerenja građana u demokratske institucije i njihove vjere u poželjnost demokracije – kako bi oslikao fundamentalne probleme s kojima se nose suvremene demokracije. Ostatak knjige Ravlić rabi kako bi pokazao razloge postojanja ovih paradoksa i nastojanja njihova rješavanja, s ciljem očuvanja liberalne demokracije, pogotovo u kontekstu globalizacije, koja se, čini se, ne može zaustaviti. Uzimajući u obzir globalizaciju, autor proučava pitanje razaranja demokratskoga građanstva i transformacije političkih stranaka kao izvora potencijalne transformacije sustava iz liberalno-demokratskih u sustave demokratskog autoritarizma.

Prvi dio knjige nosi naslov *Transformacija demokratskog građanstva*, a sastoji