
The Slovenian Counterpart to the American Dream

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Introduction

Once the American Dream was utilized by the lower classes to increase their upward mobility, it turned into a commodity of a zero-sum game in two senses – social and systemic. It became a socially limited commodity because it was hijacked by the upper classes, as only the richest could bring it to realization, and only at the expense of all others who had still not woken up. The assertions that the war against poverty was lost because of the inefficient and wasteful state, the excuses about the (sub)cultural essence of poverty which cannot be mitigated by financial means (because it is determined by the value system), exaggerations about the superiority of market regulation over state regulation of the market, concerns for the interests of tax payers, allusions to the dangers of communism – these are the main arguments used to demonize every type of the re-distribution of goods, resources and opportunities. The systemic aspect of the American dream, on the other hand, lies in its scope. It started with requirements for the urgent changes in the system that would lead to changes in society, but was later turned into the (global) trademark of the American way of life employed to ward off the extra-systemic impacts of accumulated contradictions.

In the first part of this article we look into the utopian element of the American dream that is subject to long-term ideological repercussions as formulated by Karl Mannheim. In the second part, we recapitulate the essence of the American dream with an intention to make easier the understanding of the sequel to the American dream (part three), from the point

when the things went wrong. In the last part we analyze the perception of the American dream from the viewpoint of the periphery (Slovenia) and end with the conclusion that such perception is guided by voluntary factors rather than determinist ones.

Long-term Ideological Repercussions

The emancipatory idea embedded in the American dream became a typical example of the ideologization of an idea in the process of its transition from the utopian to the governing form. The transition took place in three stages, all of them anticipated by Karl Mannheim as early as 1936.

According to Mannheim, the first stage of ideological mentality is sincere but unrealizable. He illustrates it using the analogy of Christian love for fellow human beings. It is an idea that is forever “transcendent and unrealizable” in any society that is based on serfdom, plundering or inequality. In such contexts, Christian love forever remains an “ideological” notion, including in cases where the motives and conduct arising from it are entirely benevolent. The reason is that Christian love cannot be entirely and consistently put into practice in a society that is not based on the same principle (as Christian love itself). Therefore, the protagonists are forced to make compromises to avoid destroying social structures, and in so doing they inevitably shift away from their noble motives (Mannheim, 1978: p. 194). In contrast to the first stage, the second stage of ideological mentality is characterized by the fact that – historically – it could reflect on the incongruence between the inherent ideas and the actual conduct, but despite all it prevents itself from doing so because of “certain vital-emotional interests.” The third stage involves ideological manipulation, which should be “interpreted as a purposeful lie. In this case, we are not dealing with self-delusion but rather with purposeful deception of another.” (ibid.) By concealing the real social condition from itself and others, the ideology shifts away from reality with an intention to stabilize it (*status quo*). Or – in psychoanalytical parlance – what is involved is the ideological transition of illusion towards phantasm.¹

1 This is meant in the Freudian sense of touch with reality, in which perception is defined as real with regard to the developments and perception of changes initiated by developments. In an opposite case, where such developments do not create any change, we have to do with the perception that is not real, meaning a phantasm. According to Freud, the difference between illusion and phantasm is functional because for an individuum such a sign of reality is invaluable and at the same time it is a weapon against it and against his/her own, often implacable instincts. For that reason the individuum invest much effort into taking out, or projecting that what causes him/her inwards problems. (Freud, 1987: p. 193).

In contemporary societies, the mentioned stages of ideology appear in various historical forms which Mannheim divided into four main categories. (*ibid.*: p. 209–243):

1. Orgiastic Chiliasm,²
2. The Liberal-Humanitarian Idea³
3. The Conservative Idea⁴
4. The Socialist-Communist Utopia.⁵

The above typology is useful for understanding the American dream for two reasons.

First, Mannheim draws attention to the historical tendency to “bring down” or ground the utopian ideas, which originally transcend the real world. While initially the utopian idea is absolutely irreconcilable with reality (form 1), it later begins to move in the opposite direction, says Mannheim. Put differently, instead of aiming to oppose, it seeks to eliminate

2 According to Mannheim, the first representative of that most extreme form of utopian mentality was Thomas Müntzer (a radical German theologian of the early reformation period). In Mannheim words, he was “a social revolutionary from religious motives.” (Mannheim, 1978: p. 209). The idea of the millennial kingdom on earth became a revolutionary idea when Chiliasm became associated with the aspirations of the subordinate classes.

3 This type of mentality also includes the gap between the real and the utopian, but the two are not irreconcilable so reality is not expected to fully adapt to the utopia (as in the first type). The goal here is to correct rather than substitute the existing reality, using the imagined and better concepts. To be more precise, in the liberal-humanitarian ideology the main function of utopia (of liberal postulates) is to function as a corrective “standard” that enables us to judge the developments around us (Mannheim, 1978: p. 217). In circumstances in which such utopias can be realized politically (as in France), it takes on a conspicuously rational form. But wherever the circumstances were not conducive to its realization (e.g. in Germany), the liberal-humanitarian ideology became inverted. “Here the road to progress was not sought in external deeds or in revolutions, but exclusively in the inner constitution of man and its transformations.” (*ibid.*).

4 The conservative mentality does not contain the utopian element because, in an ideal situation, it is completely in harmony with the reality which it masters; therefore, it lacks the ability to reflect on the historical processes, as the former is a result of “a progressive impulse.” Only with the help of the opposition and its “tendency to break through the limits of the existing order causes the conservative mentality to question the basis of its own dominance, and necessarily brings about among the conservatives the historical-philosophical reflections concerning themselves. Thus, there arises a counter-utopia which serves as a means of orientation and defence.” (Mannheim, 1978: p. 227).

5 “Henceforth, a desperate struggle takes place, aiming at the fundamental disintegration of the adversary’s belief. Each of the forms of utopian mentality which we have treated thus far turns against the rest of each belief it is demanded that it corresponds with reality ... The economic and social structure of society becomes absolute reality for the socialist” (Mannheim, 1978: pp. 237–238). The point is that the difference between the real and the utopian is the greatest, irreconcilable and unchangeable in the first form of ideology, and the smallest and most conflicting in the fourth type; in the third type it is (temporarily) neglected, and in the second it is instrumentalized to correct the reality.

the tension between utopia and reality while using the model provided by conservatism (*ibid.*: p. 243). However, Mannheim also points out that the entrance of the liberal ideology/utopia into the social sphere was not sufficient in itself to transform that sphere – suitable historical circumstances were also needed. Accordingly, the liberal ideology could evolve into explicitly rational forms only in countries where it could also be realized politically (e.g. in France), while in countries where the circumstances were not conducive (e.g. in Germany), the liberal-humanitarian ideology became introverted: “Here the road to progress was not sought in external deeds or in revolutions, but exclusively in the inner constitution of man and its transformations” (*ibid.*: p. 217).⁶ Today we can safely assume that, had Mannheim been writing the book half a century later, he would be able to support his thesis with another, even more robust and obvious example – the advance of neo-liberalism.

Secondly, all those conflicting ideologies are closely connected with the social classes among which they originated. Since over time they discarded the original utopian elements, they have been moving ever closer to a conservative stance (*ibid.*: p. 244). Mannheim derived from this the law of long-term ideological repercussions, which he formulated as follows:

It appears to be a generally valid law of the structure of intellectual development that when new groups gain entry into an already established situation, they do not take over without a further ado the ideologies which have already been elaborated for this situation, but rather they adapt the ideas which they bring with them through their traditions to the new situation. (*ibid.*: p. 245).

As an example of this law Mannheim gives the liberal and socialist ideologies which emerged as historical alternatives in the conservative circumstances. The development and the consequences of this process can-

6 Miklós Tamás, the Hungarian philosopher, stresses the same in connection with the present neo-liberalism, eighty years after the first publication of the said Mannheim work. In Miklós's words, today “we see desperation, people are retreating inwardly, resorting to individuality, while various therapeutic methods are proliferating /.../ This had already happened at the time of the final stages of the Roman Empire. Stoic philosophy is a very good example of that state of mind, What did the Stoics say? That it is insensible to meddle with things over which you have no influence, so the only sensible thing one can do in such a situation is to cultivate individuality. The contemporary counterpart of that stance is investment into oneself, care for oneself.” It is nothing new, indeed. It is very similar to the situation that prevailed towards the end of the Roman period, “when truly horrible tyrants were in power and the stance that prevailed was that nothing could be done because the tyrants were too powerful. So let's rather go home and be good, let's be open within our limitations /.../ it's not consumerism, it's an escape. In the past it was termed the inner exile caused by the lack of freedom.” (Miklós Tamás, 2017: p. 37).

not be understood in terms of binary categories (e.g. victory/defeat, new/old, better/worse),⁷ so we must take into account the long-term ideological repercussions. Both liberalism and socialism transformed their initial ideas to achieve greater consistency with the situation in which they were trying to gain ground, and the adjustment was realized at the expense of utopian elements. Mannheim even predicted that because of that we “approach the situation in which the utopian element, through its many divergent forms, has completely (in politics, at least) annihilated itself.” (ibid.: p. 246). Indeed, half a century later, we were witness to one of the most conspicuous examples of that law. With the downfall of the Berlin wall, the ex-socialist countries became the entry platform for capitalist ideologies, since the liberal-humanist utopia⁸ of the latter was considered one of the most progressive. It was more appealing than the failed socialist utopia – but only in its early stages. By adjusting the liberal ideology to post-socialist circumstances, those countries soon ran into (neo)liberal paradoxes which would have been unimaginable just a short time ago (see, e.g. Shields, 2014). Trust in fundamental institutions and in the protagonists of the new social order began to dissolve; inequality and poverty began to increase, the key resources of national economies were sold off at low prices and, faced with the economic collapse caused by the financial capital originating in the West, the former socialist countries had to adopt the same methods to remedy the situation as any other western country. In the name of the liberal principles and the free market, they resorted to state intervention to rescue private banks – the measures financed by the exorbitant sums of taxpayers money⁹ were implemented without a debate,

7 One of those is the philosophical thesis of Peter Sloterdijk, who draws attention to the unexpected effects of social changes using the binary perspective on history: “Ever since Romanticism, the period that followed the French Revolution, the general feeling is that the things developed contrary to people’s expectations. The will and the deed are one thing, and the effects of the unfolding events another. If the difference between the two is too great, we find ourselves in the tragic or romantic situation. It is tragic when we have to reconcile to the failure of human projects, and romantic because people again begin to feel the power of fate. In such a situation, history can be defined as a sphere where actual events always contradict the expectations.” (Sloterdijk, 2017: pp. 49–50). The advantage of Mannheim’s law of long-term ideological repercussions is that it explains how and why that happens, and this cannot be perceived in binary categories.

8 Those are: individual freedom, greater social equality, (meritocratic) justice and welfare for all, the autonomy of market laws that leads to greater productivity than in the central-planning system, national sovereignty and affirmation.

9 Slovenia used more than five billion euros of taxpayers money to stabilize the banking sector (the rescuing of the largest Slovenian bank alone, NLB – Nova Ljubljanska banka, cost 4.5 billion euros). However, using state intervention to contain private financial losses is not the only paradox of neo-liberalism in this case. It turned out that the international expert estimates of the losses incurred by the Slovenian banks were much exaggerated, as much as by 2.5 billion euros in the case of the two largest Slovenian banks (Kos, 2016).

were taken in the name of “objective necessity,” and fell short of expectations. Put differently, it was the method comparable to the one used during the most severe periods of the central-planning socialist economy. But that was not the end of the ideological transformation. The liberalism of today is different from the one that was in place during R. Reagan and M. Thatcher. At that time, the fundamentalist principle of the market law was promoted by invoking general improvement of the economy and welfare for all, including lower classes. Today, the situation is diametrically opposite. Instead of optimism and improvement of the situation for all classes, the necessity of neo-liberal principles is justified by pessimism (over the state of globalization) and by promises that nothing will change.

In the post-industrial era and in particular since 2008's financial crisis, the neoliberal message has become simultaneously more mainstream and less optimistic. Contemporary neoliberals present the principle of the market as the last hope for G20 countries to maintain the status-quo. (Gould & Robert, 2013: p. 82)

In short, neo-liberalism is no longer what it used to be. The utopian element of neo-liberalism¹⁰ degenerated into a banal concept of the safety valve that should protect us from losing what we already have. In this case too – in harmony with the above-mentioned Mannheim law – the case in point is a shift towards even greater conservatism.

The American Dream is not an exception. It went through all three (Mannheim's) stages of ideology and much like other ideological-utopian constructs succumbed to the law of long-term ideological repercussions. The next section describes how that process unfolded and what the crucial turning point was. This will also help us understand the Slovenian version of the American Dream (addressed in the last part of this article).

»I have a dream...«

Once the American dream reached the ultimate stage of religious and political consensus among the American people, which happened during the 1950s and the 1960s, it became globally convincing more than ever be-

This money was therefore unnecessarily invested in the banking sector. There is a strong suspicion that the incorrect, exaggerated estimates of the loss, which were used as the basis for state intervention, were intentional and made in favor of the future international buyers of those banks. In fact, once the banks are stabilized through state intervention, they need to be sold according to the European rules. The sale, however, cannot recover the money invested in the banks, meaning that the taxpayers were penalized two times. (Kovač, 2017: p. 33).

10 The utopian element of neo-liberalism is its blind trust in the free market which purportedly can ensure the realization of the iconic phrase “a rising tide lifts all boats” often repeated during the 1980s and first used by John F. Kennedy in 1963 (Gould & Robert, 2013: p. 80).

fore (or later). And not solely because the most prominent protagonist of that dream – Martin Luther King, Jr. – was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (in 1964). Equally deserving were the then political leaders of the US (Vice-president R. Nixon, and President L. B. Johnson), who co-opted the content of the American dream for the official doctrine of domestic politics. At the same time, the US began to spread the concept outside its borders. It was even used as the main and unique American weapon against the Soviet Union, and it proved to be absolutely indestructible. It was an extremely imaginative move amidst the military stand-off at the time, when both sides realized that there was no winner in the nuclear race and that the congested street along which they thronged was a cul-de-sac.

The attack on the impoverished Soviet Union using the American dream weapon – which carried a blatant message that promoted material welfare and freedom for all citizens and on a much higher level than anywhere else on the planet – was the second¹¹ and the last magnificent contribution of the US to international relations. The American dream, the progressive human “bomb,” was and still is the most effective of all bombs invented by humans. At any rate, from the moment it was first used to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, it proved indestructible for the Soviet Union.

The American dream was first directly used as an intelligent weapon against the enemy in 1959, when Richard Nixon arrived in Moscow to open the exhibition which celebrated the American material achievements. The main exhibit was a life-size model of the apartment of an average American worker. It included real carpets, a real TV set, a central heating and a fully equipped kitchen including a washing machine, a dryer and a refrigerator. Nixon personally guided Nikita Khrushchev through the exhibition, and Khrushchev was obviously astonished, envious and skeptical about the things that were shown and told to him. For example, when he stopped in front of the electrical lemon squeezer and acrimoniously commented that he could not imagine anyone in their good mind using such a redundant device, Nixon explained that “everything that helps women reduce their work is undoubtedly useful.” To which Khrushchev responded: “We do not perceive women as workers – as you do, in the capitalist system” (Botton, 2005: p. 37).

But Nixon was right. The American standard of living had been unattainable for the Soviet Union. In connection with this, at the said exhibition Nixon also forecast a completely new form of political action which half a century later became known as “soft power” (an ability to exert in-

11 The first was the US role in the WWII.

fluence by using non-military means; Nye, 2002).¹² The best illustration of the soft power approach is a transcript of the dialog between Khrushchev and Nixon published by the media that covered the said exhibition (among others also the socialist newspapers in Slovenia). The conversation that took place during the brandishing of American consumer goods was as follows (Katoliški glas, 1959: p. 1):

Khrushchev: You Americans think that our people will be surprised. It's not like that. We already have similar things in our new apartments...

Nixon: It's not our intention to surprise anyone. We only want to show the difference. The world needs free exchange of ideas. We must trust people, leave them freedom of choice.

Khrushchev: (acknowledges, but remains silent).

Nixon: We should not maintain, opposing each other, that our system is the only one. We must talk, but not starting from the position of supremacy, or inferiority, but rather from that of mutual respect. Isn't it better to talk about washing machines rather than rockets?

The significance of that pompous and triumphant entrance of the American dream onto the international stage does not lie in its success. It is important because it occurred at the right time, because the material basis for its realization was in place and because it was not (yet) an illusion, although less than three years later everyone was again talking about rockets rather than washing machines.¹³ On the internal political stage the situation was different. The American dream lasted for some time, and its fading was a long process. Its "killers" did not come from the outside, as in the case of the Cuban crisis, but from the inside.

At the time of its climax (with Dr. Martin L. King, jr.), the main elements of the American dream were as follows:

12 In contrast to the traditional (hard) power, where confrontation is based on the military and economic capacity, soft power draws on the openness towards others, on the material welfare, culture, values and models which have power to convince thanks to their appeal rather than inherent threats and compulsion. "The development of soft power need not be a zero sum game. All countries can gain from finding attraction in one another's cultures" (Nye, 2012).

13 When in 1962 the Americans discovered Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba, the promises of soft power swiftly dissolved. It was replaced by the traditional hard form of power. "If my calculation is correct, over the past thirty years the USA initiated or caused in one or another way thirteen wars," says Oliver Stone (Maličev, 2017: p. 5). The political difference between the 20th and the 21st century lies in the potential of the American policy of hard power, whose scope is today smaller than ever before and continues to decrease, while its soft power potential was entirely wasted.

- the implementation of the classical bourgeois principles of the French revolution: freedom, equality, brotherhood;¹⁴
- anti-racism;¹⁵
- the religiously inspired struggle for the rights¹⁶ that remains within the system.¹⁷

The role that in the European version of the implementation of the above-said principles was fulfilled by trade unions was in the US taken up by the American dream. Thanks to its sobriety (the third element), the official national politics found it acceptable, since without it the political system would have been exposed solely to the more radical variant of the Black Power. At the same time, the government was obliged to implement the principle of equality (the first element), along with all other ingredients of the American dream, rather than leaving equality to the random market regulation. For Martin L. King, emancipation was a triangle resting on tightly joined angles, and if one of them was neglected the entire triangle would collapse.

At one angle stands the individual person, at the other angle stands other persons, and at the up top stands God. Unless these three are concatenated, working harmoniously together in a single life, that life is incomplete (King, 1954).

In short, without reducing social inequalities neither the individual nor society is free and this is in contradiction with the God's will. Therefore, the American Dream does not distinguish among religious, social and political reform. The goal is the emancipation of all citizens, and particularly those who are most excluded in the richest country.

If we spend thirty-five billion dollars a year to fight an ill-conceived war in Vietnam and twenty billion dollars to put a man on the moon, we can

14 "I have a dream that /.../ all men are created equal. I have a dream that /.../ the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state /.../ will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice« (King, 1963).

15 "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King, 1963).

16 "Martin's voice was more than the communication of intellectual ideals and spiritual vision/.../ Martin was first of all a man of faith, a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus« (Young, 2001: p. viii). »As the weeks and months wor on, it became clear to me that we had found our Moses, and he would surely lead us to the promised land of liberty and justice for all." (Parks, 2001: p. 4).

17 "Martin led to fulfill the American Dream without resorting to the destruction of either persons or property" (Young, 2001: p. x).

spend billions of dollars to put God's children on their own two feet, right now" (King, 1967).

At that time, King's argument was still considered indisputable. We should keep in mind that halfway through the previous century, fight against poverty attracted both political and practical attention in the US and in Europe. It was an optimistic signal for the humankind that basic existential problems could be resolved (at least in the most developed countries). It was also a good illustration of the fact that intra-systemic changes are possible when the pressure from the bottom coincides with the sensitivity of the elites who then provide support from the top. Unless both of those conditions are fulfilled, the change can only be effected through alternative means, that is, outside the system (or by working against it). At the time of M. L. King, the American fight against poverty – which was an essential angle of the American Dream – was not questionable in the sense of bottom-up pressure or top-down support, as both conditions were fulfilled. It seemed that all that needed to be done to turn the American Dream into an export product was to convince Khrushchev. The discrepancies as to the details of the implementation manner did not seem fateful (yet).

The Turning Point

The answer to the question of how to eliminate poverty depends on the (combination of) related concepts¹⁸ and on the explanation, or rather theories of why poverty exists in the first place. In the absence of extra-systemic alternatives, the fate of poverty is dependent on the consensus about it. At the time when the American Dream gained ground, three main approaches to its elimination existed (Table 1).

With a view to enabling the poor classes to implement the American Dream and to extending the concept to the neglected areas, in 1964 a new law was passed (the Economic Opportunity Act) accompanied with relevant institutions (e.g. the Office for Economic Opportunity). Their function was a top-down coordination of the fight against poverty. Various employment programs for the poor class were put into practice, aiming to motivate, train and enable them to develop the skills necessary to compete effectively on the labor market. The "personal growth" camps, youth

18 There are four main concepts of poverty (on which the definitions of poverty also depend, as do measurements of poverty, the determination of the existential minimum, basic needs and relative deprivation) – absolute, relative, and subjective concepts, and social exclusion (Turner, 2006: pp. 462–464; Haralambos & Holborn, 1995: pp. 123–173; Haralambos & Heald, 1989: pp. 142–171; Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1998: pp. 502–504; Levitas, 2007; Dragoš, 2013).

centers, specialized organizations (e.g. Neighborhood Youth Corps) organizing temporary work etc. (Haralambos & Heald, 1989: pp. 167–171) were aimed at the young people from poor quarters. The goal of those endeavors was to neutralize the culture of poverty as conceptualized and researched by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1959) and to socialize the poor classes with an aim to encourage them towards higher ambitions, increase their motivation, initiative and working habits.

Table 1: Fighting poverty – how to win?

The main problem causing poverty	SOLUTION
a) sub/culture of poverty (Oscar Lewis, 1959)	reintegration of the poor as re-culturalization
b) material deprivation of the lower classes (Lee Rainwater, 1970)	More resources for the lower classes, but not at the expense of the higher classes (= a compromise as in the aphorism of the rising tide that lifts all boats)
c) stratification whose function is to make the rich richer at the expense of all others (Herbert J. Gans, 1968)	The restructuring of the whole system is a precondition for the redistribution of resources from the higher classes to the lower classes

As to the approaches to poverty shown in Table 1, variant a) prevailed over variant b), while variant c) was never really put in practice. Lewis's concept of the culture of poverty became a political excuse for the ideological turn in the fight against poverty. The social problem of poverty began to be considered in the light of the personal characteristics of poor people, which seemed logical, particularly in the American culture. If poverty is dysfunctional due to the (sub)culture of the poor people, which is essentially different from that of the majority, then nothing can be changed by means of money but only through re-socialization, since the main problem is values and wrong upbringing. Accordingly, all measures except direct financial support were preferred. Money donations to the poor people became the "least popular strategy in the fight against poverty in America" (Haralambos & Heald, 1989: p. 168).

In this predicament that originated in the 1960s, the government's method of fight against poverty was opposed by both the political right and left wing. The right-wing criticized it on two counts. They maintained that the taxpayers money spent to fight poverty was wasted because the measures did not lead to the desired result; had that money been re-directed to the market, it would have been spent in a much more efficient and just way.¹⁹ Furthermore, the obvious fall in the propor-

19 A typical example of this regrettable argument is as follows: "The benefits go to people who, for a host of reasons, are relatively unproductive, while the funds to pay for them

tion of poor people boasted by the government was not to be seen as its achievement, since it did not occur because of the government's measures but despite them. The critics were referring to the data showing that poverty began to decrease as early as 1959 (the peak of the economic cycle), that is, even before the government program to fight poverty was in place; had the government not intervened, the decrease in poverty would have been even faster. The left wing's criticism took the opposite path, although the arguments were similar. They objected that the measures taken were inadequate because they were insufficiently radical and therefore without effect, and on top of that they were wrong since the poor people reaped less benefit from them than those who were concerned with their implementation, i.e. the educated middle class experts and the growing market of humanitarian organizations and services which made profit from poverty (Bachmann, 2001: pp. 164–165). One of the most criticized approaches was the government's effort towards the working resocialization of the poor people.

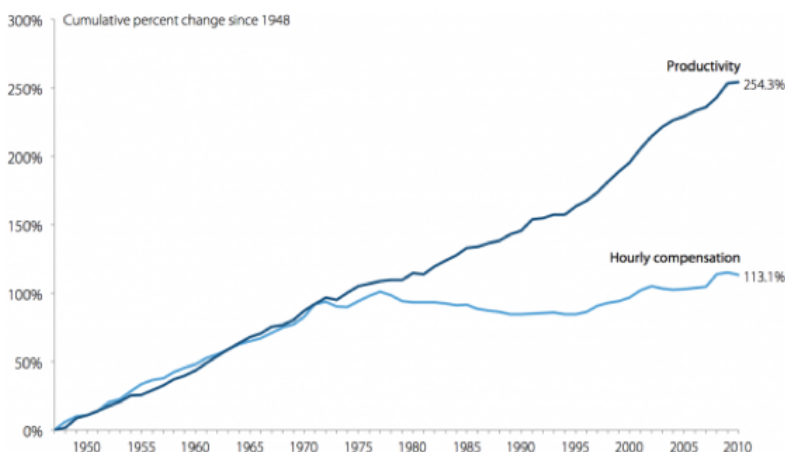
Some of the neediest poor such as unskilled people in rural pockets, rarely found it possible to enroll in job training, and at least two-thirds of the hard-core unemployed (ghetto blacks and early school drop-outs) failed to get stable work even if they completed courses (Patterson, 2003 p. 124)

The triangle of the American Dream to which Martin L. King referred (an individual – other people – the God) eventually began to disintegrate, since one of its angles – the social dimension – was weeded out, by both the left-wing and the right-wing. And what was the effect? In the US, inequality is on the rise, as is the percentage of the poor people and of the extremely rich. From that point on, the triangle of the American Dream, resting only on the two remaining angles (an individual – the God), went from bad to worse. The turning point was the decade of the 1970s, when the American Dream turned into a phantasm.

come, through taxation, from people who are relatively productive. /.../ Thus the welfare system tends to encourage unproductiveness and discourage productivity. /.../ Let officials design policy—that is, do away with policies—according to the classical Liberal principle that 'the force of law should never be used to benefit some people at the expense of others', not even if those benefiting are poor. Let care of the really needy be returned to individual responsibility—to genuine, private charity and efficient, private organizations" (Baetjer, 1984).

Table 2: The erosion of meritocracy as an important element of the American Dream (among other things)

Growth of real hourly compensation for production/nonsupervisory workers and productivity, 1948–2011



Note: Hourly compensation is of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and productivity is of the total economy.

Source: Author's analysis of unpublished total economy data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Productivity and Costs program and Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Income and Product Accounts public data series

Table 2 clearly shows that from the beginning of the WWII until the mid-1970s, the increase in wages corresponded to the increase in productivity, while from that time on the two curves have been increasingly drifting apart (Akadjian, 2015). The discrepancy between the payment in financial and non-financial sectors reached its peak (in favor of the former) which is comparable only with the situation during the years preceding the great depression between the two wars (FCIR, 2011: p. 62). Despite all, the war of words over whether the economic growth or the welfare state/social state is more important for the reduction of poverty still continues, the same as in the 1960s. The dilemma is completely wrong, both empirically and logically. It is empirically wrong because in all developed and rich countries headed by the US, it has been accepted that inequality and the poverty rate do not depend any longer on the total wealth of the country or the state of its economy, but on other, mainly political factors (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Secondly, if we choose the wrong answer

trying to solve the wrong dilemma, prioritizing market laws over the state re-distribution, then we concede to the fact that the existence of the poorest classes and all others who are excluded from the market against their will completely depends on the economic boom/recession cycles. Even the believers who are convinced that the economic growth automatically reduces poverty must know by now that recession in fact increases and deepens poverty unless the state intervenes – and it is no longer a matter of politics or care for the poor people. One consequence is that even before the last economic crisis, meaning during the period when the economic indicators were at their highest, the number of poor Americans was growing as did the number of people without medical insurance (The Other Planet, 2004); “Today, the United States is by far the most unequal rich democracy in the world” (Akadjian, 2015). For that reason, the American Dream can no longer make happy even those who invented it. Despite the general economic growth, the Americans are ever unhappier (Sachs, 2017).²⁰ As Table 3 clearly shows, they have a good reason for that.

Table 3: Share of total household wealth growth 1983 – 2010 (based on Mishel et al., 2012: p. 380 ss)

US households by:		% of wealth growth 1983 - 2010	
quintiles	deciles	centile	
		upper 1% ("top 1")	38.3
1. quintile: the wealthiest 20 %	1. decile:	2 - 5 %	35.9
	The wealthiest 10 %	6 - 10 %	16.0
			90.2
	2. decile: the second 10 % of the wealthiest		10.9
2. quintile: second 20 % of the wealthiest			4.3
3. quintile: median 20 %			-1.5
4. quintile: last but the low- est 20 %			-1.3
5. quintile: the lowest 20 % of the poor			-2.6
Total			100

20 “The central paradox of the modern American economy, as identified by Richard Easterlin (1964, 2016), is this: income per person has increased roughly three times since 1960, but measured happiness has not risen. The situation has gotten worse in recent years: per capita GDP is still rising, but happiness is now actually falling” (Sachs, 2017: p. 179).

In about a quarter of a century – between 1983 and 2010 – the average wealth of American households increased by incredible 179,400 dollars (from 284,400 to 463,800 dollars), and that growth is the source of the welfare paradox. Why did the increase in wealth crush the American dream? The answer lies in the rise of inequality, or rather, in the question of who at all can afford the American dream. As Table 3 shows, during the period in question, 38.3 percent of the wealth growth in the US went to the family budgets of just 1 percent of the richest households. The next 4 percent of the richest, following that Top 1 Percent, accrued only 35.9 percent of the total growth during that same period. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of the richest tenth of households which appropriated as much as 90.2 percent of the total growth of wealth was possible because for the majority of the population, which belongs to the lower 60 percent, the situation seriously deteriorated (in 3. to 5. quintiles). The most seriously affected was the lowest and the most vulnerable fifth of the population (-2.6).

Even if the inequality of distribution is viewed against the more precise data relating to various areas of the quality of life, and even if it is relativized through comparison with other parts of the world, the result would be the same, which is obvious from the index compiled by Oxfam (2017). The US is a botched state comparable to India or Nigeria.²¹

If the American Dream is again to become a convincing notion for the majority of the US citizens, it should make people happy instead of frustrating them by being unrealizable. One of the main moves (among the five most urgent ones) which could increase social capital and consequently the satisfaction of US citizens, “should be a set of policies aiming at reducing income and wealth inequality” (Sachs, 2017: p. 183). It is disputable, however, whether those expectations are real given that the improvements should take place *within* the existing system. We should not forget that it was one of the main emphases of the American Dream as formulated in the mid-20th century. For several decades now, the problem of inequality, poverty and the scope of the welfare state is not the lack of information, empirical data or expertise. The main problem lies in the interests and in the functional role of poverty, without which the system (of neoliberal capitalism) would have to operate in an essentially different way. Since the benefits of poverty include the economic, status, political and cultural gains (Gans, 1971: 2012) – enjoyed by the system as a whole but not also the poor classes – it is hard to imagine how improve-

21 “Index finds that 112 of the 152 countries surveyed are doing less than half of what they could to tackle inequality. Countries such as India and Nigeria do very badly overall, and among rich countries, the USA does very badly” (Oxfam, 2017: pp. 1–2).

ments could be implemented within the existing system (without changing it). On the other hand, it is possible to imagine changes inside the system which, at the time when the situation turns for worse, would alter the system to such an extent that it would slip into a new one.²² This is an ugly *deja vu* of the events preceding the WWII (the slipping of the Weimar Republic into the Third Reich), and of the more recent events, e.g. Erdogan's Turkey or so called "Arabic spring" (Šterbenc, 2011; Žužek, 2015).

A View from the Periphery (Slovenia) on the American Dream

Slovenia is one of the youngest, smallest and least important countries.²³ It's an ex-socialist country that continues to be a typical peripheral country in the region (the Balkans, the Southern Europe) that is itself a conspicuously peripheral one in the European and global context in terms of geography, politics, the economy and all other senses. For this reason, the Slovenian view on the subject of this article may be educative, since it is typical of most developed countries,²⁴ which serve as a model for the underdeveloped countries. If the American Dream has been waning at its source, in the US itself, how does it look from the peripheral area of the periphery, i.e. Slovenia? Let's suppose that a bright star in a night skyscape is a metaphor for the American Dream – does its brightness fade proportionally to its distance, or perhaps the star has already died and it can be admired only from faraway places because its light has only now reached us?

22 "It is neo-Fascism since a significant part of the phenomenon consists of neo-liberal ideology that promotes the curbing of the social state. Fascism is present in the sense of control over the losers, who need to be punished, and the pan-optic state needs to be developed to exert control and punish every form of non-conformism and to closely monitor the doings of the unemployed, the Roma people, migrants and other minority groups.

This form of neo-Fascism is today most strongly present in Hungary, where the things are moving into a formidable direction. A similar trend can be observed in other countries and in various forms, for example, the Golden Dawn in Greece. Similar groups can be found in Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and even in Scandinavian countries. These are groups of criminals who will readily attack migrants and other minorities. The rhetoric of the American Tea Party is also ominous. There are so many crazy right-wing movements today that one can speak about an international trend." (Standing 2017).

23 Slovenia became a sovereign country in 1991, after the dissolution of the socialist Yugoslavia. It has two million people and occupies the territory of 20,273 square kilometers (0.21% of the US territory). It's a coastal Alpine country in the southern part of Europe, bordering on Austria, Italy, Hungary and Croatia.

24 Although Slovenia is the least influential country, it belongs in the group of the richest countries of the world (it is also an OECD member). Although the Slovenian GDP is almost half of the US's GDP, (on the average) the quality of life in Slovenia is better than that in the USA (see Table 4).

The opinion surveys in Slovenia show that the majority of the Slovenes tend to agree with the general assessment that everything is wrong in Slovenia,²⁵ but despite that they would not exchange the Slovenian situation for the American one.²⁶ The subjectivity of the public opinion is not in discord with the facts though. Despite all historical drawbacks experienced by the Slovenian ethnos, and despite all the tensions in the Balkan neighborhood, it is still considered that the quality of life in Slovenia is better than that in the US, especially in terms of the key criteria that define the American Dream. For example:

- In Slovenia, social inequality is noticeably below the average in OECD countries, and also below the European average; in this sense, Slovenia is comparable to the Scandinavian countries, while in the US inequality is high above the OECD average, while according to the European standards it is scandalous.
The same can be said about the percentage of the poor people in the total population as a whole and within individual categories (among children, the young people, grown-ups, older people) – Slovenia is far below the OECD average, and the US high above it.
- As to life expectancy, as late as 1970, Slovenia was below the OECD average and the US above it, while today the situation is opposite – life expectancy in Slovenia is 81.2 years, and in the US it is 78.8 years.
- The percentage of people who are very concerned about their jobs and are afraid that they may lose a job and not find another one is lower in Slovenia than in the US, despite the fact that the unemployment rate in Slovenia is higher than that in the US.
- The percentage of immigrants in Slovenia (assessment based on the birthplace criterion) with regard to the total population is higher than in the US.
- The percentage of prisoners and people who were at any time questioned or detained by the police or were judicially processed is extremely low in Slovenia, as opposed to the US where it is extremely high (all from OECD, 2016).

25 According to the latest happiness index, Slovenia occupies the scandalous 62nd place among the 155 world country (Helliwell, 2017: pp. 20–22). Just in passing, let me mention that the Netherlands occupies the very high, sixth position. The former politician, Mrs Louisewies van der Laan, who has been living in Slovenia for many years now, thus assessed the situation: “It is truly unbelievable. You live in a country that has everything and despite that you constantly complain.” (Bulatović, 2017).

26 See the results of the Slovenian opinion survey, especially responses to the questions about the responsibility of the state for the quality of life (questions R5 to R8c in SJM, 2016: 23–32) and about the perception of socialism, capitalism and (in)equality (questions S24 to S65 in SJM, 2013: pp. 58–69).

The comparison of other indicators of the quality of life is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Quality of life in United States (US) and Slovenia (SI)²⁷

AREA	INDICATOR	US	SI	RATING
Economy	<i>GDP</i> (Gross domestic product per capita, PPP \$)	52,5	28,9	US is better
	<i>Taxes on income, profits and capital gains</i> (% of total tax revenue)	52,8	10,4	
	<i>Employment</i> (% of the population ages 15 years and older that is employed)	58,8	52,1	
Inequality	Gini coefficient	41,1	25,6	SI is better
	<i>Coefficient of human inequality</i> (= average inequality in three basic dimensions) [†]	12,9	5,8	
	<i>Inequality in life expectancy</i>	6,1	3,6	
	<i>Inequality in education</i>	5,6	2,6	
Education	<i>Population with at least some secondary education</i> (% ages 25 and older)	95,3	97,3	SI is better
	<i>Government expenditure on education</i> (% of GDP)	5,2	5,7	
	<i>Education quality</i> (% satisfied)	68	73	
Health care	<i>Mortality rate: infant</i> (per 1.000 live births)	5,6	2,1	SI is better
	<i>Mortality rate: under-five</i> (per 1000 live births)	6,5	2,6	
	<i>Physicians</i> (per 10.000 people)	24,5	25,2	
	<i>Public health expenditure</i> (% of GDP)	8,3	6,6	
	<i>Health care quality</i> (% satisfied)	77	80	

²⁷ Based on Human Development Report, 2016: pp. 198 ss.

[†] Basic dimensions of human development are: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living; higher coefficient = greater inequality.

AREA	INDICATOR	US	SI	RATING
Individual well-being	Standard of living (% satisfied)	74	67	SI is better
	<i>Ideal job</i> (% answering yes)	65	65	
	<i>Feeling safe</i> (% answering yes)	73	84	
	<i>Freedom of choice: female</i> (% satisfied)	87	89	
	<i>Freedom of choice: male</i> (% satisfied)	86	88	
	<i>Renewable energy consumption</i> (% of total final energy consumption)	7,9	19,3	
	<i>Gender development index</i> (ratio of female to male HDI values)	0,993	1,003	
Community	<i>Community</i> (% answering good)	81	87	SI is better
	<i>Prison population</i> (per 100.000 people)	698	73	
	<i>Homicide rate</i> (per 100.000 people)	3,9	0,7	
	<i>Actions to preserve the environment</i> (% satisfied)	60	71	
Trust	<i>Confidence in judicial system</i> (% answering good)	59	24	US is better (except at the last indicator)
	<i>Trust in national government</i> (% answering yes)	35	20	
	<i>Actions to preserve the environment</i> (% satisfied)	60	71	

Why, then, should the Slovenes dream the American Dream rather than the Americans dreaming the Slovenian Dream (or at least the Canadian Dream, to take a spatially closer example)? There are at least three categories of reasons: historical, political-cultural and marketing reasons. The first two are related to the immense difference in social power possessed by Slovenia and the US in international relations. The third reason is quite banal – the American Dream is one of the globally most recognizable American export products, while there is nothing that could be branded the “Slovenian Dream.” The most serious attempt in this sense, aimed at establishing a Slovenian national ideology that would play the same role as the American Dream did in the US, is “the second republic.” It is a political phantasy of the most powerful opposition politician in Slo-

venia, Janez Janša (2014), which, luckily, continues to fail to gain support, since in its essence it is a crypto-Fascist project (Mihelj, 2011). In short, the American Dream, or rather what is left of it (neoliberalism) is present in Slovenia, and in various areas.²⁸ Below we will look into the most important one, which is the area of social policy.

The latest reform of the fundamental institutions of social protection in Slovenia²⁹ introduces the concept that has been spreading across Europe during the past decade under the name “new public management.” It is a new neo-liberal trick (Gould & Robert, 2013; Green-Pedersen, 2002), which is in Slovenia introduced by the ministry responsible for social policy.³⁰ The reform is implemented with the help of US experts as direct advisers. In this concept, the social work has been instrumentalized and turned into an extension of social policy which, in turn, has become an instrument in the hands of economic policy – or to be more precise, the part of economic policy concerned with the regulation of the labor market. And what is a consequence of that approach? Once social policy, which had already subjected social work (Dragoš & Leskošek, 2016) becomes subjected to wrong economic policy, social work is expected to accomplish things that can no longer be considered part of social work. Social workers are required to condition social benefits on specific prerequisites, effectively forcing their clients into accepting the worst forms of employment relations, when, for example, there is no suitable job on the labor market for the client in question, or the job is rejected by everyone because it is a junk job not providing even for a bare existence. In the new parlance, this approach is described as “empowering target groups to approach the labor market,” as can be seen from the reform documents published by the government (Predlog ZSV 2017:6). Social workers are now required to provide “motivation” for the user of social work in the sense that the user will be “compelled to search for better options” (ibid.: pp. 2–3). It is a toxic effect of the American Dream. In Slovenia, it is disseminated by the political elites, from top to bottom, despite the three important factors.

- Civil society strictly opposes it, because (in contrast to the political elites), it attaches high value to the social role of the state and decisively rejects the rise in inequality; this has been so throughout the past several decades, ever since the opinion polls in Slove-

28 For the area of economy and labor relations, see: Leskošek et al., 2013; Poglajen, 2017.

29 These are 62 centers for social work that were established as early as the 1960s; at that time, the network constituted the best system of social protection in all ex-socialist countries.

30 The Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs.

nia were launched in the 1960s. In this sense, the Slovenian public is constantly, consistently, surprisingly and refreshingly resistant to the enforcement of neoliberalism (Dragoš, 2016).

- The “rationalization” of the social state, which is an euphemism for slashing the budget for the social sector, is not in any way connected with the material condition or capacity of Slovenia! As already pointed out, Slovenia is one of the richest states (OECD) which despite that fact even now – meaning before the neo-liberal reform – allocates one of the smallest share of the budget funds in Europe to the social protection of its citizens (relative to its GDP), while it is among the best in Europe according to the criterion of the utilization (effectiveness) of those funds (Dragoš & Leskošek, 2016: pp. 98–99). Furthermore, we should not neglect the fact that following the end of the latest economic crisis, for several years now the rate of economic growth in Slovenia is (again) one of the highest in Europe, while other macro-economic indicators are also improving.

Table 5: The share of the poor people in ex-socialist countries from 2005-2014 in percentage points (in brackets) and percentages (calculations by S. Dragoš based on Eurostat, 2016).

2005 to 2014: EU27 (+0.7) = +4.2 % Euro19 (+1.6) = +10.3 %		Changing share of the poor people in (percentage points) and %	
		Increase	Decrease
Extent of poverty	Large^d	Estonia (+3.5) = +19.1 %	Macedonia (-4.9) ^b = -18.1 %
		Bulgaria (+3.4) ^a = +18.5 %	Lithuania (-1.4) = -6.8 %
		Latvia (+1.8) = +9.3 %	Croatia (-1.2) ^c = -5.8 %
		Serbia (+0.9) = +3.7 %	
		Romania (+0.8) = +3.3 %	
	Smaller^e	<i>Slovenia</i> (+2.3) = +18.9 %	Poland (-3.5) = -17.1 %
		Hungary (+1.5) = +11.1 %	Czech Republic (-0.7) = -6.7 %
			Slovakia (-0.7) = -5.3 %

a Data for 2006-2014.

b Data for 2010-2014.

c Data for 2010-2014.

d Poverty scope is higher than EU (27) average in 2014.

e Poverty scope is lower than EU (27) average in 2014.

- Despite the above-mentioned favorable indicators of the development stage of the social state in Slovenia (compared to the US), compared to other European countries Slovenia is in the lower group, while the growth of the share of the poor people is one of the highest compared to other ex-socialist countries (Table 5). All those facts

have not prevented the government from continuing with the reform plans.

Compared to other ex-socialist states, Slovenia's contribution to the social protection is indeed higher, but only on average which obscures comparisons. A more realistic picture of the social image of Slovenia compared to other ex-socialist states is revealed in Table 5. It shows the relation between the extent (share) of poverty in individual countries and the attitude of the state politics towards the issue. The countries are first divided into the group with a large extent of poverty and the one with a smaller extent of poverty – the criterion for grouping is the European average. At the same time, the countries are grouped according to their approach to poverty and the criterion of whether poverty increased or decreased during the last decade, that is, from the beginning of the last economic peak in 2005 to the end of the last crisis in 2014. The comparison of data shows that the second highest figure (5) in the lower left quadrant of the table is associated with Slovenia. It denotes the increase in poverty among the Slovenes (and especially Slovenian women). In the last decade it increased by as much as 18.9 percent. The only country that is a bit worse than Slovenia in this respect is Estonia, where the poverty increased by 0.2 percent more than in Slovenia, while in all other countries the increase in poverty was much slower (except in Bulgaria, where the rate of increase was the same as in Slovenia). Moreover, more than half of the ex-socialist countries listed in the right part of the table, managed to decrease the share of poor people, with Poland and the Czech Republic being the most successful. The alleviation of poverty in Poland transformed the country from the social loser to the winner. In 2005, the share of poor people in Poland was high above the European average (higher by 5 percentage points than the average), while in 2014, that share dropped below the European average. The Czech Republic is the most exemplary case on the European and global scale. Although poverty there dropped by “only” 6.7 percent, it is necessary to take into account that the Czech Republic originally had a very low poverty rate which was reduced even further, without ever risking the opposite upward trend characteristic of Slovenia. The Czech Republic had 10.4 percent of poor people in 2005, but as early as the following year, that share dropped below 10 percent, and the downward trend continued throughout the decade, including during the crisis years. In 2014, the Czech Republic had only 9.7 percent of poor people, which is the second lowest share of poor people in Europe. The lowest share (7.9%) has been recorded by Island (Eurostat 2016), the country that was even more severely affected by the economic crisis than Slovenia. In

short, the ex-socialist countries fare worst in this respect in Europe, and Slovenia is the worst among them (according to the criterion of the relative increase in poverty). This is particularly true in the housing sector, as is evident from Table 6.

Table 6: The share of population living in inadequate housing – the comparison of ex-socialist countries (and Greece, as the greatest European loser; Eurostat 2016a)

%	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU (27)	/	18.0	17.0	16.0	16.1	15.6	15.1	15.7	15.7	/
EU (18)	16.5	16.1	15.8	16.0	16.4	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	/
Greece	20.4	19.4	18.6	17.6	17.1	15.3	14.7	14.0	13.7	/
Bulgaria	30.7	14.8	30.4	23.9	15.4	14.9	13.8	12.9	13.2	12.9
Czech Republic	21.2	15.6	13.8	14.6	11.8	11.9	10.5	10.0	9.2	/
Estonia	23.7	21.6	17.1	20.2	18.8	19.2	19.4	17.5	15.9	/
Lithuania	32.4	26.5	25.7	25.9	24.7	26.0	28.2	27.7	27.5	24.4
Latvia	28.5	25.2	25.1	21.2	19.2	19.0	17.6	19.9	18.9	/
Hungary	27.0	19.2	30.8	14.5	24.2	22.1	24.7	26.7	26.9	25.4
Poland	41.4	37.5	22.8	17.6	15.6	11.5	10.5	10.1	9.2	/
Romania	/	29.5	24.3	22.0	19.1	18.0	15.4	15.0	12.7	/
Slovakia	6.6	6.1	9.1	6.6	5.8	7.8	8.8	7.5	7.0	/
Croatia	/	/	/	/	19.8	15.2	13.3	13.1	11.7	/
Slovenia	21.6	17.5	30.2	30.6	32.4	34.7	31.5	27.0	29.9	26.9
Macedonia	/	/	/	/	24.7	16.6	14.4	14.3	15.2	/
Serbia	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	21.6	26.2	23.4

The share of inadequate housing is the highest in Slovenia compared to all other ex-socialist countries – in 2014, 29.9 percent of the housing stock was unsuitable for living. Seven years earlier, seven countries had higher shares of inadequate housing than Slovenia, and according to that indicator Slovenia was exceptionally below the European average (by half percentage point), but as early as the following year – meaning even before the beginning of the last economic crisis – the share of inadequate housing rose by substantial 72 percent, exceeding the European average by approx. 13 percentage points. Once again it is necessary to mention the two record holders – Poland and the Czech Republic. During the selected period, the former reduced the percentage of inadequate housing from 41.4% to 9.2%. The Czech Republic, which in 2006 was comparable to Slovenia according to this criterion, eight years later had the share of adequate housing that was 20.7 percentage points lower than that in Slovenia.

Even Greece, the biggest European loser, managed to decrease the share below 14 percent. Slovenia, on the other hand, is shifting away in the

wrong direction even from the Greek standard, although it never even approached it, because it never invested efforts in that direction.

The main reason for the housing disaster is the American Dream. As soon as Slovenia gained independence, the entire housing stock in Slovenia, which during the socialist era was declared as “collective/social” property, was privatized. Since Slovenia succumbed to the propaganda from the late 1950s, when Nixon in Moscow was showing off to Khrushchev a typical worker’s apartment (described in the second part of this article), it was convinced that the solution to the housing problems of the population could be resolved solely by the market initiative. The latter is, naturally, impossible without the private property. With the re-categorization of the housing stock (the right to housing) during the era of transition into a tradeable good, Slovenia ended up with one of the highest share of privatized housing in Europe and the lowest share of rented and social housing. This situation is also responsible for the above-the-average financial dependence of children on their parents, the below-the-average birth rate and large dissatisfaction of the Slovenes over the housing situation in the country (Mandič, 1990; 2016).

Conclusion

The utopian elements of all ideologies – from socialist, Marxist, conservative and liberal to neo-liberal – are subject to the law of long-term ideological repercussions as formulated by K. Mannheim. The American dream originating in the mid-20th century, which is the second and the last great contribution of the US to the world peace, is not an exception. The race towards a higher quality of life instead of a larger number of nuclear bombs looked like a good promise for the prevalence of soft power politics in international relations, with the US as its initiator at the time. However, by neglecting one of the angles of the American dream “triangle” defined by Martin L. King (an individual – attitude towards others – the God), the triangle collapsed and the American dream turned into a neoliberal phantasm. The global impact of that extremely toxic product is directly proportional to the distance from the source. The American dream is more convincing in less developed countries than in countries in which it originated. The case of Slovenia, a typical peripheral country, clearly shows that the reason for this phenomenon cannot be reduced to material or cultural factors. Indeed, Slovenia’s peripheral position highlights the paradox of why the Slovenian elites are more susceptible to the American way of life than, for example, the American elites to the Slovenian way, although the quality of life in Slovenia is higher than that in the US. The comparison of Slovenia and other ex-socialist countries shows

that the appeal of the American dream is easier to explain with the help of voluntarism than determinism.³¹ The differences in the perception of the social state, inequality and poverty are not a result of culture, or of the economic development or economic cycles,³² but of the susceptibility of the political elites to the American dream in its residual (neo-liberal) form which was disseminated around the world in the past half of the century.

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31 Determinism is here used in the sense of factors which the country cannot (essentially) influence.

32 The case of Slovenia proves this. Of all socialist countries, it was the least authoritarian, the most economically developed, the most open and the most free country with the highest quality of life (according to all criteria). It should also be noted that the theoretical concept of the welfare state – the most important social invention of the 20th century – was developed in Slovenia at the same time as in the Scandinavian countries, which is to say, early enough, between the two wars (the author was Andrej Gosar, 1933, 1935; Dragoš, 2015).

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