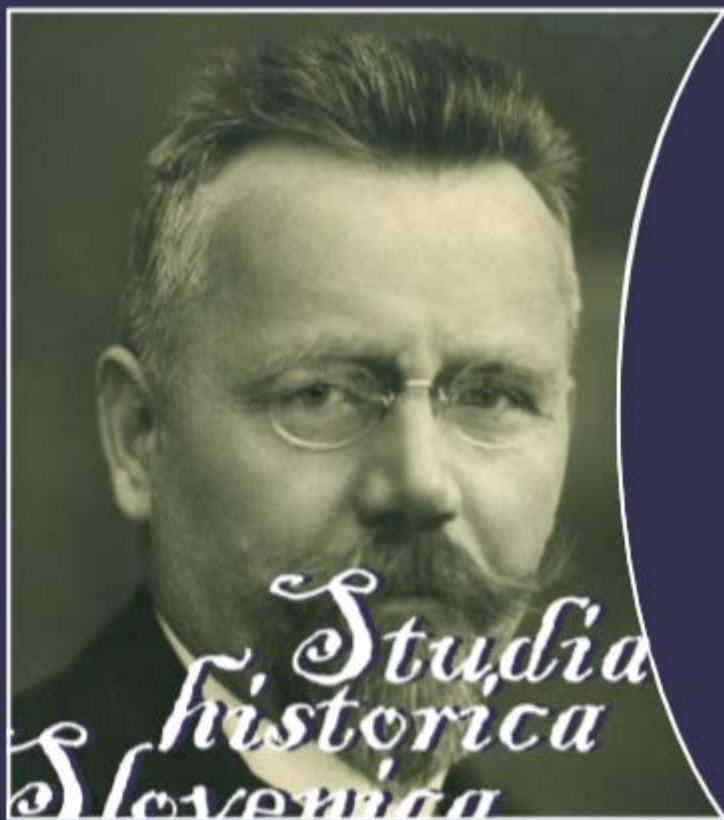


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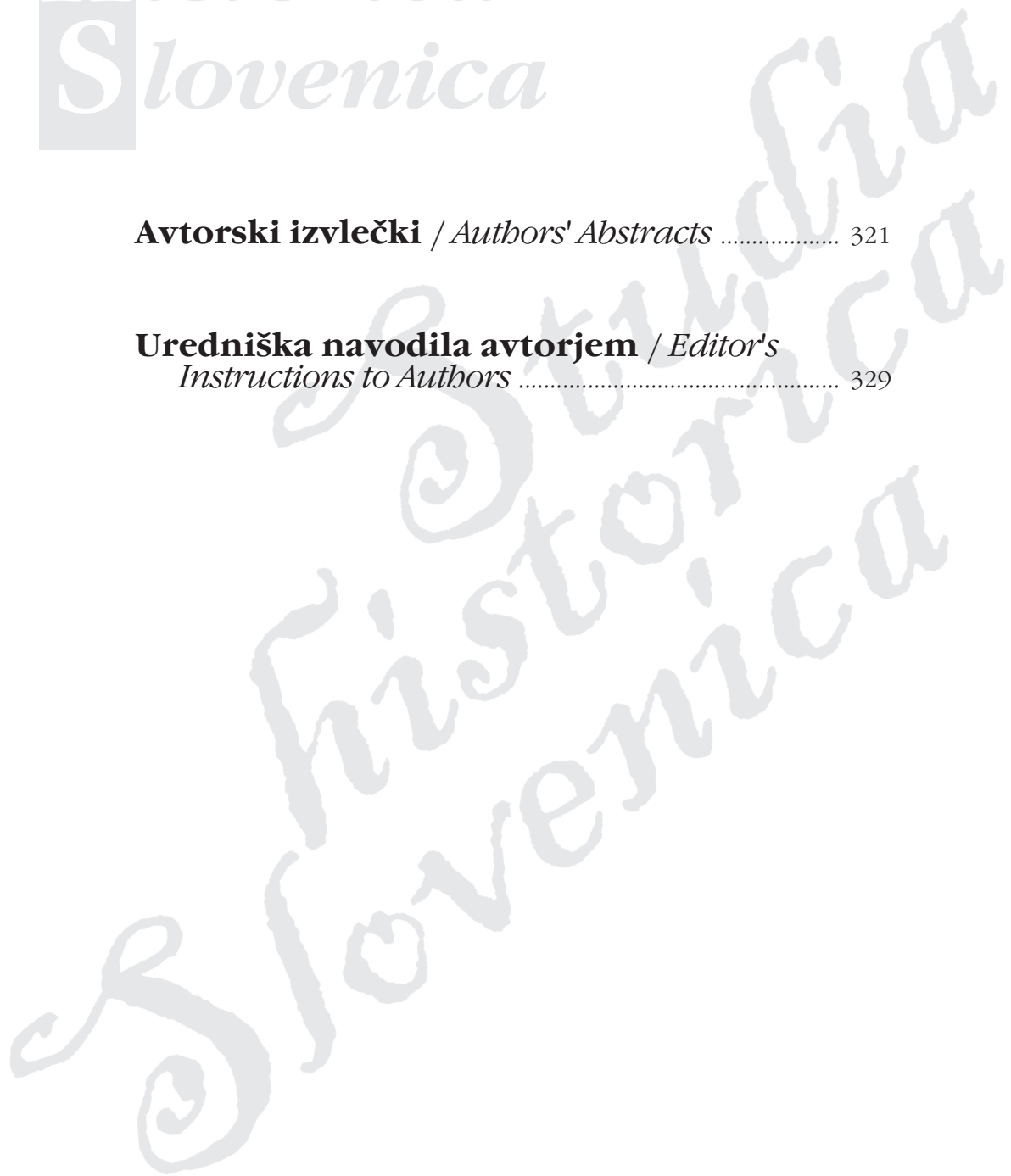
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Levels and Determinants of Youth Political Participation: Regional Inequalities and Northeastern Slovenia

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Abstract:

The main purpose of our study was 1) to analyse previously unexamined regional inequalities in four dimensions of political participation among Slovenian youth (self-reported voter turnout, non-electoral conventional participation, protest participation and civic participation); 2) to examine macro-determinants of regional inequalities in political participation; and 3) to examine regional variation in individual-level determinants of political participation. We found several substantial regional inequalities in youth political participation, although the extent of inequalities differed depending on examined participation dimension. Regional inequalities exist particularly in voter turnout and civic participation, while at the same time, regions that score higher on one dimension in some cases score lower on other dimensions.

Key words:

political participation, determinants, youth, Slovenia, regional inequalities, democracy, civic participation, democratization, democratic consolidation, post-communism

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Introduction¹

In cross-national comparative perspective, Slovenia is among socioeconomically and democratically most developed countries. For example, it ranks 25th among 188 countries on the Human Development Index, which is a summary measure of three indicators of quality of life, as indicated by average levels of health in a given population, its educational levels and its levels of economic development.² Slovenia also ranks high on measures of law and order, according to the Gallup Global Law and Order Report, which among other reflects perceptions of Slovenian citizens, who are among the most likely to report feeling safe walking alone at night (87 %).³ In terms of democratic development, Slovenia is in the group of countries with the highest levels of democratic development according to Freedom House index.⁴ Other organizations, such as Transparency International, OECD etc., also rank Slovenia high on measures of economic, social and democratic development.

On the other hand, there are important aspects of Slovenia's comparative democratic performance that have been identified as problematic. One of the key conditions of democratic functioning are citizens' behaviours, including their political participation patterns. Political participation includes those acts that aim to influence public policies and decisions, or that aim to influence the selection of public figures, who create such policies.⁵ In recent years, numerous studies have indicated low levels of political participation among Slovenian citizens. Thus, despite high levels of institutional democratic functioning and socioeconomic development of Slovenia, in comparative perspective both young and adult Slovenian public is politically rather inactive.

Among adults, for example, Kirbiš reported low party membership rates

¹ This article is the product of research of the Department of History (Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor) programme group P6-0138 (A): *History of Northeastern Slovenia between the middle Europe and European southeast (Preteklost Severovzhodne Slovenije med srednjo Evropo in evropskim jugovzhodom)*.

² United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report: Work for Human Development* (New York, 2016), hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf, received: 4. 1. 2018.

³ Gallup, *Global Law and Order Report 2017* (Washington, D.C., 2017).

⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2015* (2015), freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/01152015_FIW_2015_final.pdf, received: 15. 12. 2016.

⁵ Max Kaase and Alan Marsh, "Political Action. A Theoretical Perspective", in: *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, eds. S. H. Barnes et al. (London, 1979); Geraint Parry, George Moysers and Neli Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain* (Cambridge, 1992) (hereinafter: Parry et al., *Political Participation*); Stephen Macedo, Yvete Alex-Assensoh and Jeffrey M. Berry, *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, DC., 2005); Cliff Zukin, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins and Michael X. Delli Carpini, *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen* (Oxford, 2006) (hereinafter: Zukin et al., *A New Engagement*)

and low protest engagement of Slovenians compared to other post-Yugoslav countries. Similarly, low levels of political participation have also been detected among youth.⁶ For example, Kirbiš and Flere examined political participation patterns in Slovenia and Europe and found that political participation among Slovenian youth was lower than the EU average on several indicators of political participation. Specifically, examining European Values Study data they found self-reported voting *abstinence* increased among Slovenian youth from 32.5 % in 1999 to 39.7 % in 2008. While increases in self-reported voter abstinence (from 17.7 % to 28.2 %) were also detected among European youth, their abstinence levels were much lower. Longitudinal increases of voter abstinence among Slovenian youth were also substantially higher than those of Slovenian adults; among the latter, no substantial increase in the observed 1999–2008 period was detected (increase was only minimal – from 22.8% to 23.2%). Moreover, Slovenian adults also report going to the voting polls significantly more frequently than youth.⁷

Similar results of low and/or declining levels of political participation have also been detected for other forms of conventional political participation in Slovenia, in particular among youth. For example, membership in political parties was much lower among Slovenian youth in the 1992–2008 period compared to average Slovenian and European adults, and compared to average European youth. Overall, these patterns hold true for numerous indicators of political participation – for membership in political parties and for other forms of conventional political participation, including its cumulative measure (composed of respondents' self-assessed average frequency of carrying out four forms of conventional participation activities: contacting politicians or public officials, performing work for political parties, performing work in other organisations, and wearing or publically displaying a badge/sticker supporting a candidate or party). Furthermore, non-institutional conventional political participation forms, such as the frequency of discussing political issues or watching and listening to political and informative content in the mass media, are also low, in particular among Slovenian youth.⁸ Low levels of political participation and engagement have also been reported by Kirbiš and Zagorc, who examined a representative sample of Slovenian Youth 2013 study and compared Slovenian youth's political participation and political attitudes levels with those of Croa-

⁶ Andrej Kirbiš, "Political participation and non-democratic political culture in Western Europe, East-Central Europe and post-Yugoslav countries", in: *Political Participation in the European Union (Democracy in Transition Series)*, ed. Kyriakos Demetriou (Berlin, 2013) (hereinafter: Kirbiš, "Political participation").

⁷ Andrej Kirbiš and Sergej Flere, "Participation", in: *Youth 2010: The social profile of young people in Slovenia*, ed. Miran Lavrič (Ljubljana–Maribor, 2011) (hereinafter: Kirbiš and Flere, "Participation").

⁸ Kirbiš and Flere, "Participation".

tian and Kosovar youth. Only 15 % of eligible Slovenian youth voted in all previous elections (despite the fact that young people have, due to their age, not had the opportunity to take part in a high number of elections due to their relatively infrequent nature).

Social norms, country's historical background and general socio-political climate in Slovenia all partially explain low political participation levels among youth. For example, Slovenian (2013), Croatian and Kosovar youth surveys asked about perceived social "popularity" of political engagement in its societies. Respondents from three post-Yugoslav countries indicated what they thought was "in" (popular) at the time of the survey in their countries, thereby indicating their perceptions of popular areas of life, of social norms, and of behaviours. "Politics" was found to be more popular in Croatia, where 36 % of youth believed that "being active in politics" was "in", while only 10 % of Slovenian youth gave the same answer. Furthermore, 46 % of Kosovo youth believed that "participating in civic actions/initiatives" was "in", while only 28 % of Slovenian youth agreed with this statement.⁹

On the other hand, previous studies of Slovenian youth have also reported a few encouraging findings. For example, in 2008 Slovenian youth were in comparative perspective found to be most likely to be protest engaged compared to other examined groups. It is particularly noteworthy that protest engagement increased from 1992 to 2008 among Slovenian youth, more so than among Slovenian adults, European adults or European youth.¹⁰ High levels of protest engagement among Slovenian youth is – among otherwise mostly negative longitudinal trends – a somewhat optimistic sign for the future of democratic functioning in Slovenia, as previous studies across established and post-communist democracies haven indicated that protest participation is higher in democratically more developed countries, and that within democracies more pro-democratically oriented citizens express highest levels of protest engagement.¹¹

⁹ Andrej Kirbiš and Barbara Zagorc, "Politics and democracy", in: *Slovenian youth 2013: living in times of disillusionment, risk and precarity*, ed. Sergej Flere (Maribor, 2014) (hereinafter: Kirbiš and Zagorc, "Politics and democracy").

¹⁰ Kirbiš and Flere, "Participation".

¹¹ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (New York, 2007); Jan Teorell, Paul Sum and Mette Tobiasen, "Participation and Political Equality: An Assessment of Large-Scale Democracy", in: *Political Disaffection in Contemporary Democracies. Social Capital, Institutions, and Politics*, eds. Mariano Torcal and Jose Ramon Montero (New York, 2007); Kirbiš, "Political participation".

Regional Inequalities in Political Participation and its Macro-determinants

Numerous previous studies have also compared political participation at the cross-national level. One key issue that has not been sufficiently addressed is whether spatial within-country variations in political participation among Slovenian youth exist, with one such possible determinant of youth's political participation being regional context. Previous results on political participation of adults have namely detected spatial inequalities in voter turnout patterns. For example, Rogelj and Tiran conducted a geographical analysis of the electoral participation in Slovenian parliamentary elections in 1992–2014 period. The results of their analysis showed that there were no increases in spatial differences in electoral participation, but there was a change in the spatial structure of electoral participation, with the polarization between the eastern and western parts of Slovenia, which was prominent in the 1990s, being replaced by polarization between the central Slovenia and the rest of the country. In 1992–2000 period, for example, voter turnout was below national average in Mura, Drava, Savinja, Carinthia and Lower Sava regions, indicating that northeastern Slovenian public had particularly high voter abstinance. In 2004–2014 period voter turnout was below average in the same regions, which again indicated that northeastern Slovenian public remained relatively inactive at the polls throughout the 25 years of Slovenia's independence, although some other Slovenian regions also had low turnout in this latter period (Coastal Kast, Littoral–Inner Carniola and Southeast Slovenia). The authors also found that voter turnout was higher in electoral districts with higher average level of education and lower unemployment rates. Interestingly, at the electoral district level, authors also found that participation was moderately and positively related to a higher proportion of pupils and students in a district. They argue that this could indicate a higher level of electoral engagement of younger voters in comparison with those not involved in educational process, but that this should be examined at the level of individual data in future studies.¹² Several other study have also examined spatial patterns of political participation, but as Tiran and

¹² Boštjan Rogelj and Jernej Tiran, "Geografska analiza volilne udeležbe v Sloveniji", *Geografski vestnik* 86 (2014), 25–43 (hereinafter: Rogelj and Tiran, "Geografska analiza").

Rogelj¹³ summarize, previous studies¹⁴ have largely dealt with voter turnout and voting results of the general Slovenian population, which means that regional participation patterns of youth on different dimensions of political participation have systematically not yet been examined.

Individual-level Determinants of Political Participation

From the point of view of normative democratic theory, one would wish for low levels, or ideally, absence of sociostructural inequalities in political participation, as this would indicate that all citizens are engaged in the democratic political process to a similar (preferably high) degree, despite differences in their positions within the social structure. Yet the reality of political life in modern-day democracies is different than democratic ideals would suggest. Although in the present study we do not go into in-depth analysis of individual determinants of political participation, our aim is nevertheless to examine the extent of regional inequalities in individual-level determinants of political participation.

We next briefly summarize some of the most frequent individual-level determinants of political participation detected in previous studies of Slovenian youth and in other Western democracies, which have reported that political participation is unevenly distributed among their citizens. As political participation among Slovenian youth is particularly low, the question that needs to be addressed is which are the key determinants that lower youth's political participation. Studies of adult populations have indicated that women tend to have lower participation rates, although these differences are dependent on the national and historical context and on the examined participation dimension. Additionally, respondents' higher educational levels and higher personal or family income all tend to have a positive impact on political participation levels, both on voter turnout and on protest participation.¹⁵ Previous studies of political participation of Slovenian youth have similarly detected several sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables that impact political partici-

¹³ Jernej Tiran and Boštjan Rogelj, "Geografski vidiki volitev v Podravju", *Geografije Podravja* 1 (2017), 189–205.

¹⁴ Samo Kropivnik, *Slovenski volivci v geografskem, družbenem in ideološkem prostoru* (Ljubljana, 1998); Jernej Tiran, "Settlement area type as a factor of electoral behaviour in Slovenia", *Hrvatski geografski glasnik* 73 (2011), 87–98; Jernej Tiran, "Urbano proti ruralnemu: (nov) razcep v slovenskem političnem prostoru?", *Teorija in praksa* 52 (2015), 271–290; Boštjan Rogelj, "Uspeh nestranskih kandidatov na lokalnih volitvah 2006", *Dela* 27 (2007), 163–181.

¹⁵ Andrej Kirbiš, "Determinants of political participation in Western Europe, East-Central Europe and post-Yugoslav countries", in: *20 years later: problems and prospects of countries of former Yugoslavia*, ed. Sergej Flere (Maribor, 2013) (hereinafter: Kirbiš, "Determinants of political participation").

pation. For example, Kirbiš and colleagues carried out multivariate analyses of a wide array of determinants of political participation among Slovenian youth using 2010 national survey data and found that older youth and female gender both had the most consistent positive impact on political participation, while family economic status and parental education had no significant impact.¹⁶ Not all studies have indicated similarly consistent results; among them, for example, bivariate analyses of determinants of political participation employing a representative sample of Slovenian youth in 2013 indicated insignificance of some sociodemographic determinants.¹⁷ Specifically, gender proved to play no significant role in neither political participation nor in political interest, while more educated, older young people, and those with better educated fathers and mothers expressed higher interest in politics. The same study also found that older youth and youth with higher-educated fathers were more likely to attend elections.¹⁸

In previous studies, particularly the *resource model* has been tested, as it is one of the most widely used models to explain inequalities in political participation.¹⁹ Its proponents argue that personal and family resources, especially those involving better socioeconomic status (SES), increase the likelihood of one's participation in public life, since SES resources tend to increase citizens' knowledge and skills in management and understanding of political information and political content, which consequently increases the likelihood of one's participation in a political process. Individuals with more resources – especially higher (personal or parental) educational levels, higher income and higher occupational status – have a better ability to participate in political life more frequently and with less effort.²⁰ Resource model has not been univocally confirmed in previous studies of Slovenian youth. Previous studies from other

¹⁶ Andrej Kirbiš and Sergej Flere, "Political culture in the Yugoslav successor states", in: *Building Democracy in the Yugoslav Successor States: Accomplishments, Setbacks, and Challenges since 1990*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Christine Hassenstab and Ola Listhaug (Cambridge, 2017).

¹⁷ Kirbiš and Zagorc, "Politics and democracy".

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism* (Cambridge, 2002).

²⁰ Wendy K. Tam Cho, James Gimpel and Tony Wu, "Clarifying the Role of SES in Political Participation: Policy Threat and Arab American Mobilization", *Journal of Politics* 68 (2006), 977–991; Julianna Sandell Pacheco, "Political Socialization in Context: The Effect of Political Competition on Youth Voter Turnout", *Political Behavior* 30 (2008), 415–436 (hereinafter: Sandell Pacheco, "Political Socialization"); Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, 1995) (hereinafter: Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*); Sidney Verba, Nancy Burns and Kay L. Schlozman, "Unequal at the Starting Line: Creating Participatory Inequalities across Generations and among Groups", *American Sociologist* 34 (2003): 45–69.

countries have also found that – besides age²¹ and gender²² – size of residential settlement²³ and family structure²⁴ may also be determinants of political participation. For this reason we also included these variables in our study in order to examine regional variation in these determinants of political participation.²⁵

In sum, based on the results of previous studies of Slovenian youth, an important question that needs to be answered is whether determinants of political participation are similar across Slovenian geographical regions, or in other words, whether key determinants impacting political participation of Slovenian youth on a national level can be replicated on geographical regions. In our study we also compare northeastern Slovenia with the remaining regions. Rogelj and Tiran, for example, argued that besides district-level analysis of determinants of political participation, individual-levels survey data should also be used in the future studies, and that other forms of citizen participation, besides voter turnout, should also be examined.²⁶

Purpose of the study

Despite Slovenia's comparatively good overall standing on several objective measures of quality of life, socioeconomic and democratic development, one of the more troublesome issues of Slovenian society is the relative lack of political

²¹ Russell J. Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics* (Washington, DC, 2008); Eldin Fahmy, *Young Citizens: Young People's Involvement in Politics and Decision Making* (Burlington, 2006); Zukin et al., *A New Engagement*.

²² Parry et al., *Political participation*; Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*; Francesca Vassallo, "Political Participation and the Gender Gap in European Union Member States", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 14 (2006), 411–427.

²³ Srečko Mihailović, "Odnos omladine prema politici", in: *Položaj, svest i ponašanje mlade generacije Jugoslavije: preliminarna analiza rezultata istraživanja*, ed. Srđan Vrcan (Belgrade, 1986); Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, 1997); Doh C. Shin, *Mass politics and culture in democratizing Korea* (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁴ Timol Hener, Helmut Rainer and Thomas Siedler, "Political Socialization in Flux? Linking Family Non-Intactness during Childhood to Adult Civic Engagement", IZA Discussion Paper no. 9042, www.diw.de/documents/vortragsdokumente/220/diw_01.c.425241.de/v_2013_hener_political_eea.pdf, accessed: 15. 12. 2016.

²⁵ For analyses of these variables at the national level, see Andrej Kirbiš, Sergej Flere, Darko Friš, Marina Tavčar Krajnc and Tina Cupar, "Predictors of Conventional, Protest, and Civic Participation among Slovenian Youth: A Test of the Civic Voluntarism Model", *International Journal of Sociology* 47 (2017), 182–207 (hereinafter: Kirbiš et al., "Predictors").

²⁶ Rogelj and Tiran, "Geografska analiza".

activity of Slovenian citizens, both the adult and young population.²⁷ The main purpose of our study was to add to the existing literature by focusing on several issues, which have previously not been investigated in Slovenian context. First, we examined the extent of regional inequalities in political participation among Slovenian youth. When comparing Slovenian regions, we also aimed to show how northeastern Slovenian regions (Mura, Drava, Carinthia and Savinja region) fare on youth political participation compared to other regions. Second, we examined macro-determinants of regional inequalities in political participation. Third, we examined regional variation in individual-level determinants of political participation. All three questions deal with whether politically more active youth are representative of the total Slovenian population; of young people, both as to regional representation, as well as to sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics. From the perspective of normative democratic theory, it would be desirable, if only a few (or ideally none) inequalities existed, or, in case they do, that these inequalities would be relatively small.

Method

Sample

We analyzed Slovenian Youth 2010 survey data, which consisted of a representative random sample of Slovenian youth. The target population (332,211 young people) were all residents of the Republic of Slovenia, who on July 26, were between 15 and 29 years old ($N = 1,257$; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.90$; $SD = 4.25$; 48.3 % women). A field survey was conducted between July 27 and September 24 in the form of face-to-face interviews. The target population of the study was previously stratified into 12 statistical regions and 6 types of settlements. The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts: oral and written. The oral part of the questionnaire was conducted in face-to-face interviews with interviewers reading the questions aloud to interviewees and with interviewers filling out survey responses they received from the respondents. Upon completion of the oral part of the questionnaire the interviewer handed the respondent the written questionnaire and asked him or her to fill it out. The written part of the questionnaire consisted of questions that were more personal and intimate in nature.²⁸

²⁷ Kirbiš and Flere, "Participation"; Kirbiš, "Political participation"; Andrej Kirbiš, "Determinants of political participation"; Kirbiš and Zagorc, "Politics and democracy"; Mitja Hafner-Fink and Samo Uhan, "Vrednote, ekonomska rast in družbeni razvoj", *Teorija in praksa* 53 (2016), 232–250; Kirbiš et al., "Predictors".

²⁸ Miran Lavrič, Marko Divjak, Andrej Naterer and Petra Lešek, "Research Methods", in: *The Social Profile of Young People in Slovenia*, ed. Miran Lavrič (Ljubljana, 2011).

Variables

Dependent variables: political participation

We examined four dimensions of political participation. Electoral political participation (self-reported voter turnout) was examined with the following question: "Did you attend the last Slovenian parliamentary elections that took place September 2008"? Only data of respondents that were of legal age to vote in September 2008 elections were analysed (1 = did not vote; 2 = voted).

Non-electoral conventional political participation was measured with five items. The following question was asked for all participation items: "People are active in politics in different ways. Have you ever engaged in the following activities or would you engage in them if you had the possibility?" The items were: "Try to convince others to vote for the same candidate or party as me"; "Contact politicians"; "Contribute money to a political party"; "Work for a political party or candidate"; and "Hand out leaflets with political content." All items were rated on a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = would definitely not do; 2 = would probably do; 3 = have already done). A summation scale was formed and the reliability of the scale was found to be sufficiently high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.70).

Protest participation was tapped with the following four items: [Did you ever] "Sign a petition (printed or electronic)"; "Attend lawful demonstrations?"; "Boycott buying certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons?"; "Buy certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons?" All items were rated on a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = would definitely not do; 2 = would probably do; 3 = have already done). A summation scale was formed and the reliability of the scale was found to be sufficiently high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65).

Civic participation was measured with four items on the frequency of: "Helping peers with learning"; "Counselling peers on their problems"; "Helping the elderly"; "Helping physically/mentally challenged." All items were rated on a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = would definitely not do; 2 = would probably do; 3 = have already done). A summation scale was formed and the reliability of the scale was again sufficiently high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73).

Independent variables: micro level

We examined the impact of four sociodemographic variables: age (measured as

year of birth, recoded into age in years and into age groups: 1 = 15–18 years²⁹; 2 = 19–24 years; 3 = 25–29 years), gender (female = 1, male = 2), size of current residential settlement (1 = countryside/village, 2 = small town [between 1,000 and 50,000 inhabitants], 3 = larger city [above 50,000 inhabitants]), and family structure (1 = presently living in a traditional family [with biological father and mother]; 2 = all other family forms).

With regard to socioeconomic resources, we examined respondent's family and personal socioeconomic status by means of several commonly used indicators of SES. *Family SES* was measured with 1) parental educational level, which was formed as a composite index of maternal and paternal educational level; and (2) self-perceived family material status of respondents. We measured father's and mother's educations with two identical questions on a nine-point scale: "What is the highest achieved level of [your father's / your mother's] education?" (1 = uncompleted primary school; 9 = completed master or doctorate degree). For the purposes of statistical analyses, the values were recoded into a three-point scale: 1 = uncompleted secondary education (original values 1, 2, 3); 2 = completed secondary education (original values 4, 5, 6); 3 = completed tertiary education (original values 7, 8, 9). Respondents' family material (economic) status was assessed by them with the following question: "How do you rate the material situation of your family compared to the Slovenian average?" Family material status was coded on a five-point scale (1 = highly below average; 5 = highly above average). We recoded the five-point scale into a three-point scale of family's relative material status: 1 = (highly) below average, 2 = average; 3 = (highly) above average. The *family SES* was a composite score of all three indicators (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73).

Personal SES was measured via indicator of a personal income. The question was: "Assess the size of your available overall monthly income (in Euros). Combine all incomes." We recoded the open-coded question into four groups (1 = lowest monthly income; 4 = highest monthly income).

Of course, we also examined the impact of respondents' *regional affiliation*, which was our main point of interest.

Independent variables: macro level

Macro (regional) data was acquired from the Statistical Office of the Republic

²⁹ Voter turnout was examined only for young people of legal age in September 2008 at the time of Slovenian parliamentary elections.

of Slovenia.³⁰ We included four sets of macro-level data in our analyses. We examined regional data for 1) gross domestic product per capita (in EUR); 2) average gross monthly earnings; 3) rates of registered unemployment; 4) the proportion of the population aged 15 and over with higher educational level. Since Slovenian Youth 2010 survey was conducted in 2010, our macro-analysis included regional data from 2009, since we wanted to ensure the appropriate timing sequence, which would be consistent with the potential causal explanation of the influence of macro-variables on political participation of young people in Slovenia.

Plan of analysis

We first examined differences in the frequency of four dimensions of political participation among twelve statistical regions. Next, we examined macro-determinants of political participation in Slovenian regions by carrying out bivariate analyses at the regional (macro) level. Finally, we examined the variability of micro-determinants of political participation on a regional level by carrying out bivariate analyses at the individual level. Below we present the results of our analyses.

Results

Regional inequalities in political participation

Figure 1 indicates inequalities in four dimensions of political participation among twelve statistical regions. We show mean values (on a scale from 1 to 3) of three political participation dimensions in columns (non-electoral conventional, protest and civic participation), while the fourth (self-reported voter turnout) shows percentage data (shown with a line graph).

³⁰ SORS, *Podatkovna baza SI-STAT*, pxweb.stat.si/pxweb/dialog/, accessed: 23. 1. 2018 (hereinafter: SORS, *Podatkovna baza*).

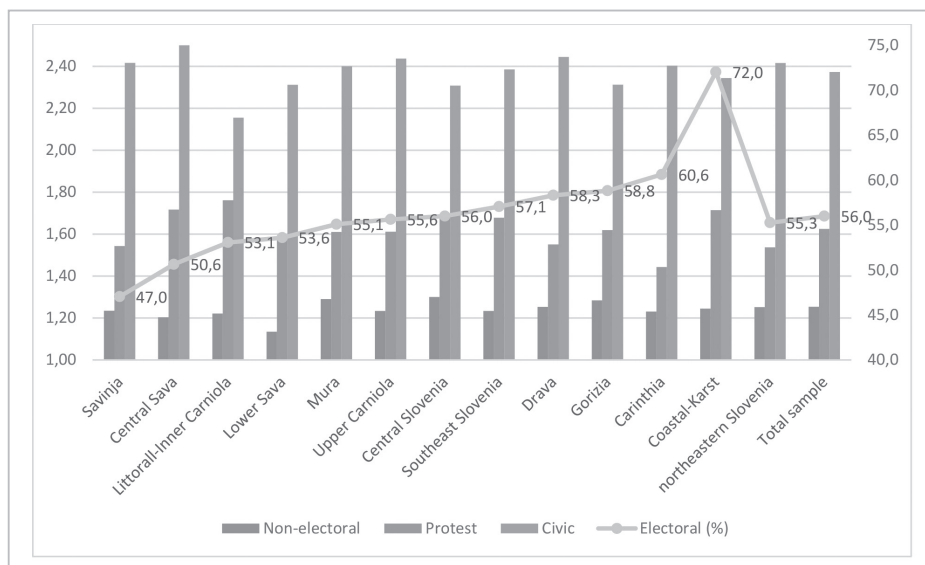


Figure 1: Regional inequalities in youth political participation in Slovenia

Note: Columns indicate the frequency of four dimensions of political participation. 1 = would definitely not do; 2 = would probably do; 3 = have already done.

First, looking at the total sample on the far right, we see that self-reported voter turnout among Slovenian youth was 56 %. On a scale from 1 to 3, we see that green columns (civic participation) was highest at the national level and in all individual regions, followed by red columns (protest participation), while non-electoral conventional participation was lowest at the national level and in all statistical regions.

Figure 1 also indicates that there are substantive differences on several dimensions of political participation. Coastal Karst, Carinthia, Gorizia and Drava regions had the highest voter turnout, while Savinja, Central Sava and Littoral-Inner Carniola had the lowest turnout. On non-electoral conventional participation (blue columns), Mura and Gorizia scored highest, while Lower Sava, Central Sava and Littoral-Inner Carniola scored lowest. On protest participation (red columns), Littoral-Inner Carniola, Coastal Karst and Central Sava regions scored highest, while Carinthia, Savinja and Drava regions scored lowest. Finally, on civic participation (green columns), Central Sava, Drava and

³¹ Slovenian Youth, *Mladina 2010: Družbeni profil mladib v Sloveniji* [data file] (Maribor: Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta [production], Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov [distribution], 2011), ADP - IDNo: MLA10 (Maribor–Ljubljana, 2011) (hereinafter: Slovenian youth, *Mladina 2010*).

Upper Carniola scored highest, while Littoral-Inner Carniola, Central Slovenia and Gorizia regions scored lowest. Northeastern Slovenian regions (Mura, Drava, Carinthia and Savinja region), as a group, had the lowest scores on protest participation compared to other Slovenian regions, and northeastern Slovenia was below the national average (see the second group of columns from the right). At the same time, there was large variation within northeastern regions on some participation indicators, especially in voter turnout. For example, Savinja region had the lowest turnout of all twelve regions, Mura region was just below the national average, Drava region was slightly above it, while Carinthia region had the second highest self-reported voter turnout among all Slovenian regions.

These results indicate that substantial regional inequalities exist in some dimensions of political participation of Slovenian youth, in particular in voter turnout and civic participation. On the other hand, no clear pattern was detected whereby regions that score higher on one dimensions would also score higher on other participation dimensions. We further test this finding in *Table 1*.

Macro-level determinants of political participation

Table 1 shows macro-determinants of political participation at a regional level. We see that several macro-determinants are correlated with mean regional political participation levels (see bivariate associations in bold), yet there are no significant coefficients. Regional GDP is positively associated with three out of four participation dimensions, while civic participation was the only exception with a negative coefficient. Identical pattern was detected for gross income and participation association and for higher educational structure and participation association (in both cases civic participation had the only negative coefficient). Higher unemployment decreased voter turnout and protest participation, increased civic participation, but had not association with non-electoral conventional participation. We again note that none of the associations were significant.

We were also interested whether results in *Figure 1* could be interpreted as to showing a clear pattern of regional inequalities in total participation. *Table 1* shows the underlined coefficients of associations between regional participation levels. Positive coefficients between different participation dimensions indicate that regions scoring higher on one participation dimension also score higher on second dimension. Since three out of six underlined coefficients in *Table 1* are negative, this seems to not to the case. Regional inequalities in participation do exist, but regions high on one participation dimension are in

some cases lower on other dimensions, and vice versa.

Table 1: Macro-determinants of political participation in Slovenia at the regional level

	Regional GDP	Gross earnings	Unemployment rates	Higher education (%)	Voter turnout	Non-electoral p.	Protest p.
Gross earnings	0.89**						
Higher education (%)	-0.57	-0.64*					
Voter turnout	0.88**	0.96**	-0.75**				
Non-electoral p.	0.32	0.35	-0.28	0.27			
Protest p.	0.42	0.45	0.00	0.42	<u>0.23</u>		
Civic p.	0.21	0.37	-0.43	0.34	<u>0.06</u>	<u>0.07</u>	
Regional GDP	-0.30	-0.16	0.47	-0.29	<u>-0.15</u>	<u>-0.01</u>	<u>-0.37</u>

Sources: Slovenian Youth³²; SORS³³.

Notes: * p < 0,05; ** p < 0,05. Table shows Pearson coefficients. Coefficients also have statistical significance levels indicated, though we note that the number of statistical regions was low (N = 12). Regional macro-data is from 2009.

Individual-level determinants of political participation

Finally, we examined and compared variations in determinants of political participation in Slovenian regions by performing bivariate analyses at the individual level. *Table 2* shows those coefficients that are statistically significant (at p < 0.05 or p < 0.01 levels) between all examined individual-level determinants and four participation dimensions in twelve statistical regions.

³² Slovenian youth, *Mladina* 2010.

³³ SORS, *Podatkovna baza*.

Table 2: Individual-level determinants of political participation in Slovenia in twelve statistical regions

	VO	NE	PR	CI	VO	NE	PR	CI	VO	NE	PR	CI
		Mura			Drava				Carinthia			
Age	0.53		0.34		0.22		0.15				0.33	
Gender (male)							-0.15	-0.18				
Family structure												
Size of residential settlement												
Family SES			0.24								0.34	
Personal SES	0.33								0.49			
		Savinja			Central Sava				Lower Sava			
Age	0.19		0.20									
Gender (male)			-0.17				-0.42		0.38			
Family structure					0.41							
Size of residential settlement		0.28	0.40								0.38	
Family SES			0.20									
Personal SES				0.28								
		Southeast			Central				Upper Carniola			
Age	0.26										0.22	
Gender (male)							-0.16					-0.24
Family structure												
Size of residential settlement		0.31	0.43									0.19
Family SES		0.28	0.37									
Personal SES												
		Gorizia			Coastal-Karst				Littoral-Inner Carniola			
Age					0.27		0.27		0.33			
Gender (male)												-0.35
Family structure					0.27		0.23					

Size of residential settlement				-0.36			-0.26				
Family SES											
Personal SES	0.52										

Source: Slovenian Youth³⁴; SORS³⁵.

Notes: * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,05$. VO = voter turnout; NE = non-electoral conventional participation; PR = protest participation; CI = civic participation.

Results in *Table 2* indicate that among Slovenian youth, higher age of youth is most consistently a significant determinant of more frequent political participation, with twelve significant associations. Gender has eight significant coefficients, with seven of those indicating women scoring higher on participation scales. Size of residential settlement also has eight associations, with six of them indicating more frequent political participation in urban environments. Family SES, personal SES and family structure have only five, four and three significant coefficients, respectively.

Table 3: The number of significant determinants of political participation in twelve statistical regions and at the national level

	Slovenian regions						
	Total sample	Mura	Drava	Carinthia	Savinja	Central Sava	Lower Sava
Number of significant coefficients	10 (42 %)	4 (17%)	4 (17%)	3 (13%)	7 (29%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)
	north-eastern Slovenia	Southeast	Central Slovenia	Upper Carniola	Gorizia	Coastal-Karst	Littoral-Inner Carniola
Number of significant coefficients	(19%)	5 (21%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	6 (25%)	2 (8%)

Source: Slovenian Youth.³⁶

Notes: Data indicate the number of significant coefficients within each region (out of 24 coefficients). The numbers in the parentheses indicate the percentage of significant coefficients within each region.

Table 3 indicates the number of significant coefficients in each statistical region and at the national level. The higher number of significant coefficients in

³⁴ Slovenian youth, *Mladina* 2010.

³⁵ SORS, *Podatkovna baza*.

³⁶ Slovenian youth, *Mladina* 2010.

a given region indicates that a larger number of examined micro-level determinants significantly impact political participation. Two important aspects have to be taken into account when interpreting these results. First, the number of significant coefficients in each region may be smaller than in the total sample partly due to a smaller regional subsample size, as significance levels are also impacted by the number of respondents in a regional subsample. Nevertheless, we argue that a basic picture can be provided by our analyses, at least in terms of comparing the number of significant coefficients between different Slovenian regions (though here we also have to take into account that the number of respondents also differs between regions). Second, the number of coefficients does not indicate the *extent* of participation inequalities on a particular determinant (this can be examined in *Table 2*, where a higher coefficient indicates greater participation inequalities on a given determinant), but does indicate the *variety* of participation inequalities (a higher number of significant coefficients indicates a greater number of determinants that impact political participation in a given region).

Table 3 indicates that at the total sample level, ten coefficients (42 %) were significant. The smallest number of significant coefficients were in Central Slovenia and Gorizia (both had only one significant coefficient), while Savinja, Coastal-Karst and Southeast regions had the highest number of coefficients (seven, six and five, respectively). We also examined whether the number of significant coefficient is associated with macro-regional characteristics. While there were no significant coefficients, insignificant associations indicated that greater variety of participation inequality was linked with higher regional unemployment ($\rho = 0.29$), lower gross mean income ($\rho = -0.24$), lower proportion of highly educated population ($\rho = -0.18$), but with slightly higher regional GDP ($\rho = 0.12$). Taking into account a low number of cases (regions) and a cut-off point of $\rho > 0.2$, our results tentatively suggest that youth participation inequalities are present to a higher degree in regions with higher proportion of unemployment and lower gross earnings, i.e. in socioeconomically more disadvantaged regions, despite a lightly positive link with the regional GDP.

Looking again at the northeastern Slovenian regions as a group (Mura, Drava, Carinthia and Savinja region; second column in the second row in *Table 3*), we see that northeastern Slovenia has 19 % of significant coefficients, yet there are again substantial differences within its regions. For example, Mura and Drava regions have 17 % significant coefficients, Carinthia 13 %, while Savinja has 29 %. This again indicates that there is not only substantial regional variation in participation in Slovenia, but that there is also regional variation within northeastern Slovenia. Furthermore, socioeconomic inequalities in political participation are particularly salient in three out of four northeastern Slovenian regions, compared to other regions (*Table 2*).

Discussion and implications

The main aim of our study was to examine some key issues of political participation of Slovenian youth, which have so far not yet been investigated. First, we examined whether there are substantive regional inequalities in four dimensions of political participation, and second, whether regional inequalities could be partly explained by macro-level characteristics. We detected several substantial regional inequalities in youth political participation, although these inequalities differed according to participation dimension. Regional inequalities exist in particular in voter turnout and civic participation, while at the same time, regions that score higher on one dimension in some cases score lower on other dimensions. Third, we also found that female gender and higher age are most consistent individual-level predictors of youth political participation in Slovenian regions, and that there is a greater variety of individual-level youth participation inequalities in regions with higher rates of unemployment and lower gross mean earnings.

In the context of northeastern Slovenian regions (Mura, Drava, Carinthia and Savinja region), our results indicate that they can hardly be taken as a monolithic whole when examining youth political participation patterns (with the exception of protest participation, which is low across northeastern regions). In fact, the opposite might be true. Among northeastern regions, Savinja region seems to be the most problematic from the standpoint of low youth participation rates (with the lowest voter turnout of 47 %) and from the extent of participation inequalities, which are also highest in Savinja region. Furthermore, socioeconomic inequalities in political participation are particularly salient in three out of four northeastern Slovenian regions.

The questions we attempted to answer in our study are particularly important for democratic functioning, especially for newer democratic states, including Slovenia. Political participation is the cornerstone of a democracy.³⁷ More democratically and socioeconomically developed states also tend to have more participatory citizens.³⁸ Furthermore, political participation patterns of youth are also indicative of their participation patterns as adults and of the future state of affairs in a country, thereby indicating the direction the democracy might take in a given country.³⁹ It is thus crucial to examine, in the present and

³⁷ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (Princeton, NJ, 1963); Parry et al., *Political participation*.

³⁸ Kirbiš, "Political participation"; Kirbiš, "Determinants of political participation".

³⁹ Jelena Obradović and Ann S. Masten, "Developmental Antecedents of Young Adult Civic Engagement", *Applied Developmental Science* 11 (2007), 2–19; Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources and Growth in Young Adulthood", *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002), 41–56; Sandell Pacheco, "Political Socialization".

in the future studies, whether politically more active youth are representative of the general Slovenian population of young people, with regard to regional representation, as well as to other sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

From the point of view of normative democratic theory, and for the realization of democratic ideals through equal participation of all social groups, it is important to realize that regional participation inequalities among Slovenian youth do exist, together with numerous other issues of Slovenian democracy, as researchers have recently argued.⁴⁰ Yet regions also differ according to different participation dimensions. For this reason, it is crucial that participation inequalities are investigated separately in the future, as the focus should not be only on electoral political participation, especially since other forms of participation are becoming more and more widespread, especially among youth⁴¹. Indeed, as researchers have increasingly reported in recent years, and as our study results confirmed, different participation dimensions have different micro- and macro-level determinants, and policy- and decision-makers should take that into account when forming policy at national, regional and local level.

Our study has several important limitations that need to be addressed. Slovenian youth 2010 data provided only a small number of respondents in some regional subsamples. Second, only bivariate analyses were performed in the present study, although we did examine different forms of political participation and its macro- and micro-level determinants. Future studies would benefit if the data collection was carried out in a way to ensure larger regional subsamples. Another issue that might be interesting to examine in the future would be to analyse youth participation levels according to polarization between central Slovenia and the rest of the country, as spatial shift took place in the recent decade in adults' voter turnout, as Rogelj and Tiran have reported.⁴² Additionally, a longitudinal analysis may be carried out in the future comparing Slovenian Youth 2000 and 2010 data on participation. This would enable an examination of whether inequalities have remained relatively stable, or if the extent of inequalities changed significantly in either direction. Of course, the authors of such investigations would have to keep in mind that Youth 2000 survey questionnaire contains fewer political participation and engagement items, though several indicators could still be meaningfully compared. Interestingly, previous

⁴⁰ Alenka Krašovec and Sabrina P. Ramet, "Liberal Democracy in Slovenia: From Seventh Heaven to the Lobby of Hell in Only Two Decades?", in: *Building Democracy in the Yugoslav Successor States: Accomplishments, Setbacks, and Challenges since 1990*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet, Christine M. Hassenstab and Ola Listhaug (Cambridge, 2017).

⁴¹ Kirbiš and Flere, "Participation".

⁴² Rogelj and Tiran, "Geografska analiza".

analysis of adults' voter turnout at the electoral district levels found only a few changes in the determinants of electoral participation comparing 2011 and 2014 national parliamentary elections⁴³, and it would be interesting to examine these patterns among youth, taking into account the variety of participation dimensions.

In sum, we argued that from the perspective of normative democratic theory, it would be desirable if very few or even none sociostructural participation inequalities existed. We know that such ideal democracies do not exist in reality, yet these basic democratic ideals should be strived for nonetheless. Our study indicated that regional inequalities in youth political participation exist, and that there is regional variation in individual-level determinants of political participation among Slovenian youth. Several policy implications stem from our study, with one of them being that encouraging programs and interventions that would specifically target regions with low levels of political participation might have a significant impact on participation rates of present-day youngsters (i.e. future adults), and might also have a beneficial impact on Slovenian democracy as whole. The question is, of course, whether policy makers, political institutions and political parties will act in accordance to national and democratic common interest, or whether regional inequalities are something they have no interest in reducing, as increases in participation in certain regions might potentially change the political party landscape in Slovenia. This may be one of the reasons why one may be sceptical whether a reduction of inequalities in participation are something decision makers will strive for on their own, unless citizens exert bottom-up democratic pressures on the elites.

⁴³ Ibidem.

Andrej Kirbiš

**RAVNI IN DEJAVNIKI POLITIČNE PARTICIPACIJE MLADIH:
REGIONALNE NEENAKOSTI IN SEVEROVZHODNA SLOVENIJA**

POVZETEK

Ena ključnih težav, s katero se v zadnjih desetletjih sooča demokracija v Sloveniji, je relativno nizka stopnja politične participacije slovenskih državljanov, tako odraslih kot mladih. Glavni namen pričujoče raziskave je bil 1) analizirati obstoj do sedaj še neraziskanih regionalnih neenakosti v štirih dimenzijah politične participacije mladih v Sloveniji (volilne in nevolilne konvencionalne politične participacije, protestne in civilnodružbene participacije); 2) preučiti makrodejavnike regionalnih neenakosti v politični participaciji; in 3) preučiti regionalno variabilnost dejavnikov politične participacije na individualni ravni. Ugotovili smo obstoj regionalnih neenakosti v politični participaciji mladih, čeprav se je obseg neenakosti razlikoval glede na preučevano dimenzijo participacije. Regionalne neenakosti so večje pri volilni udeležbi in civilnodružbeni participaciji, hkrati pa so regije z višjimi stopnjami ene dimenzije participacije v posameznih primerih nizko na drugi dimenziji. Regije severovzhodne Slovenije (Mura, Drava, Koroška in Savinjska) imajo kot celota v primerjavi z drugimi regijami najnižje stopnje protestne participacije, čeprav obstaja na nekaterih kazalnikih participacije znotraj severovzhodnih regij velika variabilnost, npr. v volilni udeležbi mladih. Prav tako se je izkazalo, da sta na individualni ravni ženski spol in višja starost najbolj konsistentna dejavnika višje stopnje politične participacije mladih in da obstajajo večje neenakosti v participaciji v regijah z višjo stopnjo brezposelnosti in nižjimi povprečnimi bruto plačami. Na podlagi rezultatov sklenemo, da bi se bilo potrebno pri sprejemanju ukrepov na nacionalni, regionalni in lokalni ravni osredotočiti na različnost dimenzij participacije, zlasti ker so nekatere oblike participacije med mladimi vse bolj razširjene in ker lahko imajo različne dimenzije participacije na mikro in makroravni različne dejavnike.

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Izvleček: Glavni namen pričujoče raziskave je bil 1) analizirati obstoj do sedaj še neraziskanih regionalnih neenakosti v štirih dimenzijah politične participacije mladih v Sloveniji (volilne in nevolilne konvencionalne politične participacije, protestne in civilnodružbene participacije); 2) preučiti makrodejavnike regionalnih neenakosti v politični participaciji; in 3) preučiti regionalno variabilnost dejavnikov politične participacije na individualni ravni. Ugotovili smo obstoj regionalnih neenakosti v politični participaciji mladih, čeprav se je obseg neenakosti razlikoval glede na preučevano dimenzijo participacije. Regionalne neenakosti so večje pri volilni udeležbi in civilnodružbeni participaciji, hkrati pa so regije z višjimi stopnjami ene dimenzije participacije v posameznih primerih nizko na drugi dimenziji.