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Quality of Treatment of Prisoners in the Slovenian Prison System: Impact of the Crisis Period and Systemic Burdens in 2023 and 2024

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This article analyses how the delivery of offender treatment in the Slovenian prison system changes under conditions of pronounced systemic strain. It begins with an understanding of treatment as a relational, holistic, and interdisciplinary practice which both staff and prisoners view, not merely as a set of programmes, but as a process dependent on continuity, individualization, and access to professional support. This study is a pilot qualitative inquiry, with data collected between November 2024 and July 2025 through guided focus groups in five prisons (Dob, Ljubljana, Maribor, Koper, Celje). The sample included 33 Slovenian-speaking prisoners (serving longer sentences and/or recidivists) and 22 staff members from diverse professional backgrounds. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The findings show that, as pressures increase, treatment contracts at their core (stable relationships, continuity, and individualization) become increasingly formalized. This contraction is driven by four basic mechanisms: shifts in the population structure and the rise in foreign nationals (communication and inclusion in programmes), overcrowding and spatial constraints (conditions for work), staffing and administrative overload (less direct work and weaker dynamic security), and a post-release gap (disrupted continuity after release). Solidarity, mutual understanding, and perceived legitimacy in staff-prisoner relations emerge as protective factors that contribute to stability yet remain a fragile support. This study, therefore, highlights the need for systemic measures to reduce the gap between the normative aims of treatment and its practical feasibility.

Keywords: prisoner treatment, overcrowding, pre-trial detention, foreign nationals, dynamic security

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Ten Years of Intensive Research on Safety and Security in Local Communities in Slovenia – Selected Findings

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The perception of safety and fear of crime are central concepts in contemporary criminological and sociological research on local security. Although crime indicators in many countries, including Slovenia, are relatively low, empirical studies consistently demonstrate that residents' subjective perceptions of threat are often not directly related to objective crime rates. This study examines the perception of safety in local communities as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by the interplay of individual experiences, social relations, spatial characteristics, and institutional action. Based on a review of research conducted by the programme group "Safety and Security in Local Communities" and other relevant literature, this article presents key theoretical approaches to understanding fear of crime, safety in local communities, and other factors influencing local security in particular the role of the police, local communities (municipalities), and residents and substantiates the importance of the perception of safety as an independent field of research within criminology and sociology. Special emphasis is placed on the role of the local community as a space for everyday experiences of safety and on the importance of systematic research into perceptions of safety for the development of knowledge and the formulation of (local) security policies in Slovenia.

Keywords: perception of safety, fear of crime, local community, police, security provision

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Democratic Backsliding and the Weaponisation of Law: Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

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The article examines democratic backsliding as the deliberate weakening of democratic institutions, norms, and oversight mechanisms by the state or political and/or economic elites. It places particular emphasis on independent media, academia, and non-governmental organisations, all of which play a vital role in maintaining the balance of power and safeguarding democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. For this very reason, they are frequently subjected to political and economic pressure. The analysis focuses on threats and attacks carried out through the use of law, namely via ostensibly lawful procedures that in reality constitute an abuse of legal instruments. Such practices are often cloaked in legal language and formal structures, thereby appearing legitimate, even though their true purpose is to intimidate, exhaust, and silence critics. The author links these developments to democratic backsliding, illiberal democracy, and the broader concept of hybrid threats. In response, both the Council of Europe and the European Union have begun developing protective mechanisms, particularly those addressing SLAPP lawsuits. These lawsuits are not intended to succeed on their merits, but rather to impose financial and psychological strain on the target and to produce a chilling effect. The article highlights that defining SLAPPs is inherently complex, as it requires a careful balance between freedom of expression and the right of access to justice. Key elements of such lawsuits include an imbalance of power between the parties, the lack of substantive merit in the claims, an intention to intimidate, and a detrimental impact on public participation. Furthermore, the author examines the European legal framework, including the European Democracy Action Plan, the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, and the recommendations of the Council of Europe, while also drawing attention to the Slovenian legislation designed to protect against abusive judicial proceedings. Illustrative examples from Italy, Turkey, and Slovenia are provided. The central conclusion of the article is that law is increasingly being used as a tool to silence critics, that it is being »weaponised« and therefore protective measures must be carefully calibrated, proportionate, and thoughtfully designed so as not to undermine the very democratic values they seek to defend.

Keywords: democratic backsliding, strategic lawsuits, freedom of expression, academic freedom, abuse of the law, legal deviance, criminality of the elite

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