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## THE ROLE OF TRAFFIC TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS STATEMENTS IN SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF SOCIAL EXPLOITATION

### ABSTRACT

*The empirical sociological studies of exploitation are nowadays rare in Slovenia and in other countries as well. Research among Slovene students showed that according to their statements there is much exploitation in Slovenia and that it has been increasing. It showed also that statements of students do not differ much from the results of public opinion research regarding exploitation, nor from the statements of irregular students with long working experience. It was also found that there are no substantial differences in statements of Italian and Slovene students. Traffic technology students are a group among full-time students who agree most with the statements that there is much exploitation and that it has been increasing. A hypothesis was set that statements of these students could be used as an indicator of general student opinion regarding exploitation.*

### KEY WORDS

*exploitation, student statements, traffic technology study, social science methodology*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the period 1995 – 2002, the research on student statements regarding exploitation was conducted by the University of Ljubljana [1]. The results of the empirical research among 1215 students from Slovenia and Italy are interesting in general as well as from the point of view of traffic. In this paper a part of these results is presented.

One of the problems regarding empirical research of statements on exploitation is the different meanings of the word »exploitation«. Therefore, in the first part of this article different theoretical definitions of exploitation and student understandings of them are presented. In the second part of the article the results of empirical research of student opinions regarding the extent of exploitation in Slovenia are presented in comparison to statements of traffic technology students.

### 2. DEFINITION OF THE TERM »EXPLOITATION«

The word exploitation has different meanings. It is used in the technical sense (to exploit mineral sources, to exploit woods, etc.) and in the social sense. The latter will be the subject of this presentation. But in this sense, too, the term has more meanings.

#### 2.1. Survey on the usage of the term exploitation in sociological science

Theoretical definitions of the term exploitation could be divided into a few more or less homogeneous groups:

##### a) General definitions of exploitation

Alan Wertheimer has set the following general definition of exploitation, with which, as he says, virtually everyone will agree: »At the most general level, A exploits B when A takes unfair advantage of B. (I shall always refer to the alleged exploiter as 'A' and to the alleged exploitee as 'B')« [2:10]. Theorists agree that the core of exploitation is an unfair, non-moral relationship. Differences among them arise mostly because they have different views of what an »unfair advantage« is.

##### b) Exploitation from the point of view of the type of acquired advantage:

– *Exploitation as unpaid acquisition of the results of other people's labour*

This group includes in the first place different Marxist definitions of exploitation, beginning with the definition of Karl Marx [3:193] and others [4:121] [5:61].

– *Exploitation as instrumental utilisation of people*

Some theorists say that for the existence of exploitation it is enough that a subject A uses a subject B as an instrument, as a means for his purposes, without the acquisition of his surplus

labour or other material advantages [6:87] [7:171] [8:114].

c) Definitions from the point of view of the *coerciveness* of a relationship.

– *Exploitation as a coercive relationship*

Some theorists say that a relationship is exploitative only if exploited persons are forced to accept them [9:357] [10:3-4]. Voluntary participation in such relationship is not seen as exploitation.

– *Exploitation as a relationship that can be entirely voluntary*

For some sociologists a relationship is exploitative also when a person accepts it without material or other type of constraint, if somebody gets advantage from it without an adequate repayment [11:11].

d) There are also other types of definitions<sup>1</sup>.

In social science the Marxist definition of exploitation is mostly known and used; but in Slovenia since 1990 no scientific or professional works on the actual problem of labour exploitation in Slovenia have been published [1:70]. In university teaching this topic has become marginal, as if it were unimportant for actual societies. Some questions about exploitation were included in the research of public opinion in Slovenia [12:279-339] (they will be presented later in this paper). One of the goals of our research was to discover student opinion regarding the extent of exploitation in practice.

## 2.2. How students understand the term exploitation

In the pilot survey among 85 students (first and third year of the traffic technology course at the Uni-

versity of Ljubljana) we asked the students how they understand the term »to exploit somebody«. Among others we asked the students the four questions presented in Table 1. Only the first two of them mean an unfair, non-moral relationship. The last one represents exploitation as a »technical« relation that has a positive value (perform work tasks in a correct way).

A great number of students (more than 75%) understand the term "to exploit somebody" as an unfair relationship with this person (to get something from them without paying for it or getting something else in an unfair way). A minority (28.2%) says that to exploit means to get advantages from somebody. Only 15.3% of students understand exploitation in a technical way as a useful relation, meant to guarantee good work results.

For the purpose of our research, the finding that 84.7% of students understand exploitation as a non-moral relationship was very important. We used this type of definition also in a broader survey, in which we asked questions about the presence of exploitation in our practice.

## 3. STATEMENTS OF STUDENTS REGARDING EXPLOITATION IN SLOVENIA

### 3.1. Description of student samples and the survey methodology

The 1215 students included in the survey were divided into three groups: the major "basic" sample and two "control" samples (Table 2).

The basic sample was formed by regular, full-time students<sup>2</sup> from the University of Ljubljana. This strati-

Table 1 - Understanding of the moral view of exploitation

N=85

To exploit somebody means:	Shares of students who agree (in %)
– to appropriate products of somebody's work without paying for them	75.3
– to take advantages of somebody in an unfair way	84.7
– to get advantages from somebody	28.2
– to make somebody perform work tasks in a correct way	15.3

Source: [1: 75]

Table 2 - Size of samples

Sample	Number of students (N)
Basic sample: regular students of the first year from the University of Ljubljana	611
Control sample: Slovene irregular students	368
Control sample: regular students in the first year from the University of Udine (Italy)	236
Total	1215

Source: [1:85]

**Table 4 - The basic sample: regular students, first year, University of Ljubljana**

Faculty, academy	N	%
<i>Social sciences and the humanities</i>	355	58%
Pedagogical Academy	33	5%
Faculty of Economics	112	18%
Law Faculty	29	5%
Faculty for Social Sciences	44	7%
Management Institute	60	10%
Faculty of Philosophy	77	13%
<i>Natural sciences and technology</i>	256	42%
Faculty of Biotechnology	45	7%
Faculty of Architecture and Constructions	26	4%
Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology	27	4%
Faculty of Engineering	19	3%
Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences	39	6%
Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport	100	16%
Total	611	100%

**Table 5 - First control sample: Slovene irregular students**

Total		Without working experience		1-5 years of working experience		6-10 years of working experience		More than 10 years of working experience	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
368	100%	69	19%	131	36%	64	17%	100	27%

fied representative sample consisted of students of the 12 biggest faculties. Inside each stratum the students were chosen randomly. Table 3 presents the structure of the basic sample.

The first control sample was formed by irregular students, that is, students who have special short courses and pay for their study by themselves; these students are generally older than regular students and have more work experience. The sample included 368 irregular students from different faculties and organisations (from the university sphere and outside) and from different years of study. The sample was not representative but it was important as a control: 81% of these students have had work experience. A lot of them (27%) had more than 10 years of work experience (see Table 5). Therefore, we can assume that they are more familiar with the practice of labour exploitation than regular students.

The second control sample was formed by Italian students of economics. We put questions to 235 regular students from the first year of the University of Udine. We compared their answers with the answers of their Slovene fellows in Ljubljana (same type of study and year) to see if the factor "country" has an important impact on their statements.

The survey was part of a larger study completed in 2002. The practical part of the survey took place during the academic year 1995/96.

### 3.2. Results of the survey

#### 3.2.1. Is the society in which we live exploitative or not?

We put to all students this question »Do you agree or not with this statement: 'In our society there is much exploitation (appropriation of the results of other people's labour)?' « Let us see their answers.

#### *Regular students from the University of Ljubljana*

The majority (83%) of first year regular students agreed with the statement that there is much exploitation in our country. There are no significant differences between the answers of students who study social sciences and humanities and those who are oriented toward technology and natural sciences. Only 4% to 6% of students in both groups disagreed with this statement. Thus the general opinion of students in the basic sample is that Slovene society is exploitative.

This opinion is close to the results of Slovene public opinion research. In 1998, 60% of 1008 ran-

**Table 6 - Statements of regular students (first year): »In our society there is much exploitation (appropriation of the results of other people's labour).«**

Answers	All regular students		Social sciences and humanities		Natural sciences and technology	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I agree	502	83%	282	80%	220	86%
I don't agree	31	5%	20	6%	11	4%
I don't know	69	11%	49	14%	20	8%
Without answer	6	1%	1	0%	5	2%
Total	608	100%	352	100%	256	100%

**Table 7 - Statements of irregular students: »In our society there is much exploitation (appropriation of the results of other people's labour).«**

Answers	All irregular students		Without working experience		1-5 years of working experience		6-10 years of working experience		More than 10 years of working experience	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I agree	321	87%	60	87%	110	84%	57	89%	90	90%
I don't agree	11	3%	3	4%	3	2%	1	2%	4	4%
I don't know	35	10%	5	7%	18	14%	6	9%	6	6%
Without answer	1	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	368	100%	69	100%	131	100%	64	100%	100	100%

domly chosen Slovene people rejected the statement "A man (človek) is adequately paid for his effort". The greater part of Slovenes (62%) also expressed the opinion that they are paid less for their work than they should be [13: 818,819]. We could say that the statements of students regarding exploitation are even more critical than those of the average Slovene.

#### *Irregular students*

Regular students of the first year have the least work experience of all students. Therefore it is useful to compare their statements with statements of irregular students, who have, on the average, more experience.

Irregular students have an even more critical attitude towards social exploitation than regular students. 87% think that there is much exploitation in Slovene society (only 3% disagree with this statement). The more work experience they have, the more they perceive Slovene society as exploitative. 89% of students who have 6-10 years of work experience agree with the statement that there is much exploitation in our society, an even higher percentage (90%) of the students with more than 10 years of work experience agree with this statement.

#### *Italian regular students*

Students who were included in our research in 1995/96 grew up in a social environment which for decades (from 1945 to 1991) was formally dominated by

Marxist ideology, which views the capitalistic society as exploitative. We desired to check whether the above Slovene people were influenced by this ideology; therefore we included students from Italy in the research. A group of regular students of economy from the University of Udine (regular students of the first year) was chosen for this purpose. We compared their statements with the statements of their fellows (first year regular students of economy) from the University of Ljubljana.

The majority of Italian students agree with the statement that there is much exploitation in the society in which they live. But the level of agreement (70%) was not quite as high as it was in the Slovene group of students of economy (75%). The data in table 7 show as well that an important number (21%) of Italian students disagree with this statement. The level of disagreement was much higher than in the Slovene control group (10%). This doesn't alter the general statement that the great majority of both Slovene and Italian students perceive the society in which they live as exploitative, but fewer Italians regard it as exploitative than do Slovenes. We do not know if this reflects effective differences in the practice of exploitation or whether it is the result of possible perceptual differences due to effects of past ideological factors. However, students of economy were the group in our survey who expressed the lowest level of agreement with the opinion that there is much exploitation in the society in which they live.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 8 - Statements of Italian regular students (first year) : »In our society there is much exploitation (appropriation of the results of other people's labour).«**

Answers	Italian students of economy (University of Udine)		Slovene students of economy (University of Ljubljana)	
	N	%	N	%
I agree	165	70%	84	75%
I don't agree	50	21%	11	10%
I don't know	15	6%	16	14%
Without answer	6	3%	1	1%
Total	236	100%	112	100%

**Table 9 - Statements of students of traffic technology : »In our society there is much exploitation (appropriation of the results of other people's labour).«**

Answers	All regular students of the first year		Irregular students		Regular first year students of traffic technology	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I agree	502	83%	321	87%	87	87%
I don't agree	31	5%	11	3%	6	6%
I don't know	69	11%	35	10%	5	5%
Without answer	6	1%	1	0%	2	2%
Total	608	100%	368	100%	100	100%

**Table 10 - Statements of regular students (first year): »During the last decade the level of exploitation: «**

Answers	All regular students		Social sciences and humanities		Natural sciences and technology	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
has increased	286	47%	156	44%	130	51%
has diminished	71	12%	39	11%	32	13%
hasn't changed	82	13%	50	14%	32	13%
I don't know	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
without answer	169	28%	107	30%	62	24%
Total	608	100%	352	100%	256	100%

### *Students of traffic technology*

On the contrary, the group of regular students who study traffic technology expressed the highest level of agreement with the statement that there is much exploitation in their country. 87% of them perceived Slovene society as exploitative; that is the same level we noticed in the group of the much more experienced irregular students (see Table 9).

### **3.2.2. Has the level of exploitation been changing?**

In our survey we also asked questions about possible changes in exploitation during the last ten years. Let us see the answers of different student groups.

### *Regular students from the University of Ljubljana*

An important number of regular students (28%) didn't answer that question. This is not surprising taking into account the age of students in question (19-20 years) and the type of question. Nonetheless, the greatest number of students (47%) declared that the level of exploitation has been increasing. More students of natural sciences and technology (51%) perceived this increase than students of social sciences and humanities.

### *Irregular students*

Irregular students have a more critical attitude towards exploitation during the transition processes in Slovene society than regular students: 59% perceived

**Table 11 - Statements of irregular students: »During the last decade the level of exploitation:«**

Answers	All irregular students		Without working experience		1-5 years of working experience		6-10 years of working experience		More than 10 years of working experience	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
has increased	217	59%	28	41%	80	61%	35	55%	72	72%
has diminished	29	8%	11	16%	8	6%	4	6%	5	5%
hasn't changed	44	12%	10	14%	8	6%	10	16%	16	16%
I don't know	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Without answer	78	21%	20	29%	35	27%	15	23%	7	7%
Total	368	100%	69	100%	131	100%	64	100%	100	100%

**Table 12 - Statements of students of traffic technology: »During the last decade the level of exploitation:«**

Answers	All regular students of the first year		Irregular students		Regular first year students of traffic technology	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
has increased	286	47%	217	59%	55	55%
has diminished	71	12%	29	8%	17	17%
hasn't change	82	13%	44	12%	9	9%
I don't know	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
without answer	169	28%	78	21%	19	19%
Total	608	100%	368	100%	100	100%

an increase in exploitation during the last ten years. Among students with most work experience (more than 10 years) this critical position was even more emphasised: 72% of them say that exploitation has increased and only 5% say that it has diminished.

#### *Students of traffic technology*

Students of traffic technology emerged as the most critical group among regular students regarding their opinion on the changes in exploitation: 55% of them said that the level of exploitation has increased during the last ten years (compared to the average 47% of regular students). Their position is also in this case close to the position of more experienced irregular students (59% irregular students say that the Slovene society is becoming more exploitative).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The survey carried out in 1995/96 among 1215 students showed that according to the students, the exploitation was an important problem in Slovenia (and in Italy as well). At least 75% of Slovene students in-

terviewed agreed with the statement that there is a lot of exploitation in the society in which they live. In this respect the students' statements are similar to the Slovene public opinion poll results, in fact even more critical (60% of Slovenes disagreed with the statement that people in Slovenia are paid adequately for their work). According to the research about this survey and also the Slovene public opinion, the level of exploitation has been increasing.

The traffic technology students are in this respect the most critical among all regular students. This group of students presents the highest level of agreement with the statement that there is much exploitation in the society in which they live and that it has increased. Their opinion is close to the opinions of irregular students, who have had much more work experience than the regular students.

As consequence of our findings a hypothesis was established that the statements of the traffic technology students could function as pilot sociological studies of student statements regarding the level of social exploitation. In 2004, a new survey of student statements regarding exploitation has begun in which we will ascertain the adequacy of this hypothesis.

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## POVZETEK

### VLOGA STALIŠČ ŠTUDENTOV TEHNOLOGIJE PROMETA V SOCIOLOŠKEM PROUČEVANJU DRUŽBENEGA IZKORIŠČANJA

Empirične sociološke raziskave izkoriščanja so dandanes redke tako v Sloveniji kot drugod. Raziskava med slovenskimi študenti je pokazala, da je po mnenju študentov v Sloveniji precej izkoriščanja in da se to povečuje. Pokazala je tudi, da se stališča študentov ne razlikujejo bistveno od ugotovitev javnomnenjskih raziskav o izkoriščanju, pa tudi ne od stališč izrednih študentov z dolgoletno delovno prakso. Izkazalo se je tudi, da ni občutnih razlik med stališči slovenskih in italijanskih študentov. Študentje tehnologije prometa se med vsemi skupinami rednih študentov najbolj strinjajo s trditvami, da je izkoriščanja v naši družbi precej in da se še povečuje. Oblikovana je bila hipoteza o vlogi stališč študentov tehnologije prometa kot indikatorja splošnega stališča študentov v socioloških raziskavah družbenega izkoriščanja.

## KLJUČNE BESEDE

izkoriščanje, stališča študentov, študij tehnologije prometa, sociološke metode

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1. Some theorist say for example, that only exploiters gain in the exploitative relationship, others say that exploited also gain [2:10-13].
2. The terms regular and irregular correspond nearly but not precisely to full time and part time.
3. Research of academic culture showed that there are substantial differences in value orientation of differently oriented students. Students of law and economy on the average tend more towards the professional success (values of power) than others [14]. We can assume that they are more interested in reaching the leading positions in the society in the future. This might be the reason for the

fact that students of economy expressed the lowest level of agreement with the statement that there is much exploitation in their country.

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