

THE SLOVENIAN POLITICAL FIELD AND ITS CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

This article grasps the meaning of social action and enumerates constraints that stratify and structure the Slovenian political field. The author is influenced by the theoretical premises of Pierre Bourdieu and draws further conclusions about the field from responses that were provided by general secretaries of Slovenian parliamentary parties as well as some selected extra-parliamentary parties in semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. The author thus tries to determine how the structure and functioning of the political field constrains and limits its agents and how the political field is constrained by external effects from other social fields, especially the journalistic field. The final conclusion of the article is that for political agents manoeuvring space is significantly narrowed; however, it is not completely devoid of viable options for alternative ways of acting.

Keywords: political field, journalistic field, Bourdieu, personalization, party, general secretary

AMBITO POLITICO SLOVENO E I SUOI VINCOLI

SINTESI

Il presente articolo esamina il significato dell'azione sociale e stabilisce alcuni vincoli che stratificano e strutturano l'ambito politico sloveno. L'autore è influenzato dai presupposti teorici di Pierre Bourdieu e analizza le risposte ricevute da parte dei segretari generali dei partiti parlamentari e non-parlamentari sloveni nelle interviste semi-strutturate approfondite. L'autore cerca di stabilire come la struttura e il funzionamento dell'ambito politico limitino gli agenti nel campo e come sia limitato l'ambito politico dagli effetti esterni da parte di altri ambiti sociali, soprattutto dall'ambito giornalistico. La conclusione finale dell'articolo è che lo spazio di manovra degli agenti nell'ambito politico sia molto ristretto. Ciò nonostante, non è completamente privo di opzioni che permetterebbero dei metodi alternativi di funzionamento.

Parole chiave: ambito politico, ambito giornalistico, Bourdieu, personalizzazione, partito, segretario generale

INTRODUCTION

During my brief scholarly career, I have crossed different disciplines of social sciences, and I have found sociology with its theories and methods to be the most appropriate discipline that scientifically grasps human action and the structure of the social space that surrounds it. I believe that sociology offers the most adequate tools and instruments that enable a committed person to discover the violence, exploitation, inequality and most importantly, arbitrariness that pervades his or her own society. While descriptive, intellectual and analytical capacities vary from one sociological theory to another, I turned to some of them to study language. I realized that discourses, statements, and messages correspond to the very structure of the social space, i.e. the precise location or position in the social structure in which they are being produced and reproduced. I also realized that this holds for social representation in various institutions as well as the political practice of a variety of agents and groups. It will be my task in this article to provide a sociological interpretation of parliamentary and party politics and the inherent limitations that permeate its structure.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK

Based on these introductory remarks, it can already be detected that the theoretical foundations and principles underlying this article draw on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields, habitus and practice. This renowned French sociologist used the "craft of sociology" to provide an understanding of production as well as conditions and circumstances of production of speech and language, which is a necessary part of social representation and political practice (cf. Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu's theory underlies the interpretation of responses that were given to our research team by agents in the Slovenian political field as well. The reason behind this is practical: for the past couple of years I have studied Bourdieu's *oeuvre* rather thoroughly, and when I started participating in the already ongoing research on Digital Citizenship, I found some of the data that had been collected rather surprising, to put it mildly. What surprised me is that a significant number of responses confirmed what Bourdieu had been saying two or three decades ago. His findings supported and corresponded with the responses that general secretaries of Slovenian parties supplied during our interviews on how actors in

institutionalized politics perceive democracy and citizenship and how they communicate with media, voters and citizens. In the very process of researching Bourdieu's theory of capital, fields and habitus could have been already considered as "part of my habitus", as Karl Maton (2010, 64) would have put it. I applied dispositions derived from Bourdieu's writing (and empirical research) to the answers and data that we have received from respondents in the Slovenian political field. These are then some of the preliminary thoughts and conclusions when those dispositions were applied in a specific research practice, while the research process remains somewhat distant from Bourdieu's empirical - statistical and ethnographical - rigour (cf. Bourdieu, 1988a; Bourdieu, 1998c; Bourdieu, 2005b).

Empirically this analysis is or was an ethnographic inquiry into the experience and the environment of the Slovenian political field. It is and was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with general secretaries of Slovenian parliamentary and some selected extra-parliamentary parties. The selection of interviewees, who were all approved by their party and positioned rather high in the division of political labour, gave us an opportunity to uncover some of the parts of the political field, their party apparatus as well as their opinion on other fields of the state, especially the media and journalistic field. Party secretaries, it turned out, are quite powerful, well-connected and well-informed figures, if we bear in mind that the party controls access to the most conspicuous positions (cf. Bourdieu, 1991, 196).¹ However, the method and mode of knowledge applied in the research process is in line with the interpretative approach to social action of Max Weber (1978, 4–24) and the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel and Alfred Schutz (Bourdieu, 1990, 26). It relies on the qualitative method, which tries to uncover subjective and inter-subjective meanings of action and interaction of individuals.²

If I could formulate a research question that guided this research and the final form of my article, I would formulate it sociologically: In what ways do the structure and functioning of the institutional political field constrain and limit individuals in that field? What kind of constraints do other social fields impose on the political field? And how do agents understand, assign meaning, adjust, reproduce or transform those constraints and limitations? How do they in relation to those constraints somewhat unconsciously personalize their party programmes and programmatic issues? How do they monopolize the social energy and power that their party

1 General secretaries that we interviewed manage, coordinate (or at least oversee) financial and executive, operative and coordinating as well as advising and communication sections of the party. Two of the ten secretaries are responsible for communication and PR tasks besides their secretarial work.

2 The sample of interviews which in accordance with the ethnographic method can "only be based on a small number of cases" (Bourdieu, 1993, 14), consists of 10 interviews. I conducted the interviews that I interpret in this article with Jernej Amon Prodnik (cf. his article in this edition of *Annales*). That is why when I refer to interviewees in this article I use first person plural (we); however, when I refer to the person that interprets the responses and writes the article I use first person singular (I).

and the people who they are supposed to represent relegate to their persona? Answers to those questions constitute the first part of my text. In the second part, I briefly evoke Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital before I go on to demonstrate why an alternative way of doing politics and radical social change is almost impossible to achieve solely through the political field. In the last part, I try to merge both arguments and finally explain some wider and deeper causes as well as reasons for a systemic change of parliamentary democracy in past decades.

POLITICAL FIELD

Thinking about the complexity of social structure in terms of stratified social spheres is an old sociological theme (cf. Durkheim, 2013; Marx, Engels, 1998). The historical and social division of labour in the highly dynamic evolution of capitalism and national states resulted in complex separation and differentiation of stratified social spheres. These relatively autonomous structures and configurations of objective relations, norms, practices, rules, regularities and regulations between institutions and actors, where people perform various social functions and collect various forms of specific knowledge, expertise, experience and information (i.e. capital) Bourdieu labelled as *fields* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 97; Thomson, 2010, 69; cf. Meiksins Wood, 1988, 74).

The "microcosm of representative politics" (Wacquant, 2005, 14) in a capitalist national and bourgeois state is one of these stratified fields defined by the competition for power - over public finances, law, army, police etc. (Weber, 1946, 80–81). On the other hand, that field is defined by competition for the "monopoly of the right to speak and act in the name of some or all of the non-professionals" (Bourdieu, 1991, 190). Political parties are hierarchical entities that embody this dual logic of competition and a shared belief in the parliamentary game of representation, an appropriation of the words as well as the power of the group that is represented, which is reproduced through the voice in the political field (Bourdieu, 1991, 190).

People who gravitate towards a specific party tend to share similar beliefs, values and norms; however, they also compete for positions and hold titles and functions in the party. Parties should - like faculties in a field of universities or companies in a field of building companies - be viewed as fields in themselves, as entities that have horizontal as well as vertical relations and structure (Bourdieu, 1988a, 296; Bourdieu, 2005b, 69–73;

cf. Thomson, 2010, 72–73). The field's "relative autonomy" is then institutionalized in its very own functioning: in electoral procedures and mechanisms of *competition* between hierarchically positioned parties, groups, functionaries and candidates. It is also institutionalized in its *rules of functioning* - law-making, debating, sitting in parliamentary bodies, monitoring, investigating, opposing, blocking, impeaching, etc. (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 2005a, 32; cf. Rosanvallon, 2008, 101, 156–160, 203–212; my emphasis).³ The political field, perhaps more than any other field, is a field of struggles, "one of the least free markets that exist" (Bourdieu, 1991, 173). Constant and fierce competition generates struggles to improve one's own position and/or impose new principles of hierarchization (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 101–102). However, participation in the field (or the game) also demands a level of belief in the game, devotion and recognition of the value of the field, and mastering of its rules (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 116).

The field and its constraints

Political agents in the field are relatively autonomous and "free"; however, their scope and scale of functioning is far from limitless and boundless. It is useful to grasp the political field precisely in its complex tension between homological logics of parallel fields in densely intertwined and embedded social structure. I can outline three configurations that significantly limit the political field: firstly, the influence and functioning of the national and international economic field, secondly, the ever more integrated international political field and thirdly, the local journalistic field.⁴

Firstly, the political field is largely limited by the country's economic field, since the economic field has a tendency to enforce its structure onto other social fields (Bourdieu, 1991, 230). At the same time, the political field of a state is not immune to developments in the national economic field (Bourdieu, 1991, 245–246), which is based on the capitalist mode of production, specific relations and exchange that stratify that field. If we take Slovenia as an example we see that in the years 2005–2008 Slovenian banks accumulated excessively large debts (on foreign financial markets) and loaned excessively: to domestic companies (construction and real estate), to consumers, to sectors that were not technologically nor commercially productive or advanced. The economic crisis that later hit western economies (in 2008 and 2009) caused a significant reduction of Slovenian exports and domestic demand. Companies in the economic field faced reduced demand and decrease in sales (a sharp fall

3 The political field should not be conflated with representative democracy. According to Bourdieu (1998b, 14–18) the political field existed in former socialist regimes as well; it largely merged with the bureaucratic field, while mechanisms of reproduction and its functioning were different.

4 The functioning of the bureaucratic field - a field of ministries, agencies and directorates that structure the state - should not be underestimated and exempt from objectifying. Bourdieu devoted a considerable amount of time to the logic of the bureaucratic field and the structuring role that it has for the state (cf. Bourdieu, 1998c; Bourdieu, 2005b, 99–110).

in incomes) as well as a devaluation of their assets (the price of their property and their capital fell). Banks found themselves exposed to those loans and had to clear their accumulated external debt – which they did by finding money on the market, reducing loans to companies significantly, and eventually through state interventions or bailouts. Due to bailouts, years and years of tax exemptions for the richest classes, and shocks caused by the scale of crisis in the banking sector, the Slovenian national debt spiralled (Drenovec, 2015, 158–162; Kržan, 2013, 134–141). The general secretary of the largest governmental party admits that precisely this unfavourable debt and the state of public finances strongly affect their governmental practice: *“as a movement rooted in civil society you have a certain goal, but when you start doing politics you have to look wider, while your focus narrows. We promoted controlled privatization and we still mean that, but you take over the government and you are confronted with a certain state of the books. And then you have a dilemma: or you stick to what you were saying or you try to fix that bad economic and fiscal balance sheet. The first option brings with it a set of complications on financial markets since your balance sheet of public finances appears to start collapsing.”* Practical necessities of ruling appear immediately upon election night and the government is stripped of time to contemplate. *“You win the elections in the fall and already in November you have to rebalance the budget completely and God forbid that this thing fails.”*

Secondly, externally, a political field like the Slovenian one is extensively being limited by the structure of its international integration: the European Union, the European monetary union, as well as the wider globalized space (i.e. international superpowers, hedge funds, international lenders, etc.). If we look at Slovenia again, we see that when public deficits in the eurozone grew exponentially in 2009, financial markets started to speculate with the debts of its most vulnerable countries (Spain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus and Portugal). Slovenian yields on governmental bonds closely correlated with the rise in yields of Greece and Italy, while internal conditions did not significantly affect that rate (Kržan, 2013, 142–143). Countries in the eurozone represent diverse economies; under a single currency and unable to influence their own monetary policy, states do not control (and print) the currency with which they pay the holders of their debt, and it seems that in order to react to intensive competition and balance the budget as prescribed by the Maastricht criteria, countries are left with two alternatives: resort to debt on one hand and “internal devaluation”⁵ or austerity on the other (cf. Carchedi, 2001; Onaran, 2010). The general secretary of a governmental party expressed the effects of this “iron cage”, as Max Weber would put it, in

an almost apologetic way: *“We are keen on recognizing the Palestinian state, but then you have these financial markets. Based on our macroeconomic situation we desperately need financial markets. /.../ So we weigh: recognition and/or losing financial markets”.*

While those two configurations significantly enforce limitations on the political field, the responses provided by our respondents demonstrate, thirdly, how the weight and functioning of the national journalistic field constrains agents in the political field. And to put it precisely: the relation of the political field to the journalistic field is mostly a relation with the *television and commercial pole of the journalistic field*, which, being far from the intellectual pole, is a dominated field of cultural production with a high degree of heteronomy (Bourdieu, 1998a, 49–53). This pole of the journalistic field succumbs to “external legitimation” (Champagne, 2005, 58–59) which lies outside the field and is restrained by intense competition – for ratings, *scoop*, higher audience share and advertising. It is also the pole where the precarity of labour relations and forms of employment is endemic. As a general secretary put it: *“precarious journalists say 500 euros and they launch anything about you”.* It is, however, also the pole of the field where competition and the search for exclusivity under severe deadline pressure tend to minimize the field’s internal differences and generate uniformity through homogenized products (Bourdieu, 1998a, 20). As an oppositional functionary put it: *“Instead of analysis and reporting, media creates politics, they actually dictate the tempo and themes, they create politics instead of someone else (i.e. politicians) who was voted in to create it”.* Precisely this logic of the commercialized pole of the national journalistic field asserts itself in accordance with the logic of the political field, and it does so as soon as the party begins its battle for parliament. The production of ideas is subordinated to the logic of the conquest of power, which is the logic of the mobilization of the greatest number (Bourdieu, 1991, 181), while it is subordinated to the daily routines of the ever more commercialized and commodified journalistic field. Political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events (Bourdieu, 1991, 172) have to be expressed in accordance with “day-to-day thinking and competition”, which “equates what’s important with what’s new (Bourdieu, 1998a, 7). That is why even the activists in the party furthest to the parliamentarian left seem somewhat astonished by the power of television and its impact on their own success: *“Success of United Left and Luka Mesec (now an MP) materialized after the debate on the biggest commercial television (POP TV) two days before the elections. Despite the fact that we reinforced his presence, in print media, radio and the web through*

5 “Internal devaluation” is basically an economist’s euphemism that stands for an aggressive attack on the labour movements and welfare state – its strategy is basically reducing direct and indirect labour costs (i.e. wages and social transfers) in the name of reviving international competitiveness of a state.

our own channels, his “performance” on television, and not on any television, but on commercial television and in prime time, was the one that sealed our breakthrough into a wider political space (of recognition)”.⁶

Personalization of social energy

The last point of the previous section brings me to a specific monopoly of social energy that politicians with a high volume of political (or symbolic, etc.) capital secure in time. It brings me to processes where those agents eventually start to personify the party through “charismatic domination”, to use Max Weber’s formulation (1946, 79). Bourdieu argues that functioning of the field enforces its logic on agents and eventually differences between competing parties are almost eradicated while parties’ leaders and visible parliamentarians differ only in regard to their personal styles and characteristics (Bourdieu, 2005a, 34; cf. Močnik, 2003, 134). However, I argue that the answer to this very question is the same as the answer to the question of why parties tend to embrace advertising tricks in their campaigning. I argue that only if we understand the complexity of interplay between the forces of different fields and dynamic social structure can we address both those questions properly. That is why, besides scoop and its focus on the sensational and trivial as the *modus operandi* of the journalistic field,⁷ the *personalization* of issues, candidates and parties should be given thoughtful consideration. That is why I make personalization a central point of the debate in this part of the article.

Personalization, as is pointed out in our interviews, is an ambiguous condition for the parties in question – it provides a dose of much needed visibility on one side and a contingent vulnerability on the other: “*We are lucky that the president of our party is also the mayor of the Slovenian capital city, and whenever he speaks it gains large media support, thus his party is automatically considered*”. However, this double-edged nature of personalization in an era where spin, according to oppositional functionaries, “*is not done for self-promotion but for complete annihilation of your opponent*”, creates a considerable amount of tension and anxiety for everybody in the field. This is especially true for politicians in those parties that did not develop organically and through a long laborious process of organization building. Mostly

it applies to parties that Colin Crouch (2013, 32) termed post-democratic, parties constructed rapidly, aiming for the closest elections and gathered around a person with a considerable amount of social reputation and symbolic capital, a person whose name the party then bears⁸. In an era with a low level of trust towards the political field as a whole, anything questionable that could tarnish that reputation quickly receives unwanted (political, journalistic and public) attention. Building the reputation of an organization or collective on one man’s symbolic capital is certainly not something that sociologists would recommend, since the “|m|an of politics is, like the man of honour, especially vulnerable to suspicions, malicious misrepresentations and scandal, to everything that threatens belief and trust, by bringing to light the hidden and secret acts and remarks and discredit their author” (Bourdieu, 1991, 192–193). However, empirically speaking, for parliamentarians short and constant mediatized exposure in a small community brings with it a certain “contamination”, as secretaries put it. This is also the point where the full effects of electoral logic become manifest, if we know that accumulated political capital and its appeal is also largely constituted by the jobs the party is able to make available – be it in organizations subordinate to the party apparatus, institutions and administration of local or central power, or a network of enterprises it controls (Bourdieu, 1991, 196–197; Weber, 1946, 87, 125). Considerable attention directed toward a single candidate, or a leader, whose symbolic and political demise media can help bring about, brings with it not only *his* professional demise, but also the demise of the party, and all the capital and work it has accumulated. Those who invested time, work and dedication – however short and minimal that might have been – express this anxiety in a serious and cautionary tone, warning us that the seriously damaging effects of electoral defeats should not be underestimated. Oppositional politicians sounded genuinely worried: “*We cannot get a job without people speculating that it was handed to us via connections. /.../ Former colleagues, they cannot get anywhere, they are self-pitying, no one calls them, they cannot get a job, they are depressed. /.../ Telephones do not ring anymore, people do not call you, those who were patting you on your back all that time, pat your successor, and people (voters, citizens) – people do not like you....*”⁹.

6 This statement belongs to a member of the IDS party, a socialist component of an oppositional United Left coalition. The statement was retrieved from an interview that I conducted this year when questioning the participants of social movements and protests in Slovenia. Many interviewees from that study believe that IDS and United Left are a parliamentary and institutional outcome of large protests that happened in Slovenia in 2012 and 2013.

7 An oppositional and experienced politician told us: “*You can make a selection of a few themes in the party that you think are important and ready for a wider discussion and debate but the media will not pay attention at all. You create your agenda, but they give you the microphone and tell you: ‘comment on this scandal that happened there’*”.

8 Parties that have flourished in Slovenia in the past year exemplify this tendency: Državljanska lista Gregorja Viranta (DLGV), Zaveznštvo Alenke Bratušek (ZaAB), Positive Slovenia born out of Lista Zorana Jankovića, Stranka Mira Cerarja (SMC).

9 This point should not be taken lightly in the political field, since 3 out of 4 parties mentioned in the previous footnote (fn. 8) will probably not even compete for national parliament at the next elections and virtually (in terms of media attention they receive and jobs they supply) do not exist anymore.

It is not surprising, then, that interviewees excessively criticized the *modus operandi* of the journalistic field. I agree with their criticism and theory confirms it (cf. Bourdieu, 1998a). However, let us bear in mind that these are partial views of respondents blindsided by the structure of the political as well as journalistic field. As newcomers to the field of politics and extra-parliamentarian parties experience and know, media accessibility is strongly limited while parties are on the outskirts of the parliamentary radar and it expands rapidly and extensively when parties manage to cross the necessary threshold. And as much as our interviewees expose the destructive effects of the journalistic field, it must be highlighted that our research did not objectify the journalistic field itself. Answers that were given to us belong to general secretaries of political parties and represent a “point of view taken from a point” (Bourdieu, 1988b, 782), i.e. from a specific position in a specific field. Party secretaries in their “subjective investigation of social complexity” (Sennett, 2006, 10–11) seem to be blind to mechanisms and power inherent to the political field and how their own field is able to transform, affect and influence the structure of the journalistic field.¹⁰ Politicians, functionaries and officials hold significant and important information, they orchestrate the rate and scale of press releases and PR events, they intervene in the journalistic field through the law-making process and subsidies that they provide. They also promote their ideas and policies via reporting and attention that the journalistic field is keen on giving them (Darras, 2005). Philippe Marliere (1998, 227) expressed this clearly, when stating that in day-to-day confluence of the political and journalistic field, the *former* still wields significant power to transform the latter (for better or for worse).

STRUCTURES OF THE FIELD INTERNALIZED

The political field, besides existing in objective systems of positions, also exists in *dispositions* of its agents. The latter are observable as cognitive and conative schemata, mental structures that inform and generate thoughts and practices in accordance with objective structures of the world (Bourdieu, 1990, 52–66). Consequently, cognitive systems or mental structures constitute (political) habitus of politicians (Bourdieu, 1990, 52–66; Bourdieu, 1991, 192). Thus commodification of politicians when it happens and when it is seen does not appear and function mechanically. It advances through mastery that is cultivated in the field of professional schools and classes like the ENA in France (Bourdieu, 1998c; Darras, 2005, 169), FDV, Faculty of Law or Faculty of Administration in Slovenia. It also advances through practical mastery of the immanent log-

ic, constraints and electoral mechanisms of the political field (Bourdieu, 1991, 175), when habitus is objectively adapted to objective structures it tends to reproduce (Bourdieu, 1990, 62). However, structure of the field is, according to Bourdieu, also defined by the structure of distribution of specific forms of capital(s), which are active in the field (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992, 108).

Habitus, capital and coercive power of the field

Bourdieu elaborated on forms of capital(s) rather schematically: “Capital is accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1986, 46). These regularities, where the holder of political capital and habitus anticipates the structure and the movement of the field, explain how the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS) could hold an office in three different ministries in every one of the five governments that ruled Slovenia from 2004. He was a minister (of defence, environment and foreign affairs) and had to enter three different parties when trying to elevate his own career and climb the structure of the Slovenian political field *in propria persona*. The general secretary of the DeSUS party admits that “*the president of our party has a lot of mileage, having been with us for ten years, and he knows exactly how to deal with the media,*” while he forgets to add that the president was elected president in 2005 while a member of that party for only a year. Patricia Thomson (2010, 68) says that capitals are processes as well as products of the field, capital is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things. Habitus is closely related to the structure and volume of capitals, since forms of accumulated capital (like embodied cultural capital or symbolic capital) are an inseparable part of an individual politician and his or her dispositions. The social democratic representative, for instance, tells us about their leader, who was also prime minister of Slovenia from 2008 to 2011: “*daily communication and new media inform us about positions and values that our base tends to have toward the party. But having this information about the base in advance, what the base values, wants or needs, our former president, who is today president of Slovenia - he simply had that intuition, he developed it, he had a political sense, a strong sense and did not need anything else*”. Bourdieu defined political capital as a “form of symbolic capital, *credit* founded on *credence* or belief and recog-

10 When pressed on the question as to why their web pages were not used to inform the public - by publishing important documents or explanations of laws - and thus bypass the journalistic field they criticize, general secretaries mostly seem surprised or genuinely struck by this idea. Some even admitted that that possibility did not occur to them at all.

tion, or, more precisely on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it)" (Bourdieu, 1991, 192). Symbolic, because the politician derives his (or her) political power from the trust that a group places in him (or her). Recognition, because (s)he derives his (or her) truly magical power over the group from faith in the representation that (s)he gives to the group and which is a representation of the group itself and of its relation to other groups (Bourdieu, 1991, 192). In that very sense we see different forms of capital at work when the United Left party tries to transform cultural capital into political when they try to translate daily topics from the language of "classical terminology of socialist theory into actual and modern language" and represent it as well as spread it through a functioning and discourse of parliamentary democracy.

Political practice is thus not simply to be considered as a result of one's habitus but rather a mastery that combines one's dispositions (habitus), volume of different capitals and one's current circumstances, i.e. current state of the field (cf. Maton, 2010, 51–52). When asked why a party prefers or favours faces and personalities instead of its content, an oppositional secretary expressed this mastery clearly: "it's a mixture of both, really, on a local level, if you do not have a mayoral candidate who also leads the list of candidates, you are not in the media, if you are present only with a political party, you are not invited to TV debates. /.../ so we could not find a candidate for a mayor, and we didn't go with a list as well, it would be irrelevant /.../". United Left chose their strategy similarly: "We used and interpreted results from this year's European elections and during the national campaign we visited those places that showed us support in order to gain a national vote. That is why for local elections, communication wise, we limited ourselves to those cities where we detected that we could win seats in municipal parliaments." Habitus, this practical sense of the political game and internalized externality, anticipates immanent necessities of a social (and especially political) world, since it is a product of circumstances and necessities in which political agents exist. It thus plays a vital role in balancing the possibilities and aspirations, when generating and organizing practices (cf. Bourdieu, 1990, 53–58). You see how habitus anticipates necessities when politicians go as far as to denounce the advice of PR experts which they perceive as a non-viable posturing that could be detrimental to their electoral success: "These new politicians, to which I belong as well, do not allow themselves to be told from the beginning to the end how to behave and what to say in public appearances, and they are slightly rebellious and 30 or even 40% of their appearance is their own,

which gives them a personal note. That is absent from the old politicians' way of doing things."

It is not only mastering the objective space of existing and potential stances in the field itself that politicians have to master. Nor is it only adding personal to the visible, preferable and lovable. Habitus is at play when ideology and ideological mechanisms come into play. As one general secretary explained to us, when electoral slogans and ads are put in newspapers and on television, they are carefully adjusted to the state of the national media field. Political parties anticipate and try to master stances of the voters they are trying to address. Along with their writers, "who draw on their inherited cultural fund of words and images" (Bourdieu, 2005b, 24), they create content that corresponds to the readers' or viewers' pre-existing dispositions, i.e. their habitus. But in order to get as many votes as possible and broaden their potential base they do not inculcate important messages to the masses evenly or equally. Various groups (according to gender, age or environment in which they live), which are supposed to have synchronized or homologous habitus, are addressed each in a slightly specific way. Various media (whether radio, print, broadcast or online, whether local, regional or national) display specific kinds of advertisements and issues (whether equal rights, social policies, urban planning, ecology, agricultural policy, etc.) and they highlight it or elaborate it in a "voter-friendly" way.¹¹

Tendency to eliminate alternatives

This far I have tried to elaborate on two tendencies: first, on limitations that the field imposes on its agents, and second, on the tendency of habitus to adapt to the field's structures and its functioning. At the intersection of these two tendencies I want to address another important question. That is why in this section I will develop an argument explaining why attempts to democratize the political field or subvert its relations seem impossible and why attempts to influence a radical systemic change or to intervene in contradictions as well as systems of domination outside the field are severely limited. I will argue that this impossibility lies predominantly in the logic and functioning of the field as well as the day-to-day inertia of the agents that move in it.

If a social field is relatively autonomous, this does not mean that it is homogenized or unified. On the contrary. The relational state and differentiated nature of the inner structure of the Slovenian political field with all its limitations for progressive change are neatly grasped and important conclusions made when observing the acts and discourse of the previously mentioned united coalition of three smaller parties (named *United Left*),

11 However, it is not only about informing, but also transforming dispositions. As Bourdieu noted of political policy in general: political parties with their advertising team try to use a realistic knowledge of dispositions to work to transform them or displace them on to other objects (Bourdieu, 2005b, 23).

which positioned itself in the empty space on the left of the existing *Social Democrats* (SD). Capitalizing on the recessionary economic downturn, the disappointment of voters with the established political system, their visible participation in the 2012/2013 uprisings, and new social (and broadcast) media, they took on themselves not only to define and outline social alternatives, but materialize them through the logic of parliamentary process. Their responses as well as their electoral addresses resemble the practical mastery of the “well-informed politician” that Bourdieu wrote about (1991, 177–179) since they master the meaning and social effects of their own stances – stances mastered by unconsciously mastering the objective space of existing and potential stances in the field itself, the very principles on which those stances are based *while* addressing groups they themselves are supposed to represent. Thus in their own words they have to oppose the right and far right side of the field (the current opposition), through cultural and single issue themes (Palestine, LGBT rights, view of historical socialist regimes and World War II) as well as delineate their economic Keynesianism from the nearest party, i.e. the governmental SD, and other newcomers, the governmental SMC, and position themselves against their social liberalism. According to their representative they have to position themselves “*against privatizations, against austerity legislation, and for workers’ ownership, cooperation and management*”. They put to work and have to put to work their dispositions to anticipate and predict possible outcomes of actions while they maintain and subvert the advantages and limitations of the field to benefit them and their coalition.

However, what is limiting those types of reformist movements in thinking, expressing and realizing what is currently politically and economically unthinkable, unexpressed and unrealizable through mechanisms of parliamentary democracy should probably be repeated *ad infinitum*.¹² The first thing, which is rather clear, even to the parties positioned to the right of the Social Democrats, is that this “relatively autonomous” field tends to “close in on itself”. Our respondents argue: “*Politicians sometimes enclose themselves in a balloon, not even wanting to /.../ and they don’t know how to step out of this frame and look out. It is not because you do not want to step out, but because time and events take you in and those mutual interactions that you have with a certain group take you in and you cannot take yourself out.*” Because of everyday parliamentary practice and division of social spaces that everyone in the field tries to address, relations between the agents in the field become more important than relations of the representatives towards the social groups they

represent (Bourdieu, 2005a, 34). Only in this sense could a political game (electoral and law-making game of parliamentary democracy) be understood in terms of a Wittgensteinian “game”, i.e. as a normative structure external to its players as individuals, while being internal to them as a collective. In this sense, it is also termed as inter-subjective rather than objective (cf. Hollis, 2002, 164). Because what underlies things common to all players in the field goes beyond mere *illusio* (cf. Bourdieu, 1991, 180; Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992, 98), doxical belief and total investment in the game or “*multi-party system achieved through Slovenian independence*”, as some oppositional parties put it. This condition and the product of the game constitute everyday material practices and rituals that manage to transcend the generational and party differences. One of the extra-parliamentary secretaries gave us a rather incautious but very honest and straightforward answer: “*If I befriended an older politician and we have coffee. /.../ Once you’re in that circle, friendships develop in that circle and it is normal to meet other politicians from other parties, maybe, on a friendly basis, where we do not talk politics exclusively*”.

Important conclusions for those who try to map out and define alternatives via mechanisms of parliamentary democracy should already be drawn from this. The logic of parliamentary competition distances even those who speak for the most deprived and dominated groups away from the very base that elected them (Bourdieu, 1991, 246–247; Bourdieu, 2005a, 34). Why? As Bourdieu argues, political parties in order to get elected try to broaden their electoral base by a somewhat unconscious and unintentional strategy of universalizing their speeches, making them ambiguous and murky, somewhat undifferentiated and homogenized (Bourdieu, 2005a, 34; cf. Močnik, 2003, 134; Močnik, 2007, 36). The general secretary of the Prime Minister’s party is already aware of this tendency, which permeates the minds of the party’s parliamentarians. “*We will see in two years, hopefully not, but I see it already – the parliamentary group is all about: ratings, ratings, ratings*”. In the same way, the national and international economic field and international limitations, the state of the state, in its demands and expectations, structure the action of elected and established governments. The same secretary thus continues: “*I think, now, when we consolidate public (state) finances, we will be able to finally start to deal with the content*”. It could be said that United Left successfully challenged the discursive monopoly and monotony of local professionals at first; however, through adapting to the structure and mechanisms of the field it did not manage to dismantle its functioning nor damage it.

12 Although we rely on Bourdieu’s theory of the political field (1991) it should be noted that one of the first to address the question of “monopoly of production in the hands of a body of a small number of units of production” (Bourdieu, 1991, 173), was Robert Michels. Probably one of the first to do so, this disciple of Weber already elaborated in his *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1911) what Bourdieu elaborated decades later. Michels labelled the tendency of centralizing energy and power as the “iron law of oligarchy”.

It seems then, according to the answers that we were given, that on the left of social democracy this point has already been taken. Their representative expressed the view that *“a party is only a phase, which has to dissolve itself if it wishes to achieve the final triumph of socialism”*. However, dangers observed by the representatives of United Left, such as *“the tyranny of quickness that coerces us to the media spectacle, where you do not exist if you do not communicate”* or *“framing calls for a press conference in populist terms to attract journalists’ attention”* and even relying on public opinion polls, can render these responses as part of well-intended rhetoric. Especially when considering the widening gap that the coalition carries within itself, precisely the gap that it tried to avoid by forming a broad coalition (or front) of plural voices rather than a single party. It seems, however, that the practical necessities of the parliamentary game structure relations in the coalition similarly, as a field, generating a gap between “pure”, “theoretical” or “scientific” members on one side and “practical” or “Realpolitical” on the other. The former tend to bring the logic of an intellectual field to the field of politics, while their group remains without a wider base and consequently power. The latter, on the other hand, tend to follow the logic of Realpolitik by attempting to widen the clientele through compromises and concessions, a vital and necessary condition to enter the realm of political representation (cf. Bourdieu, 1991, 188–190). The void between the two logics is exacerbated by this practical logic of everyday political necessity, and eventually becomes clearer and sometimes even unbearable, especially when mechanisms of the field and its strategies of conservation become completely transparent to most of the party members. Fractions finally begin to break from what they see as unnecessary and demeaning compromises¹³.

SYNTHESIS

To synthesize my argument, I will try to elaborate on some underlying causes and valid explanations for this double game of parliamentary democracy in a state that organizes its economy on the capitalist mode and relations of production. This could prove to be rather difficult; however, I argue that reasons are systemic and transcend the functioning of a specific and localized field. Thus far I have deliberately tried to avoid explanations of causal and underlying causes since my main goal in this research was to objectify understanding and production of meaning in a Slovenian political field. I will synthesize both parts of the article now and offer some

explanatory arguments as to what was the historical transformation of parliamentary parties from the 1980s onwards. I will also try to extend my last argument as to why alternative ways of doing politics seem hard to realize in practice.

I think that the very tendency to eradicate even the slightest of programmatic differences between the parties (cf. Močnik, 2003, 134; Močnik, 2007, 36) has structural causes. Part of the underlying cause is definitely historical and should be sought in the broader social structure. For example, parties, especially in western capitalist economies, experienced deep transformations in class and workforce composition – or to put it bluntly, economic fields transformed and caused the decline of industrial working classes. This demise of the industrial labour force meant that parties of Keynesian compromise in the post-war period also faced a high contraction of their social (i.e. voters’) base and membership. Leadership and parties somewhat blindly cast their trust in improved and accessible public opinion polling and neglected the parties’ activists who were acting and working with the base. Their financial fall-out for ever more expensive national and TV campaigns was slowly relegated to the upper echelons of economic fields – instead of unions and loyal membership as the backbone of its structure, parties’ inner circles accepted and relied on companies and wealthy groups or individuals. This turned voters away from parties (Crouch, 2013, 55–56, 70–72) as recent elections clearly demonstrate (Cipek, 2014, 21–22). The result of a combination of changed class constellations, parliamentary machinery and pragmatism means that this wider inner circle now concentrates and accumulates a high amount of power, energy and capital, while the vast majority outside of it is stuck with recognition without power (Bourdieu, 1991, 196; Bourdieu, 2005a, 34).

Simultaneously, in order to get re-elected and playing on the journalistic mode of story-telling, a more individualized approach to political issues developed in the political field itself - highlighting politicians’ personal integrity, morality, honesty or simplicity became a widespread strategy (Rosanvallon, 2008, 47–48). That is why I would argue that we cannot accept the argument that the media “merely reflected and amplified the advent of a new politics of distrust” (Rosanvallon, 2008, 47–48). The journalistic field itself went through some radical legal, political, economic as well as important technological transformations (Bourdieu, 1998a). Due to expansion of higher education and higher demands for a formally educated workforce, certificates of institutionalized cultural capital (university degrees and diplomas) became almost man-

13 While I was writing this article, the secretary general of the IDS party, the socialist component of the United Left coalition, resigned, claiming that the party is “completely subjected to the parliamentary group of representatives”, that it succumbed to “parliamentary and PR logic of functioning” and that it “drifts towards the political centre” (Potič, Belovič, Delo, 4 December 2015, Spopad pragmatičnega in ideološkega dela IDS). A public secret that is (un)known in Slovenia states that around 20 so-called “theoretical” members had already left the same party in September of 2014, citing almost identical reasons.

datory. Journalism schools and departments thus started to play a decisive role in educating and training journalists, where students' dispositions tend to be transformed, re-socialized and re-educated. This systematic cultivation in schools and in newsrooms where a personalized and individualized approach to structural contradictions and tendencies is favoured becomes internalized and preferred as (personalized) forms of story-writing (Neveu, 2007, 339). We can see then that the role of journalism and media in psychologizing structural phenomena are *constitutive* and not merely contextual. The consequences of the entangled relationship of the political and *journalistic field*, which is highly and intensely competitive, should thus not be put aside. Crouch argues that precisely those structural causes of concentrated and centralized power in political parties caused the growing rate of scandals that have arisen in political fields in general. It could also be argued, though I feel this is less important, that in the past two decades some institutions of control and judgement proliferated while peoples' sensitivity for transparency (and trust) increased (Rosanvallon, 2008, 47–48).¹⁴ One thing is, however, clear. The latest stage of capitalism generates widely shared ideological mechanisms that misconceive the effects of structurally caused problems (like unemployment, scandals or crises) and explain them through acts and motivations of individual psychology (like greed, corruption and moral integrity) (cf. Močnik, 2006, 80–82). I would pose a pertinent question here instead of an explicit answer: which field (field of education, economic field, political field, artistic field or journalistic field) developed this individualism of rational actor that permeates explanations and narratives in those respective fields and exported it to other fields and to wider society in general?

This question asks why radical and meaningful social change is difficult to achieve while it tries to transcend the problematic of a specific field and grasp the complex structure of the national state in its entirety. It tries to grasp that reality is made in the day-to day inertia

by agents who follow explicit codes, implicit rules and hierarchies of their own respective fields. And furthermore, the complex functioning of parallel and intertwining fields in the social structure influences the outcome of the struggles and mystifies the power that one field has over another. In their struggles agents follow conscious and unconscious strategies that their own field allows them to follow, while they adjust and synchronize the actions according to the functioning of the nearest field(s) and agents in those fields.

CONCLUSION

I believe that responses that were provided to us in our research confirm that the space for manoeuvring in the political field is narrow in general, yet not completely devoid of meaningful action. Interviews confirm that the political field tends to close in on itself, while the influx of new parliamentarians clearly shows that none of the fields is permanently closed, unreachable or impossible to alter. As I tried to demonstrate, radical social change will occur synchronically and simultaneously, since we cannot accord a leading or vital role to one specific field. Changes in one field will probably be annihilated by the forces and entities from other fields, which have the power to enforce their own logic on its structure. However, national and local fields, or sectors of those national and local fields, *internationalize* and form relationships and ties with other sectors of other national fields, where they manage to transcend some of the state's jurisdiction and transactions. This shows that capitalism has consolidated and entrenched its structure and expanded its global interconnectivity in recent decades while it did not find the slightest need to abolish the national state, its domination, hierarchies and coercive powers. This means that the transnational needs the national to wield its power, strength and influence. Answers to that symbiosis should come in forms that are truly international.

¹⁴ I agree with Močnik (2007, 36) that scandals perform a preferential function – they introduce differences between political agents that are *de facto* invisible if we try to juxtapose their messages and programmes. Scandals also play a normative role - they confirm societal and normative consensus of what is acceptable and what is not.

SLOVENSKO POLITIČNO POLJE IN NJEGOVE OMEJITVE

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POVZETEK

Članek poskuša prikazati, kako struktura, odnosi in delovanje političnega polja omejujejo agense v samem polju. Avtor se opira na teorijo polj, habitusa in prakse, ko interpretira odgovore generalnih sekretarjev slovenskih političnih parlamentarnih in zunajparlamentarnih strank. Avtor tako poskuša pokazati, da so mnogi odgovori, ki jih je dobil v poglobljenih intervjujih, v skladu z empiričnimi ugotovitvami in teorijo, ki jo je v svojih delih razvil francoski sociolog Pierre Bourdieu. Članek se najprej ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako zunanje sile, posebej tiste s komercialnega pola novinarskega polja, ekonomskega in transnacionalnih političnih polj, omejujejo agense v slovenskem političnem polju in zakaj agensi personificirajo strankarske programe ali pomembne dnevne teme. Nato se posveti delovanju in strategijam habitusa, kapitalov oz. dispozicij politikov in njihovih svetovalcev, ki poskusijo izkoristiti strukture polja, ko razširjajo ali nagovarjajo potencialno bazo volivcev. Avtor v drugem delu tudi elaborira, zakaj so radikalni glasovi in organizacije iz polja izločeni ali pa se podredijo logiki in njegovemu delovanju. Končno, avtor sintetizira obe glavni točki diskusije in opredeli strukturne dejavnike ter vzroke za obravnavane tendence v političnem polju.

Ključne besede: politično polje, novinarsko polje, Bourdieu, personalizacija, stranka, generalni sekretar

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