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Social Climate in Serbian Prisons[1]

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The paper focuses on measuring the social climate in Serbian prisons. The translated and modified version of the MQPL questionnaire was applied in five Serbian prisons to measure the following dimensions of social climate: 1) Harmony, 2) Professionalism, 3) Security, 4) Conditions and family contact, and 5) Wellbeing and development. The survey took place from May 2022 to January 2023 in Sremska Mitrovica, Niš, Požarevac, Zabela, and Beograd prisons. In total, 767 prisoners participated in the survey, and 618 prisoners were included in the sample. In general, the overall social climate in five Serbian prisons is at an adequate level. The highest scores in all regime types were detected with dimension Conditions and family contact, while the lowest were detected with Security in open and semi-open regimes, and Professionalism in closed regimes. A comparison of social climate in different prison regimes shows that prisoners in open and semi-open regimes perceive all dimensions (Harmony, Professionalism, Conditions and family contact, and Well-being and development), except for the Security dimension, more positively compared to prisoners in closed regimes. In conclusion, the findings of the pilot study on measuring social climate in Serbian prisons and future research prospects are discussed.

Keywords: social climate, prison, prisoners, regime, Serbia

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1 Introduction

One of the most effective tools for evaluating the quality of implementation of penal sanctions and conditions within correctional institutions is the measurement of social climate. Brinc (2011) argued that social climate presents the sum of organisational characteristics and conditions in which prisoners live and prison staff work. Differences in the perceived social climate experienced by prison workers and prisoners may be the result of actual differences between correctional institutions or simply of different individual perceptions of social climate (Wright, 1985). Social climate is reflected in the subjective sphere in the consciousness of each prison worker and prisoner. As a cognitive and emotional component, it is expressed through the attitudes of all prison workers and prisoners towards life in the institution (Toch, 1978).

Measuring social climate in correctional institutions took place in numerous countries, such as the USA, England, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Australia, Germany, Malaysia, Canada, etc. (e.g., Ali et al., 2016; Auty & Liebling, 2019; Day et al., 2012; Mihelj Plesničar et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2008; Schalast & Laan, 2017; van Tiem et al., 2025; Weinrath & Ricciardelli, 2023). The current study presents the first measurement of the social climate in Serbian prisons that advances our knowledge of measuring social climate in correctional institutions in the following ways. First, while studies on social climate were conducted in non-Western prison environments, none of them was conducted in a former socialist country using the MQPL questionnaire (Liebling et al., 2011, 2012). Consequently, the current study presents an opportunity to test the questionnaire in a different cultural context that would provide valuable insights into the suitability of the survey instrument for its application in a prison context of former socialist countries. Second, as previous studies exposed differences in social climate between institutions (e.g., Ross et al., 2008; Schalast & Laan, 2017), the study compares social climate and its dimensions in different prisons to test the application of these theoretical premises in the Serbian prison context. As prison for women is included in the sample, the presumable differences in male and female prisoners' perceptions of social climate are also tested (Batrićević et al.,

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2023). Finally, deriving from Brinc's (2011) observations on the effects of the level of security on prisoners' perception of social climate, dimensions of social climate in different prison regimes are tested and compared.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, a theoretical framework of social climate and its dimensions is set, followed by a description of the Serbian prison system. In the second part of the paper, methods employed for measuring social climate are described, and the results of statistical analyses are presented. In conclusion, the findings are discussed, and limitations together with future research prospects are delineated.

2 Social Climate and Its Dimensions

One of the most critical elements of a humane prison experience is maintaining a safe and supportive prison climate. Prison climate is a complex and multidimensional construct that refers to the overall social, emotional, organisational, and environmental conditions within a prison (Ross et al., 2008; van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020). Differences in climate across facilities are meaningful and consequential. A more favourable prison climate is often associated with higher levels of personal wellbeing, greater engagement with rehabilitation, reduced institutional violence, and lower recidivism (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Ilijić et al., 2024; Liebling et al., 2021; Skar et al., 2019; van Ginneken, 2022).

The measuring of social climate in correctional institutions began in the 1960s when Moos (1968) conducted the first study in 16 correctional units, including educational and vocational training schools, juvenile halls, and boys' camps. The number and complexity of studies quickly rose. Moos's questionnaire, the Correctional Institutions Environment Scale – CIES [and its variations] (Moos, 1975; Wenk & Moos, 1972), presented the first survey instrument used in social climate studies (e.g., Brinc, 2011; Mihelj Plesničar et al., 2019; Wright, 1985). However, the complexity of primary scales and subscales has not been confirmed through adequate statistical analysis (Røssberg & Friis, 2003; Schalast & Laan, 2017; Wright & Boudouris, 1982). More recently, new survey instruments for measuring social climate were developed, such as the Essen Climate Evaluation Schema – EssenCES (Schalast & Laan, 2017; Schalast et al., 2008), Prison Climate Questionnaire – PCQ (Beijersbergen, 2016; van Tiem et al., 2025) and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life – MQPL (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2011, 2012).

Numerous factors contribute to differences in the perceptions of the prison climate, including environmental, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions (Bosma et al., 2020). While instruments for measuring social climate differ, they cover similar dimensions related to prisoners' physical wellbeing, relations between prison actors, treatment, prison conditions, etc., but under different names, e.g., EssenCES (Experienced safety, Hold and Support, and Inmate's cohesion; Schalast & Laan, 2017; Schalast et al., 2008), CIES (Relationship, Treatment, and System maintenance; Moos, 1968, 1975). As the MQPL questionnaire was applied in the current study, the different dimensions of social climate are delineated in the form of five "core" dimensions based on the concepts of prison moral performance and prisoners' lived experiences (Liebling et al., 2012): 1) Harmony, 2) Security, 3) Professionalism, 4) Conditions and family contact, and 5) Wellbeing and development.

The Harmony dimension explores the relational and moral aspects of imprisonment, focusing on the way prisoners are treated by staff and supported within the institution, as well as the prison's ability to foster trust, compassion, and fairness in everyday interactions (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). It reflects the quality of interpersonal relationships, treatment, support, and the general climate within the prison. Humane treatment and favourable relations between the prison staff and prisoners affect the latter's participation in the resocialisation process and reduce their misconduct (Beijersbergen et al., 2015; Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2016; Crewe et al., 2015; Fitzalan Howard & Wakeling, 2020). The Harmony dimension comprises the following factors: 1) Entry support (assessing prisoners' perception of safety upon arrival, including the adequacy of induction procedures); 2) Respect/courtesy (assessing prisoners' daily interactions with prison workers, focusing on staff politeness, fairness, and the extent to which prisoners are treated with dignity; 3) Relationships (assessing prisoners' levels of trust, fairness, and communication, including their feelings of safety in the presence of staff); 4) Humanity (assessing the institutional recognition of humanity of the individual through kindness, empathy, and refraining from degrading treatment); 5) Care for the vulnerable (assessing the institutional support for individuals at risk of self-harm, suicide, and/or victimisation); 6) Decency (assessing the conditions within the institution); and 7) Help and assistance (assessing the support for prisoners faced with addiction, health issues, or obstacles to rehabilitation and reintegration (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2012).

The Professionalism dimension reflects how the prison regime is perceived in terms of integrity, legitimacy, authority, fairness of prison staff, and operational competence, including transparency in decision-making and predictability of the prison regime (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). This dimension focuses on expertise, fairness, transparency and consistency in the application of authority and the organisation of the prison

system. As van Ginneken et al. (2020) highlighted, it sets the ethical and moral tone of institutional life. Overall, high standards of professionalism, including fairness, transparency in decision-making, effective communication, and knowledge of policies, are important for creating and maintaining a positive prison climate (Gonzales et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Liebling et al., 2021). The Professional dimension comprises four elements, including: 1) Staff competence/professionalism for assessing whether prison workers exercise authority with confidence, competence, and respect; 2) Bureaucratic legitimacy for measuring the extent to which prisoners feel recognised as individuals rather than as risk profiles or case numbers; 3) Fairness for assessing prisoners' perception of impartiality, proportionality, and legality of prison staff's decisions; and 4) Organisation and consistency for evaluating the overall reliability, predictability, and structure of prison life (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2012).

The Security dimension focuses on prisoners' perception of formal control, personal safety, and the informal dynamics within the prison environment (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). A prison that enables prisoners to feel secure and relaxed is one where authority is not merely imposed but trusted, which is characteristic of a prison climate that supports engagement with rehabilitative goals (Crewe et al., 2015). Paradoxically, high formal security does not guarantee perception of safety, as overly rigid security regimes may increase fear, undermine trust, and lead to more violence among prisoners (Liebling & Arnold, 2012; Martens & Crewe, 2025; Ricciardelli & Sit, 2016; Wolff & Shi, 2009). From prisoners' perspective, feeling safe and being able to trust staff have a greater impact on experiencing a more favourable climate than adapting to prison life, whether behaviourally or emotionally (Crewe et al., 2017; Khan, 2022; Wheeler & Cline, 2020). This dimension consists of the following domains: 1) Policing and security (assessing the visible presence of authority and its ability to enforce rules and intervene); 2) Prisoner safety (a measure of prisoners' feelings of safety and the ability to interact freely without fear); 3) Prisoner adaptation (assessing whether prisoners feel pressured to enter trades, go into debts, or form allegiances to cope with daily life); and 4) Drugs and exploitation (measuring the extent of bullying, victimisation, and substance abuse) (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2012).

The Conditions and family contact dimension focuses on the quality of living conditions within institutions and opportunities for prisoners to maintain external relationships (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). It integrates the material and relational components of prison climate, both important for prisoners' psychological wellbeing and successful reintegration into society (van Ginneken et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019). "Conditions" evaluate the decency of living standards by assessing prisoners' access to adequate sanitation, personal hygiene, and the cleanliness and maintenance of their living spaces. Decent living standards are associated with prisoners' sense of self-worth and dignity, as well as improved post-release outcomes (Hyatt et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2024; Nilsson, 2003). "Family contact" reflects the extent to which prisoners can sustain meaningful relationships and includes frequency, quality, and duration of visits (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2012). De Claire and Dixon (2017) highlighted visitations as an important element influencing prisoners' wellbeing, reducing misconduct, and improving their reintegration.

The Wellbeing and development dimension explores prisoners' experience of the psychological climate and rehabilitative potential of imprisonment. It evaluates whether imprisonment provides not only containment but also opportunities for growth, identity preservation, and psychological stability (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). Treatment-oriented prison regimes have a beneficial effect on prisoners' psychological wellbeing, adjustment to prison life, and reduced reoffending (Bobić et al., 2022; Simović, 2024; van Ginneken & Palmen, 2023). This dimension of social climate comprises four elements: 1) Personal development (assessing the prison's capacity to support rehabilitation); 2) Personal autonomy (evaluating prisoners' perception of institution, identity, and control); 3) Wellbeing (measuring the psychological burden of incarceration or the "pains of imprisonment"); and 4) Distress (assessing acute emotional strain, including suicidal ideation and sleep disruption) (Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2012).

3 A Brief Note on the Serbian Prison System

The Serbian prison system is governed by the Administration of the Enforcement of Penal Sanctions, which operates under the Ministry of Justice. Its legal foundation lies in the "Law on Execution of Criminal Sanctions" (2019), which regulates the enforcement of penal measures and the organisation of institutions, and defines the overall aim of punishment that comprises general and special prevention, with elements of rehabilitation. In general, there are two main types of facilities: penal-correctional institutions (10) for sentences over one year, and district prisons (15) for pretrial detainees, persons sentenced for misdemeanours, and prisoners serving shorter sentences. In addition, Serbia also has a prison for juveniles, a prison for women, a correctional home, and a special prison hospital for medical and psychiatric care. Institutions are categorised by security level (open, semi-open, closed, and closed with maximum security) based on the type of offence, sentence length, and risk assessment. Open-type units have minimal physical barriers and house

low-risk prisoners, whereas high-security wards are reserved for individuals convicted of organised crime, terrorism, and severe or violent offences, with enhanced measures and specially trained staff. Prisoner placement and subsequent reclassification are determined after an initial assessment based on risk level, rehabilitation potential, conduct, and sentence progression (Vujičić & Karić, 2020).

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Serbian prison system has undergone significant changes. However, it continues to face certain challenges, such as overcrowding, limited funding and resources, and pressing need for modernisation (Jovanić et al., 2020). The economic limitations, along with a shortage of trained experts and staff, limit the availability and effectiveness of the treatment programs (Vujičić, 2023). While recent legal amendments and architectural reforms demonstrate efforts to improve the system, there is still a strong emphasis on security and control, particularly through the expansion of maximum-security facilities and stricter parole conditions (in 2024, the prison population rate amounted to 161.9; Aebi & Cocco, 2024). In parallel, the system's organisational design continues to evolve under political, economic, and international pressures, yet the tension between maintaining order and promoting rehabilitation persists (Jovanić et al., 2020; Vujičić, 2023).

4 Data and Methods

4.1 Study Design and Survey Instrument

The study reported in this paper took place in five prisons (penal-correctional institutions) in Serbia: 1) Sremska Mitrovica, 2) Niš, 3) Požarevac, 4) Požarevac-Zabela (hereinafter Zabela), and 5) Beograd.[4] The selected prisons comprise one prison for women prisoners (Požarevac) and a maximum-security prison (Beograd); the maximum security unit is also located in Zabela prison. This study is part of the broader PrisonLIFE project (PrisonLIFE, n. d.). It was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research (Nos. 103/20, 38c/22, 274/22, 119/24) and conducted following the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments (World Medical Assembly, 1964). Field research was conducted with the written consent of the Administration of the Enforcement of Penal Sanctions (Nos. 29a/22, 195/22, 287/22).

After obtaining formal authorisation for the cross-cultural adaptation of the MQPL questionnaire from Alison Liebling, a systematic process of translation and cultural adaptation was undertaken (Milićević et al., 2024a). Following internationally accepted guidelines, this process unfolded in several stages. First, the instrument was independently translated into Serbian by both an informed translator (a researcher familiar with prison studies) and a professional translator unfamiliar with the content. A second professional translator then performed a back-translation into English. An expert panel, which comprised three specialists with expertise in prison research, quality of life studies, cultural adaptation, and bilingual proficiency, reviewed the translations, compared versions, and resolved discrepancies. The preliminary Serbian version was then piloted in focus groups with prisoners to test clarity, cultural appropriateness, and relevance. Feedback from these groups highlighted the need for adjustments in terminology, phrasing, and sentence structure. Several items were reformulated from passive to active voice to align more naturally with Serbian linguistic norms, and specific terms were adapted to reflect the everyday realities of prison life. While no items were removed, modifications were made to ensure conceptual, semantic, idiomatic, and experiential equivalence with the original MQPL. The final version, approved by both the expert panel and the original authors, demonstrated content validity at both the item and scale levels and was thus considered appropriate for use in the present pilot study.

The survey was implemented between May 2022 and January 2023. Prisoners' participation in the study was voluntary, and the following criteria were applied for inclusion in the sample: 1) at least 30 days of the sentence served, 2) no disciplinary segregation at the time of data collection, and 3) functional literacy in the Serbian language. Surveying began with the introduction of the study, informing prisoners who gathered in the prison dining area, about voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their answers. All prisoners provided written consent before participating in the study. Questionnaires (paper and pencil) were distributed to prisoners who decided to participate. Researchers remained present while prisoners filled out the questionnaires. After completion, researchers immediately collected questionnaires in sealed envelopes and later entered the answers of participating prisoners into a dataset.

The applied MQPL questionnaire was first developed by Alison Liebling to measure social climate in English prisons

[4] Institutions were selected to include all major closed-type prisons with the largest prison populations and a prison for women offenders. Dislocated open-type institutions and those for juveniles were excluded due to their distinct sentencing regimes and populations. Two closed-type prisons were not included: 1) Kragujevac, which became operational later in the project, and 2) Pančevo, which was excluded due to organizational constraints and timeline limitations. Overall, selected institutions are high-capacity, long-established facilities that vary in size, security level, and prisoner profile (Ćopić et al., 2024).

(Liebling et al., 2011, 2012). Given that this was the first systematic application in Serbia, the original MQPL rather than the MQPL+ (a more intensive mixed-methods version combining surveys with ethnographic fieldwork, Liebling et al., 2021) was used to ensure feasibility and comparability with prior research, while still retaining the open-ended questions that allow for complementary qualitative insights. The questionnaire comprises five main thematic dimensions: Harmony, Professionalism, Security, Conditions and family contact, and Wellbeing and development that encompass more than 20 categories. Due to the robust statistical analyses used, only 14 factors were formed (see Table 2). The dimensions reflect the treatment of prisoners and physical conditions in prisons, and all items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. A detailed description of the conceptual basis and development of the MQPL questionnaires can be found in previous studies (Liebling & Arnold, 2004; Liebling et al., 2012).

4.2 Limitations of the Study

The study is not without limitations. First, the problem of sample characteristics that affect the generalisation of results should be mentioned. While the sample reflects some of the overall characteristics of the prison population in Serbia, surveying was conducted only in five prisons. Consequently, results cannot be generalised without reservation. Also, in contrast to most other studies on measuring social climate (e.g., Liebling et al., 2011; Reading & Ross, 2020; Schalast & Laan, 2017), prison workers were not included in the study. Their inclusion would provide an important insight into conditions and relationships from the power-holders' perspective, and not solely from the perspective of the governed (i.e., prisoners). Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data, which captures the views of prison workers at a single point in time, exposes the possibility of response bias. As prior studies have shown (e.g., Brinc, 2011; Mihelj Plesničar et al., 2019), prisoners' perception of social climate can vary across time. Finally, the problem of prisoners' candour and sincerity should be acknowledged. It is possible that prisoners provided socially desirable answers during the survey due to fear of disclosure and potential consequences. Despite efforts to mitigate such behaviour by ensuring confidentiality, some level of trepidation likely remained.

4.3 Participants

In total, 767 prisoners from five Serbian prisons participated in the survey (Milićević et al., 2024b). Due to a significant number of incomplete questionnaires, 149 respondents were eliminated from the sample; all participants who had not answered 90 percent or more of the questions in the questionnaire were not included in the sample. The remaining missing values were replaced with mean values in the subsequent analyses. The rate of missing answers to individual questions ranges from 15 (2.43%) to 50 (8.09%); most rates were below three percent.

In total, 618 prisoners were included in the sample, representing 5.73% of the overall prison population in Serbia at the time of surveying and 8.44% of the sentenced prisoner population, from which the sample was drawn (Aebi & Cocco, 2024). Considering the total prison population in the five prisons included in this study ($n = 5{,}113$; Administration of the Enforcement of Penal Sanctions [Personal communication], 2023), the overall response rate of prisoners was 12.09% (Požarevac women's prison; 38.70%; Sremska Mitrovica: 10.33%; Niš: 12.33%; Zabela 8.70%; and Beograd: 33.33%). Despite the use of convenience sampling, the characteristics of the sample show partial alignment with national prison population patterns in Serbia (Aebi & Cocco, 2024). However, it has to be noted that female prisoners were overrepresented in our study (14.4%) compared to their national share (4.2%). Also, the average age of the participants was 39.79 years, which is lower than the national average of 50.40. Characteristics of the sample are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

		n	%
Gender	Male	529	85.6
	Female	89	14.4
Education	Elementary school or lower	190	30.7
	High school or higher education	428	69.3
Type of criminal offence	Non-violent	329	53.2
	Elements of violence	289	46.8
Time in prison	12 months or less	168	27.2
	1 year or more	450	72.8
Work in prison	No	301	48.7
	Yes	317	51.3
Discipline measures during imprisonment	No	377	61.0
	Yes	241	39.0
Regime	Open or semi-open	159	25.7
	Closed*	459	74.3
Recidivism	No	324	52.4
	Yes	294	47.6
Prison	Požarevac (women)	89	14.4
	Sremska Mitrovica	184	29.8
	Niš	185	29.9
	Zabela	132	21.4
	Beograd	28	4.5

Age (in years): Mean [*M*] = 39.79, Standard deviation [*S.D*]. = 10.24, Median [Med.] = 39, Mode [Mod.] = 42, Minimum [Min.] = 20, Maximum [Max.] = 74
Length of sentence (in months): *M* = 96.90; *S.D.* = 96.33, Med. = 60, Mod. = 36, Min. = 2, Max. = 480
General assessment of the quality of life in prison*: *M* = 4.42; *S.D.* = 2.63, Med. = 4, Mod. = 3, Min. = 1, Max. = 10

* Closed regime also includes prisoners in maximum-security units.
** Scale: 1 – Very low quality to 10 – Very high quality.

4.4 Measures

The following sections describe variables included in factor analyses. Drawing on the findings of previous studies on the social climate in prisons (e.g., Auty & Liebling, 2019; Liebling et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2008), 14 modified factors were operationalised from 81 variables reflecting prisoners' perceptions of the measured variables rather than the actual measure of observed variables. Factors "Decency", "Organisation and consistency", "Fairness", "Prisoner safety", "Conditions", "Personal autonomy", "Distress" and "Stand alone items" were not formed, and factors "Entry support", "Humanity", "Policing and Security" and "Wellbeing" were modified due to low factor loadings and/or insufficient reliability (i.e., Cronbach's α). Each of the factors represents a small number of latent variables, simplifying the interpretation of multivariate analyses to follow (Abdi, 2003; Field, 2009). All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert-type response ranging from "Strongly disagree" (coded 1) and "Strongly agree" (coded 5); several variables were reverse-coded before their inclusion in the factor analysis. Factor scores were calculated as the weighted sum of variables highly correlated with the factor (the cut-off value was set at .40; see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). A principal axis extraction with varimax rotation was used. Factors were classified into five dimensions (Liebling et al., 2011): 1) Harmony, 2) Professionalism, 3) Security, 4) Conditions and family contact, and 5) Wellbeing and development.

Table 2: Factor analysis – Harmony dimensions

	F.L.	*M*	*S.D.*	Med.	Mod.	Range
Entry support (Cronbach's α = 0.70, Kaiser-Meyer-Okin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) = 0.67, variance [var.] = 43.42%)						
In my first few days in this prison, the staff took a personal interest in me.	0.64	2.88	1.23	3	3	4
When I first came into this prison, I felt looked after.	0.72	3.04	1.29	3	3	4
The induction process in this prison helped me to know exactly what to expect in the daily regime and when it would happen.	0.61	3.56	1.22	4	4	4
Respect/courtesy (Cronbach's α = 0.73, KMO = 0.90, var. = 50.01%)						
Personally, I get on well with the officers on my wing.	0.60	3.88	1.05	4	4	4
Relationships between staff and prisoners in this prison are good.	0.72	3.30	1.21	4	4	4
Most staff address and talk to me in a respectful manner.	0.76	3.50	1.21	4	4	4
I feel I am treated with respect by the staff in this prison.	0.81	3.21	1.18	4	4	4
Staff speak to you on a level in this prison.	0.82	2.98	1.21	3	3	4
Staff are argumentative towards prisoners in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.72	3.29	1.32	4	4	4
This prison is poor at treating prisoners with respect. (reverse coded)	0.65	3.06	1.26	3	3	4
This prison encourages me to respect other people.	0.52	3.20	1.17	4	4	4
Relationships (Cronbach's α = 0.91, KMO = 0.93, var. = 58.87%)						
I receive support from the staff in this prison when I need it.	0.82	3.25	1.27	3	4	4
Overall, I am treated fairly by the staff in this prison.	0.76	3.57	1.19	4	4	4
I trust the officers in this prison.	0.81	3.15	1.41	3	3	4
Staff in this prison often display honesty and integrity.	0.83	3.08	1.17	3	3	4
This prison is good at placing trust in prisoners.	0.72	2.65	1.28	3	3	4
I feel safe from being injured, bullied, or threatened by staff in this prison.	0.72	3.31	1.32	4	4	4
When I need to get something done in this prison, I can normally get it done by talking to someone face-to-face.	0.68	3.39	1.19	4	4	4

Humanity (Cronbach's α = 0.71, KMO = 0.92, var. = 56.60%)						
I am treated as a person of value in this prison.	0.78	3.17	1.19	3	3	4
The staff here treat me with kindness.	0.80	3.47	1.12	4	4	4
I feel cared about most of the time in this prison.	0.81	2.93	1.19	3	3	4
Staff in this prison show concern and understanding towards me.	0.79	2.93	1.19	3	3	4
I am being looked after with humanity in here.	0.80	3.47	1.24	4	4	4
Staff help prisoners to maintain contact with their families.	0.62	3.22	1.31	3	4	4
Some of the treatment I receive in this prison is degrading. (reverse coded)	0.65	2.72	1.32	2	2	4
Care for the vulnerable (Cronbach's α = 0.79, KMO = 0.81, var. = 44.84%)						
Anyone in this prison on a self-harm monitoring form gets the care and help from the staff that they need.	0.77	3.02	1.15	3	3	4
The prevention of self-harm and suicide is seen as a top priority in this prison.	0.57	2.91	1.23	3	3	4
Victims of bullying get all the help they need to cope.	0.82	2.89	1.16	3	3	4
This prison is good at providing care to those who are at risk of suicide.	0.70	2.96	1.19	3	3	4
Bullying behaviour by prisoners is not tolerated in this prison.	0.41	3.45	1.14	4	4	4
Help and assistance (Cronbach's α = 0.79, KMO = 0.83, var. = 39.87%)						
This prison is good at improving the wellbeing of those who have drug problems.	0.69	2.73	1.23	3	3	4
Wing staff take an interest in helping to sort out my healthcare needs.	0.70	2.88	1.38	3	4	4
I feel I have been encouraged to address my offending behaviour in this prison.	0.50	3.02	1.17	3	3	4
Anyone with a drug problem coming to this prison gets the help they need to detox safely.	0.78	2.91	1.22	3	3	4
In this prison, it is clear to me what I need to do in order to progress/prepare for court.	0.59	3.47	1.38	4	4	4
I have been helped significantly by a member of staff in this prison with a particular problem.	0.45	3.22	1.29	3	4	4

* Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Varimax rotation; Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree; F.L. – Factor loading.

Table 3: Factor analysis – Professionalism dimensions

	F.L.	***M***	***S.D.***	**Med.**	**Mod.**	**Range**
Staff competence/professionalism (Cronbach's α = 0.91, KMO = 0.93, var. = 51.96%)						
Staff here treat prisoners fairly when applying the rules.	0.84	3.19	1.32	3	4	4
Staff here treat prisoners fairly when distributing privileges.	0.77	2.94	1.39	3	4	4
Privileges are given and taken fairly in this prison.	0.71	2.95	1.38	3	4	4
Staff in this prison have enough experience and expertise to deal with the issues that matter to me.	0.72	3.10	1.29	3	4	4
Staff in this prison tell it like it is.	0.81	3.13	1.34	3	4	4
The rules and regulations are made clear to me.	0.55	3.79	1.19	4	4	4
Staff carry out their security tasks well in this prison.	0.79	3.63	1.17	4	4	4
The best way to get things done in this prison is to be polite and go through official channels.	0.68	3.77	1.29	4	4	4
If you do something wrong in this prison, staff only use punishments if they have tried other options first.	0.61	2.76	1.25	3	2	4
Bureaucratic legitimacy (Cronbach's α = 0.60, KMO = 0.86, var. = 39.34%)						
I have to be careful about everything I do in this prison, or it can be used against me.	0.51	1.97	0.97	2	2	4

All they care about in this prison is my 'risk factors' rather than the person I really am.	0.58	2.68	1.26	3	2	4
I feel stuck in this system.	0.81	2.66	1.35	3	1	4
Decisions are made about me in this prison that I cannot influence.	0.66	2.25	1.07	2	2	4
Decisions are made about me in this prison that I cannot understand.	0.54	2.94	1.29	3	4	4
When important decisions are made about me in this prison, I am treated as an individual, not a number.	0.55	3.04	1.30	3	2	4
To progress in this prison, I have to meet impossible expectations.	0.69	2.78	1.35	3	4	4

* Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Varimax rotation; Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree; F.L. – Factor loading.

Table 4: Factor analysis – Security dimensions

	F.L.	***M***	***S.D.***	**Med.**	**Mod.**	**Range**
Policing and security (Cronbach's α = 0.66, KMO = 0.86, var. = 37.23%)						
Staff in this prison turn a blind eye when prisoners break the rules. (reverse coded)	0.75	2.81	1.22	3	2	4
Supervision of prisoners is poor in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.56	2.40	1.16	2	2	4
This prison is run by prisoners rather than staff. (reverse coded)	0.66	2.36	1.19	2	2	4
This prison does very little to prevent drugs from being smuggled in. (reverse coded)	0.53	2.77	1.23	3	3	4
There is a lot of trouble between different groups of prisoners here. (reverse coded)	0.61	2.91	1.16	3	3	4
In this prison, there is a real 'pecking order' between prisoners. (reverse coded)	0.63	3.26	1.26	3	4	4
Staff respond promptly to incidents and alarms in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.49	3.90	0.99	4	4	4
Prisoner adaptation (Cronbach's α = 0.71, KMO = 0.65, var. = 46.70%)						
In this prison, I have to buy and sell things in order to get by. (reverse coded)	0.82	2.05	1.16	2	1	4
I find it hard to stay out of debt in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.63	2.12	1.21	2	1	4
In this prison, you have to be in a group in order to get by. (reverse coded)	0.58	2.55	1.13	2	2	4
Drugs and exploitation (Cronbach's α = 0.82, KMO = 0.78, var. = 46.84%)						
Drugs cause a lot of problems among prisoners here. (reverse coded)	0.73	3.42	1.25	4	4	4
The level of drug use in this prison is quite high. (reverse coded)	0.70	3.17	1.35	3	3	4
There are a lot of threats/bullying in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.66	2.69	1.25	3	2	4
Weak prisoners get badly exploited and victimised in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.69	2.93	1.28	3	3	4
Certain prisoners run things on the wings in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.64	3.10	1.31	3	4	4

* Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Varimax rotation; Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree; F.L. – Factor loading.

Table 5: Factor analysis – Conditions and family contact dimensions

	F.L.	*M*	*S.D.*	Med.	Mod.	Range
Family contact (Cronbach's α = 0.82, KMO = 0.71, var. = 59.25)						
I am able to receive visits often enough in this prison.	0.78	3.57	1.25	4	4	4
I am able to maintain meaningful contact with my family while I am in this prison.	0.72	3.59	1.18	4	4	4
The length of time for each visit is long enough.	0.80	3.29	1.30	4	4	4

* Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Varimax rotation; Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree; F.L. – Factor loading.

Table 6: Factor analysis – Wellbeing and development dimensions

	F.L.	*M*	*S.D.*	Med.	Mod.	Range
Personal development (Cronbach's α = 0.79, KMO = 0.92, var. = 49.73)						
My needs are being addressed in this prison.	0.74	2.91	1.25	3	4	4
I am encouraged to work towards goals/targets in this prison.	0.78	3.11	1.29	3	4	4
I am being helped to lead a law-abiding life on release in the community.	0.75	2.71	1.36	3	1	4
Every effort is made by this prison to stop offenders from committing offences on release from custody.	0.75	2.81	1.27	3	3	4
The regime in this prison is constructive.	0.82	3.09	1.26	3	4	4
My time here seems like a chance to change.	0.64	3.56	1.26	3	4	4
This regime encourages me to think about and plan for my release.	0.64	3.33	1.34	4	4	4
On the whole, I am doing time rather than using time. (reverse coded)	0.44	3.18	1.29	4	4	4
Wellbeing (Cronbach's α = 0.84, KMO = 0.73, var. = 63.32)						
My experience in this prison is painful. (reverse coded)	0.80	2.93	1.33	3	2	4
I feel tense in this prison. (reverse coded)	0.77	3.32	1.29	3	4	4
My experience of imprisonment in this particular prison has been stressful. (reverse coded)	0.82	3.31	1.31	3	4	4

* Principal Axis Factoring extraction with Varimax rotation; Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree; F.L. – Factor loading.

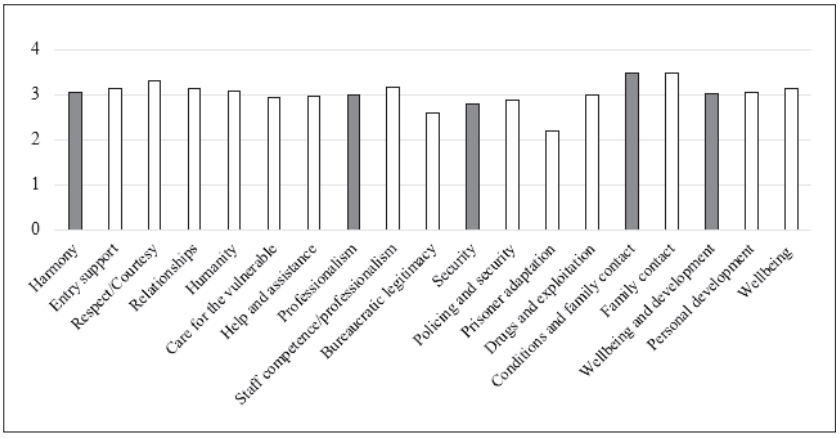
5 Results

The section begins with the presentation of results on the overall social climate and its dimensions in Serbian prisons, followed by a comparison of the results of measuring social climate in individual prisons. Finally, results on the comparison of measuring social climate in different prison regimes, indicating the correlation between the level of security in prison and prisoners' perception of social climate, are reported.

In Graph 1, factor scores calculated as the weighted average sum of variables are reported for individual factors (14) as well as for five social climate dimensions: 1) Harmony (36 variables included, Cronbach's α = 0.96, KMO = 0.98, var. = 47.40%); 2) Professionalism (16 variables included, Cronbach's α = 0.87, KMO = 0.94, var. = 41.32%); 3) Security (15 variables included, Cronbach's α = 0.86, KMO = 0.91, var. = 36.25%); 4) Conditions and family contact (three variables included, Cronbach's α = 0.82, KMO = 0.71, var. = 59.25%); and 5) Wellbeing and development (11 variables included, Cronbach's α = 0.51[5], KMO = 0.91, var. = 44.18%) are reported. Overall, the results show that the dimension Conditions and family contact was evaluated most favourably by the prisoners. In contrast, the lowest scores were detected with the dimension Security, especially with the factor Prisoner Adaptation, as its scores were the lowest among the 14 measured items. The other three dimensions had similar scores (mean value around 3). Factors Respect/courtesy and Staff competence/professionalism should be highlighted, as prisoners' perception of the professional conduct of staff and the ability to enter into relationships with them was positive. In general, the overall social climate in five

[5] Taber (2018) argued that alpha values above .05 are still acceptable as a sign of reliability for the continuation of analysis.

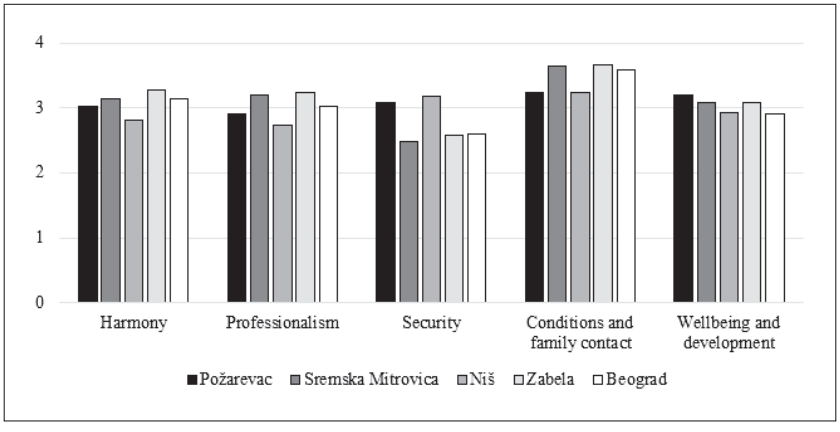
Serbian prisons is at an adequate level, as the average score of five dimensions is 3.07 on a five-point scale.



* Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree

Graph 1: Social climate in Serbian prisons

Previous studies have shown that the social climate is not stable but varies in different prisons (Reading & Ross, 2020; Ross et al., 2008; Schalast & Laan, 2017; Weinrath & Ricciardelli, 2023). As demonstrated in Graph 2, this is also true in Serbian prisons. The comparison of dimensions of social climate in different prisons in the sample shows that the highest scores on dimensions Harmony, Professionalism, and Conditions and family contact were identified in Zabela prison. In contrast, the lowest scores on these three dimensions were detected in Niš prison (also the dimension Wellbeing and development). The highest score on the dimension Security was detected in Niš prison, and the lowest was in Sremska Mitrovica; this result is interesting given that two of the five facilities surveyed, namely Beograd, Požarevac, and Zabela, contain maximum-security or high-risk units, suggesting that perceived security levels may not align with official security classifications. Finally, the dimension Wellbeing and development was best evaluated in the Požarevac prison for women. Deriving from the identified differences in overall scores on dimensions between prisons, a discriminant analysis was performed (Table 7).

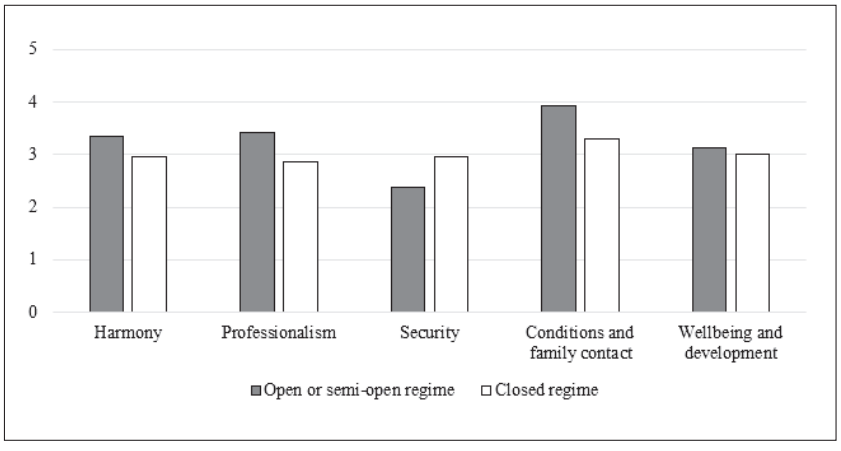


* Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree

Graph 2: Dimensions of social climate in Serbian prisons

In Table 7, the results of the discriminant analysis are presented, with which a multivariate test of differences between prisoners' perceptions of social climate in different prisons was conducted. Statistically significant differences between prisoners in different prisons were observed. Results emphasised that dimensions Harmony ($F = 8.94$; $p < 0.001$), Professionalism ($F = 12.76$; $p < 0.001$), Security ($F = 30.56$; $p < 0.001$), Conditions and family contact ($F = 5.15$; $p < 0.001$), and Wellbeing and development ($F = 2.42$; $p < 0.05$), and the following factors within dimensions: 1) Entry support ($F = 2.62$; $p < 0.05$), 2) Respect/courtesy ($F = 8.33$; $p < 0.001$), 3) Relationships ($F = 9.91$; $p < 0.001$), 4) Humanity ($F = 9.33$; $p < 0.001$), 5) Care for the vulnerable ($F = 5.04$; $p < 0.001$), 6) Help and assistance ($F = 5.79$; $p < 0.001$), 7) Staff competence/professionalism ($F = 12.79$; $p < 0.001$), 8) Bureaucratic legitimacy ($F = 5.71$; $p < 0.001$), 9) Policing and security ($F = 23.16$; $p < 0.001$), 10) Prisoner adaptation ($F = 6.59$; $p < 0.001$), 11) Drugs and exploitation ($F = 35.51$; $p < 0.001$), 12) Family contact ($F = 5.15$; $p < 0.001$), 13) Personal development ($F = 5.81$; $p < 0.001$), and 14) Wellbeing ($F = 14.93$; $p < 0.001$) affect differentiation between prisoners in different prisons. A comparison of prisoners in different Serbian prisons shows that Harmony (dimension), Professionalism (dimension), Conditions and family contact (dimension), Entry support, Respect/courtesy, Relationships, Humanity, Help and assistance (also in Beograd prison). Staff competence/professionalism, and Family contact are best perceived with prisoners in Zabela prison; Care for the vulnerable in Beograd prison; Bureaucratic legitimacy and Personal development in Sremska Mitrovica prison; Security (dimension), Prisoner adaptation, and Drugs and exploitation in Niš prison; and Policing and security, Wellbeing and development (dimension), and Wellbeing in Požarevac prison for women. Classification of prisoners' responses shows that 49.0% of respondents were correctly classified.

In general, the perception of social climate is less positive in stricter prison regimes (Brinc, 2011; Mihelj Plesničar, 2019). As demonstrated in Graph 3, this is also true in Serbian prisons. The comparison of dimensions of social climate in different prison regimes shows that all dimensions (i.e., Harmony, Professionalism, Conditions and family contact, and Wellbeing and development) except for security dimensions are higher in open and semi-open prison regimes. The highest scores in all regime types were detected with dimension Conditions and family contact, while the lowest were detected with Security in open and semi-open regimes, and Professionalism in closed regimes. Deriving from the identified differences in scores on dimensions between prison regimes, a discriminant analysis was performed (Table 8).



* Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 -Strongly agree

Graph 3: Dimensions of social climate in open/semi-open and closed regimes

Table 7: Discriminant analysis: Social climate in Serbian prisons

	Požarevac		Sremska Mitrovica		Niš		Zabela		Beograd		*Wilks' Lambda*	*F*
	n = 89		*n = 184*		*n = 185*		*n = 132*		*n = 28*			
	M	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*		
Harmony	3.02	0.80	3.14	0.71	2.81	0.76	3.28	0.67	3.15	0.82	0.94	8.94***
Entry support	3.12	0.96	3.14	0.96	2.98	1.02	3.35	0.91	3.12	1.20	0.98	2.62*
Respect/Courtesy	3.23	0.74	3.36	0.71	3.08	0.75	3.54	0.67	3.40	0.74	0.95	8.33***
Relationships	3.08	1.07	3.34	0.95	2.79	1.01	3.41	0.89	3.17	1.09	0.94	9.91***
Humanity	3.14	0.80	3.14	0.75	2.81	0.78	3.32	0.69	3.13	0.76	0.94	9.33***
Care for the vulnerable	2.85	1.00	3.00	0.83	2.74	0.93	3.16	0.84	3.18	0.96	0.97	5.04***
Help and assistance	2.95	0.92	3.06	0.88	2.72	0.94	3.17	0.88	3.17	0.97	0.96	5.79***
Professionalism	2.91	0.77	3.20	0.75	2.73	0.77	3.24	0.67	3.02	0.74	0.92	12.76***
Staff competence/ professionalism	3.04	1.01	3.37	0.94	2.80	0.99	3.50	0.85	3.17	0.99	0.92	12.79***
Bureaucratic legitimacy	2.52	0.72	2.76	0.71	2.42	0.67	2.64	0.70	2.62	0.71	0.96	5.71***
Security	3.09	0.71	2.49	0.67	3.19	0.74	2.59	0.63	2.60	0.64	0.83	30.56***
Policing and security	3.25	0.73	2.63	0.63	3.16	0.74	2.72	0.65	2.57	0.53	0.87	23.16***
Prisoner adaptation	2.20	0.92	2.06	0.86	2.48	1.03	2.02	0.85	2.03	0.90	0.96	6.59***
Drugs and exploitation	3.26	0.97	2.54	0.86	3.56	0.92	2.71	0.81	2.97	0.87	0.81	35.51***
Conditions and family contact	3.25	1.23	3.64	1.02	3.25	1.07	3.67	0.92	3.60	1.22	0.97	5.15***
Family contact	3.25	1.23	3.64	1.02	3.25	1.07	3.67	0.92	3.60	1.22	0.97	5.15***
Wellbeing and development	3.12	0.60	3.08	0.53	2.94	0.57	3.08	0.57	2.91	0.66	0.98	2.42*
Personal development	2.96	0.92	3.22	0.79	2.83	0.89	3.19	0.87	2.91	1.11	0.96	5.81***
Wellbeing	3.70	1.06	2.78	1.08	3.38	1.10	2.86	1.07	3.01	1.29	0.91	14.93***
Wilks' Lambda	0.59***											

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

In Table 8, the results of the discriminant analysis are presented, with which a multivariate test of differences between prisoners' perceptions of social climate in different prison regimes was conducted. Statistically significant differences between prisoners in different regime types were observed. Results emphasised that dimensions Harmony (F = 31.38; p < 0.001), Professionalism (F = 64.90; p < 0.001), Security (F = 74.23; p < 0.001), Conditions and family contact (F = 42.51; p < 0.001), and Wellbeing and development (F = 7.36; p < 0.01), and the following factors within dimensions: 1) Entry support (F = 13.80; p < 0.001), 2) Respect/Courtesy (F = 28.95; p < 0.001), 3) Relationships (F = 45.17; p < 0.001), 4) Humanity (F = 25.49; p < 0.001), 5) Care for the vulnerable (F = 12.26; p < 0.001), 6) Help and assistance (F = 12.00; p < 0.001), 7) Staff competence/professionalism (F = 46.49; p < 0.001), 8) Bureaucratic legitimacy (F = 61.50; p < 0.001), 9) Policing and security (F = 34.55; p < 0.001), 10) Prisoner adaptation (F = 45.63; p < 0.001), 11) Drugs and exploitation (F = 88.07; p < 0.001), 12) Family contact (F = 42.51; p < 0.001), 13) Personal development (F = 31.07; p < 0.001), and 14) Wellbeing (F = 47.11; p < 0.001) affect differentiation between prisoners in different prison regimes. A comparison of prisoners in different prison regimes shows that all dimensions (Harmony, Professionalism, Conditions and family contact, and Wellbeing and development) and factors, except for Security (dimension), Policing and security, Prisoner adaptation, Drugs and exploitation, and Wellbeing, are better perceived in open and semi-open regimes. Classification of prisoners' responses shows that 79.9% of respondents were correctly classified.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Measuring social climate presents one of the most useful tools for evaluating quality of life in prisons, as it focuses on social, emotional, organisational, and environmental conditions within a prison (Brinc, 2011; Ross et al., 2008; van Ginneken & Nieuwbeerta, 2020). The current study presents

Table 8: Discriminant analysis: Social climate in open/semi-open regimes and closed regimes

	Open or semi-open regimes		Closed regime		*Wilks' Lambda*	*F*
	n = 159		*n* = 459			
	M	*S.D.*	*M*	*S.D.*		
Harmony	3.34	0.69	2.96	0.75	0.95	31.38***
Entry support	3.38	0.98	3.04	0.98	0.98	13.80***
Respect/Courtesy	3.57	0.64	3.21	0.75	0.95	28.95***
Relationships	3.60	0.88	2.99	1.01	0.93	45.17***
Humanity	3.35	0.69	2.99	0.79	0.96	25.49***
Care for the vulnerable	3.16	0.92	2.87	0.89	0.98	12.26***
Help and assistance	3.19	0.89	2.89	0.93	0.98	12.00***
Professionalism	3.42	0.72	2.87	0.73	0.90	64.90***
Staff competence/Professionalism	3.62	0.88	3.01	0.98	0.93	46.49***
Bureaucratic legitimacy	2.96	0.73	2.47	0.66	0.91	61.50***
Security	2.39	0.69	2.96	0.72	0.89	74.23***
Policing and security	2.61	0.67	2.99	0.72	0.95	34.55***
Prisoner adaptation	1.77	0.70	2.35	0.97	0.93	45.63***
Drugs and exploitation	2.41	0.94	3.21	0.91	0.87	88.07***
Conditions and family contact	3.94	0.87	3.31	1.09	0.93	42.51***
Family contact	3.94	0.87	3.31	1.09	0.93	42.51***
Wellbeing and development	3.14	0.51	3.00	0.58	0.99	7.36**
Personal development	3.38	0.82	2.93	0.88	0.95	31.07***
Wellbeing	2.60	1.07	3.30	1.11	0.93	47.11***
Wilks' Lambda	0.79***					

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

the first attempt to evaluate social climate in Serbian prisons. Findings show that the overall social climate in five Serbian prisons is at an adequate level. The overall average score of social climate was 3.07 on a five-point scale, while the average general assessment of the quality of life in prison amounted to 4.42 on a 10-point scale. It could be argued that, in practice, life in prison, especially the lack of adequate physical conditions that would meet living standards on the outside, presents a significant strain for most prisoners. However, as Brinc (2011) argued, prison social comprises not solely conditions in prisons, but also organisational characteristics. In practice, this mainly refers to different forms of treatment and support for prisoners, as well as prison staff-prisoner relations. Based on the overall score of social climate in Serbian prisons, it can be argued that the organisational aspect of social climate is at least as important to prisoners as physical conditions in prisons.

Although the MQPL framework was initially developed and most widely applied in England and Wales, and subsequently in Western European and Anglophone contexts (e.g., Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada), several studies have adapted it to other jurisdictions (e.g., Chile – Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019; Indonesia – Arifin et al., 2020; Croatia – Sekol & Vidranski, 2017). Findings of the current study, similar to studies in other cultural environments, reflect the cultural and organisational specifics that affect the prison social climate. The highest scores were detected with the dimension Conditions and family contact, while the lowest scores were recorded with the Security dimension. Contrary to studies in other countries (e.g., Auty & Liebling, 2019; Ross et al., 2008; Weinrath & Ricciardelli, 2023), it seems that the treatment orientation in prisons, despite its shortcomings, has a positive impact on prisoners' perception of social climate, as categories family contact, personal development, and wellbeing were evaluated most positively. The scores on prison adaptation also confirm this effect; the lowest scores were recorded due to reverse coding. In general, prisons that strive for prisoner rehabilitation influence their psychological wellbeing, adjustment to prison life, and reduced reoffending (van Ginneken & Palmen, 2023). The Security dimension revealed problems with drugs and exploitation, the universal problem present in almost all prisons. The high scores with dimensions related to prison staff-prisoner relations and prison workers' professionalism highlighted the importance of prison workers' competence in dealing with prisoners; it had to be noted that the most "dangerous/problematic" prisoners from maximum security units, demanding special treatment, were also included in the sample (Ćopić et al., 2024). Skar et al. (2019) reported that positive relational climate dimensions were inversely associated with prison violence. Prison staff-prisoners relations present the foundation of maintaining order and safety for all prison actors. In this context, two factors should be acknowledged. First, the physical conditions and size of prisons. Johnsen et al. (2011) found that prison size influenced staff–prisoner relationships in Norway. While size has a limited effect on the relations within Serbian prisons, the professionalism of prison workers is crucial. The importance of professional competencies should not be overlooked, as prison workers possess a high level of discretionary power over prisoners (Kifer et al., 2003). As van Ginneken et al. (2020) highlighted, professionalism involves more than maintaining order, as it sets the ethical and moral tone of institutional life. Application of the MQPL in Serbian prisons shows promise, but also revealed certain shortcomings, especially regarding forming constructs; this is not an unusual phenomenon in applying Western models in non-Western prison environments. The complexity of the primary dimension and subcategories needs additional testing (especially in a non-Western prison environment), as applying more rigorous statistical methods eliminated approximately one-third of the variables/factors. Similar problems were detected with applying Western models for measuring legitimacy in non-Western prison environments (e.g., Hacin & Meško, 2025; Reisig & Meško, 2009).

Social climate is not stable but varies between different countries, as well as in different prisons within the same cultural environment (Reading & Ross, 2020; Ross et al., 2008; Schalast & Laan, 2017; Weinrath & Ricciardelli, 2023). Sanhueza and Pérez (2019) demonstrated that an adapted MQPL was sensitive to local prison realities and highlighted variation in moral performance between prisons in Chile. Similarly, differences in prison social climate were also detected in the current study. Wright (1985) argued that differences in perceived social climate may result from the actual differences between institutions (i.e., prison conditions) and/or individual perceptions (i.e., prisoners' subjective perception of living conditions and treatment). The latter was obvious between two similar institutions in Niš and Zabela (old prisons built in the 19th century with a similar number of prisoners at the time of the survey and no overcrowding comprising different regimes), where the highest and lowest scores on the three dimensions (i.e., Harmony, Professionalism, and Conditions and family) of social climate were detected (in Zabela prison highest scores was detected, and the lowest in Niš prison). It seems that relations between prison actors truly represent the beating heart of a prison, influencing the lives of all involved and the overall social climate (Brinc, 2011; Liebling, 2011). Rodríguez Menés et al. (2018) came to similar conclusions, as perceived prison quality differed significantly across Spanish prisons, primarily due to organisational factors and relationships. The importance of social dynamics within prison walls for

the overall social climate is obvious. As Tomažinčič (2023) highlighted, incarcerated women are exposed to additional "pains of imprisonment", which affect their relationships in prison. While differences between the prison for women in Požarevac and other prisons were detected, they were not profound. Only the dimension Wellbeing and development had the highest scores in Požarevac; the category Wellbeing (reverse coded) was evaluated most favourably, showing the importance of (mediating) deprivation factors of imprisonment (Batrićević et al., 2023). Finally, the differences between prisoners' perceptions of safety and security must not be neglected. The finding implies that shared perceptions of safety and control may be shaped more by local institutional culture than by formal security classification. The highest score on the dimension of security was detected in Niš prison, followed by a prison for women in Požarevac; neither of these institutions has a maximum-security unit. It seems that high formal security in maximum security prison/units does not guarantee high perceived safety. Overly rigid security regimes may increase fear, undermine trust, and lead to more violence (Liebling & Arnold, 2012; Martens & Crewe, 2025; Ricciardelli & Sit, 2016; Wolff & Shi, 2009).

A more favourable social climate is generally detected in less rigid prison regimes that support rehabilitation (Brinc, 2011; Mihelj Plesničar, 2019; Schalast & Laan, 2017). Almost all dimensions of social climate, except for Security, were higher in open and semi-open regimes compared to closed regimes. Auty and Liebling (2019) argued that more open prisons record the highest scores on MQPL dimensions. The (reverse coded) scores on the dimension Security reflect the characteristics of the prison population in open and semi-open, and closed regimes. Prisoners in more open prison regimes have proven themselves as trusted individuals who do not cause problems (Hacin & Meško, 2020). In turn, the overall (perception of) safety is enhanced. An individual's adaptation to such an environment is easier, and the need for supervision is lower. Interestingly, differences between prisoners' perception of the dimension Wellbeing and development in open and semi-open, and closed regimes, while statistically significant, were not profound; differences were more significant when comparing individual factors. This finding indicated that while there are obvious differences between prison regimes, they all strive towards conditions that would enable prisoners' wellbeing and development.

While the application of the MQPL survey instrument in former socialist countries remains limited (measurements of social climate were conducted in Slovenia and Croatia, e.g., Bokalič et al., 2017; Brinc, 2011; Sekol & Vidranski, 2017), the current study not only presents the first study of this kind in Serbia, but also advances the knowledge of measuring prison social climate in the following ways. First, it represents the first study in the Serbian prison context, providing important empirical evidence on measuring social climate in a non-Western cultural environment, as only a handful of studies in different non-Western countries were conducted (e.g., Batrićević et al., 2023; Brinc, 2011; Mihelj & Plesničar, 2017). Second, while the current study extended the reach of the MQPL survey instrument to a distinctive former socialist prison context in Serbia, it exposed the problems with the suitability of the Western models (i.e., survey instruments; Liebling et al., 2011, 2012). Third, the inclusion of several prisons in the study enabled the comparison that resulted in supporting the theoretical premises on the unstable nature of social climate, not solely between countries but also between different institutions and regimes (Brinc, 2011; Ross et al., 2008; Schalast & Laan, 2017; Weinrath & Ricciardelli, 2023). Finally, the pilot study opened up wide new possibilities for future research. The logical next step would be to conduct a comprehensive study on measuring social climate based on a national sample of prisoners and prison workers in Serbia. Such a study would enable comparative analysis and provide the basis for the development of a longitudinal study on the measurement of social climate in Serbian prisons. As the implementation of the MQPL questionnaire in the Serbian prison context exposed certain problems with suitability, future research should also test the suitability of other questionnaires (e.g., EssenCES, CIES; Brinc, 2011; Reading & Ross, 2020; Schalast & Laan, 2017) for measuring prison social climate.

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Socialna klima v srbskih zaporih

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Prispevek se osredotoča na merjenje družbenega vzdušja v srbskih zaporih. Za merjenje naslednjih dimenzij družbenega vzdušja: 1) Harmonija, 2) Profesionalnost, 3) Varnost, 4) Pogoji in družinski stiki ter 5) Dobro počutje in razvoj v petih srbskih zaporih je bila uporabljena prevedena in spremenjena različica vprašalnika MQPL. Anketiranje je potekalo od maja 2022 do januarja 2023 v zaporih Sremska Mitrovica, Niš, Požarevac, Zabela in Beograd. V anketi je sodelovalo skupno 767 obsojencev, v vzorec pa je bilo vključenih 618 obsojencev. Gledano celostno je splošna socialna klima v petih srbskih zaporih na ustrezni ravni. Najvišje vrednosti v vseh vrstah zaporskih režimov so bile zaznane pri dimenziji Pogoji in družinski stiki, najnižje pa pri Varnosti v odprtih in polodprtih režimih ter Profesionalnosti v zaprtih režimih. Primerjava socialne klime v različnih zaporskih režimih kaže, da obsojenci v odprtih in polodprtih režimih vse dimenzije (Harmonija, Profesionalnost, Pogoji in družinski stiki ter Dobro počutje in razvoj) z izjemo dimenzije Varnost, zaznavajo bolj pozitivno v primerjavi z obsojenci v zaprtih režimih. V zaključku prispevka razpravljamo o ugotovitvah pilotske študije o merjenju družbenega vzdušja v srbskih zaporih in možnostih za raziskovanje v prihodnje.

Ključne besede: socialna klima, zapor, obsojenci, režim, Srbija

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