
Book Review

Ivan Burić
**Sociologija hrvatskog
društva: Procesi i strukture
u suvremenom hrvatskom
društvu**

Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2024, 293 pp.

Sociology of the Croatian Society: Processes and Structures in the Contemporary Croatian Society is a book of great ambition. Ivan Burić analyses the Croatian society comprehensively, through a multitude of various crucial processes. The book is largely a synthesis of modern sociological insights on the Croatian society.

To accomplish this ambition, Burić starts by showing the general trends in the first two chapters, contrasting the developmental successes and failures in Croatia. The former most notably include independence, overcoming the effects of war, EU membership, stable democracy, guarantees of human rights, high levels of safety, increases in tolerant values and material wealth. The latter involve overly slow and insufficiently inclusive socioeconomic development, slow poverty reduction, very large demographic losses, corruption and clientelism, loss of confidence in social institutions and social pessimism.

The third chapter deals with demographic trends in Croatia. Measured in regular intervals via censuses, we can easily see that the population of Croatia has continued to increase to almost 4.8 million

in 1991 and then started to fall quite rapidly – to slightly less than 3.9 million in 2021. Burić notes that the underlying causes were long in coming, as the birth rates have been continuously dropping since the mid-1950s. Population kept increasing for the next few decades, but at a decreasing speed. One of the principal reasons for the decrease in birth rates was an overly rapid urbanization after WWII coupled with initially inadequate housing in cities. Other trends of the era compatible with lower birth rates are labor emigration (prime age adults moving away) and social modernization, which also enhanced the labor activation and education possibilities for women (trends which tend to postpone first births). These trends became more radical due to emigration since the early 1990s. Other general demographic trends in Croatia involve the aging of the population and increased education levels, with tertiary education attainment having tripled since 1991.

The fourth chapter is a brief discussion of extreme regional disparities in Croatia, while the fifth chapter discusses emigration. Croatia has a long history of emigration, including three great waves (1870-1914 – with roughly 10% of population emigrating in the 1900-1914 period; 1918-1941; and since the mid-1960s). The current wave of emigration was primarily caused by a deep economic downturn in Croatia which coincided with the entry to the European Union, offering an easier path to labour emigration for many in search for better job prospects. The timing of this book and the cut off for data is slightly unfortunate, as these trends have reversed since 2022 with more immigration than emigration being recorded.

The sixth chapter discusses capitalism in Croatia – with a plethora of terms being used by various authors – including tycoon, peripheral, predatory, clientelist, political and crony capitalism. The various toxicities and pathologies that these terms imply (particularly the latter two) do provide some insights in the development of capitalism in Croatia. However, Burić also optimistically notes that an intense development of a cleaner, entrepreneurial capitalism may now be noted – particularly since Croatia overcame the post-2008 recession and became an EU member state. The areas which might incite such optimism include new offshoots in industry and services, particularly IT. These may grow to provide stronger economic development in general.

The seventh chapter analyses corruption and clientelism. Burić provides the context of long running extractive institutions in monarchist Yugoslavia and in the socialist period as a fertile ground for the captured state issue of modern Croatia. As in other chapters, he points to recent research and estimates (including the pre-covid-19 estimate that more than a tenth of GDP is lost to Croatia due to corruption every year).

Chapters 8-13 follow a number of subjects on social stratification and inequality. These form a substantial portion of the book and succeed in showing the state of the art in these subjects. These are also perhaps the most important parts of the book, as the issues raised are less well known in the Croatian public sphere than other insights of the book. Burić starts by recounting the brief overview of class creation in Croatia. Rapid urbanization and industrialization after WWII were crucial, with industrial output increasing 6.5 times and the

number of industrial workers increasing 2.5 times in the 1950-1973 period. Using available studies, Burić suggests that the class structure of Croatia at the end of the socialist period had a management-oriented elite (2.5%), the middle class (28.9%), the working class (53.8%) and the agricultural class (14.9%). The scientific interest in analyzing classes was lost in the 1990s, but has come back into vogue in the last decade. Burić points to recent class analyses which differ wildly in approach and results – the top-most stratum is between 1 and 20%, the lowest is between 15 and 53%. More importantly for the book, Burić provides his own approach to classes in Croatia. He plays with various concepts of social groups, discusses their presence in Croatia and, where possible, assesses their size. The elite fragments of the Croatian society are described as *tycoons* (initial winners in transition and privatization), *political tribe* (economic power through political function), *the anywheres* (members of the uprooted, global elite), *super-managers* (corporate leaders, of which perhaps several thousand exist in Croatia), *cognitive entrepreneurs* (founders and owners of high-tech start-ups – perhaps several hundred to one thousand strong) and the *opportunity driven entrepreneurial elite* (businessmen, but their elite status is contingent on their successfulness). Burić suggests the middle class in Croatia consists of several major segments: *technocrats* (educated white collar experts working in the public sector or as researchers, roughly 325000 in Croatia in 2020), *petite bourgeoisie* (owners of small businesses, the self-employed – not easily measured, Burić assesses their number in Croatia at 170000-300000), and *cognitive workers in*

the private sector. The latter are quite diversified, and Burić divides them into *symbolical analysts*, which are graphical designers, PR, marketing and tourism experts (several tens of thousands in Croatia), the *numerati*, which are data driven analysts, market researchers and profilers, and *developers* in the IT sector (15000-30000 of which work in Croatia). The lower classes in Croatia likewise consist of several identifiable segments: *post-socialist manual laborers* (in industry, construction and logistics – 250000-300000), *emotional proletariat* (service-oriented workers at the point of contact with clients, i.e. projecting positive emotions – 250000-350000 in Croatia), the *precariat* (agency and gig workers), and the subclass (the poor, the overly indebted, low-income pensioners and long-term unemployed). More generally, income inequality in Croatia shows an increasing trend after the introduction of capitalism, but a steady decrease since 2011. Most studies show current income inequality in Croatia to be roughly in line with EU averages. Wealth inequality is more equally distributed, primarily due to relatively high homeownership rates. At the same time, upward socioeconomic mobility is relatively scarce and the economic and cultural capital of parents seems to be a good predictor for the outcomes of children.

Chapters 14-16 discuss the state and evolution of social values and religiosity in Croatia. The shifts in values since the 1990s are a mixed bag. Some of them include a greater acceptance of authoritarian values, a weakening of certain aspects of conservatism (increasing acceptance of homosexuality, divorce and casual sex) and a greater acceptance of gender equa-

lity in the workplace, but not necessarily in families. According to the 2021 census data, only 8.1% of the population of Croatia do not feel to be a part of any religion (i.e. they are atheist, agnostic, skeptic or undeclared), while a vast majority of the population declares themselves to be Catholic. However, Burić draws on recent studies to show the complex nature of the evolving relationship towards religion in the Croatian society, which includes both a secularization and a religious revitalization. Chapter 17 discusses the recent cleavages in Croatian society, particularly those opened by covid-19 and the war in Ukraine.

Burić shows a specific sensibility in exploring sociological concepts and adapting them for use in modern Croatia. He plays upon some well-known classics in Croatian social sciences and is not afraid to draw on broader sources, often movies, for inspiration. The result is an altogether refreshing approach, alternating between a serious and data-heavy analysis and more light-hearted witticisms. The readers that stand most to gain from it are likely the broader social sciences readership beyond sociology, as the book conveys the recent academic work on the Croatian society. The book was written at a time of significant economic and social changes in Croatia, which makes it a candidate for useful updates and revisions in future editions. Even so, this is a book we need at this time. It is one of the books taking stock of Croatian experience in the last decades, this time from a sociological standpoint.

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