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UDK 621.391:65.01:338.014

Izvorni znanstveni rad

## **STRATEGIC INFORMATION SYSTEM PLANNING: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CROATIAN AND SLOVENIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

*Autori prikazuju rezultate empirijskog istraživanja informacijskih sustava u praksi slovenskih i hrvatskih velikih organizacija, koji se temelje na upitniku već prije razvijenom u Singapuru. Usporedili su rezultate obiju zemalja u tranziciji i zaključuju da organizacije obiju tranzicijskih zemalja preferiraju više unutarnje nego vanjske prednosti.*

### **Introduction**

A lot of research has been done which focuses on identifying key information technology (IT) issues concerning corporate transformation. Technical progress and global business market definitely among the primary factors which play important roles in a modern society. IT is an essential component of a firm's strategy used in a global market. One of the consequences of the recent development in the field of IT is an ongoing process of planning in both the IS and business areas. In Croatia and Slovenia, as well in other economies in transition, there is a significant lack of empirical research in the area of strategic IS planning.

Since a large proportion of studies on the strategic IS planning is based on case-oriented research, researchers have found it difficult to generalize their results across a wide variety of organizations. After the study objectives and concerns for external validity and generalization had been evaluated, a survey questionnaire was determined to be the most appropriate research methodology for this study. The study was performed by the MIS Department of the Faculty of Economics in

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Ljubljana (Slovenia), as well as by Department of Information Science and Business Computing of the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb (Croatia) in 2000 and was based on a questionnaire that was previously developed by Conrath, Ang and Matthey (2), McLean and Soden (18), Pavri and Ang (19) and Teo, Ang and Pavri (27). The questionnaire covered all areas of IS planning process and above all it provided us with a useful set of results on the strategic IS planning practices in Slovenia and Croatia.

This paper focuses on the IS strategic planning part of the questionnaire which covers the following topics: The comparison of the macro-organizational features of those Slovenian and Croatian organizations that undertook IS strategic planning and those that did not; The participation in the strategic IS planning; The critical success factors of the strategic IS planning; The benefits of the strategic IS planning; Other relevant strategic IS planning data (e.g. planning methodology, corporate and strategic IS planning alignment).

## **Methodology**

The survey was based on the questionnaire previously developed by Conrath, Ang and Matthey (2) and McLean and Soden (18). The questionnaire was supplemented and successfully used in Slovenia and Croatia but it was of course translated into Slovene and Croatian language. Since we made use of an existing instrument, we did not investigate its reliability and validity.

Slovenian study target population included 450 large Slovene organizations taken from a wide range of industries, randomly chosen from the Register of Organizations (23), a register of all organizations in Slovenia. The inquiry was being performed from April 2000 to June 2000. In order to ensure that the responses reflect the organizations' perspective of the strategic IS planning, the IS executives were asked to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed by mail and the answers were obtained by mail or with the help of the web-based application ([www.ef.uni-lj.si/projekti/informatika](http://www.ef.uni-lj.si/projekti/informatika)). All answers were collected in the same database. There was some verbal communication between the organizations and authors, which was mostly concerned with the organizations expressed some doubts about the confidence of information, but it did not influence the results.

Croatian study target population included 400 organizations from a list of '400 biggest' Croatian organizations (31) of a wide range of industries. The inquiry was being performed during 2000 and was conducted by professional market research agency (Puls, [www.puls.hr](http://www.puls.hr)) with verbal communication with IS executives. Organization, in Slovenia as well as in Croatia, classifies as large when a total number of employees exceeds 250, and annual revenue is over 8 million DEM. The

questionnaire was pre-tested with the post-graduate and doctoral students for content validity, comprehensiveness and readability. After the feedback from pre-testing has been obtained, the questionnaire was pilot tested with five senior IS executives.

A total of 131 (Slovenian study) and 106 (Croatian study) useful answers to the strategic IS planning part were obtained, representing the database on the strategic IS planning practices in Slovenia and Croatia. The rates of the return were 29 % and 26 % for Slovenia and Croatia that make them comparable to the similar studies conducted by Karimi, Gupta and Somers (13), Lederer and Sethi (15), Pavri and Ang (19), Teo, Ang and Pavri (27) and Torkzadeh and Xia (29) where the rate of the return reached 21 %, 24 %, 22 %, 20 % and 23 % respectively.

Surveyed organizations have been classified into different industry types according to the National Classification of Economic Activities - NACE Rev. 1 (obligatory classification for all EU member-states, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997).

Table 1 shows the structure of the organizations according to the annual revenue, type of business and number of employees. The activities in the category Miscellaneous are of a different kind such as consulting, transport, IT, catering, tourism, health service, government, telecommunications. The respondents were also reasonably well distributed according to the revenue structure, types of business and number of employees of all Slovenian and Croatian large organizations (28), (8), (30). Therefore we can generalize the results of the survey to the population of large organizations in Slovenia as well as Croatia.

Table 1

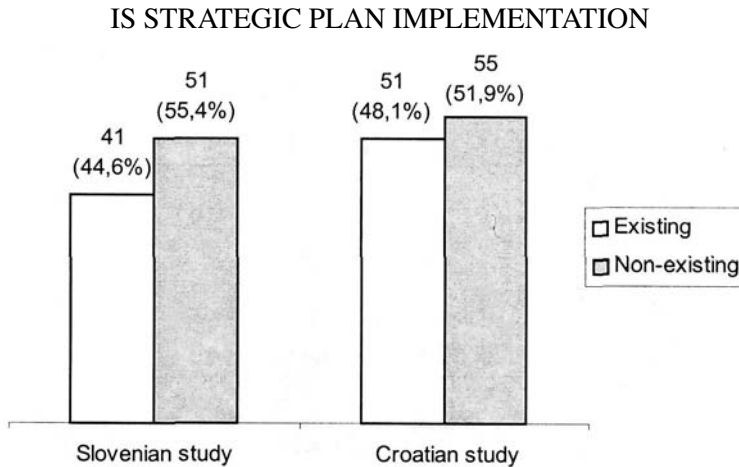
## STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZATIONS

	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Sample Size	Croatian large organizations	$\chi^2$ -Test	Sample Size	Slovene large organizations	$\chi^2$ -Test
	%	in %		%	in %	
Structure by annual sales revenue	74			92		
< 2 million DEM	10,80%	5,60%	DF=2	5,40%	4,50%	DF=2
2-8 million DEM	14,90%	11,10%	$\chi^2=7,2133$	6,50%	8,00%	$\chi^2=0,4707$
> 8 million DEM	74,30%	83,30%	<b>p&lt;0,0654</b>	88,00%	87,50%	<b>p&lt;0,9253</b>
			<b>Not significant</b>			<b>Not significant</b>
Structure by type of business	104			92		
Manufacturing	17,30%	22,20%	DF=3	39,60%	36,50%	DF=3
Retail and Wholesale	30,80%	20,40%	$\chi^2=7,7358$	15,40%	12,00%	$\chi^2=2,8666$
Finance and Insurance	2,90%	1,90%	<b>p&lt;0,1017</b>	4,40%	3,20%	<b>p&lt;0,4126</b>
Miscellaneous	49,00%	55,50%		40,70%	48,30%	
			<b>Not significant</b>			<b>Not significant</b>
Structure by total number of employees	106			92		
< 50	9,40%	2,00%	DF=2	4,30%	4,00%	DF=2
51-250	21,70%	16,40%	$\chi^2=3,7887$	34,80%	41,50%	$\chi^2=1,8620$
>250	68,90%	81,80%	<b>p&lt;0,1504</b>	60,90%	54,50%	<b>p&lt;0,3942</b>
			<b>Not significant</b>			<b>Not significant</b>

## Results

The analysis of the returned questionnaires shows that about 50% of the responding organizations performed some form of the strategic IS planning process. As can be seen from Figure 1, the results of implementing some form of strategic IS planning process are very similar in Slovenian and Croatian organizations.

Figure 1



As evident from the Table 2 the number of firms that carried out the strategic IS planning increases directly with the total number of employees as well as with existence of IT department. Similar relationship was found in Teo et al's study (27) where significant relationships were found also between strategic IS planning and annual sales revenue. In our investigations the latter was not found significant ( $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=1.593$ ,  $p<0.451$  in Croatian study and  $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=0.6141$ ,  $p<0.735$  in Slovenian study). Slovenian study show weak (but certainly not significant) relationship between strategic IS planning process and total number of employees as well as with existence of IT department ( $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=6.9335$ ,  $p<0.031$  for total number of employees and  $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=6.7685$ ,  $p<0.0339$  for IT department), while Croatian study results are similar ( $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=1.765$ ,  $p<0.414$  for total number of employees and  $df=2$ ,  $\chi^2=3.666$ ,  $p<0.160$  for IT department) Surprisingly, the number of Croatian and Slovenian organizations that do not perform strategic IS planning process also increases with total number of employees, although we would expect an opposite trend. Considering the results of Chi-Square Test in table 2 we can conclude that for Slovenian as well as Croatian study there is no relationship between macro-organizational variables and strategic IS planning process.

Table 2

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MACRO-ORGANIZATIONAL  
VARIABLES AND STRATEGIC IS PLAN

	Croatian study				Slovenian study			
	Sample Size	Yes	No	$\chi^2$ - Test	Sample Size	Yes	No	$\chi^2$ - Test
Total Number of Employees	105				92			
< 50		2	3	DF=2		0	3	DF=2
51 - 250		11	18	$\chi^2 = 1.765$		10	22	$\chi^2 = 6,9335$
> 250		37	34	<b>p&lt;0.414</b>		31	26	<b>p&lt;0,031</b>
Annual sales revenue	74				92			
< 2 million DEM		3	5	DF=2		3	2	DF=2
2-8 million DEM		3	8	$\chi^2 = 1.593$		3	3	$\chi^2 = 0,6141$
> 2 million DEM		26	29	<b>p&lt;0.451</b>		35	46	<b>p&lt;0,735</b>
IT department	105				92			
Exists		37	30	DF=2		28	22	DF=2
Exist, but not as an organizational unit		8	11	$\chi^2 = 3.666$		9	15	$\chi^2 = 6,7685$
Does not exists		6	13	<b>p&lt;0.160</b>		4	14	<b>p&lt;0,0339</b>

*IS strategic plan/corporate plan*

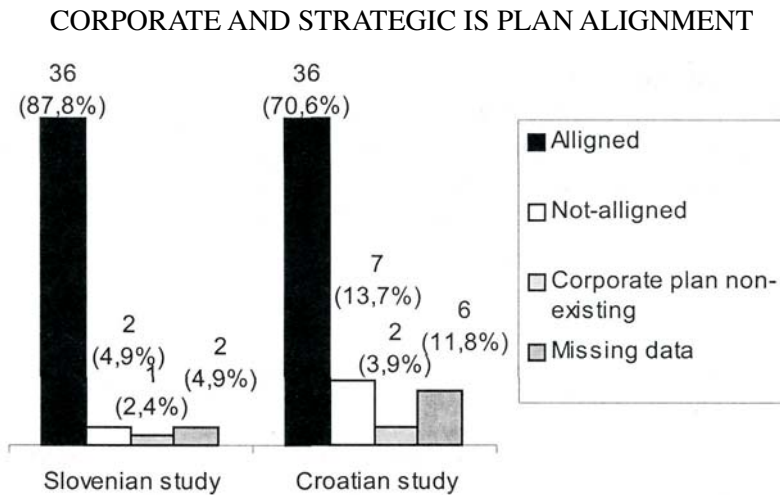
As is has already been presented in the past by Clarke (1), Lederer and Sethi (15), Lederer and Salmela (16), the key to the success of the strategic IS planning process is in the corporate and strategic IS plan alignment. Although the rate of organizations conducting the strategic IS planning in Croatia is slightly higher than in Slovenia, it is surprising that the corporate and strategic IS plans in Slovene organizations are aligned in a much higher rate than in Croatian (87,8% in Slovene organizations compared to 70.6 % in Croatian) as shown in Figure 2.

Furthermore, in the majority of organizations (96,9% in Slovenian study, 78,4% in Croatian), the IS strategic plan developers show a high level of awareness of corporate objectives. Such results suggest that those organizations that perform the strategic IS planning have realized the importance of corporate and strategic IS plan alignment as the key to the successful role of IT in business environment.

***Planning methodologies/participants in strategic IS planning***

In Table 3 the planning methodologies used by organizations are compared. Only the respondents that have the strategic IS plan answered this question and the rest of the questionnaire. It is interesting to note that majority of respondents use a combination of bottom-up and top down methodologies (53,7 % and 54,9 % in Slovenia and Croatia consequently).

*Figure 2*



In addition, approximately one-third of the respondents used top-down planning approach. This result suggests that the combination of different methodologies prevails as the most common strategic IS planning methodology, as it enables the synergy of business and user involvement.

*Table 3*

**STRATEGIC IS PLANNING METHODOLOGIES**

Methodologies	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Number	%	Rank	Number	%	Rank
Bottom-up	5	9.8	3	5	12.2	3
Top-down	15	29.4	2	13	31.7	2
Combination of above	28	54.9	1	22	53.7	1
No answer	3	4.9	4	1	2.4	4
Total	58	100.0		41	100.0	

Results of the comparative study suggest that the top-down approach is more widely used in Slovenia and Croatia than in some recent studies (19), (27). This indicates that the strategic IS planning in Slovenia and Croatia as transition countries is still a traditionally oriented process in which management plays a very important role. The degree of managements' participation in the strategic IS planning can be depicted from Table 4. Participants in strategic IS planning process in Croatian surveyed organizations are in logical order: MIS managers, top management, line management and users. The results for Slovenia show that in the strategic IS planning, the top management play the predominant role, while the MIS managers were rated only as fifth. This is surprising since someone would expect, MIS managers to be the key participant due to their expert knowledge (like is the case in Croatia). Most important participants in SISP process in Slovenian surveyed organizations are: top management, system analysts, consultants and programmers. If we compare the rating of users involvement in Slovenian study with Croatian and other studies (19), (27) we can detect significant differences. In Slovenian study users are surprisingly rated almost at the very bottom (ranked 7., compared to Croatian study where users are ranked 4.).

*Table 4*

PARTICIPANTS IN STRATEGIC IS PLANNING

Participants (scale from 1 to 4)	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Number	Mean	Rank	Number	Mean	Rank
MIS managers	45	3.66	1	41	2.29	5
Top managers	45	3.04	2	41	2.84	1
Non-MIS managers	47	2.91	3	40	2.29	5
Users	46	2.67	4	40	2.15	7
System analysts	47	2.65	5	40	2.74	2
Programmers	45	2.60	6	38	2.46	4
Consultants	43	2.55	7	41	2.69	3
Computer operations personnel	47	2.36	8	39	1.25	9
Vendors	43	2.32	9	39	1.66	8

If we compare the strategic IS planning methodologies and participants we can conclude that the combination of both, top-bottom and bottom-up, planning methodologies still prevails. A high involvement of the top and MIS management



and the significant lack of users' participation (especially in Slovenia strategic IS plan practise) result in a high rate of top-down approach.

### *Critical success factors*

Among 10 critical success factors listed, the first 4 in our study are the same for Slovenian and Croatian practise, and they were related to the importance of management involvement and support as well as human resources related issues.

Getting the top management support for the planning efforts (4.79) in the Slovenian study, 4.76 in Croatian) with having a clear-cut corporate plan guide strategic IS planning efforts (4.14 in the Slovenian study, 4.56 in Croatian) represent the key factors for the successful strategic IS planning by Clarke (1), Karimi, Gupta and Somers (13) as well as by Lederer and Sethi (15). The ability to obtain sufficient qualified personnel ranks as the second most important critical success factor in the strategic IS planning personnel in Slovenia and Croatia (4.54 and 4.57 respectively). Transition countries as Slovenia and Croatia are still short of qualified resources who would support increasing evolution and the spread of information technology. The next most important critical success factor is having a good user-IS relationship (4.26 in the Slovenian study, 4.36 in Croatian). This relationship is crucial for achieving the strategic objectives. Users and IS staff should act as partners in meeting the strategic objectives which would lead the organization to an operational excellence as was already proved in the past by Karimi, Gupta and Somers (13), Lederer and Sethi (15), Lederer and Salmela (16) and Porter (20). Other success factors (see Table 5) are mainly related to planning issues (i.e. time management, environmental changes, planning procedure, etc).

Table 5

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS IN STRATEGIC IS PLANNING

Critical success factors (scale from 1 to 5)	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Number	Mean	Rank	Number	Mean	Rank
Getting top management support for the planning efforts	50	4.76	1	41	4.79	1
Being able to obtain sufficiently qualified personnel to do a proper job	50	4.57	2	41	4.54	2
Having a clear-cut corporate plan to guide strategic IS planning efforts	49	4.56	3	41	4.14	4
Having good user-IS relationship	50	4.36	4	41	4.26	3
Anticipating likely changes in information technology (and environmental changes) which might affect the strategic IS planning process	49	4.18	5	41	3.58	9
Having free communication and commitment to change thought the organization	50	4.02	6	40	3.79	8
Investing sufficient 'front end' time to ensure that all planning tasks and individual responsibilities are well understood	50	3.98	7	41	3.84	6
Having a clear, concise and formal planning procedure	50	3.9	8	41	4.03	5
Deciding on an appropriate planning horizon	50	3.83	9	41	3.82	7
Taking into account the people and politics side of strategic IS planning system	49	3.65	10	40	3.14	10

Table 6

BENEFITS FROM STRATEGIC IS PLANNING PROCESS

Benefits (scale from 1 to 5)	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Number	Mean	Rank	Number	Mean	Rank
Improved productivity	50	4,36	1	38	4.26	3
Improved internal coordination	50	4,32	2	37	3,35	2
Improved competitive position	50	4,32	2	37	3,43	7
Efficient and effective management of IS resources	50	4,30	4	38	4.50	1
Improved quality in products/services	50	4,30	4	37	3.68	5
Greater ability to meet changes in the industry	50	4,06	6	37	3.54	6
Larger market share	50	3,96	7	37	3.32	8
Sound technology path and policies	50	3,76	8	37	3.86	4

*Benefits/satisfaction with strategic IS plan*

The respondents were asked to rate the degree of benefits derived from the strategic IS planning process on a five-point scale. According to the results shown in Table 6, the organizations highly appreciate the benefits from the strategic IS planning process (on a scale from 1 do 5, all benefits in both studies were rated with a mean of 3.32 or higher). It is interesting that Croatian respondents rated benefits with a mean 3.76 or higher. In both studies, the most important benefits were improved productivity (4.26 in the Slovenian study, 4.36 in Croatian), improved internal co-ordination (4.35 in the Slovenian study, 4.32 in Croatian) and efficient and effective management of IS resources (4.50 in the Slovenian study, 4.30 in Croatian). Croatian respondents found improved competitive position (mean 4.32) as second important benefit, while their Slovenian colleagues ranked it almost at very bottom (seventh with a mean 3.43). Generally, it is also interesting to observe that the respondents value internal benefits more than the external ones. The possible reason might be that internal benefits are easily recognized whereas the external ones are not clearly defined.

The comparison of the two studies reveals that although the most important benefits match, they were nevertheless ranked differently. The improved

productivity, which was the most important benefit in Croatian study, ranked only third in the Slovenian study. This is somehow interesting because the improved productivity was according to Davenport and Linder (11), Karimi, Gupta and Somers (13), Lederer and Salmela (16), Porter (20), Torkzadeh and Xia (29) the most important benefit of the strategic IS planning process and was clearly underscored in the Slovenian study (10 respondents rated the improved productivity below semi-beneficial). The improved competitive position also vary in comparative study (in Croatian study ranked second with mean 4.32, while in Slovenian study almost at very bottom - seventh with a mean 3.43). This indicates that many Slovene and some Croatian executives perhaps still do not understand the strategic role and benefits of the IS. The traditional thinking using the IS for the internal coordination and efficient and effective management support will have to be changed to improve productivity as well as external benefits. The first step towards this change should be a part of the strategic IS planning process. Similarly to the highly appreciated benefits of the strategic IS planning process, the satisfaction with the strategic IS plan also ranked high. Over 98 percent of respondents (Slovenian study, compared to 94 % in Croatian study) rated the satisfaction with their strategic plan above average.

### *Initiation of strategic IS planning process*

The results presented in Table 7 show that the initiators of the strategic IS planning process vary between Slovenia and Croatia. Whereas Croatian study shows somehow natural rank of initiators (33.3% IS management; 27.4% top, 23.5% top and IS management), Slovenian study reveals that the most important initiator of the strategic IS planning process is the top management (31,7%), followed by the top and IS management (29.3%) and IS management (24.4%).

Table 7

INITIATORS OF STRATEGIC IS PLANNING PROCESS

Initiated by	Croatian study			Slovenian study		
	Number	%	Rank	Number	%	Rank
IS management	17	33.3	1	10	24.4	3
Top management	14	27.4	2	13	31.7	1
Top and IS management	12	23.5	3	12	29.3	2
Top, IS and line management	4	7.8	4	2	4.9	5
Missing data	3	5.9	5	3	7.3	7
Line management	1	2	6	1	2.4	5
IS and line management	0	0	7	0	0	4

The responses regarding the initiation of the strategic IS planning process confirmed that in Slovenia as well as partially in Croatia, the strategic IS planning is still a traditionally oriented process in which the top management plays a very important role which is surprising because we would expect IS management to significantly add value to the strategic IS planning due to its expertise. It also has to be pointed out that the top, IS and line management does not take the joint initiation in Slovenian and Croatian organizations (4.9% and 7.8% respectively), while IS and line management do not initiate strategic IS planning at all.

## Conclusion

Although the importance of the strategic IS planning is clearly identified, the study shows that a moderate number of Slovene (44.6%) and Croatian (48.1%) organizations are involved in the strategic IS planning. Comparing the results to surveys conducted in the developed countries (2), (15), (19), (27) this is surprisingly low. The reason for this and some other differences could be the economical and political background of Slovenian and Croatian organizations. On the other hand, it is encouraging that those Slovenian organizations that perform the strategic IS planning have corporate and strategic plans aligned (96.4%), which enables them to meet overall business plans and goals. Croatian organization that perform strategic IS planning are not so much aware (only 78.4%) of the importance of corporate and strategic IS plan alignment. The corporate and strategic IS plans in Slovene organizations are aligned in a much higher rate than in Croatian (87.8% in Slovene organizations compared to 70.6% in Croatian). We pointed out that almost 30% of Croatian organizations that perform strategic IS planning (and all of them that are not) find information technology only as operational tool and support, and are not aware of their strategic enefit. This deviation can lead to conclusion that, from Croatian business perspective, IT is neglected resource mainly used for pure automation of particular processes with very week impact on organizations' overall strategy.

We can also conclude that for both studies there is no relationship between macro-organizational variables and strategic IS planning process. Generally, IS planning practise in Croatia and Slovenia in internally oriented because the respondents value internal benefits more than the external ones. The possible reason might be that internal benefits are easily recognized whereas the external ones are not clearly defined.

The study also shows that the strategic IS planning in Slovenia and Croatia is still a traditionally oriented process in which top management plays an important role since top managers are the key initiators and participants in the strategic IS planning where which top-down approach is broadly used. This is surprising since

we would expect the role of IS management to be significant due to their expert knowledge and experience. Apart from underestimated role of IS management, users involvement in a strategic IS planning is also insufficient, although having a good user-IS relationship is one of the key success factors in the strategic IS planning.

On overall strategic IS planning process is still one of the key business activities where Slovene and especially Croatian organizations will have to improve in order to be able to effectively participate on the overall global market of the information era. Since we plan to carry out this comparative study every year it is going to be very interesting to observe how the IS strategic planning process in Slovenia and Croatia will develop. In addition, we plan to compare our results with the results of other countries in transition and to perform some additional statistical analysis to investigate the connections between the strategic IS planning and the business performance.

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## PLANIRANJE STRATEŠKOG INFORMACIJSKOG SUSTAVA: KOMPARATIVNA STUDIJA HRVATSKIH I SLOVENSКИH ORGANIZACIJA

### Sažetak

Članak prikazuje rezultate empirijskog istraživanja planiranja strateških informacijskih sustava u praksi slovenskih i hrvatskih velikih organizacija. Izvještaj se temelji na upitniku već prije razvijenom u Singapuru. U ovoj smo studiji usporedili rezultate obiju zemalja u tranziciji. Ističe se sudjelovanje, čimbenici kritičkog uspjeha, pokretači i glavne prednosti planiranja strateškog informacijskog (IS) sustava. U usporedbi sa sličnim studijama rezultati pokazuju da samo umjereni broj slovenskih i hrvatskih organizacija koristi strateško IS planiranje. Također je interesantno da vrhovni menadžment igra ulogu vrhovnog pokretača u slovenskim organizacijama a uloga IS menadžmenta je iznenađujuće umjerena, dok je u hrvatskim organizacijama IS menadžment vodeći pokretač strateškog IS planiranja. Organizacije obiju tranzicijskih zemalja preferiraju više unutarnje nego vanjske prednosti. Gledano iz slovenske poslovne perspektive vodeće prednosti su: učinkovit menadžment IS sredstava, unaprijeđena unutarnja koordinacija i produktivnost; dok su u hrvatskoj studiji glavne prednosti: poboljšana produktivnost, unutarnja koordinacija, unaprijeđen konkurentski položaj i učinkovit menadžment IS sredstava.