

Towards the Patterns of Problem Gambling in Slovenia

K vzorcem problematičnega igranja v Sloveniji

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Abstract

The author analyses the results of the National Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey conducted by the School of Advanced Social Studies in 2008. The prevalence figures based on the SOGS questionnaire from the SASS national survey are not extreme when placed in a comparative perspective but still quite significant. The author then distinguishes between the higher relative risks related mostly to the casino games and the absolute risks related to the games played by the most significant portions of the population – the so called ‘classical games’. Single young men and immigrants are identified as the most vulnerable categories concerning the problem gambling in Slovenia. Finally, a theoretical model is developed to explain problem gambling patterns as a ‘social fact’ at the macro level combining the impacts of cultural patterns, governance, market situation, types and frequency of games played and money spend for particular games to the prevalence of problem gambling.

Keywords: gambling, problem gambling, pathological gambling, SOGS

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Povzetek

Avtor analizira rezultate Nacionalne raziskave prevalece problematičnega igranja, ki jo je izvedla Fakulteta za uporabne družbene študije leta 2008. Podatki o prevalenci na podlagi vprašalnika SOGS iz nacionalne raziskave FUDŠ ne kažejo na ekstremne vrednosti, ko jih postavimo v primerjalno perspektivo, a so vseeno znatni. Avtor nato razlikuje med višjimi relativnimi tveganji povezanimi predvsem z igrami v igralnicah, in absolutnimi tveganji povezanimi z igrami, ki jih igrajo največji deleži prebivalstva – s t.i. klasičnimi igrami. Samski mladi moški in imigranti so prepoznani kot najbolj kategorije, ki so najbolj dovzetne za razvoj problematičnega igranja. Nazadnje avtor razvija teoretični model, da bi pojasnil vzorce problematičnega igranja kot »družbeno dejstvo« na makro ravni, tako da kombinira učinke kulturnih vzorcev, politike, tržnih razmer ter tipov in pogostosti igranja iger in porabljenega denarja za posamezno igro na pogostost problematičnega igranja.

Ključne besede: *igre na srečo, problematično igranje, patološko igranje, SOGS*

Towards the Patterns of Problem Gambling in Slovenia

The central purpose of this paper is to analyze the results of the first Slovenian national Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey conducted in autumn 2008 by the School of Advanced Social Studies (FUDŠ/SASS) and discover some patterns of problem gambling in a comparative perspective. We are interested in the problem and pathological gambling prevalence as a social fact that can be identified at the societal level, not in the individual specifics of the particular problem and pathological gamblers. Moreover, in the final part of the paper there is also an attempt to establish a more generalized model of factors that influence the patterns of problem gambling at the macro level that might be applied not only to the Slovenian case but to the problem gambling patterns in general.

The 2008 problem gambling prevalence survey by SASS was the first of this kind in Slovenia. When one examines the statistics on the consumption for gambling in Slovenia it may seem strange why no prevalence survey had been done before. When compared to the other countries of the European Union, Slovenia occupies one of the highest ranks in terms of money spend for gambling. In 2004, 187 Euros per Slovenian inhabitant were spent for gambling. This figure places Slovenia to the fourth place among the EU countries – after Finland, Luxemburg and Sweden. If only spending for casinos and slot machines is taken into account, Slovenia ranks second in the EU, only after Luxemburg (Jaklič et al. 2007: 41). According to another statistics, spending on gambling in Slovenia is the highest in the EU when calculated as the percentage of household expenses (Insee in Valleur 2009: 76).

The illusion of ‘not-our-problem’: the concept of export oriented gambling

Why then the previous lack of interest in gambling studies in Slovenia? The most obvious reason may lie in the fact that gambling has often been considered a Slovenian industry but not a Slovenian problem. In other words, casino and slot machines gambling began in Slovenia as an export oriented industry strongly related to tourism and it has remained to a significant extent to be considered as such. Generating revenues in Slovenia and exporting gambling problems to other countries, especially the neighboring Italy, might have seemed an easy option but the sustainability of this situation can be questioned.

It is clear that the enormous spending for casino and slot machines gambling in Slovenia is only to some extent the spending by Slovenian population. According to Jaklič et al. (2007:41 ff) only 80 Euros per person were spent for gambling in 2004 when only domestic spending is taken into account. This was in fact below the EU average of 114 Euros. However, when domestic spending for gambling is calculated in terms of countries' GDP, Slovenia (0.62%) was slightly above the EU average (0,50%) in 2004 (ibid. 43). Moreover, the trend after 2004 indicates significant increase in spending for gambling during the following years which was disproportionately higher than the one that could be extrapolated from the GDP growth (ibid. 44). Interest in gambling has clearly been increasing among the Slovenian population.

To understand the gambling patterns and gambling problems in Slovenia, one should distinguish between several types of games, typically available in Slovenia. Slovenian legislation differentiates between classical and special games. The classical include lottery, scratch cards, certain tombola games and sport betting. All casino gambling and slot

machines are considered as special games. Classical games, especially lottery, have a relatively long tradition in Slovenia. They are monopolized by two companies, namely the Lottery of Slovenia and the Sports Lottery based on the concession provided by the government while their profits are used for humanitarian purposes (UNPIS, 2010). These games are mostly played by the local Slovenian population, they are the most common games played among the Slovenians (Makarovič et al. 2008) and they are also considered as relatively harmless and unproblematic by the general public, especially when compared to casino gambling (Makarovič 2008).

Casino gambling, on the other hand, was traditionally much more distant from the local population. The first casino was opened in 1913, i.e. just before the World War I in the Slovenian coastal town of Portorož, at that time a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Luin 2004). It was oriented towards the elite and its existence was much too brief to affect the local population in any way. It was followed by the decades of prohibition of casino gambling first in the Yugoslav monarchy and then in the communist Yugoslavia.

However, legal casino gambling reappeared during the communist times but as an activity only accessible for the foreign tourists, while strictly forbidden for the local population. Thus, in 1964 the first casino after half a century was opened in Slovenia, once again in Portorož and after that in Bled. It was again an elite activity, offered to the wealthy foreign tourists. During the 1980s Nova Gorica became the first tourist destination in Slovenia (and in Yugoslavia which Slovenia had been a part of) where casino gambling was not a supplementary but the central local attraction for western, mostly Italian, tourists (Luin 2004). Even after the democratization and liberalization of Slovenia in the beginning of the 1990s when casino gambling became accessible for the local population

as well, it remained an export oriented activity – firmly linked with tourism. Consequently, its impact on local population was mostly not considered even when gambling supply began to spread, especially with the rise of the gambling halls. Technically the gambling halls in Slovenia only differ from the casinos that they do not offer live table games but mostly slot machines and sometimes also electronic equivalents to the table games, such as electronic roulette. Formally, however, the difference is more significant: while casinos with live table games are owned by the state and municipalities, the gambling halls are privately owned. Moreover, gambling halls have gradually become more attractive for the local population than casinos and are thus less export oriented than the casinos.

The lack of consideration of the social costs of gambling among the local population has been clearly demonstrated by an expertise by Bole and Jere (2004) for the Ministry of Finance. The authors claimed that the distance between different gambling halls and casinos should be ‘at least 11 to 22 minutes of normal drive by car’ (Bole and Jere 2004: 3). Clearly, collecting revenues was the only aspect taken into account and the only aspect relevant for the Ministry of Finance at that time. In some areas, however, the density of casinos and gambling halls is even greater. If we use the criteria reported by an American study by Gerstein et al. (in Reith 2006: 46) who claimed that problem gambling rates double when gambling facilities are accessible within the 50 miles radius, Slovenia is more than fully ‘covered’ by the gambling supply. Almost its entire population is included even if only a half of this distance is applied (Macur et al. 2009: 271).

The social costs of gambling and the prevalence of problem gambling only became an issue in 2007 when the plans for the ‘Mega-Centre’ by Harrah’s Entertainment and the local company Hit were presented to the

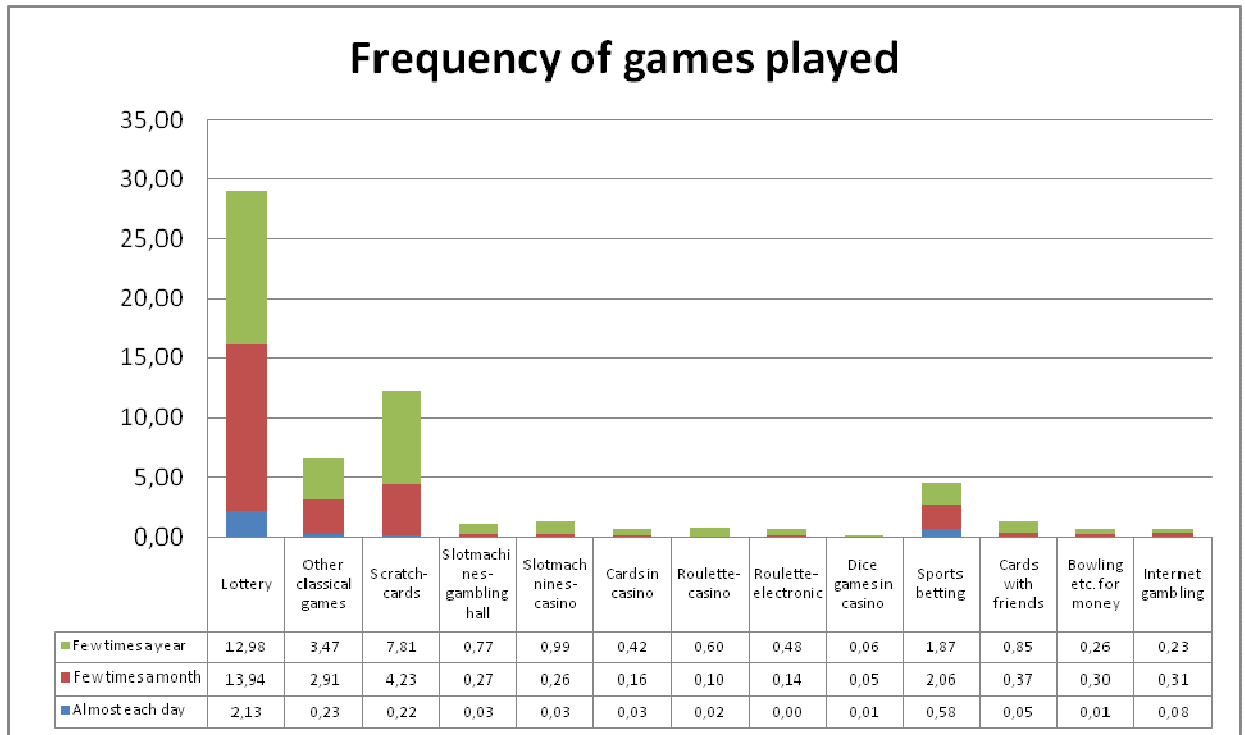
public. Finally, at the end of 2008, we conducted the first prevalence survey on the national sample of 10.001 (Makarovič et al. 2008).

In this paper we deal with two major issues: first, what do the results tell us about the patterns of gambling within the Slovenian population; and second, how can one interpret these patterns in a wider context. Concerning the latter issue, it may be of particular interest whether gambling patterns are something deeply rooted in the national culture (or even civilization) or is it the availability of certain types of games in certain social contexts that generates gambling patterns? As we shall see, the Slovenian data from 2008 seem to indicate that combination of both may be the case.

Gambling patterns and problem gambling: relative and absolute risks

The proportion of people who gamble in Slovenia is quite modest. 35.5 per cent of respondents have claimed to play at least one of the games included in the survey in the last year. Lottery, scratch cards, sports betting and other classical games are far the most common among Slovenians. The dominance of these types of games is in fact quite a typical European pattern. These games are followed by playing cards and other games for money (outside casinos) with friends and only then by slot machines in casinos and gambling halls. No other casino game was played last year by more than 1 per cent of the sample. The proportion of casino and slot machines gambling among the Slovenian population is thus quite low when compared to the other European countries with similar (or even much lower) gambling supply. This clearly confirms the thesis on the predominantly export oriented casino and slot-machines gambling in Slovenia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Games played and their frequency during the last year by the Slovenian population



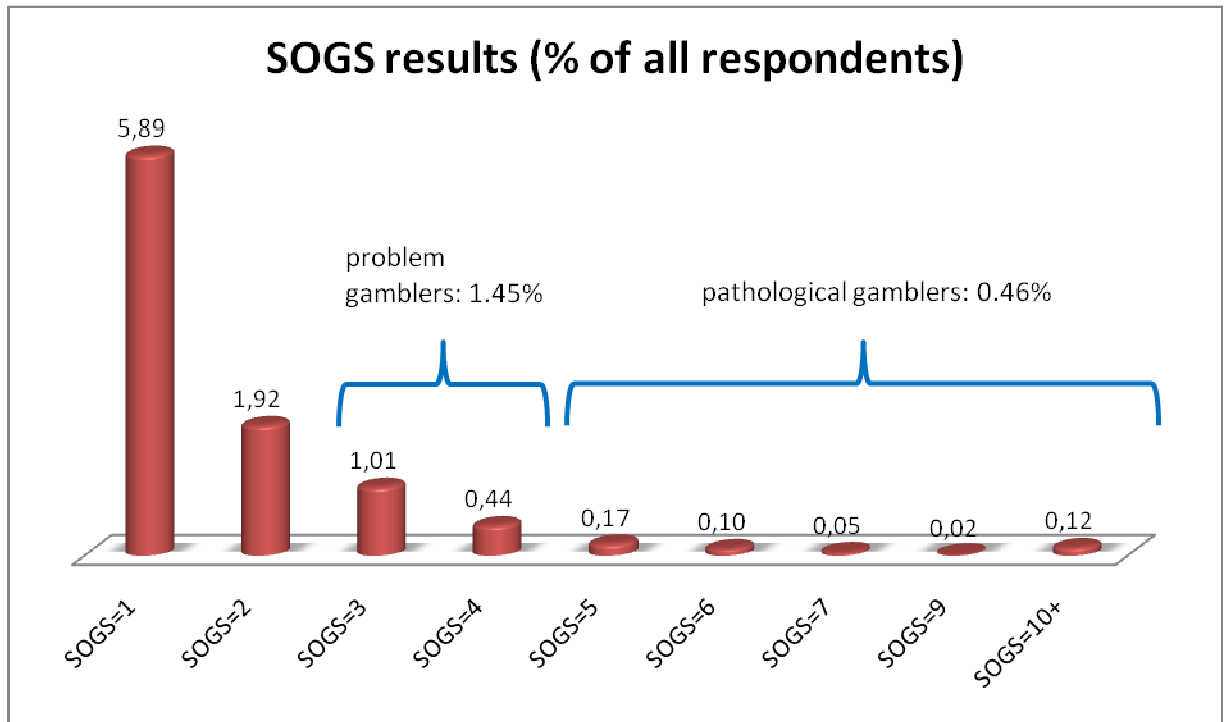
Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

It does not imply, however, that Slovenian population is problem free as far as gambling problems are concerned. Our survey included the South Oaks Gambling Screen questionnaire in order to determine the prevalence of gambling problems within the population. We discovered significant risks of problem gambling (SOGS scores of three and four) among 1.45 per cent of our respondents. Another 0.46 per cent have even more serious problems (SOGS scores of more than four) that are usually described as pathological gambling (see Figure 2).

The figures of problem and pathological gambling for Slovenia are thus far from extreme when compared to other countries. They are, for instance, somewhat higher than those in Germany, comparable to

Northern Italy, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway; while significantly lower than those in Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, not even to mention Estonia or some non-European countries such as the United States, Australia or New Zealand (see: Meyer et al., eds. 2009; Reith 2006 etc.). The Slovenian problem and pathological gambling, however, are still quite significant when compared to the proportion of population that actually plays the games. This may be interpreted as a result of comparatively poorly developed responsible gambling policies in Slovenia. If gambling as such is about to increase during the following years and decades as it has been predicted from the previous trends (see e.g. Jaklič et al. 2007) and problem gambling is about to increase proportionally one certainly has good reasons to worry. This leads us once again to the question whether gambling is determined more by some relatively stable cultural patterns or simply by what is available. If the latter is the case we can expect a serious increase of both gambling and gambling problems in Slovenia in the near future.

Figure 2: The results of SOGS test in the Slovenian representative national sample, 2008



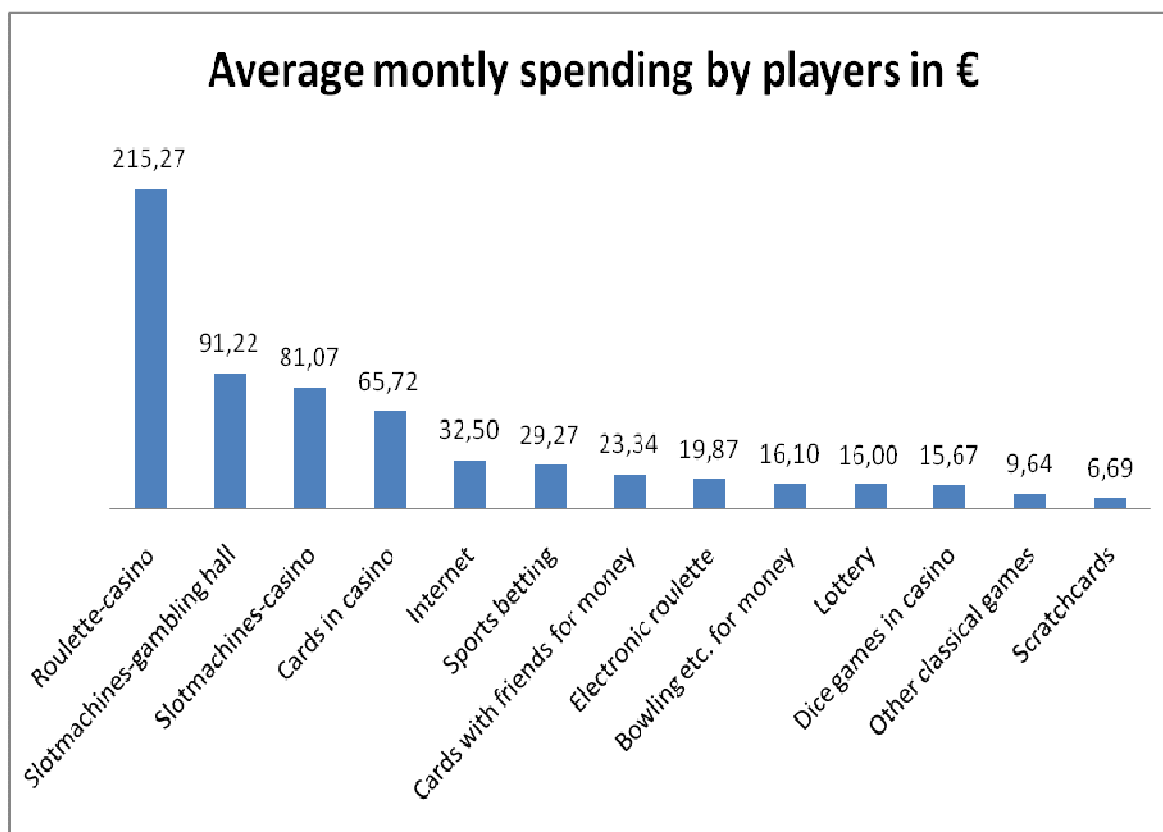
Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

Another question is which games cause most of the problems. Here we can observe an interesting contrast. While classical games of lottery and scratch cards are played by most of the people, casino and slot-machines games lead people to spend more money on them per month (see Figure 3).

The distinction between the relative risks of problem gambling caused by casino games and the absolute risks of problem gambling caused by classical games is even more interesting. In relative terms, live casino games and internet games are far more risky than lottery or scratch cards, since greater proportions of those playing these games are pathological gamblers. In absolute terms, however, the situation is

somewhat reversed. Since lottery, scratch cards and sports betting are far more popular than the other games, the highest proportion of pathological gamblers consists of the players of these games. Playing classical games may thus be enough to generate significant amounts of problem and pathological gambling. 61.7 per cent of pathological gamblers have not played casino, slot-machines and internet games at all – classical games such as lottery, scratch cards and sports betting were quite enough in their cases to generate severe gambling problems.

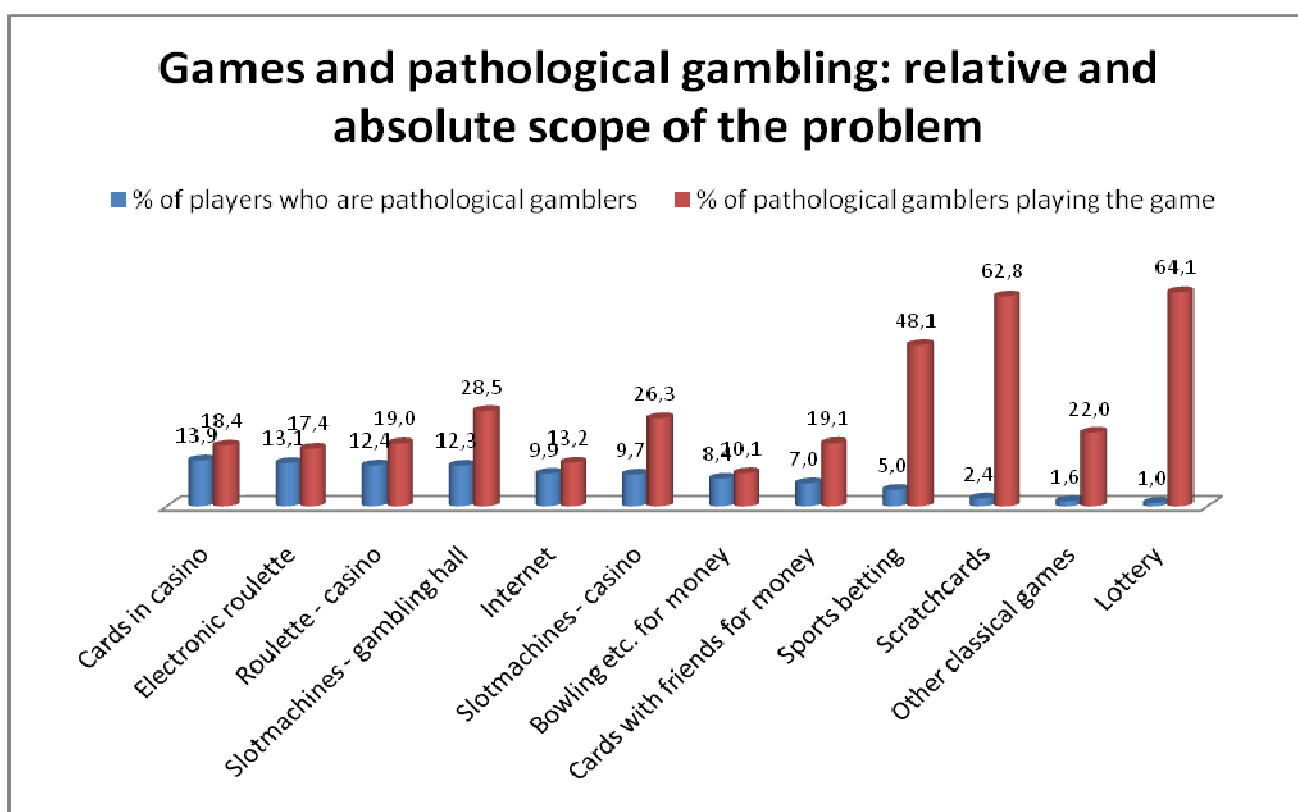
Figure 3: Average monthly spending by players for particular games in Euros (estimated by the respondents)



Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

Particular attention should also be devoted to the risks related to the slot machines. These games seem to be quite problematic in both absolute and relative terms. More than a quarter of pathological gamblers has played slot machines games during the last year and 12.5 per cent of slot machine players in gambling halls and 9.7 per cent slot machine players in the casinos reported serious gambling problems (pathological gambling) according to SOGS (Figure 4). Concerning the particular risks related to the slot machines gambling, Slovenia is quite comparable with most of the other countries.

Figure 4: Relative and absolute problems of different types of games



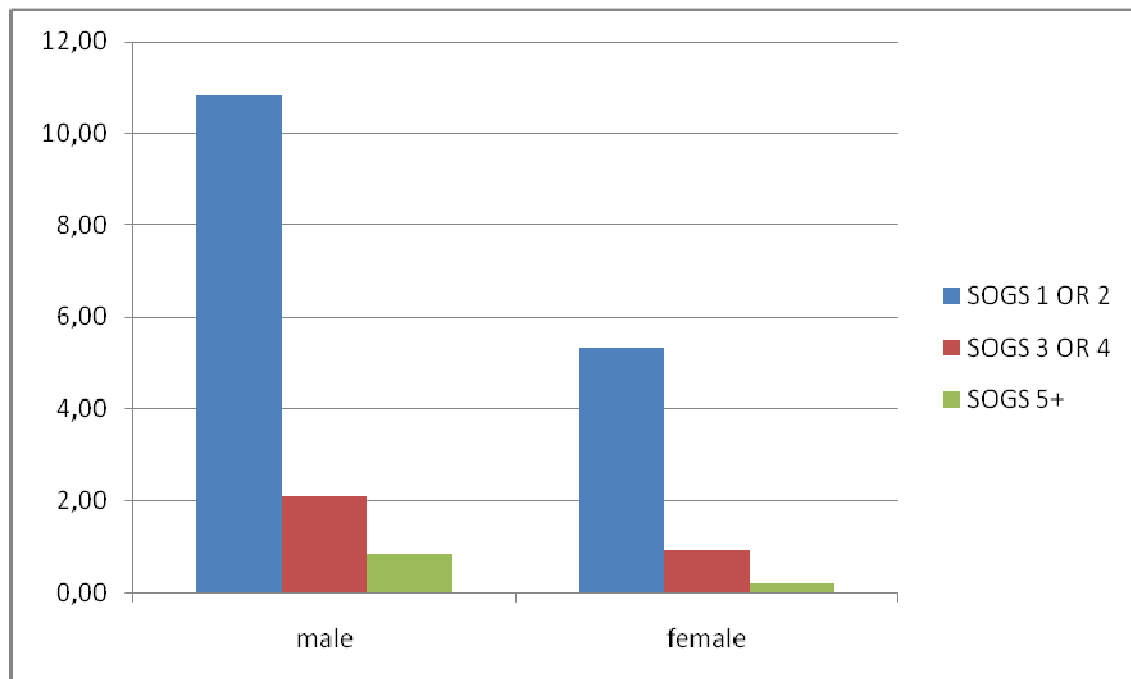
Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

The vulnerable categories: men, youth, single, immigrants

Beside the risks related to different games, one should also identify the groups most vulnerable to problem and pathological gambling. The amount of gambling problems within the Slovenian population is clearly influenced by gender, age and marital status.

There are significantly more pathological gamblers among men than among women: 0.82 versus 0.18 per cent. By this we do not claim that problem gambling among women is irrelevant or even that gambling is a male issue (as criticized for instance by Mark and Lesieur 1992) but simply stress a clear difference in gambling patterns of Slovenian women and men (see Figure 5). The former play with smaller frequency, both classical, casino games and slot machines, spend less money and have less gambling problems than the latter. In this respect, Slovenia is similar to most of the other countries. Similar disproportions regarding gambling are reported in the United States (Volberg 2003) and Europe, for example, from Belgium (Druine 2009: 6), Estonia (Laansoo and Niit 2009), Great Britain (Griffiths 2009: 109), and The Netherlands (Goudriaan et al. 2009: 194-195).

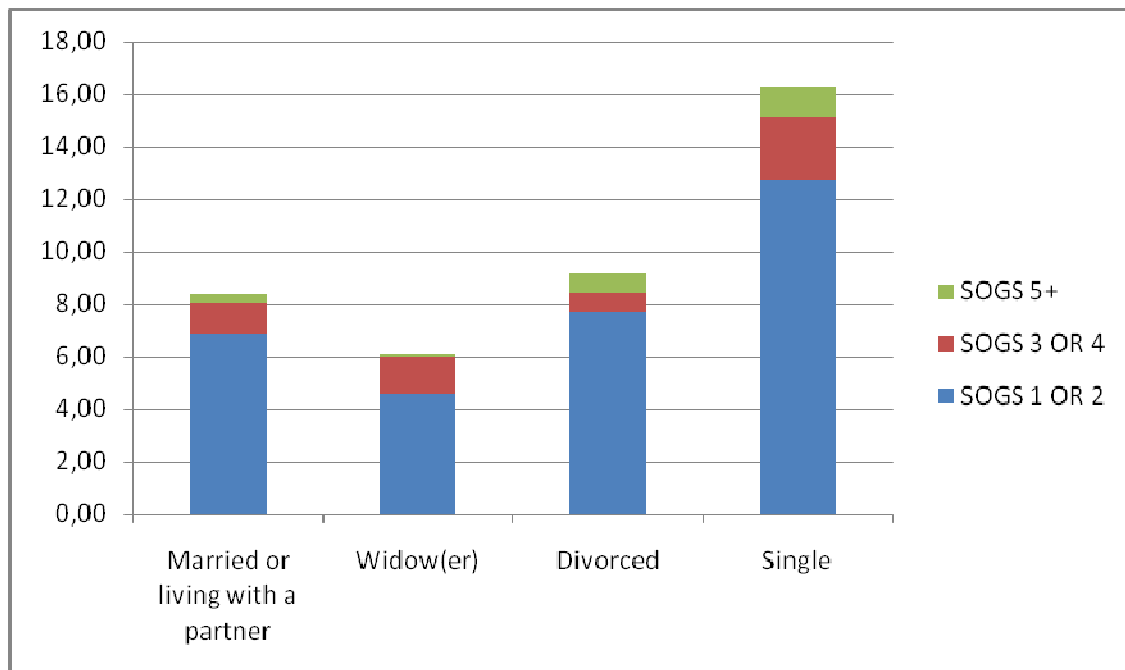
Figure 5: Gender and gambling problems



Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

It is questionable, however, if this gender difference will sustain in the long run. Both women emancipation and the growth of gambling industry may cause these differences less significant in the long run. The trends in the United States seem to demonstrate the rise of problem gambling among women from the 1980s to the 1990s and the recent years. Volberg (2003) and other authors thus report about the 'feminization of gambling' in the United States and elsewhere.

Figure 6: Marital status and gambling problems



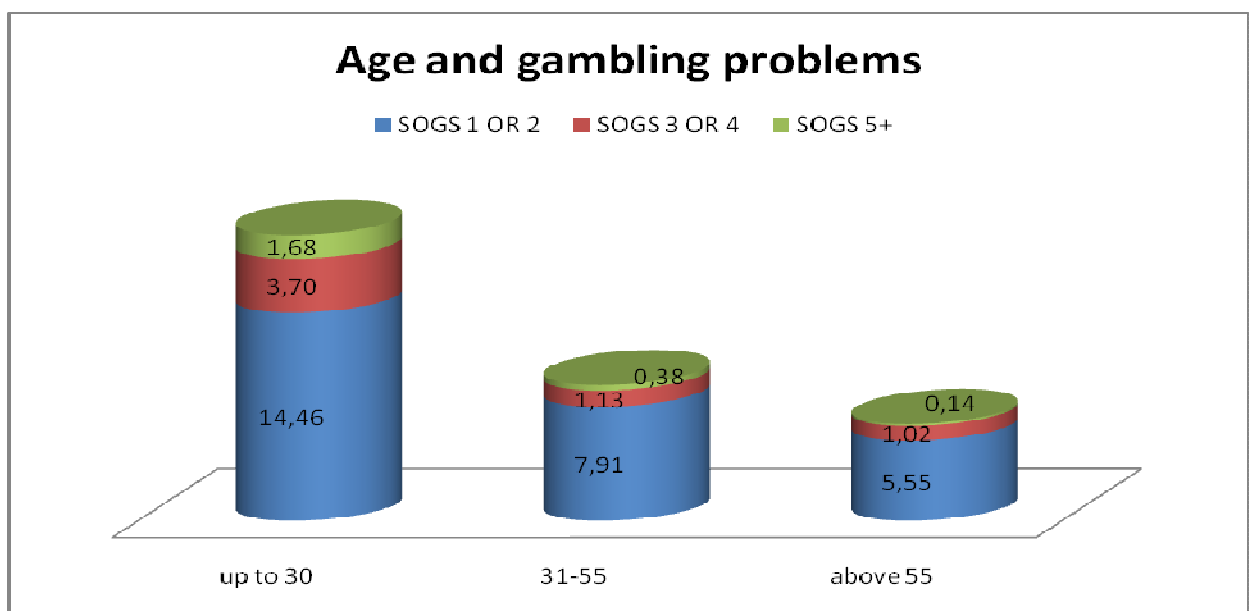
Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

Another predictable feature is related to the marital status. Married people and other people who live with a partner are almost 3.5 times less likely to be pathological gamblers than those who are single and were never married (see Figure 6). Similar patterns can be found in most other European countries, such as Belgium, Great Britain and The Netherlands (Druine 2009; Goudriaan et al. 2009; Griffiths 2009) and is also confirmed by some other studies (e.g. McCready 2008). The classical sociological explanation could be already found in Emile Durkheim's classical discussions on integration of people in the community and the regulation of their lives (Durkheim 1992). The more integrated in the community and the more regulated one's life is, smaller the probability of he or she becoming a problem or pathological gambler. Nevertheless, this rule is also not fully universal and there are some exceptions, for

instance in Spain, where no significant differences are reported between married and single people concerning gambling (Becoña 2009: 288).

The variable that most clearly correlates with gambling problems is age. Respondents of up to 30 years old are 12 times more likely to be pathological gamblers (SOGS score higher than 4) than the respondents older than 55 (see Figure 7). Age also influences the games people play. While the older people tend to play lottery and other classical games more often than the younger, the situation is reversed in scratch cards, sports betting, slot machines, internet and other games, which are significantly more often played by younger than 30. It may be argued that the games that are the most risky for the development of the gambling problems are also those that are the most often played by the younger generations.

Figure 7: Age and problem gambling



Source: Makarovič et al. 2008.

In this respect Slovenian patterns of problem gambling correspond to many other European countries, such as Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Spain etc. (Druine 2009; Laansoo and Niit 2009; Jaakkola 2009; Griffiths 2009; Goudriaan et al. 2009; Becoña 2009).

It is an important issue how to interpret the impact of age on gambling, since at least two opposite explanations are available: is problem gambling among young people caused by the specific characteristics of the youth in modern societies or is it a sign of the future behavior patterns that will characterize the other age groups as well during the next decades? If the latter is the case the gambling problems would become much more widespread in Slovenia in the future unless more efficient preventive measures are adopted. While no longitudinal data are available for Slovenia, we can find certain limited evidence from some other countries.

The evidence from Sweden, for instance, seems to indicate that patterns of gambling of the youth are relatively unstable and may thus be subject to change (Jonsson and Rönnerberg 2009: 306-307). This may indicate the connection of gambling problems with some typical problems experienced by the youth and young adults while looking for the suitable way to be integrated within the society. In this respect problem gambling of the youth is quite directly comparable with the problems of drug abuse which is also quite clearly though not exclusively related to certain age groups.

On the other hand, the data from Spain demonstrate that the gambling problems eventually seem to become more equally distributed among the age groups (Becoña 2009: 288). The data from Canada, for example, show no significant differences between young and middle age group concerning the scope of pathological gambling (Statistics Canada

2002/2009). Of course, the combination of both answers can also be the case: problem gambling may be related to specific problems of the youth but it may also be a pattern that tends to spread to the future population.

Our research has also indicated the relation of gambling problems with ethnicity and religion. Gambling problems thus seem to be more widespread among those of Bosniak, 'Muslim' (in ethnical sense referring to an ethnic group from Bosnia and Herzegovina), Serb and Montenegrin ethnic origin and those of Orthodox and Muslim religion than among ethnic Slovenians of Roman-Catholic religion and non-believers. Nevertheless, one should be quite cautious in interpreting this correlation. It is very likely that it does not have much to do with their particular ethnic and/or religious cultural background. There is no clear evidence about the connection between Orthodox Christianity and problem gambling and the Islamic religious doctrine opposes gambling even more strictly than the Christian doctrines.

The actual causes mostly cannot be found in ethnic and religious origins as such but in the fact that these people also constitute the most typical immigrant population in Slovenia, which mostly originates from the former Yugoslav republics. The situation of the immigrants, the lack of integration within the host society and the uncertainties they face may contribute to gambling problems. The evidence from other European countries seems to confirm this claim if one, for instance, considers the findings from Great Britain and The Netherlands (Griffiths 2009: 117; Goudriaan et al. 2009: 194-195).

It is not only interesting where one can find the relationship between certain characteristic and problem gambling but also where such relationships cannot be found in the Slovenian case. Research in several

countries links gambling problems with the population categories of lower education, lower social status and lower income. In Great Britain, Italy and Spain gambling problems are more typical for lower income groups (Griffiths 2009: 109; Croce et al. 2009: 154-155; Becoña 2009: 288); in The Netherlands (Goudriaan et al. 2009: 194-195) and Spain they are more typical for the groups of lower education. Beckert and Lutter (2008) demonstrate the same in the case of the German lottery.

Such correlations are not the case in Slovenia. Relatively higher prevalence of pathological gambling can be found at middle educational levels (secondary education) and there is no correlation between income and gambling problems. It should be noted that another interesting case of relationship between income and gambling problems can be found in Europe. This is the case of Estonia, where income correlates positively with gambling problems (Laansoo and Niit 2009).

Hypothetically, the difference between Estonia and most other countries, which can also be relevant for the Slovenian case, may be explained as an example of stratified diffusion. The concept of stratified diffusion implies that new patterns of behavior usually start at the higher levels of the social stratification structure and then diffuse from the higher social classes to the lower social classes.¹ If this is the case for casino gambling it may also be the case for problem gambling that may accompany it. Problem gambling in countries with a well developed tradition of casino gambling may be more typical for the lower social classes, while in the countries with the lack of such tradition the situation may be just the opposite. Slovenia may be somewhere in the middle with the situation when problem gambling is relatively equally

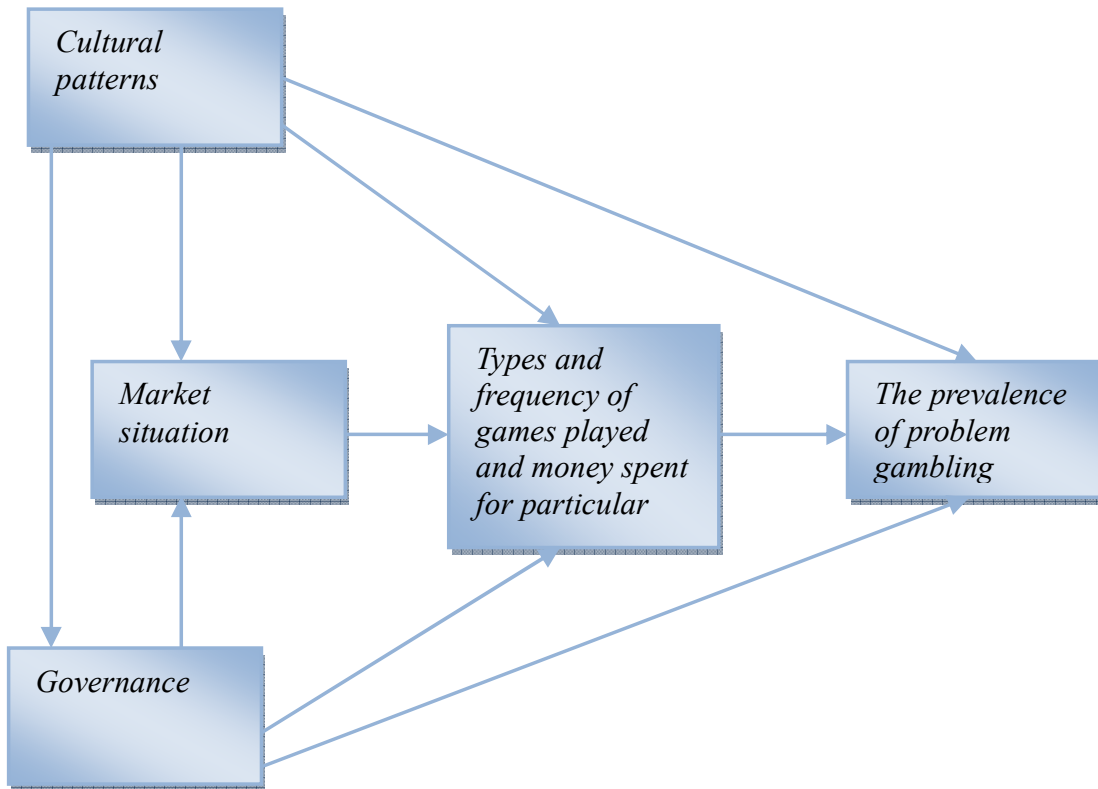
¹ The concept of stratified diffusion can be applied to a variety of practices such as smoking, gender roles within the family (Willmott and Young 1960), various aspects of fashion (Levitt and Dubner 2006) etc.

distributed among the social strata. Clearly, such claims can only be formulated as hypotheses that still require further research to be tested in a reliable and valid way. If the hypotheses on stratified diffusion are true for the case of gambling, one may expect further growth of gambling problems among the lower classes in Slovenia.

Discussion: the societal factors of gambling problem prevalence

What can one expect about the further change in the scope of problem gambling in Slovenia? The lack of longitudinal data does not allow predictions. One may, however, specify the major factor influencing the gambling patterns and problem gambling in Slovenia. While the individual risk of problem gambling depends on a complex set of individual psychological factors, the scope of problem gambling within a given society can be considered a clearly sociological issue – a social fact in a sense implied by Emile Durkheim (1982). The difference in the prevalence of problem gambling between any two given societies is not an individual psychological but a social issue. It depends on the social factors that can be analyzed at the macro level. These factors and the major relationships between them are specified in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Social factors of the problem gambling prevalence (macro-level – society as the unit of analysis)



Cultural patterns of a given society are considered as an independent variable, while the problem gambling prevalence is the dependent variable. The rest of the variables can be either independent of intervening variables. While the quantity of problem/pathological gamblers is available, the other elements in the causal model can only be described, though we do not exclude the possibility that they may also be operationalized as quantitative indexes during the subsequent research.

It may be argued that the cultural patterns concerning gambling differ from one society to another. Historically, one may distinguish between 'gambling' and 'non-gambling' peoples and nations, as well as related to

relate gambling to some properties of culture, such as religion (Binde 2005; 2007). Within contemporary Europe, one can observe significant differences that cannot be simply attributed to the differences in the supply of games, regulation and legal framework. Despite the wide availability, Slovenians on average gamble significantly less than the Finns (see: Jaakkola 2009) despite the comparable or even greater availability of gambling in Slovenia. It would thus be incorrect to understand gambling patterns and gambling problems simply as a result of particular policies and the market situation. Slovenian cultural patterns do not seem to be highly oriented towards heavy gambling and towards generating gambling problems. However, it would be premature to conclude from this assumption that problem gambling cannot increase in the future. Although culture is normally relatively stable, it can also be subject to change.

Governance can be considered the second major factor influencing gambling patterns and problems. It includes not only regulation and normative framework shaped by certain policies but also the formation of these policies that may be formulated by the political actors and influenced by a variety of interest groups. Governance is significantly more dynamic factor than the cultural patterns. With the major exception of the failed project of the 'Mega-centre' by Harrah's and Hit gambling issues have not drawn significant attention by the public as a major political issue. Gambling is politically tolerated or even actively supported because of pragmatic reasons as an activity generating tax revenues and other financial benefits but a clear governance strategy is missing. Despite the declared export orientation of gambling extensive growth of smaller private companies opening gambling halls that are increasingly oriented towards the domestic market has been allowed. The policies are also not very consistent since they are quite restrictive in granting government permissions to organize classical games and live

casino games (required to be owned by the state and the municipalities) while quite permissive in relation to the gambling halls based on slot machines that can be privately owned. Preventive measures against problem gambling are still quite underdeveloped (Macur et al. 2008).

Both cultural patterns and governance have impact on the market situation but the latter also has the logic of its own. The economic crisis may make the incomes less self-evident which may increase competition. In Slovenia, responsible gambling practices and social responsibilities depends too much on the decisions of the companies themselves. In the situation of crisis and lower consumers' demand advertising can become even more aggressive and there may be less space for responsible gambling practices. While general spending on gambling may decrease the prevalence of gambling and gambling problems of the most vulnerable groups may become even more significant. A 'Slovenian Pulse' survey from November 2009 in fact demonstrates the increase of gambling during the first year of the economic recession (Makarovič et al. 2009).

This clearly implies that further focus is required to the sphere of governance. Slovenia now needs a complete set of responsible gambling measures; otherwise it may be assumed that the situation concerning problem gambling within the Slovenian population may worsen significantly during the following years.

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