

# Social Ties, Solidarity and Threat Perception in Rural and Urban Communities in Slovenia<sup>1</sup>

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*“Do you know, Watson,” said he [Sherlock Holmes], “/.../ You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there /.../ They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside /.../ But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard’s blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser...”*

Doyle, 1892/1998: 129,130: *The Best of Sherlock Holmes: The Copper Beeches.*

Most of the Slovenian population lives in rural areas, followed by suburban and urban areas. The author builds a theoretical conceptualisation to explain social life in rural and urban societies based on a Marxist understanding of the role the countryside plays as an important (biopolitical) cradle of power with two extremely influential sources (capitals) – agricultural land and people (so-called labour force or power). Other theoretical concepts included in this article derive from Tönnies’ (1887/2001) notion of *Gemeinschaft* (community or communal society) and *Gesellschaft* (society), Durkheim’s differentiation between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, and Weber’s distinction of two social relationship types – the communalisation and the aggregation of social relationships. Data from the research study *Security and safety in local communities* (2017) and the *Slovenian Public Opinion 2016/1* reveal differences between rural and urban communities in Slovenia. On one side, we see demographic differences (religion, education levels, nationality etc.) and, on the other, differences in opinions and perceptions of communal life. Mutual help, relationships in the neighbourhood, joint efforts at problem-solving etc. show that personal bonds and cohesion in rural communities are closer and stronger than elsewhere. However, this also coincides with a tendency towards homogeneity and a lack of acceptance of various minorities, that is, people with different lifestyles or appearances from the mainstream. Among all threats, respondents in rural, suburban and urban areas believed that deteriorating socio-economic conditions (unemployment, poverty and economic stagnation) are the biggest threats to their safety.

**Keywords:** rural sociology, solidarity, community, rural, urban, crime

UDC: 316.334.55/.56

## 1 Introduction

Everyone who has lived for some time in a bigger city and then (or before) moved to a rural location can detect the dif-

ferences between these two social environments. A contrast is apparent in the different population densities,<sup>3</sup> incomparable levels of urbanisation and clearly dissimilar transportation

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a research programme Security and safety in local communities – comparison of rural and urban environments (P5-0397 (A), 2019–2024), financed by the Slovenian Research Agency. The research programme is carried out by the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

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<sup>3</sup> Among Slovenian municipalities, 81% belong to thinly-populated areas, 18% to areas with an intermediate density and only the two biggest city municipalities (Ljubljana and Maribor) to densely-populated areas. Slovenian settlements are typically small (95% have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, 47% have fewer than 100 inhabitants and 59 settlements have no people living in them) (Ministrstvo za okolje in prostor, 2016). More than 62% (1,230,000) of the total Slovenian population lives within a 2-kilometre gravitation belt from a local urban centre (Uršič, 2014: 39).

systems. Aside from all the visible differences in spaces and places, other significant demarcations are also present in social interactions, (self-)ascribed identities, various social ties, the existence of different types of solidarity as well as allegedly different values, traditions and different forms of social control. Uršič (2015) states that within the Slovenian context distinctions of different life patterns and orientations characterising individuals living in urban, suburban or rural areas are supposed to be seen when compared to people living in the country's two biggest cities (Ljubljana and Maribor) and other urban places.

Eurostat's (2018) urban-rural typology confirms the low level of urbanisation in Slovenia compared with other EU countries. According to the typology used by the OECD, there are no predominantly urban areas in Slovenia, with 42.4% of the area at an intermediate level of urbanisation and 57.6% belonging to the rural type. Based on a different typology, among all the regions in Slovenia, only the Central Slovenia region (orig. osrednjeslovenska regija) may be categorised as an urban region. A more detailed overview of the Slovenian population and corresponding types of settlements that people live in can be seen from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia data where we categorised densely-populated areas as urban areas, intermediate-density areas as suburban areas, and thinly-populated areas as rural areas (see Table 1). Most of the Slovenian population (44%) lives in thinly-populated (rural) areas, the second biggest group is those living in (suburban) areas with intermediate density, and just 19.5% of people live in densely-populated (urban) areas. Table 1 also reveals one key characteristic – despite the relatively widespread belief in Slovenia that young people are moving away from the countryside, age distribution of the population by different age groups and different types of settlements shows quite a similar pattern. Clearly, some areas have faced depopulation, yet this is not a general trend for the whole country.

**Table 1:** Population of Slovenia by degree of urbanisation and age (2019)<sup>4</sup> (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019b)

	0–14 years	56,485 (13.9%)
	15–64 years	266,433 (65.8%)
<b>Densely-populated areas (urban areas)</b>	65+ years	82,135 (20.3%)
	<b>All ages</b>	<b>405,053 (19.5%)</b>
	0–14 years	115,474 (15.4%)
	15–64 years	484,405 (64.7%)
<b>Intermediate-density areas (suburban areas)</b>	65+ years	148,760 (19.9%)
	<b>All ages</b>	<b>748,639 (36.0%)</b>
	0–14 years	141,747 (15.3%)
	15–64 years	603,310 (65.1%)
<b>Thinly-populated areas (rural areas)</b>	65+ years	182,159 (19.6%)
	<b>All ages</b>	<b>927,216 (44.6%)</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,080,908</b>

The general perception of rurality in Slovenia (and in other countries) is closely connected to farming and agriculture. Barbič (2005) argues that agriculture remains a typical economic activity of countryside communities in Slovenia, although in many cases it is not the main one. In recent decades, rural and suburban areas have become more a place where people live and work. Some economic activities are still connected to agriculture, while there has been an increase in the importance of the non-agricultural economy. The conditions in Slovenia confirm what Bakker and Winson (1993) concluded decades ago for Canada – that many people living in rural areas are not farmers, and many people who live in urban or suburban areas are part of the agro-food complex. If we consider that globalisation, the mass production of food, and improved, faster and cheaper transportation have all heavily influenced the agricultural economy and farming, we soon realise that the idea of the rural community providing food for dependent urban neighbours is largely a romanticised image from the past. Despite the rise of some grass-root

<sup>4</sup> A detailed list placing all Slovenian municipalities into three categories: densely-populated areas (urban areas), intermediate-density areas (suburban areas) and thinly-populated areas (rural areas) is available from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2019c). For the purpose of this paper, we accept this categorisation where the term urban areas is used interchangeably for cities (with the exception of 11 city municipalities, among which only Ljubljana and Maribor are included in the urban category, although all 9 remaining municipalities in this paper are referred to as cities), suburban areas for towns and rural areas for villages, squares, hamlets and farms.

initiatives to produce local food and some retail chains exploiting this trend via various versions of advertising “100% Slovenian food”, farming and food self-sufficiency is on the decline. Slovenia is becoming ever more a net importer of food (Kuhar, 2014). It has also happened in Slovenia that the “traditional dominance of the agricultural economy in rural areas has gradually shifted in emphasis from landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption” (Cloke, 2006: 18). On the other side, gardening and growing one’s own food remains a characteristic of the Slovenian countryside. However, this is not a professional and mass-scale economic activity, but more a way of life that satisfies family demands for high(er) quality and home-produced, inexpensive food.

The period after the Second World War was a time of the so-called de-agrarianisation of Slovenian and Yugoslav society that led to emigration, first of those from the rural parts of Slovenia to the cities, and then also from other republics of Yugoslavia to Slovenia. Industrialisation created new jobs in urban centres and people moved to them. De-agrarianisation caused a rise in the number and size of cities, while also bringing a city life-style to rural environments (Čepič, 2005; Rebernik, 2014). Yet, Uršič (2014) argues that urbanisation in Slovenia did not follow the path taken in Western industrially developed countries. Instead of developing large urban agglomerations, Slovenia saw a distinct form of polycentric development and moderate growth of its urban population. Rebernik (2005) concludes that during the 1970s–1980s, polycentrism and dispersed industrialisation became the main concept of urban and regional planning, leading to the creation of jobs and services in smaller urban and rural places and slowing down rural-urban migrations. As a result, today Slovenia has only two big cities (Ljubljana, Maribor), yet many other regional centres. This is also clearly seen in the development and dispersion of the economy and industry in smaller cities or towns (e.g., the big home appliance manufacturer Gorenje is located in Velenje; the Renault cars manufacturer Revoz and the pharmaceutical company Krka are located in Novo mesto; the Metal-processing company Impol is located in Slovenska Bistrica).

After Slovenia gained its independence in 1991, the rapid upgrade of the highway system combined with other factors (e.g., high real-estate prices in the capital city of Ljubljana, development of communication and information technology) triggered suburbanisation. People and businesses moved away from city centres out to suburban and even rural areas (Rebernik, 2014; Uršič, 2014). The countryside has become ever more a place of habitation for employed people outside their settlements or for those who move there after retirement (Barbič, 2005). This move from a city to a (sub)rural area is evidently not a challenge for Slovenians, who even if they

live in bigger cities are still strongly connected to their rural identities and culture (Uršič, 2015). They see life in the countryside, especially in the vicinity of cities with good transport connections, as giving them the opportunity to find a compromise and combine the benefits of urban (for example, access to more jobs, higher salary, better offer of services) and rural environments (for example, life in a more intact natural environment, more frequent and stronger bonds among community members, less crime). Research conducted by Lobnikar, Prisljan and Modic (2016) showed that the relationship between inhabitants and police is stronger in rural communities. They concluded that respondents in rural areas evaluated the implementation of community policing higher than respondents in the urban environment. They also noticed that this coincides with perceptions of crime and disorder, which are higher in urban areas, where community bonds are weaker in comparison to rural areas. Meško, Pirnat, Erčulj and Hacin (2019) added to this conclusion, that differences in perception of interpersonal relations between police officers and inhabitants are seen only in the case of police officers and not inhabitants (these two groups were surveyed separately). Yet, as new urban inhabitants arrive in rural communities, “they bring with them key attributes of urban living and levels of expectation which often serve to transform the very communities they had been attracted to” (Cloke, 2006: 19). The end-result of this move from the city – a process Rebernik (2014: 76) says had all the characteristics and negative effects of the ‘urban sprawl’ – is a social hybrid where old rural-urban distinctions become blurred.

The movement of urban populations to rural and suburban areas was also made easier by the rapid development of information and communications technology. Distances have, therefore, shrunk, and quite cheap and nearly instant communication with people around the world is now possible, with information being available to everybody on their computers and smartphones. While in the past rural areas found it hard to stay in touch with ongoing global, regional and even national events (e.g., it was more difficult to obtain all the latest newspapers, magazines, journals etc.), digitalisation opened another dimension and placed people in rural and urban environments on the same level. Further, it enables more and more people to work from a distance, conduct business straight from the countryside, and promote their activities in the global market. Connected to this, Cloke (2006: 18–19) concluded that “rural places in the Western world are effectively culturally urbanized [and] the idea of rurality as an isolated island of cultural specificity and traditionalism has become anachronistic”. Although some authors report a “digital divide” between rural and urban communities (Philip, Cottrill, Farrington, Williams, & Ashmore, 2017), especially when comparing access to broadband Internet, the situation

in Slovenia is quite positive. In the last few years, different providers have upgraded their services and offered higher speed Internet access to rural households. In addition, data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2019a) show that the share of households with Internet access is not connected to urbanisation. The biggest share of households is located in areas with an intermediate-population density (88%), followed by (urban) densely-populated areas (86.3%) and thinly-populated (rural) areas (85.6%). However, notwithstanding all of these advantages, widespread use of ICT in rural areas exposes people to the same global challenges and security threats (Choi, Martins, & Bernik, 2018: 752). As these technologies expand, the chances and possibilities of victimisation through the Internet or mobile phones crimes have also increased in the countryside.

Noting that one often encounters nuances between different signifiers used to describe rural areas in general discourse (for example, countryside, rural, villages), we need a clear academic and theoretical conceptualisation of rurality. Classical sociology gives interesting – albeit often misinterpreted – insights into different types and forms of communal life, which may be used as a starting point for analysing the differences and similarities among Slovenian urban and rural social life (e.g., Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; Durkheim's organic and mechanic solidarity and Weber's communalisation and aggregation). The following parts of this paper first focus on presenting the research questions and methods, while introducing the basic theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations of rurality and rural community. A presentation of the characteristics of rural communities in Slovenia is then given, along with an emphasis on how safety and security are perceived in the local environment, crime and fear of crime in various types (urban, suburban, rural) of municipalities in Slovenia.

## 2 Research Questions and Methods

This paper searches for answers to the following research questions: how can we sociologically conceptualise, understand and explain rurality? What are the basic characteristics of communal life and solidarity in rural communities in Slovenia, and which differences emerge when rural, suburban and urban areas are compared? Which are the most common security threats perceived by people in rural communities? Are there differences in these perceptions between rural, urban and suburban areas?

To answer these questions, we rely on a detailed literature review and secondary analysis of data already gathered (for a detailed description of the method and its application

to criminological research, see Hagan, 2003). The sets of data used included the research *Security and safety in local communities* (2017) conducted by the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security at the University of Maribor<sup>5</sup> and the *Slovenian Public Opinion 2016/1* (Kurdija et al., 2016) carried out by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre, University of Ljubljana and the Centre for Organisational and Human Resources Research, University of Ljubljana.

The field research *Security and safety in local communities* was conducted between April and July 2017 and included a sample of inhabitants from 24 municipalities who were at least 18 years of age. The realised sample consists of 1,266 completed questionnaires. The *Slovenian Public Opinion 2016/1* was conducted between April and June 2016, and also collected data from inhabitants aged 18 years or older. It included 150 selected local environments in Slovenia. The number of final respondents in the sample was 1,070 (Kurdija et al., 2016).

In both studies, we carefully analysed the data connected to our research questions and compared them with respondents' self-declared descriptions of their domicile. The data gathered on domiciles were grouped into three categories, whereby: 1) in the research *Security and safety in local communities* (2017) answers to the question "Size of settlement you live in?" were merged with urban (answers "bigger city" and "city municipality"), suburban (answers "suburban or smaller city"), and rural (the joined answers "condensed village settlement (village, hamlet, square) with school, post office, shop" and "detached house, hamlet or small village (away from post office, school, shop)"); 2) in the research *Slovenian Public Opinion 2016/1* answers to the question "How would you describe the place you live in? Is it ...", the responses "a big city" and "suburbs or outskirts of a big city" were merged into the category urban, "town or small city" represents the category *suburban* and answers "country village" and "farm or home in countryside" were merged into the category *rural*.

## 3 Sociological Understanding and Conceptualisation of Rurality

In the application of sociological theories to the analysis of rurality, rural communities and their importance in contemporary societies can be viewed through several – contrast-

<sup>5</sup> The author of this paper was an active researcher in the research programme *Security and safety in local communities* (P5-0397, 2015–2018, financed by the Slovenian Research Agency) carried out by the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

ing – paths (Barbič, 2014: 332-341). We could start this journey with critical Marxist perspectives and by focusing on the role of the countryside in capitalist production. This would inevitably open up questions of production, distribution, the exchange of goods in global capitalist markets as well as the role of the countryside as an important (biopolitical) cradle of power with two extremely influential sources, namely, (capitals) – agricultural land and people (so-called labour force or power).<sup>6</sup> Following Marx's (1867/2015) elaboration, land may be understood as a capital, which can be represented by the means of production (defined by Marx as constant capital) and as a commodity which can be traded. The latter opens another perspective on the (ab)use of power and specific form of legal crimes by the powerful. Quite a few urban and rural municipalities and local governments in Slovenia became involved in different dubious real-estate transactions and trade in other immovable assets (e.g., organised purchase of quite cheap agricultural land whose intended use was later changed in municipal spatial planning documents from agricultural to residential-construction land and in the final phase sold to investors at a considerable profit). The other form of capital (variable capital) connected to rural areas is "labour-power". Marx, of course, understood that labour is not a commodity *per se*, but essentially bound to the carrier of this capacity for labour. He argued, "that which comes directly face to face with the possessor of money on the market, is in fact not labour, but the labourer. What the latter sells is his labour-power" (Marx, 1867/2015: 379). The creation of free labourers was a key characteristic of the historical epoch connected to the rise of capitalism and the countryside played a crucial role in this violent process. Marx (1876/2015: 509, 523) eloquently describes it using the following words

... those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and 'unattached' proletarians on the labour-market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. /.../ Thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.

Rural farmers had forcibly become a new key element in capitalist production and created a new class of exploited proletariat. Among other researchers who observed similar disruptive patterns and victimisation of countryside peasantry,

we draw attention to Polanyi (1994/2001) and his conclusions concerning the transformation of agricultural feudal societies into capitalist market ones. Unlike Marx (1867/2015), who saw the biggest problems deriving from capitalist exploitation, Polanyi (1994/2001) argued that the problems are caused by the commodification of relations (Selwyn & Miyamura, 2014). He claims that the suffering of great numbers of the population in England and the dehumanisation of country folk into slum dwellers (Polanyi, 1944/2001: 41) of industrial towns is due to establishment of the market economy. This turned "all transactions into money transactions, and these in turn require that a medium of exchange be introduced into every articulation of industrial life /.../ Machine production in a commercial society involves, in effect, no less a transformation than that of the natural and human substance of society into commodities".

These conclusions provide an important understanding of the countryside which at first sight seem outdated, but a more detailed analysis reveals a different picture. Rural regions are still importantly connected and unseparated from capitalist production. Although some of the described characteristics are different today and not as obvious as in the past, people have recently been migrating from rural to urban areas in the search for work. This is still happening, although not on the scale as in the past and not exclusively from the Slovenian countryside, but also from economically devastated rural areas of countries in the region (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia). Large differences in economic development, great unemployment, and the absence of future prospects push people into emigration. Workers who in many cases were citizens of the country to which Slovenia once belonged (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) are now legally categorised as third world country immigrants and must meet specific requirements to enter the labour market (e.g., requirement of continuous employment by the same employer for 1 or 2 years). Local Slovenian capitalists found their reserve army of labourers whose extreme exploitation was (and still is) enabled by formal legislation, bilateral agreements between Slovenia and other countries, and accompanied by the impotence of state authorities to regulate and punish violations of workers' rights (Bučar Ručman, 2014; Kanduč & Bučar Ručman, 2016). A critical analysis of the role played by rural areas gives an opportunity for many other approaches. Another important issue is the value and consequences of self-sufficient farming in families where people are otherwise fully employed. This can be understood as a survival strategy and a way to cut expenses, but can also be viewed as a system of crediting and subsidising capitalist production. It requires extra work and, of course, available land to provide resources needed for survival. All those who do not possess even a small plot of farming land (e.g., the urban poor) or the ability to

<sup>6</sup> Polanyi (1944/2001) argues that "labour, land, and money are essential elements of industry; they also must be organized into markets; in fact, these markets form an absolutely vital part of the economic [capitalist] system".

work extra hours (e.g., sick, disabled, old) are immediately faced with unfair competition. The “rural survival strategy” has thereby reduced the potential for stronger demands being made for wage increases and (at least) keeps wages stagnant.

The characteristics of rural and urban communities may be explained by invoking other sociological theories. Bakker and Winson (1993) argue that Tönnies is viewed by many rural sociologists as the originator of the dichotomy between rural community and urban mass society. In preface to his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tönnies (1887/2001) clearly also praises Marx’s work, arguing that two ideal types of social organisations or groupings exist: *Gemeinschaft* (community or communal society) and *Gesellschaft* (society). *Gemeinschaft* is determined by “the idea that in the original or natural state there is a complete unit of human wills” (Tönnies, 1887/2001: 22) and people are guided by direct cooperation and consent. Integration and collaboration in this form of social organisation is mostly natural and spontaneous, based on the *Wesenwille* (natural will). It includes (only) “some element of thought” and mainly derives from tradition, sentiments, feelings, instincts and desires. In contrast, *Gesellschaft* is considered to be defined by *Kürwille* or *Willkür* (rational will), i.e. abstract and artificial ‘will’, which “is merely a part of the thought process” (Tönnies, 1887/2001: 98). In this type of communal life, people “live peacefully alongside one another, but in this case without being essentially united – indeed, on the contrary, they are here essentially detached” (Tönnies, 1887/2001: 52). This is a society of big urbanised areas, with individuals engaging in minimised direct contact and specific impersonal relationships based on their members’ cost-efficiency calculations.

Tönnies believes that *Gemeinschaft* develops from a community of *blood* (family and kinship) into a community of *place* (people living in proximity) and then to a community of *spirit* (people working together for the same end and purpose). For our analysis, it is the second form, community of place that is most important. Tönnies (1887/2001: 28) argues that the neighbourhood is a perfect example of this type of community and may be described hence:

Neighbourhood is the general character of life together in a *village*. The closeness of the dwellings, the common fields, even the way the holdings run alongside each other, cause the people to meet and get used to each other and to develop intimate acquaintance. It becomes necessary to share work, organisation and forms of administration /.../ Although it is basically conditioned by living together, this kind of community can persist even while people are absent from their neighbourhood, but this is more difficult than with kinship; it has to be sustained by fixed habits of getting together and by customs regarded as sacred.

Durkheim (1893/1984) came to similar conclusions. In a profound analysis of social solidarity, he concluded there is not just one general form of solidarity, with solidarity depending up the social ties and characteristics of the society as to which form of solidarity prevails. Simpler societies base solidarity on similarities among their members. It is their common beliefs, values and attitudes that bind people together. In these relatively homogenous societies, with little ethnic, religious, cultural, language, educational, career etc. diversity, people form ties of direct mutual assistance, support and specific co-dependency. In this form of social life, an individual is primarily a member of the collective, where she/he has subordinated her/his individuality and (potential) distinctiveness to the collective consciousness. This type of society establishes moral consensus as a basic characteristic of, what Durkheim called, *mechanical solidarity*. With changes in the ways of production, modernisation, heterogeneity, plurality, educational progress, technical innovations and gradual creation of ever-more complex societies (something evident in highly urbanised areas or countries), another kind of solidarity became dominant, i.e. *organic solidarity*. Here it is not similarities that are important, but the ability to coordinate individuals’ specialised and diverse activities. The key element is the division of labour. These two forms of solidarity are not mutually exclusive, with the latter upgrading and coexisting with the former. As Gofman (2014: 48) argues, organic solidarity and the corresponding type of society cannot exist without mechanical solidarity. This conclusion was, according to Thijssen (2012: 457), also evident in Durkheim’s later works where he envisioned the mutually enforcing relations of these two forms of solidarity. Thijssen (2012) further upgrades this position by calling for the abandoning of a unidirectional perspective of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity and advocates the “cyclical model” of interconnectivity of both forms of solidarity.<sup>7</sup>

Weber (1922/2002) also developed his distinction between two types of social relationships, which is reminiscent of both Tönnies’ and Durkheim’s. His concept of the *communalisation* of social relationships refers to relationships characterised by the sense of solidarity grounded on the participants’ emotional, affectual or traditional attachments. Weber connects this type of social relationships to those forms of

<sup>7</sup> Solidarity is mainly connected with altruism and morality (Alexander, 2014; Jeffries, 2014), but can aside from the positive aspects and consequences (for example, collaboration, support, achieving complex tasks) also bring negative ones. It can cause the forced conformity of group members, which can lead even to extreme cases of sacrifice, such as suicides, ‘us and them’ divisions, inhumane exclusions and restrictions of various groups (e.g., lower social classes, women, ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants, disabled people).

long-lasting relationships that go beyond the achievement of immediate goals and contribute to the development of bonds among group members. Weber (1922/2002: 92) offers examples such as military units and school class, although he firmly states the concept is deliberately vague and open to heterogeneous groups of phenomena. A communal social relationship is not defined or built by the common qualities or position of individuals nor by their common reactions or modes of behaviour. A communal relationship only arises when individuals' behaviour is mutually oriented toward each other (Weber, 1922/2002: 94). It is exactly here where we see an opportunity to link this classical sociological theory to the analysis of the situation (relationships) in rural communities. Weber (1922/2002: 91) called the other type of social relations the *aggregation* of social relationships and sees it as "the result of reconciliation and a balancing of interests which are motivated either by rational value-judgements or expediency". It is the type of relationship that leads to goals (mainly) being achieved through rational agreement and consent. Weber claims that ideal types of these relationships can be found in free-market exchange, voluntary unions of individuals pursuing specific goals and voluntary unions created on ideological values. If we may assume that the first form of social relationships is more typical for smaller communities and the countryside, then the second predominates in a heterogeneous urban environment, with specific needs to achieve goals in a social setting of strangers. Since Weber contends that the communalisation and aggregation of social relations are shared in the great majority of social relations, we may understand them as being two sides of the same coin, especially if we apply this distinction to the study of rural and urban communities. As described earlier, even the smallest and distant rural areas are today connected to information flows, the capitalist market, consumerism etc. However, we assume – and in the next section of this paper empirically analyse – that there are some differences in basic characteristics, values and perspectives between people living in urban and rural communities.

#### 4 Characteristics of Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities in Slovenia

*The Slovenian Public Opinion survey 2016/1* (Kurdija et al., 2016) reveals specifics of social life and social bonds in rural, suburban and urban environments. Insight into the basic demographic characteristics shows quite some differences among the analysed environments. However, there are also similarities. For example, in terms of employment, 51.9% of people living in urban environments hold paid employment; in suburban 51.3% and in rural 48.5%. In urban areas, 8.7% of people never had paid employment, while the corresponding figure for suburban respondents is 5.9% and is 11.2% for rural

ones. Educational levels vary among the three environments. Most have completed some type of high school education (urban 54%; suburban 52.1%; rural 56%). The share of people only completing compulsory basic education (primary school and including not finishing primary school) is higher in rural areas (19.2%) and suburban (17%) ones than in urban areas (8.6%). Religious beliefs differ between people in the analysed environments. In urban areas, 55.7% of people are religious, 21.9% stated they are not religious, and 22.4% declared as firm atheists. In contrast, in rural areas 78.1% of people say they are religious, 12.1% are not religious and 9.8% are atheists. Suburban areas lie somewhere in between (66.5% religious, 16.5% not religious, 17% firm atheists). The Catholic religion is the primary one in all settlements (urban 81.4%, suburban 81.9%, rural 95.9%), followed by Orthodox (urban 8.5%, suburban 11.1%, rural 0.9%), Islam (urban 7.8%, suburban 4.7%, rural 0.6%) and various Protestant denominations (urban 0%, suburban 1.8%, rural 1.5%). Being of Slovenian nationality was declared by 95.8% of respondents from rural areas, whereas the corresponding figures for suburban are 84.3%, and 87.1% for urban areas.

An important indicator of social conditions and communal spirit is the trust people have in each other. As argued by Wilkinson and Pickett (2010: 57), "high levels of trust mean that people feel secure, they have less to worry about and they see others as co-operative rather competitive". Trust is the inner substance for bond creation among neighbours and an important element of social solidarity. Data from the *Slovenian Public Opinion 2016/1* (Kurdija et al., 2016) show there are minor differences in trust among the three different environments. People in urban settings tend to trust others more than people do in rural and suburban areas. In answers on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (you have to be very careful) to 10 (you can trust most people), urban areas have the biggest share of trust: 13.9% of people in an urban environment tend to trust most people (merged answers for 8, 9, 10). In rural areas, the figure was 12.7% of people and in suburban ones it was 10.6%. The statement that you have to be very careful with others (merged answers for 0, 1, 2) was agreed to by 27.1% of respondents in suburban environments, in rural areas the figure was 24.5% and in urban areas 21.5%. Trust obviously varies among the different environments, with the rural one standing out as being the most distrustful.

*Slovenian Public Opinion* surveys have for several years used the question of who people do not want as their neighbours as a way to measure the social distance among various groups of people. Results of the *Slovenian Public Opinion survey 2016/1* (Kurdija et al., 2016) show that some categories are considered similarly unwanted as neighbours in all three analysed environments (for example, drug addicts, drunks, people

speaking a different language), although for some categories there are noticeable differences between urban, suburban and rural areas. The biggest ones are seen in statements connected to Roma, refugees, Muslims, homosexuals, Jews and people of a different religion. Roma are not wanted as neighbours by 34.2% of urban and even 53.2% of rural inhabitants. Refugees are not wanted as neighbours by 24.9% of urban and 43.6% of rural respondents. Although the situation with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Slovenia is not a specific problem and remains a country with low infection levels (Ministry of Health, 2019), over one-quarter of urban respondents and almost one-third of rural ones do not want people with AIDS as their neighbours. Other results presented in Table 2 show that in all but one case (i.e. drunks) respondents in the countryside are less accepting of various minorities in their neighbourhoods. Suburban areas in almost all cases tend to be somewhere in between the rural and urban ones.

The study *Security and safety in local communities* (2017) offers interesting insights into specific characteristics of communal life and solidarity and can be used to look for the dominance of mechanic or organic solidarity in specific surroundings. The results presented in Table 3 reveal that respondents perceive mutual help among the residents differently ( $\chi^2(8) = 41.18$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In rural areas, 48% of respondents agree that people help each other (15.6% of them even strongly agree)<sup>8</sup> and 16.1% do not agree with this statement. In urban areas, the situation differs: 33.4% of people confirm that people help each other (only 7.5% strongly agree), although 29.7% held the opposite view. Connection with the neighbourhood is statistically significantly linked with the type of settlement ( $\chi^2(8) = 90.85$ ;  $p < .05$ ), with 41.2% of respondents from rural areas estimating their neighbourhood is closely connected, and 20.7% disagreeing with this statement. Life and bonds between people in urban areas are obviously different, as 46.5%

**Table 2:** Who do you not want as your neighbour (urban, suburban and rural environments) (source: Kurdija et al., 2016)

	Urban (%)	Suburban (%)	Rural (%)	Slovenia (total) (%)	Difference urban v. rural (%)
Drug addicts	73.4	76.9	79.2	77.6	5.8
Drunks	74.1	71.9	69.5	70.9	-4.6
Roma	34.2	37.9	53.2	46.1	19.0
Refugees	24.9	27.3	43.6	36.3	18.7
People with AIDS	26.6	30.1	34.3	31.9	7.7
Homosexuals	19.4	24.0	34.8	29.4	15.4
Muslims	9.9	9.8	26.2	19.3	16.3
Immigrants, foreign workers	12.1	12.6	19.8	16.7	7.7
Jews	7.8	5.9	21.6	15.5	13.8
People of a different race	10.2	8.9	19.7	15.5	9.5
People of a different religion	4.4	6.6	16.7	12.1	12.3
People who speak a different language	3.9	3.1	7.1	5.6	3.2
Unmarried couples living together	1.5	1.3	2.8	2.2	1.3

The idea of how refugee migration influences our societies and the fear that “refugees would threaten the Slovenian’s way of life” differs among the three environments. People in urban areas tend to be less scared of this influence – 23.5% answered they are afraid (merged answers afraid and very afraid), whereas this feeling is present among 32.6% of suburban and 37.4% of rural respondents. On the other side, 48.5% people from urban, 47% from suburban and 37.5% from rural areas are not afraid (merged answers not afraid and not afraid at all) of this influence.

of people do not agree their neighbourhood is closely connected, while 21.9% perceive it differently and see the locality they live in as being closely connected. How people know each other is also statistically significantly connected to the type of settlement ( $\chi^2(8) = 145.69$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In smaller rural areas, neighbours tend to know each other more often than

<sup>8</sup> For this analysis, values for the answers “agree” and “totally agree” on one side, and “disagree” and “totally disagree” on the other side, are merged together.

in bigger urban ones, with 76.1% of rural respondents agreeing with this statement (of these, 43.5% even strongly agreed), whereas this is reported only by 44.4% of urban respondents. The area in which people live is also connected to the perception of the support given by their neighbours ( $\chi^2(8) = 78.25$ ;  $p < .05$ ); 64.7% of rural respondents said they can rely on the help of their neighbours to run errands for them if they are sick (12.4% disagreed). On the other side, this was agreed to by 42.8% of interviewees living in an urban area (while 30.2% of them disagreed with the statement). Cohesion and joint efforts to overcome problems are more typical of the rural environment than the urban and suburban ones ( $\chi^2(8) = 70.51$ ;  $p < .05$ ), where 53% of rural residents agreed that, if needed, people come together and solve problems (16.9% disagreed), whereas this was reported by 30.9% of urban respondents (and 33.1% disagreed). Feelings of safety in Slovenia are high in rural, suburban and urban environments, yet there are statistically significant differences among the areas ( $\chi^2(8) = 80.27$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In rural areas, 82% of people said they feel safe (46.2% totally agree with this statement) and only 3.9% disagree with it. In urban areas, 62.6% of respondents feel safe (23.7% totally agreed) and 10.2% disagreed, while 73.5% of people in rural and 49.6% in urban areas feel safe while walking around their neighbourhood at night.

The study Security and safety in local communities (2017) also dealt with the perception of security and safety threats in local communities. The results presented in Table 4 show data for selected types of possible threats and the corresponding shares of respondents from the three different environments estimating that the exposed issues are security and safety threats. It is interesting to see that respondents from all environments believed that the worsening of socio-economic conditions is the biggest threat to their safety. It is in this vein that 61% of people from urban, 56% from suburban and 38.3% from rural communities see unemployment as a threat to their security and safety. Connected to this issue are people's view that poverty also poses a threat to their community (urban 53.1%, suburban 44.5%, rural 38.3%). Among other forms of behaviour, people often perceived the following as security threats: alcoholism, public intoxication, drug dealing (especially in urban and suburban areas), thefts and burglaries. Despite the mentioned fact that refugees, immigrants and foreign workers are not desired as neighbours by some locals (with these feelings being strongest in the countryside), foreign workers, migrants and refugees are recognised as a security and safety threat on a minor level, although there are statistically important differences among the three environments. In contrast with the greater intolerance in rural areas

**Table 3:** Characteristics of relations in local communities (source: The study Security and safety in local communities, 2017)

	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree, nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
<i>Inhabitants help each other</i> ( $\chi^2(8) = 41.18$ ; $p < .05$ )					
Rural	2.8	13.3	35.9	32.4	15.6
Suburban	5.0	16.9	38.8	29.2	10.0
Urban	5.1	24.6	36.9	25.9	7.5
<i>Neighbourhood is closely connected</i> ( $\chi^2(8) = 90.85$ ; $p < .05$ )					
Rural	5.9	14.8	38.0	27.1	14.1
Suburban	10.6	26.1	36.2	21.1	6.0
Urban	11.9	34.6	31.6	16.0	5.9
<i>If needed, people get together and solve problems</i> ( $\chi^2(8) = 70.51$ ; $p < .05$ )					
Rural	3.5	13.4	30.1	33.1	19.9
Suburban	7.7	16.8	37.7	24.1	13.6
Urban	9.4	23.7	36.0	23.1	7.8
<i>Inhabitants feel safe</i> ( $\chi^2(8) = 80.27$ ; $p < .05$ )					
Rural	0.7	3.2	14.2	35.8	46.2
Suburban	2.3	4.6	21.5	43.4	28.3
Urban	2.0	8.2	27.2	38.9	23.7

reported in Slovenian public opinion 2016/1, this time it is the residents of urban areas who more often perceive these groups as a threat.

share of self-declared Slovenians among the rural population. Apart from variations in demographic characteristics, we find differences in opinions and perceptions of communal

**Table 4:** Perceived problems in local communities<sup>9</sup> (source: Research Security and safety in local communities, 2017)

	Rural (%)	Suburban (%)	Urban (%)	Statistical significance ( $\chi^2$ )
Alcoholism	35.4	45.0	40.9	$\chi^2(8) = 17.44; p < .05$
Public intoxication	32.9	45.4	49.6	$\chi^2(8) = 45.06; p < .05$
Drug dealing	29.9	41.6	48.2	$\chi^2(8) = 96.10; p < .05$
Refugees	14.8	12.7	22.6	$\chi^2(8) = 49.61; p < .05$
Foreign workers	11.5	11.4	22.6	$\chi^2(8) = 29.39; p < .05$
Migrants	12.2	12.9	21.7	$\chi^2(8) = 56.61; p < .05$
Beggars or vagabonds	10.4	15.0	24.9	$\chi^2(8) = 103.66; p < .05$
People of another nationality and culture	14.5	12.3	19.3	$\chi^2(8) = 70.51; p < .05$
Tourists	8.9	9.2	9.0	$\chi^2(8) = 4.08; p > .05$
Corruption	23.8	42.2	53.4	$\chi^2(8) = 80.28; p < .05$
Economic stagnation	29.7	37.9	46.6	$\chi^2(8) = 46.32; p < .05$
Unemployment	38.3	56.0	61.0	$\chi^2(8) = 72.18; p < .05$
Poverty	32.2	44.5	53.1	$\chi^2(8) = 69.49; p < .05$
Domestic abuse	22.2	32.7	36.2	$\chi^2(8) = 73.44; p < .05$
Youth groups in specific areas	18.2	26.3	28.0	$\chi^2(8) = 40.78; p < .05$
Vandalism	23.0	35.8	42.7	$\chi^2(8) = 83.25; p < .05$
Street violence	12.0	20.7	25.1	$\chi^2(8) = 94.17; p < .05$
Organised crime	14.6	20.4	36.0	$\chi^2(8) = 138.55; p < .05$
Prostitution	8.4	9.1	14.5	$\chi^2(8) = 71.30; p < .05$
Sexual assaults/rapes	9.5	9.5	15.3	$\chi^2(8) = 89.15; p < .05$
Thefts	32.3	40.5	42.2	$\chi^2(8) = 38.59; p < .05$
Robberies	15.9	19.1	24.7	$\chi^2(8) = 57.43; p < .05$
Burglaries	29.4	40.8	39.1	$\chi^2(8) = 35.54; p < .05$

## 5 Concluding Discussion

The empirical data reveal several differences between rural, suburban and urban communities in Slovenia. On one hand, we can notice demographic differences e.g., a higher share of religious people in the countryside, a bigger share of Catholics among believers in rural areas and the highest share of non-Catholic believers in urban areas, along with a larger

life. Responses about mutual help, estimation of connections within the neighbourhood, joint efforts at problem-solving and even the basic fact that people in rural areas tend to know each other all show that personal bonds and cohesion in rural communities are tighter and stronger. However, this does not mean mutual connections do not exist in urban settlements. We can detect the existence of different types of solidarities, cooperation, and relationships. The one based in rural environments is clearly more in line with Durkheim's (1893/1984) mechanical solidarity and these communities are closer to Tönnies' (1887/2001) notion of *Gemeinschaft*. In contrast, urban areas are marked by plurality, greater tolerance, and trust

<sup>9</sup> Answers include combined values for the answers "big problem" and "very big problem".

in others. We can clearly summarise the described differences in mutual help, interactions and solidarity among people from rural and urban environments with the common-sense conclusions my students make each year when I ask them to describe how they would organise the transport of a bigger piece of furniture to their home from the other side of their city/town/village. Almost every time, two types of answers emerge: people from smaller rural settlements describe how their friends would help them, how they would ask somebody they know to lend them a van, whereas students from a city describe how they would search online to rent a van or engage moving services.

The described differences may be attributed to different lifestyles and different connections into which people are brought through everyday interactions and socialisations. It is how it used to be in the past, when farmers had to help each other with difficult and demanding tasks, and it is how they are used to doing it today when they associate or organise events in the community (e.g., participation in volunteer firefighting brigades, local sports or cultural associations). However, as the data clearly show, these close social bonds in rural areas and mutual familiarity also have another side – the lack of acceptance of various minorities, people of different lifestyles or appearance of difference from the mainstream. It is a challenge to integrate into smaller communities if you are a local, who has moved from another village, town or a city, but even more difficult if you are a foreigner. Although not many people find ‘Others’ (refugees, migrants, foreign workers and people of another nationality/culture) a threat to their security and safety, they are undesired in their neighbourhoods, relying on the stance: “I do not have any personal resemblance with you, and I do not want someone new, different or unknown. I do not want anything that disturbs my perception of order”. This conclusion also finds some support when it is noted that the most common Slovenian family name is “Novak” (i.e. the new one, the newcomer). If we understand that family names were in the past used to describe people more specifically, we may see that being ‘a new one’ in the settlement is obviously so important that families had to be labelled by this fact. Still, many people – especially in rural areas – become upset by immigrants and newcomers and do not want them as neighbours.

While solidarity through collaboration and mutual assistance has been under pressure and subject to dismantling by neoliberal socio-economic ideology and corresponding policies, rural communities in Slovenia are resisting this pressure in their own way (e.g. self-sufficient farming for family consumption, building and renovating houses with the assistance of friends, neighbours and relatives, mutual assistance, community events). These rural-survival strategies also explain

the difference in levels of perceived socio-economic pressures as important safety threats (unemployment, poverty and economic stagnation). Yet, despite more people perceiving these phenomena as threats in urban than in rural areas, we must not overlook the fact that these are issues that worry the majority of people in all three community types.

This research encountered some limitations which could not be overcome, but may provide useful guidance and challenges for future work. The main drawback is that we had to use two research and corresponding data sets in order to answer our research questions and present the broader picture of social life in urban, suburban and rural areas. Both aspects of the research were conducted on representative samples and in approximately the same time period, although the samples are of course not the same. In addition, answers gathered through quantitative analysis only present part of the picture. Therefore, the plan and challenge for future work in this field entails including questions on social characteristics, social ties and perceptions of crime and threats in the same quantitative questionnaire while simultaneously also employing qualitative research methods (e.g., participant observations and interviews).

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## **Družbene vezi, solidarnost in občutki ogroženosti v ruralnih in urbanih skupnostih v Sloveniji**

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Največji del slovenskega prebivalstva živi na podeželju, sledijo mu prebivalci v primernih in mestnih območjih. Avtor oblikuje teoretično konceptualizacijo in razlago družbenega življenja v ruralnih in urbanih družbah na podlagi marksističnega razumevanja vloge podeželja kot pomembnega (biopolitičnega) vira moči z dvema izjemno močnima viroma (kapitaloma) – zemljo in ljudmi (t. i. delovno silo). Dodatno vključeni teoretični koncepti izhajajo iz Tönniesovega (1887/2001) razlikovanja med *Gemeinschaft* (skupnostjo) in *Gesellschaft* (družbo), Durkheimovega razlikovanja med mehansko in organsko solidarnostjo ter Weberjevega razlikovanja med dvema vrstama družbenih odnosov – komunalizacijo in agregacijo družbenih odnosov. Podatki iz raziskave Varnost v lokalnih skupnostih (2017) in Slovensko javno mnenje 2016/1 (Kurdija et al., 2016) razkrivajo razlike med ruralnimi in urbanih skupnostmi v Sloveniji. Na eni strani opazimo demografske razlike (vera, stopnja izobrazbe, narodnost itd.), na drugi pa razlike v stališčih in dojemaju življenja v skupnosti. Medsebojna pomoč, odnosi v soseski, skupna prizadevanja pri reševanju problemov itd. kažejo, da so osebne vezi in povezanost v ruralnih skupnostih čvrstejše in močnejše. Vendar to sovпада tudi s težnjo po homogenosti in nesprijemanju različnih manjšin, ljudi z drugačnimi življenjskimi slogi ali izgledom, ki odstopa od prevladujočega. Med vsemi vrstami groženj so anketiranci na podeželju, primernih in mestnih območjih ocenili, da predstavlja ogrožanje socio-ekonomskih razmer (brezposelnost, revščina in gospodarska stagnacija) največjo grožnjo njihovi varnosti.

**Ključne besede:** ruralna sociologija, solidarnost, skupnost, ruralno, urbano, kriminaliteta

**UDK:** 316.334.55/.56