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The Volatile Nature of Social Trust

The Case of Croatia and Slovenia

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The volatile nature of social trust
- the case of Croatia and Slovenia

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The volatile nature of social trust – the case of Croatia and Slovenia

Abstract

The countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have to varying degrees been struggling in their transition to market economies and democracy. Social trust is often argued to be a crucial lubricant in solving collective action problems and thus building and maintaining well-functioning institutions. Therefore building and maintaining social trust seems crucial for the countries in CEE struggling with transition. Existing research on social trust is mainly conducted in a western context, and there is a clear need for research to focus on social trust in CEE - an endeavour which this article undertakes. The article conducts a comparative study of the development of social trust in Croatia and Slovenia. In spite these countries' common Yugoslavian heritage they show a remarkably diversified development in social trust over a rather short timespan (1996-2007). The two cases thus provide good cases for examining dynamic or rather short term effects influencing social trust at the aggregated level, which in existing literature is assumed to be rather stable. The article synthesises arguments from existing theory on social trust and claims that the level of social trust could be heavily influenced by the development of public sentiment in a given context. The development of social trust in Croatia and Slovenia thus correlate with factors as the sense of trust and corruption among politicians, public officials and public institutions, the general economic and social development in the country as well as the general sense of optimism at the individual level.

Introduction

Social trust is a phenomenon, which has been given a lot of attention in recent years. There are two reasons for this: *firstly* there is a widespread consensus, that high social trust in a society generates a lot of positive outcomes. Social trust can be seen as: “*the lubricant that helps overcome collective action problems and that fosters productive social exchanges*” [Rothstein and Stolle 2001: 2]. Social trust thus spurs easier corporation and lower transaction costs, which again spurs economic growth, better functioning governments and a higher level of happiness in the society [Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Kuzio 2001; Albrekt Larsen 2007; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Uslaner 2001; Putnam 1993]. *Secondly* it seems clear, that a great deal of variation in social trust exist between different countries, regions and cities but also between different groups in a society [Albrekt Larsen 2007; Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Delhey and Newton 2005]. Since social trust appears to lead to many positive outcomes for a society, but also varies between them, it is important to examine the concept.

Social trust can be defined as: “*the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible*” [Delhey and Newton 2005: 311]. It is therefore important not to confuse social trust with *particularized trust*, which is a personal face-to-face trust in people we know. Social trust denotes a trust in people in the society *in general*¹, and thus people we don't know [Delhey and Newton 2005; Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Uslaner 2001]. The concept is often measured by the standard question: “*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with*

¹ Which is why social trust sometimes also is called generalized trust. Others again refer to the concept as interpersonal trust or simply social capital.

people?” [Delhey and Newton 2005: 314; Uslaner 2001: 9]². This question will also be used as the measure of social trust in this paper.

Research on social trust is often performed in a western context. Putnam’s classical works of 1993 and 2000 are thus investigations of the civil societies in Italy and USA. A more institutional tradition focuses in particular on the universalistic/social-democratic Scandinavian welfare states and their effects on generating social trust³. Contrary to this, the amount of research about social trust in the countries in Central- and Eastern Europe (CEE) is still limited. The former socialist systems in these countries are often described as having virtually destroyed social trust [Deacon 1993; Cerami 2006]. Table 1 below shows the percent of respondents answering “most people can be trusted” in three different cross-country surveys done in CEE.

² The question has been found to tap the concept of social trust quite well, especially in a Western and European context [Lolle and Torpe 2011]. In a factor analysis Uslaner [2001] finds that the classic trust question loads strongly with questions about trust in strangers, but not on trust in friends and family.

³ See for example: Albrekt Larsen 2007; Rothstein 1998, 2000; Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Rotshtein and Uslaner 2005.

Table 1. *The development in social trust in CEE from 1996 to 2007*

<i>“Most people can be trusted”</i>	<i>WVS 1996</i>	<i>EVS 1999</i>	<i>ISSP 2007</i>
Croatia	25 %	21 %	19 %
Slovenia	16 %	22 %	39 %
Czech Republic	29 %	25 %	50 %
Poland	18 %	19 %	26 %
Latvia	25 %	17 %	34 %
Rumania	19 %	10 %	
Hungary	23 %	22 %	
Bulgaria	29 %	27 %	
Bosnia-Herzegovina	29 %		
Serbia	30 %		
Slovakia		16 %	
Lithuania		26 %	
Estonia		24 %	

The social trust scores in table 1 are based on: Variable v27 from World Values Survey Eastern Europe 1996, variable v66 from European Values Study 3. Wave 1999 and variable v57 from ISSP Sport and Leisure 2007. v57 from ISSP 2007 was originally an ordinal scaled variable with four categories. It has been dichotomized, and the shown score reflects the sum of the two positive categories.

Table 1 shows that data on the social trust question for a lot of countries in CEE are not available in all three surveys. Of the five countries for which this data exists Croatia is the only one having a negative development in the social trust score. Opposing this Croatia's neighbour country Slovenia has the lowest score in 1996 and the second highest in 2007. The country more than doubles its score, something which no other country does. It should be noted that it can have an effect that the 2007-score stems from a dichotomized ordinal scaled variable: All countries except Croatia show a remarkable rise in the social trust scores from 1999 to 2007. Hence one could suspect that the dichotomization has caused a positive bias in the 2007-score. Taking this into consideration Croatia's negative development seems even more remarkable.

Croatia and Slovenia share a common Yugoslavian heritage and they are both catholic countries. Despite this quite similar starting point, the two countries are the ones with the most diversified development of social trust in the table. This constitutes a puzzle, and this paper will make the argument, that the diversified development in social trust in the two countries coincides with a diversified development in public sentiment. It is furthermore argued that public sentiment cannot be measured directly with individual-level variables. The argument is that the general character of the phenomenon calls for context-specific explanations based on the interaction of several factors or variables [Pfau-Effinger 2009: 27-28].

Hence the structure of the paper is as follows. *First* it will be shown, that the diversified development in social trust in the two countries cannot be subscribed to individual-level factors. The development encompasses the two societies as a whole; consequently the explanation for the developments must lie in the broader context. *Secondly* the theoretical argument of the paper will be put forward. It is argued, that the diversified development in social trust in the two countries coincides with a diversified development in public sentiment. It is furthermore argued, that the public sentiment is an effect of the interaction of the social, economic and political development.

Survey indicators for the sense of trust and corruption among politicians, public officials and public institutions and optimism as well as context descriptions can trace this interaction and thus the development in public sentiment. *Thirdly* therefore empirical material in the form of context descriptions and survey indicators will be investigated in order to render our claim. A conclusion will sum up the findings and elaborate on the consequences for the understandings of the concept of social trust.

Who changes their social trust score – disaggregating the dependent variable

In this section it will be asked whether the diversified development in social trust in Croatia and Slovenia 1996-2007 is a result of movements within all groups of society, or if some groups stand markedly out from the national average. This will be done by looking at age-groups, employment status-groups and different educational groups⁴. The argument for this section is more specifically that if the development in the two countries can be subscribed to individual/micro-level explanations, one can expect different paths of social trust for various social groups. On the other hand if the development in the two countries seems to encompass all relevant social groups it is likely that the explanation lies in macro-level phenomenons.

First we will look at age-groups in Slovenia and Croatia and their level of social trust.

⁴ We would have looked income-groups as well, however data is unfortunately missing.

Figure 1. Social trust among age-groups in Slovenia and Croatia

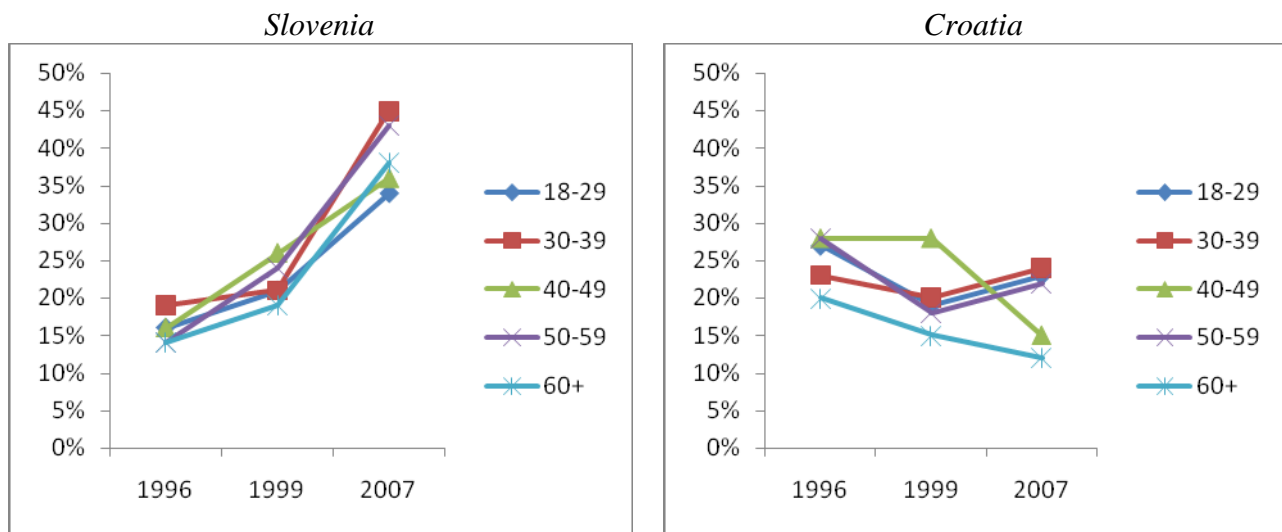


Figure 1 shows the level of social trust among different age groups in Slovenia and Croatia in 1996, 1999 and 2007. Source: WVS 1996, EVS 1999 and ISSP 2007.

At first glance figure 1 shows, that the development between different age-groups in the two countries is diversified. The development in Slovenia clearly shows a general rise in the social trust among all age-groups from 1996-2007. The dispersion between the different age-groups becomes bigger through time in Slovenia. As such the biggest differences in social trust in 2007 apparently are between the youngest group the 18 – 29 year olds (34 %), and the second youngest group the 30 – 39 year olds (45 %). The pensioners are not less trusting than other groups, as they are in Croatia.

At first glance a similar unambiguous development doesn't seem to be apparent in Croatia. For three age-groups (-29, 30-39 and 50-59) the development more or less seems to be characterised as status quo. The pensioners gradually become less trusting, while the 40-49 start out as the most trusting group in the first two datasets becoming just as little trustful as the pensioners in the last dataset. Because there are eleven years between the 1996-sample and the 2007-sample the same people can't

be said to belong to the same age-group in the whole figure. The mistrusting 40-49 year olds in the last sample are thus mainly the 30-39 year olds in the two earlier samples.

The apparent status quo among the majority of the age-groups in Croatia maybe hides a real decline. As before mentioned the 2007 social trust score potentially has a positive bias. In that case the small Croatian decline in this year is even more remarkable, and maybe the reality is a much steeper decline in their score. To sum up the development in social trust more or less seems to be an all age group phenomenon in both countries.

Secondly we look at employment status-groups in Slovenia and Croatia and their level of social trust.

Figure 2. *Social trust among employment status- groups in Slovenia and Croatia*

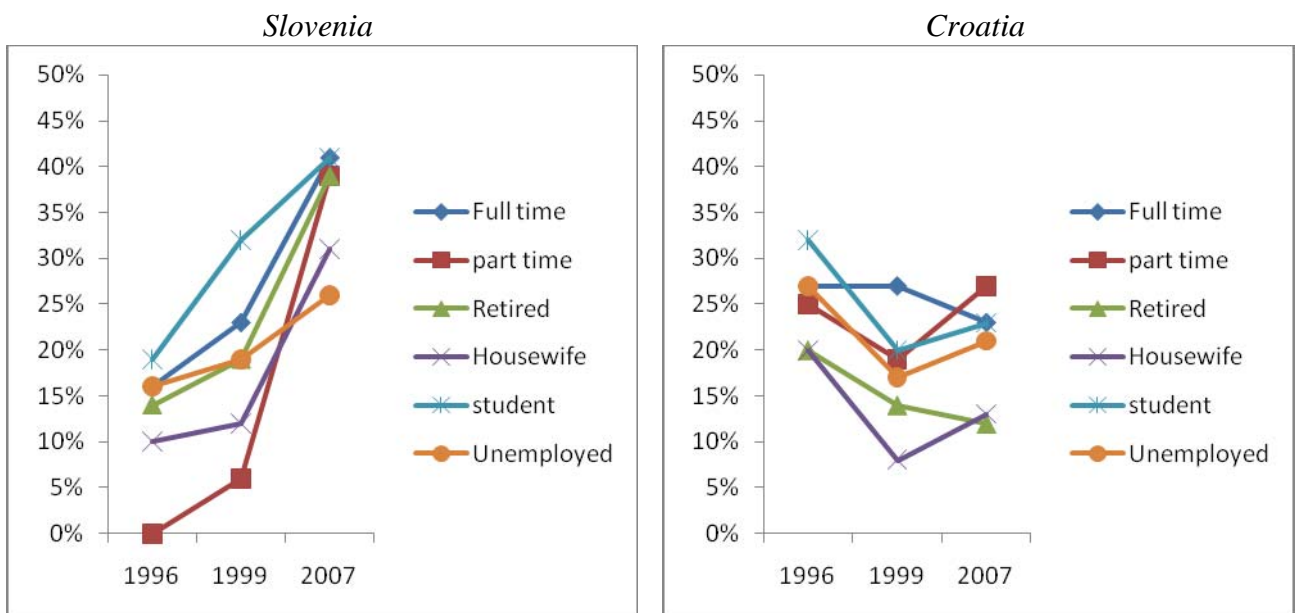


Figure 2 shows the level of social trust among different employment status-groups in Slovenia and Croatia in 1996, 1999 and 2007. Source: WVS 1996, EVS 1999 and ISSP 2007.

Figure 2 shows that the development in social trust in Slovenia among employment status-groups has been a general rise from 1996-2007. The unemployed have had the smallest rise and are in 2007 the group which is least trustful.

At a first glance the development in Croatia doesn't seem quite as clear as in Slovenia. The full timer workers, students, retired and the housewives all become less trusting from 1996-2007. The part timer workers have a small rise in their trust score from 1996-2007. However taking the positive bias in 2007 in consideration the rise is too small to be an actual rise in the groups social trust score. This should also be taking into consideration when looking at the development in Slovenia. Perhaps the rise in social trust in Slovenia from 1996-2007 is not as markedly as seen when looking at the figure.

To sum up when looking at employment status-groups none of them in either Slovenia and Croatia seem to stand out markedly from the tendency and the development thus also seems to include all groups.

Thirdly we look at different educational groups in Croatia and Slovenia and their level of social trust.

Figure 3. Social trust among educational groups⁵ in Slovenia and Croatia

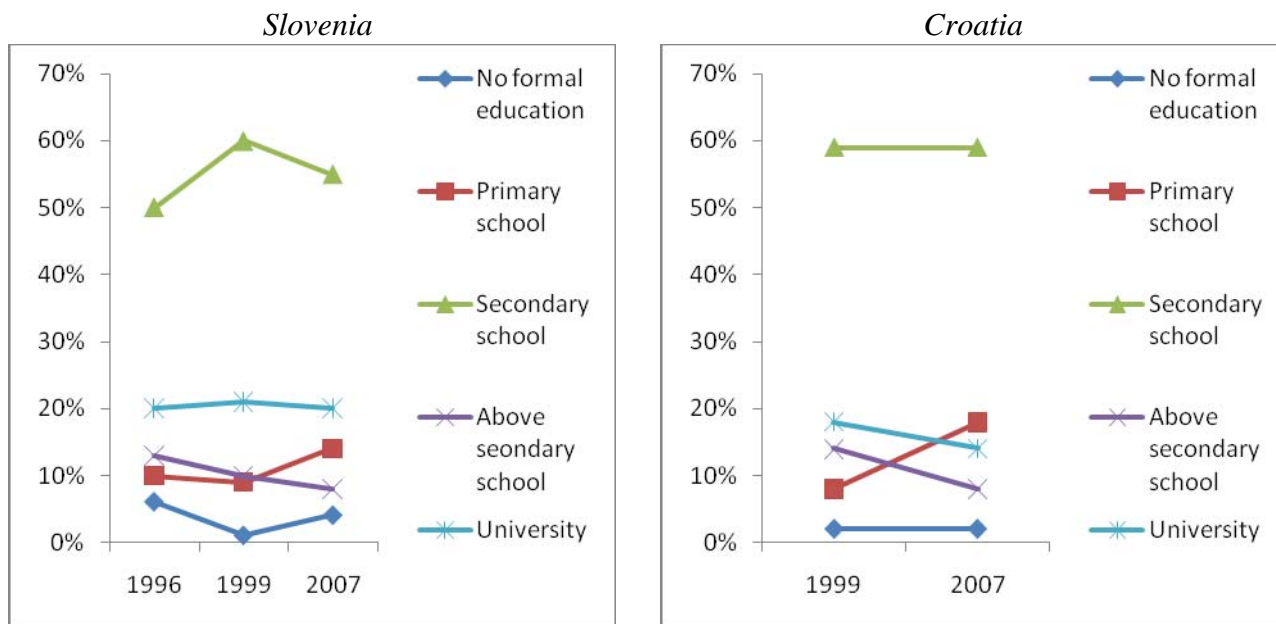


Figure 3 shows the level of social trust among different educational groups in Slovenia in 1996, 1999 and 2007. Source: WVS 1996, EVS 1999 and ISSP 2007.

Figure 3 shows that when looking at different educational groups in Slovenia there doesn't seem to be any movement from 1996-2007 in their social trust scores. All the different educational groups seem more or less to have the same level of social trust in 1996 as in 2007. It is however quite interesting that the 'secondary school group' has a markedly higher level of social trust in the hole period. However as mentioned the different education groups in the figure are combined by

⁵ The three different datasets have different educational groups. Therefore the group 'No formal education' is in WVS 1996 combined by the two values 'No formal education' and 'incomplete primary school', in EVS 1999 the group is the value 'inadequate education' and in ISSP 2007 the group is the value 'no formal education'. The group 'Primary school' is in WVS 1996 the value 'complete primary school', in EVS 1999 the group is combined by the values 'complete compulsory education' and 'elementary education' and in ISSP 2007 the group is the value 'lowest formal education'. The group 'secondary school' is in WVS 1996 combined by the values 'complete secondary: technique' and 'complete secondary: university-pre', in EVS 1999 the group is combined by the values '2nd intern vocational qualification', '2nd intern general qualification' and 'full 2nd maturity level certificate' and in ISSP 2007 the group is combined by the values 'above lowest qualification' and 'higher secondary completed'. The group 'Above secondary school' is in WVS 1996 the value 'some university-level education', in EVS 1999 the group is the value 'higher educational- lower lever' and in ISSP 2007 the group is the value 'higher educational upper-level'. The group 'University' is in WVS 1996 the value 'University-level education', in EVS 1999 the group is the value 'higher education upper-level' and in ISSP 2007 the group is the value 'university degree completed'

different values in the three datasets, and therefore the differences between the different education groups can be random and hence cannot be completely valid.

When looking at different educational groups in Croatia not much movement can be seen in the different groups social trust scores from 1999 to 2007. Unfortunately data is missing from 1996. However a little rise is seen when looking at the 'primary school group'. This is quite remarkable but this can be an explanation of why we do not see a larger decline in Croatia's social trust score from 1999 to 2007 in general. A little decline is seen when looking at the two groups 'university' and 'above secondary school', while there are no movement when looking at the groups 'no formal education' and 'secondary school'. The educational group 'secondary school' is as seen in Slovenia the group which has the highest level of social trust in the whole period.

To sum up when looking at educational groups in Slovenia and Croatia not much movement is seen in either of the two countries. None of the groups in the two countries seem to have a large rise or decline in the period and the development can therefore be said to include all groups

In conclusion when disaggregating Croatia's and Slovenia's social trust scores among age-groups, employment status-groups and educational groups it is seen: That the development in social trust Slovenia and Croatia encompasses the two societies as a whole and cannot be subscribed to individual-level factors. This is seen because none of the different groups have a development in social trust which stands markedly out from the other groups.

Theory

As shown above, the diversified development in social trust in Croatia and Slovenia 1996-2007 cannot be subscribed to individual level factors. Hence a look at the broader context seems relevant. Existing context-based explanations about the roots of social trust emphasize equilibrium and stability though.

Uslaner argues that social trust is a moral norm, a norm that is founded during childhood and stable over the life course [Uslaner 1998, 2001, 2002]. Also Putnam [1993, 2000] sees social trust as stable. He argues that in areas with a civic community i.e. areas with strong, dense and horizontal networks and with tolerant and engaged people, people will be socialized to have a high amount of social trust. These civic communities are stable and the formations of these are traced to the eleventh century [Putnam 1993]. Rothstein, though not emphasizing socialization as the trust creating mechanism, insists that the universalistic welfare states in Scandinavia creates equality both objective economic equality, but also promoting an equality of opportunity. This fosters a high level of social- as well as political- and institutional trust. Hence the Scandinavian countries are in a state of a positive equilibrium harvesting the fruits of well functioning institution, whereas the post-communist countries are caught in a negative equilibrium – a social trap of low social-, institutional and political trust [Rothstein 2000; Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Rothstein and Stolle 2007; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005].

As it is shown above existing context-based explanations of social trust by Uslaner, Putnam and Rothstein all emphasize stability and equilibrium. The Croatian and Slovenian development is clearly not one of stability though. The individual level explanations on the other hand do not hold much prominence either; the development in social trust in both countries is encompassing the society in general and not just specific groups. This poses a paradox; the existing theory does not seem to be able to explain the empirical development in the two countries.

Consequently what is needed and what this paper suggests is a context-based explanation of social trust that allows for relatively rapid changes in social trust. This said the point is not to dismiss the insights that other authors writing about social trust have presented. The argument about public sentiment that will be presented in the following is thus to a high extent a synthesis of already existing knowledge. The paper's argument will be presented in the following.

Equality of opportunity, horizontal relations and uncorrupted politicians

One factor that stands out as important in generating and maintaining social trust in a society is different forms of equality. The first form worth mentioning is what Rothstein denotes equality of opportunity. Putnam [1993] thus describes how the provinces of southern Italy are characterised by clientelism, mistrust and corruption because the societies are dominated by vertical relations. On the other hand in the civic communities in northern Italy horizontal relations dominate making the citizens: “...*helpful, respectful, and trustful toward one another, even when they differ on matters of substance*” [Putnam 1993: 88].

In the societies where the vertical relations dominate an equality of opportunity clearly is not present; the privileged classes have a clear advantage in opportunities compared to the less privileged. They have money to bribe public officials and others with, they can ask favours and get advantages using their network. The less privileged on the other hand often have to rely on help from more privileged persons than themselves – either financially or by putting a word in for them. But by accepting these good favours you at the same time put yourself in some kind of debt to the helper. This mechanism is exactly what characterises and nurses the vertical structure of these societies [Putnam 1993; Rothstein 2005].

Rothstein points to the same features although focussing on the public sector. His argument is that the actions of public officials are seen as a yardstick for how people in the society acts in general. Hence in societies where people experience a fair, just, transparent and uncorrupted treatment from the public officials, a belief that not only the public officials, but also everybody else in the society, will act to enhance the common good. This creates social trust. In societies where the public officials are corrupt, and you are dependent on contacts – vertical relationships – this positive circle does not exist [Rothstein 2000; Rothstein and Stolle 2001; Rothstein and Stolle 2007; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005].

Quite solid theoretical grounds thus exist to claim, that the social trust is related to societies characterised by a high degree of an equality of opportunity for the citizens. This said, two specifications of the above are in order. *Firstly* the behaviour of the politicians seems relevant as well. Supplementing Rothstein's argument that citizens infer experiences with public officials to perceptions on the trustworthiness of the people in the society in general. The elected parliamentary politicians could to an even higher extent be seen as the yardstick of the state of the public trustworthiness. As Abraham Lincoln said in his famous Gettysburg address: "...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" [Lincoln 1863]. If the politicians who are elected to represent the society, to take care of the country's future and the taxes everybody has paid, are not to be trusted - and if even they are corrupt, then how can people trust the ordinary people in the society?

The *second specification* deals with the nature of the equality of opportunity statement. For Putnam and Rothstein the general characteristics - of the relations of the society being vertical or horizontal, or the treatment the public officials in a country gives its citizens - seems to be rather objectively understood. It is no wonder that Putnam and Rothstein ends up emphasising stability and equilibrium, since these general characteristics probably do not change markedly over relatively short time intervals. But we would argue that it is both the actual functioning of the public sector that is important, but also how it is *perceived* to function that matters. This perceived dimension is especially apparent in connection with the politicians.

People in the society cannot know for sure, if the politicians are acting incorrupt, honestly and on behalf of the common good. But they do have bits of information from the media about how the politicians act. The media discourse can change rather fast and sometimes radically. Since media are the only source of information about the politicians for most people, it seems reasonable to suspect that if the media's portrayal of the politicians changes abruptly, it should have some effect

on people's view of the politician's trustworthiness and thus social trust. In case of a change to a more negative media discourse regarding the honesty of the elected politicians, the public sentiment also becomes more negative.

To sum up it is argued that the insights of Rothstein and Putnam can be supplemented. *Firstly* it is not only the public official's but also the elected politician's actions are relevant. *Secondly* both the perceived behaviour and nature of politicians and public officials are relevant, as well as their actual actions. Taking these modifications into consideration, and thus connecting the development in social trust with the changing public sentiment, social trust can be seen as having a much more volatile and contingent nature, than Rothstein, Uslaner and Putnam forecasts.

How can these theoretical insights be used empirically then? *Firstly*, the political development needs to be surveyed. It is clear that especially grand corruption scandals among politicians must have an effect. But not only these big events can have an effect; if the country for a long period is mismanaged by politicians, that you had high expectations for, you will lose the faith in the politicians and hence the public sentiment will worsen. Contrary if the expectations for the politicians are not high, and despite these the country seems to be managed good enjoying successes, the faith in the politicians and the public sentiment will improve. *Secondly*, it is of course not only the political development that is important. The behaviour of the political institutions and the public officials are also important in this respect. If corrupt politicians in general are put to justice, then the negative effect on the public sentiment and social trust is maybe not so big. Survey indicators measuring political and institutional trust in capsule this contextual development.

Equality, a positive economic and social development and optimism

Since public sentiment can be said to be a term for how people in the society perceive the country's current situation, it is obvious that any investigations of such should include the economic and social situation of the country as well.

Not just perceived equality of opportunity seems important for generation social trust in societies. Economic equality, and more generally good social and economic conditions for people in a society in general, actually seem to be more or less of a prerequisite for a high degree of social trust. This seem to be the case both on the individual level, where “the less-privileged” in societies always seem to have a lower degree of social trust scores than the rest of the population [Guldbrandtsen 2001; Albrekt Larsen 2007; Skov Henriksen 2008]⁶. It also seems to be the case in aggregate level analysis, where the degree economic equality in societies – often measured with the Gini-coefficient – is often the strongest predictor of country-differences in social trust [Delhey and Newton 2005; Uslaner 2001; Albrekt Larsen 2007; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009].

It seems obvious that should a country over a relatively short period experience a markedly deteriorating social and economic situation and rising inequality, the public sentiment should be affected in the negative direction. The question is: can these short time changes affect social trust?

As the case was above, the existing literature on this point have a kind of stability-bias. Uslaner [2001] thus explains intergenerational differences in USA in social trust with differences in the different cohort's economic conditions or more specifically ability to earn noticeably more than their parents [Uslaner 2001]. Albrekt Larsen [2007] argues that whether a culturally distinct underclass exists in a society or not is of fundamental importance for the degree of social trust of

⁶ See the tables above also.

that society. The general social stratification-pattern in a society should in anything but extreme cases be relatively stable over short time periods, why his equality-claim also inhibits a short term stability-bias.

This bias could possibly be overcome, by combining the arguments with another factor, which is found to correlate with social trust – optimism. Uslaner thus claims that social trusters optimistically believe the world is a good place, which can be made an even better place by the effort of oneself as well as others [Uslaner 2001: 2-4]. He also finds that different indicators of optimism at the individual level correlate with social trust. But, optimism is according to Uslaner a very stable personal characteristic of a person. Being an optimistic person or not is a part of one's moralistic trust, which is built on norms founded in the childhood not varying over time.

Although Uslaner could be right that some people in general are more optimistic than others about the future, in a common sense understanding of the concept, it seems reasonable to claim it varies. On more theoretical grounds, other traditions in the literature about social trust also claim that whether people think other people in general can be trusted or not is actually based on more or less rational evaluations based on past experiences [Hardin 2002; 2006; Guldbrandsen 2001]. Thus experiencing a rapidly deteriorating economic and social situation of your country should *ceteris paribus* affect whether you are optimistic or not. The state of public sentiment could also be seen as the state of optimism for the society, why the two concepts are closely related.

How can the above insights be used empirically then? *Firstly* the economic and social development of the countries needs to be surveyed – we will look at the development in the unemployment and the Gini-coefficients of the countries. While economic equality and a positive social development should lead to an improving public sentiment and a rising social trust, a rising inequality and a deteriorating social and economic situation should correspond with a negative development in

public sentiment. This is almost the same as saying that the optimism of the country will lower. Survey-indicators of optimism often tap a very individual concept of optimism though [see Uslaner 1998, 2001, 2002; Lolle and Torpe 2009]: Stating how happy you are, or if you are satisfied with your life should be connected to the developments in public sentiment in a country. But these questions are also related to much more individual circumstances. Therefore it can be expected, that the optimism-indicators can be connected with the public sentiment, but on the other hand these indicators are also affected by circumstances on a more individual level. As a result they are not tapping the society based public sentiment completely⁷.

Analysis

So what characterises Croatia and Slovenia in the period 1996-2007? How has the political, institutional, social and economical context developed in the two countries? And what about the political and institutional trust as well as the general state of optimism in the two populations? The following two sections in turn deals with respectively the political and institutional dimension of public sentiment presented in the section “equality of opportunity, horizontal relations and uncorrupted politicians”. Afterwards the social and economical dimension of public sentiment presented in the section “equality, a positive economic and social development and optimism” will be dealt with.

Transition to democracy versus rampant nepotism

In the following section the political development in Slovenia and Croatia will be surveyed. Both Slovenia and Croatia have undergone perceptible changes since their independence from Yugoslavia. First of all one important difference between the countries was how they gained their

⁷ In a factor analysis the optimism indicators, the general state of happiness, satisfaction with life and feeling of control over your life, correlate. KMO is 0,613, Cronbach's Alpha is 0,661 and clearly just one component is extracted. cf. Appendix. This common optimism dimension also correlates significantly with social trust. The correlation between the social trust dummy and the optimism index is highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and Pearson's r is 0.055.

independence. Slovenia had just 10 days of war, while Croatia experienced a long and gruesome war from 1991 to 1995. Croatia's social trust score is as seen above higher than Slovenia's in 1996. An explanation could be that the Croatians were still in a state of war euphoria. They had just won the war and hence the public sentiment should be affected positively by this. The euphoria did not seem to last though.

In both Croatia and Slovenia the former socially owned companies have been privatised. However this process has been done in different ways. The privatisation in Croatia has been done in a way where some groups in the society have been given preferential treatment at the expense of the rest of the population. Friends of the former ruling party HDZ became owners of most of the biggest companies because of their connections with the party. This created a new class of so-called tycoon capitalists. They were not able to create the expected improvements of the Croatian economy. The companies didn't become internationally competitive and all values were drained from the companies [Bartlett 2003: 92-111]. HDZ and the so-call tycoon capitalists can be said to have a big part of the responsibility of the economical and social crises the country were in, starting in the end of the nineties. The economical and social crises will be portrayed in the next section.

The privatization in Slovenia happened in a totally different way. The process has been slow and the main purpose for the country was to maintain the social cohesion in the country. The process has not been beneficial for either insiders as in Croatia or foreign outsiders as in many other post communistic countries. Instead it was very clear what the values of the former collective owned companies was spent on and a part of it was even distributed directly to the entire population [Zajc 1997: 170; Cox 2005: 147-149].

Additionally Slovenia has often been described as one of the most free, stable and democratic countries in CEE [Cox 2005: 117-124 + 145]. Contrary Croatia's former president Tudjman and his

party HDZ have often been seen as quite authoritarian. For instance Tudjman tried to implement restrictions on the freedom of the press [Bartlett 2003: 50-51].

The development in Slovenia is thus described in a very positive way, while the opposite is the case for Croatia. It is however interesting if this can be captured in the way Slovenians and Croatians perceive the institutions in their countries. Hence measures of trust in public institutions, public officials and politicians will be examined in the following. First indexes constructed from scores of trust in various political institutions will be examined.

Table 2. *Trust in Political Institutions*

	<i>3-5 (High)</i>	<i>6-7</i>	<i>8-9</i>	<i>10-12 (low)</i>	<i>Mean (std.dev.)</i>
<i>Slovenia</i>					
WVS 1996	7 %	25 %	45 %	23 %	8,22 (1,84)
EVS 1999	9 %	28 %	45 %	19 %	8,01 (1,88)
<i>Croatia</i>					
WVS 1996	15 %	36 %	36 %	13 %	7,41 (1,99)
EVS 1999	4 %	24 %	47 %	25 %	8,45 (1,81)

The table is based on the percentage of Slovenians and Croatians trust in various political institutions. Trust in political institutions is measured by two indexes constructed, one for each survey. For WVS 1996 the variables used are: v137, confidence in: legal system, v141 confidence in: police and v144 confidence in: parliament. For EVS 1999 the variables used are: v205 confidence in: police, v206 confidence in: parliament and v212 confidence in: justice system. For Slovenia N = 931 (1996) and 946 (1999) and for Croatia N = 1109 (1996) and 967 (1999).

Table 2 shows an incremental rise in the institutional trust in Slovenia from 1996 to 1999. The rise is so small that it is close to not being statistically significant. When looking at the variables constructing the index separately, it's clear that the Slovenes trust in their legal system changes significantly. 35 percentage points are located in the two positive categories in the original four

point ordinal scaled variable in 1996, while this figure is 44 percentage points in 1999. The trust in the police and parliament don't change significantly though⁸.

Croatians institutional trust from 1996 to 1999 decreases quite notable. This is clearly illustrated when looking at the category '10-12'. In 1996 13 percent of the Croatians have given that answer but in 1999 it is 25 percent – an increase of 12 percentage points. Compared to Slovenia people in Croatia in 1996 have a higher confidence in their political institutions. There is actually a quite notable difference between the two countries. In 1999 it is now Slovenia which has the highest confidence in their political institutions. The difference between the two countries is not quite as notable as in 1996 but it is still relatively marked.

When looking at the variables in the indexes separately it is clear that Croatia's trust decreases most to the parliament and legal/justice system. There is also a fall in the confidence to the police but it is not as notable as to the other two institutions⁹. The most diversified development between Croatia and Slovenia is thus in the trust in the justice system. This doesn't seem surprising given Croatia's nepotistic privatization process and the opposite in Slovenia. The development seems to be representative of justice and injustice.

Unfortunately the questions about trust in political institutions were not asked in the ISSP 2006-07¹⁰. Instead questions about trust in public officials and politicians were asked. They can be used as a proxy for the institutional trust question.

⁸ cf. appendix.

⁹ cf. appendix.

¹⁰ In Croatia and Slovenia ISSP 2006 and 2007 were collected simultaneously in 2007.

Table 3. *Trust in public officials and politicians*

	4-7 (high)	8-10	11-13	14-16	17-20 (Low)	Mean (std.dev.)
<i>Slovenia</i>						
ISSP 2007	1 %	14 %	44 %	33 %	9 %	13,05 (2,56)
<i>Croatia</i>						
ISSP 2007	0 %	6 %	30 %	45 %	19 %	14,37 (2,48)

The table is based on the percentage of Slovenians and Croatians trust in public officials and politicians. Trust in public officials and politicians are measured by an index constructed via the following variables: v50 trust in civil servants, v58 Public officials deals fairly with people like me, v60 Politicians involved in corruption and v61 Public officials involved in corruption from the survey ISSP Role of Government 2006-07. For Slovenia N = 799 and for Croatia N = 895.

Table 3 shows that the majority of the Slovenians and the Croatians are located in the lower end of the index indicating quite a low trust in public officials and politicians. However there is still a remarkable difference between the two countries. 64 percentage points of the Croatians has an index-score of between 14 and 20 – which is the lower end of the index. “Only” 42 percentage points of the Slovenians have given that answer. Additionally it is also remarkably that so few Croatians have confidence – only 6 percent have given an answer which indicates passably confidence in their public officials and politicians (the categories 4-10). 15 percent of the Slovenians have given an answer between 4-10.

When comparing the variables constructing the index separately, the Slovenians are more trusting than the Croatians in each case except for the question about, if “the public officials deals fairly with people like me”. Both Croatians and Slovenians have lowest confidence in their politicians¹¹.

¹¹ cf. appendix

If we compare the indexes from 1996 and 1999 with the one from 2007 it is clear that the tendency from 1999 continues in 2007. The difference between Slovenia and Croatia in 1999 where the Slovenians seemed to have most confidence in their political institutions continues in 2007. Only here the difference between the two countries is more notable. A comparison is of course problematic because it is not the same index, however the tendency is quite clear – the Slovenians have more confidence than the Croatians. This indicates that the perceived behaviour and nature of politicians and public officials are indeed relevant and hence not only their actual actions.

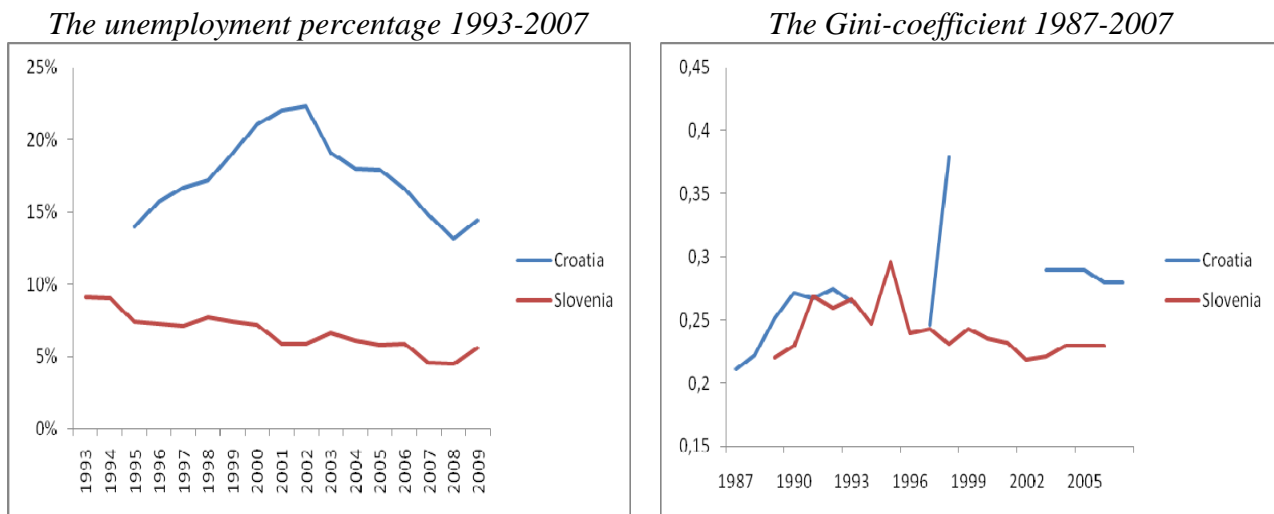
It seems clear, that the Slovenians have experienced a somewhat positive development in their institutional trust. Taking their privatization process into consideration this doesn't seem surprising. Croatia has oppositely experienced a decrease in their institutional trust. Looking at the context this doesn't seem strange. During this period the Croatians have experienced euphoria after winning their war of independence. This euphoria was however soon replaced by experiences of a privatization process influenced by nepotism and injustice.

This indicates a positive development in Slovenia's public sentiment and a negative development in Croatia's. This will be examined further in the next section where Slovenia's and Croatia's economic and social development will be surveyed.

Stability and prosperity versus disappointed expectations

Croatia and Slovenia have gone through a quite diversified *economic and social development* since they gained their independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Croatia has had a much harder period of transition with great economic and social consequences, whereas Slovenia's transition has been more painless. The employment rate and the development of the gini-coefficient in the two countries will illustrate that.

FIGURE 4. *The development in the unemployment percentage and the Gini-coefficient in Croatia and Slovenia 1987-2007*



The Slovenian data for the years 1993-2007 are acquired from the “Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia”. While the years 2008-2009 are acquired from the monthly bulletin from the Slovenian central bank. The Croatian data for the years 1996-2009 are gathered from the Croatian national banks homepage. Data for the year 1995 is acquired in [Bartlett 2003: 10].

The Slovenian and Croatian data for the years 1987-2003 are acquired from the variable undp_gini from the “Quality of Government” dataset [original source: UNPD 2004]. The Slovenian data for the years 2004-2006 are acquired from the “Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia”. The Croatian data from the years 2004-2007 are acquired from Croatia’s “Central Bureau of Statistics”. For Croatia data for several years are missing.

Figure 4 shows that the Croatian unemployment has been very fluctuating and very high in the whole period, while the Slovenian has been stable and low. The income-inequality in Croatia, measured in gini-coefficient, has also been higher and more fluctuating than in Slovenia. The unemployment and gini figures are only examples of the economical crisis which exploded in the late nineties in Croatia. Other symptoms of this economical and social crisis were a rapid rise in the amount of people living in poverty in Croatia, bank collapses and rising public expenditures caused by the many pensioners, war veterans and unemployed, who all had a right for public grants [Bartlett 2003: 92-125]. Slovenia has in general been a richer country than Croatia in the period. Their GDP/inhabitant was thus in 1998 10404 \$ while Croatia’s in the same year was just 3960 \$ [Cox 2005: 65-68 + 150]. As described in the last section the economic and social crisis in Croatia

in the late nineties was also connected with the big corruption scandals involving the ruling party HDZ and the tycoon capitalist, who managed to bankrupt a lot of the big former collectively owned companies with severe effects on the Croatian economy as a consequence.

There is good reason to suspect that this much diversified social and economical development in the two countries in the period has left a diversified mark on the public sentiment as well. While the Croatians probably have had their expectations disappointed by being struck by mass unemployment and poverty after gaining independence, the Slovenians have been spared of these forms of crisis. As one of the only post communist countries in CEE, they have not had a big rise in the inequality and unemployment in their transition to a market economy. Instead of disappointed expectations they have experienced a number of successes crowned with the entry into EU in May 2004.

You could suspect that this diversified public sentiment development could have left a mark on different indicators of optimism - although it needs to be kept in mind that these indicators also tap non-societal individual circumstances. In the following it will be investigated if this assumption is correct. In identifying which variables to use as optimism indicators, Uslaner's own measurement of the concept is used as an inspiration [Uslaner 1998: 3-7, 2001: 15-23, 2002 and Lolle and Torpe 2009]. Three optimism indicators will be examined in the following.

TABLE 4. “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?”

	<i>Very Happy</i>	<i>Quite Happy</i>	<i>Not very Happy</i>	<i>Not at all Happy</i>	<i>Balance</i>
<i>Slovenia</i>					
WVS 1996	14 %	61 %	23 %	3 %	49
EVS 1999	16 %	62 %	20 %	3 %	56
ISSP 2007	16 %	64 %	18 %	2 %	61
<i>Croatia</i>					
WVS 1996	9 %	62 %	27 %	3 %	40
EVS 1999	14 %	68 %	16 %	2 %	64
ISSP 2007	16 %	54 %	26 %	5 %	39

The data is frequency distributions of the variables v10 in WVS 1996, v11 in EVS 1999 and v64 in ISSP 2007. The last row displays the opinion balances of the scores, which are calculated as the sum of the row one and two subtracted the sum of row three and four. For Slovenia: N = 998 (1996), 979 (1999) and 979 (2007). For Croatia: N = 1183 (1996), 992 (1999) and 1178 (2007).

Table 4 displays a gradual positive development for Slovenia. 12 percentage points shifts from the two negative categories to the two positive categories from 1996 to 2007. This is reflected in the balance. The table also shows that the Croatian’s perception of how happy they are increases from 1996 to 1999 and then decreases again from 1999 to 2007. In the period the Slovenians are generally happier than the Croatians, the difference being highest in 2007. The category ‘Quite happy’ illustrates this: 54 percent of the Croatians have given that answer whereas 64 percent of the Slovenians have given that answer.

TABLE 5. “All things considered, how satisfied with your life as a whole these days?”

	<i>1-4 (Low)</i>	<i>5-7</i>	<i>8-10 (High)</i>	<i>Mean (std.dev.)</i>
<i>Slovenia</i>				
WVS 1996	15 %	51 %	34 %	6,46 (2,13)
EVS 1999	10 %	36 %	54 %	7,23 (2,15)
<i>Croatia</i>				
WVS 1996	21 %	48 %	32 %	6,18 (2,13)
EVS 1999	16 %	42 %	42 %	6,68 (2,30)

The data is frequency distributions of the variables v65 in WVS 1996 and v68 in EVS 1999. The variable originally has ten categories. The three boxes above are created to enhance the clarity of the table. The sum of the scores of respectively the categories 1-4, 5-7 and 8-10 are shown. For Slovenia: N = 1000 (1996) and 1004 (1999). For Croatia: N = 1192 (1996) and 997 (1999).

Table 5 also shows the same positive tendency for the Slovenians as table 4. Here the development is even more remarkable. 20 percentage points more are located in the highest category 8-10 in 1999 than in 1996. Also the Croatians have become more positive from 1996-1999. The same was the case with their level of happiness. Unfortunately data from 2007 are missing but you could expect that the development would become more negatively from 1999 to 2007 as with their level of happiness¹². The Slovenians are more satisfied with their lives both in 1996 and 1999 than the Croatians. Especially in 1999 there is a quite noticeable difference which can be illustrated when looking at the category ‘8-10’ where there is a difference of 12 percentage points.

¹² Emphasizing this point; a factor analysis shows that the three questions measure the same concept, see appendix.

TABLE 6. “Indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out?”

	<i>1-4 (Low)</i>	<i>5-7</i>	<i>8-10 (High)</i>	<i>Mean (std.dev.)</i>
<hr/> <i>Slovenia</i>				
WVS 1996	13 %	41 %	46 %	6,89 (2,24)
EVS 1999	6 %	40 %	51 %	7,17 (2,15)
<hr/> <i>Croatia</i>				
WVS 1996	17 %	46 %	39 %	6,49 (2,27)
EVS 1999	10 %	44 %	46 %	7,04 (2,14)

The data is frequency distributions of the variables v66 in WVS 1996 and v67 in EVS 1999. The variable originally has ten categories. The three boxes above are created to enhance the clarity of the table. The sum of the scores of respectively the categories 1-4, 5-7 and 8-10 are shown. For Slovenia: N = 998 (1996) and 993 (1999). For Croatia: N = 1179 (1996) and 987(1999).

Table 6 displays the same tendency as table 4 and table 5 above: More Slovenes locates in the highest category in 1999 than in 1996. The tendency is not as clear as in table 5 though. The Croatians again have a positive development from 1996 to 1999, which also was the case with the Croatians level of happiness and perception of how satisfied they were with their lives. Compared to Slovenians the Croatians to a little lesser extent have a have a feeling of control over their lives.

The three tables generally express a positive development for both countries on the optimism-indicators from 1996-1999. Unfortunately only the first presented question “*Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?*” is asked in all three surveys. The tendency here is that the Slovenians continue their positive development becoming more optimistic in 2007 than in 1999. The Croatians on the other hand are more pessimistic in 2007 than in 1999. Assuming the

other two questions would show the same tendency if asked in 2007 as the first one, the development in optimism is what could be expected given the economical- and social, but also the political- and institutional development in the two countries in the period.

Conclusion

The case of Croatia and Slovenia has shown that it is possible to move the general level of social trust in a society in a period of just eleven years (1996-2007). Furthermore it seems that the tendency is very broad, encompassing all major social groups in the Slovenian and Croatian populations. This suggests that the explanation for the diversified development in social trust needs to be found in the broader context of the countries and not in individual circumstances. The existing literature about social trust emphasising contextual factors inhibit a stability-bias though. The Croatian and Slovenian development is paradoxical in this optic. What are needed to explain the development are therefore contextual explanations which are able to explain rather rapid changes in social trust. This paper argues that changes in public sentiment can explain such changes. The volatile nature of this concept indeed makes it possible to see social trust as more changeable.

Empirically Croatia and Slovenia have had a much diversified development on relevant factors since 1996. Slovenia seems to have experienced a successful transition towards a well functioning democracy with a slow, just and transparent privatisation process, no big corruption scandals and a steady rise in the institutional trust. Croatia on the other hand quickly switched from euphoria after winning the war to experiences of a chaotic, nepotistic and opaque privatization process with big corruption scandals a more or less destroyed economy and a decreasing institutional trust. The Croatians have furthermore experienced a massive rise in unemployment and poverty, why the lowered optimism in 2007 can be seen as no surprise. The Slovenians have managed to keep a very low level of unemployment as well as an economically very equal society, something which is

almost unique in the post communist countries in CEE. Their optimism figures also show a tendency for a steady but gradual rise in the whole period.

It seems safe to conclude that the Croatians after a number of disappointments must have experienced a negative development in their public sentiment after about the year 2000, while the Slovenians on the other hand have experienced a number of successes crowned with the EU-membership in 2004. This should have led to a constant positive development in their public sentiment. This could be one of the explanations of the diversified and rather rapid changes in the two countries general level of social trust.

A huge amount of literature point to the beneficial effects of a high amount of social trust and because it obviously can erode or be created in a relatively short time span, it seems imperative with further research. This research must try to unravel the dynamic factors which spur the erosion or creation of social trust.

This point is even more relevant in a CEE context where the post-communist countries struggle with their transitions to create well functioning democratic societies and stable economic growths – something which social trust often has been said to be a crucial prerequisite for.

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Datasets

European Value Study 3. wave 1999-2000

ISSP Sport and Leisure 2007

ISSP Role of Government 2006

The Quality of Government dataset

World Values Survey Eastern Europe 1995-1997

Appendix

Factor analysis and reliability test of optimism indicators: the general state of happiness, satisfaction with life and feeling of control over your life

Component	Eigenvalues, total	Eigenvalues, percent of variance	KMO and Bartlett's test	Cronbach's Alpha
1	1,795	59,8	0,613***	0,661
2	0,732	24,4		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. * p< 0.05, **p< 0,01. *** p< 0.001

Crosstabs – confidence in different political institutions in Slovenia and Croatia

1996

Confidence in Legal system	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	7 %	28 %	48 %	16 %
Croatia	10 %	42 %	42 %	7 /

N = 2121

Confidence in Police	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	9 %	38 %	42 %	11 %
Croatia	15 %	46 %	33 %	6 %

N=2155

Confidence in Parliament	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	3 %	22 %	52 %	23 %
Croatia	10 %	32 %	44 %	15 %

N=2099

1999

Confidence in Justice system	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	11 %	33 %	42 %	14 %
Croatia	4 %	27 %	50 %	19 %

N = 1965

Confidence in Police	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	9 %	41 %	41 %	9 %
Croatia	6 %	41 %	43 %	11 %

N=1987

Confidence in Parliament	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
Slovenia	5 %	20 %	53 %	22 %
Croatia	3 %	17 %	54 %	25 %

N=1944

2006

Trust in Civil Servant	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Slovenia	2 %	24 %	31 %	30 %	13 %
Croatia	1 %	10 %	28 %	35 %	27 %

N = 2095

Public officials deal fairly with people like me	Almost Always	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Almost Never
Slovenia	12 %	27 %	33 %	21 %	6 %
Croatia	15 %	26 %	32 %	18 %	9 %

N=2026

Politicians involved in corruption	Almost none	A few	Some	Quite a lot	Almost all
Slovenia	1 %	6 %	36 %	46 %	11 %
Croatia	0 %	4 %	18 %	48 %	30 %

N=1953

Public officials involved in corruption	Almost none	A few	Some	Quite a lot	Almost all
Slovenia	1 %	13 %	45 %	36 %	5 %
Croatia	1 %	8 %	31 %	47 %	14 %

N=1902