

# SOCIOLOGY IN SLOVENIA

## Problems, achievements and challenges

Contributions marking the 50th anniversary  
of the Slovenian Sociological Association

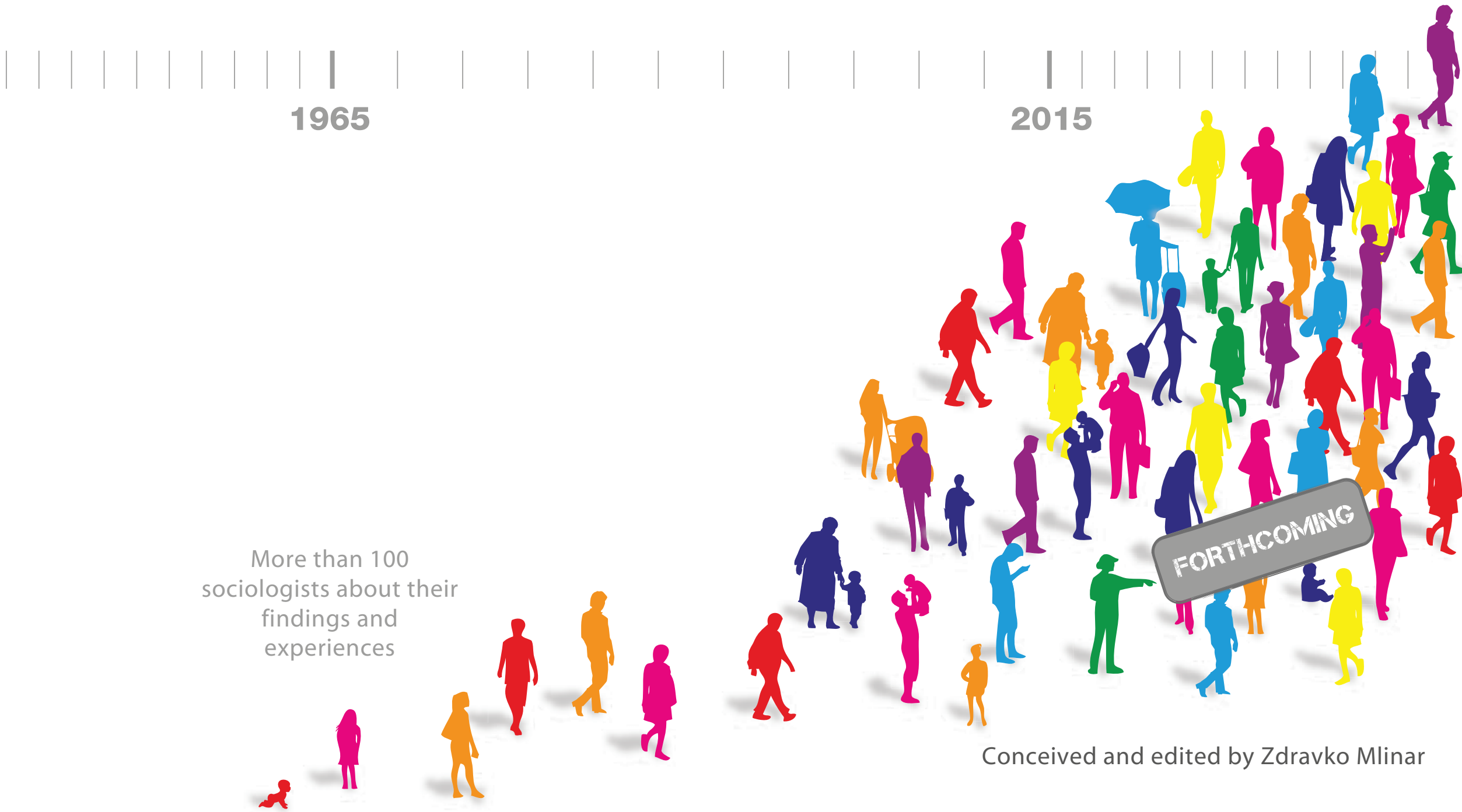
1965

2015

More than 100  
sociologists about their  
findings and  
experiences

FORTHCOMING

Conceived and edited by Zdravko Mlinar



## TO ACCOMPANY THE BOOK ON ITS WAY

It is exactly 60 years since I started participating in sociological activities (at the Faculty of Law of the University of Ljubljana). In this period, I have published numerous texts which have monitored the achievements and problems of sociology's assertion in Slovenia and around the world. At the same time, I have constantly tried to preserve the relevant »documents of the time« that would otherwise become lost. On this basis, I initially decided to publish a more comprehensive work; however, I did not want to limit myself just to my own texts and my personal retrospective. I therefore started to gather shorter contributions written by my close colleagues at the Centre for Spatial Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana, and later some others by certain other colleagues. However, the unexpectedly large response encouraged me to decide on a collective publication, which ultimately includes over 100 authors. This publication gained priority with the expectation that, being thereby enriched by my colleagues' experiences, I would be able to return to my own book in 2016.

This very year, 2015, the year of the 50th anniversary of the Association (which was founded on my initiative in 1965) brings an opportunity for a collective effort to (self)critically sum up our findings and experiences which are also to enrich the younger generations and strengthen the professional identity of sociology in Slovenia. This identity is in crisis since, among several thousand sociologists, only a small share expresses their identification with the Association and with sociology.

Through the writings in this book, which include both personal testimonies of an autobiographical nature as well as expert and scientific contributions about the discipline and its social environment, the diverse self-image of sociology over the past half-century is presented in such an integral and authentic way for the first time in Slovenia.

I paid special attention to my wish not to limit the book to a narrow circle of the "academic sphere" of sociology, but to also include – apart from university workers, teachers and researchers – as many experiences as possible of other authors who could be seen as falling into the category of "muted", "silenced" sociologists, and thus to also include so-called subordinate knowledge or – as it is described mainly in the economic literature – "silent knowledge" that is not expressed but still richly present in the everyday, lifelong environment. However, in general, the dominant attention is oriented to explicit, codified and institutionalised knowledge. This is about the question of (the loss of) professional identity of numerous sociologists who work in practice, and also generally about the emancipatory role of sociology that endeavours to empower the subordinated and the ignored.

Another special reason for gathering such a wide range of sociologists is that it is only in this way, with individual testimony, that we can gain an insight into those experiences and knowledge which are otherwise not publicly expressed in any place. If this seems to entail subjectivism, it is transcended here with the understanding that individual testimonies can always be considered together with other, more objectivised information. However, it is first necessary to acquire as much information as possible before raising the question of how to select the individual authors. Through self-evaluation, each author, as the best connoisseur of their own work, has shortened our path to his or her most significant achievements that largely remain unexploited, particularly in Slovenia in the context of the language limitations. This is where we came close to the legitimacy of qualitative methods, and in particular the biographical method that has already been asserted in sociology. This also places methodological questions in the context of an emancipatory sociology; although in our case only the narrow professional category – of sociologists – is involved which, however, is internally differentiated on the scale between the “loud” and the “silenced” with regard to gender, field of work, location etc.

My efforts to ensure a broad selection were not always exclusively limited to graduate sociologists, but I also included individual authors who typically bridge disciplinary borders. This all reflects my belief that sociologists should take on an integrating role in relation to all social science disciplines by asserting sociology as a general and generalising social science that can be some kind of a flagbearer of an integral social scientific explanation of social changes, of an integral social science.

Due to the (un)controllably large quantity of the material and the short time available, I primarily limited the inclusion of authors to sociologists of the older generation who are simultaneously the most experienced, while some of them also withdrawing themselves from active professional participation. It is from this category of sociologists that we are most rapidly, from year to year, losing unique experiences of and witnesses to historically unique events. The reason very special attention was paid to this category of older, mainly retired sociologists reflects my intention to encourage the activation of unexploited intellectual potential beginning with us, sociologists, as an example. My initiatives fell on fertile ground and so far, when dealing with the complex material collected, I have been able to lean on the exemplary co-operation of a group of retired sociologists (I discuss this more in the book). They themselves – thus encouraged – have shown interest in more intense association and (co-)operation that has not yet come to life, except episodically. This can also be a step forward in our intention for sociologists to not only write about social capital, but to also bring it into effect for themselves.

Despite the extraordinarily diverse contents of the responses I received, I did not simply aggregate them as proceedings but was able, as their number was increasing, to present them in an ever more structured way in the individual chapters of this collection of papers that I divided into the three principal sections presented below.

#### *Sociology in the contemporary transformation of the social sciences*

Within the first section, the authors address the most general issues of the changing role of sociology, namely, whether this means the fading out or strengthening of its role, the »decline or ascent of sociology«, its crisis or primarily its transformation, in which it is sociology itself that can take the leading role in the context of the social sciences in general. The more specific texts include authors' views and assessments of sociology in Slovenia over the past decades, and in particular of the currents and obstacles in the transfer of social science findings between individual social science disciplines, and from the general to the specific, and vice versa.

#### *Sociology and social practice*

In the book, central attention is paid to critical evaluations and findings, experiences of how sociological action is asserted or lacks assertion in social practice in Slovenia. Here we are not limited to narrow utilitarian views, but focus on explaining why the findings of sociological research and sociologists' work fail to achieve the expected response in those spheres and with those people in which and with whom it would be most expected. The reasons encompass factors involving sociologists themselves or mediators (the media, education), or political actors, or they involve other factors in concrete social practice.

#### *Sociological action and opening up to the world*

With some effort, I also managed to attract Slovenian authors who, while coming from the local environment, have also acquired international experiences, including authors active in different countries around the world. Both groups of authors indicate successful breakthroughs and experiences that reach beyond the different forms of self-sufficiency and institutional and territorial closing in. At the same time, they also reveal possibilities for more successful work in science and in the social environment that have been unknown or unrecognised in Slovenia.

Therefore, this book is not the mere sum of 106 authors' contributions but presents our joint and generalised summarised findings of the main thematic sections: both retrospectively and as challenges for the future – from the aspect of the professional work of both sociologists and the Association – for Slovenia and society in general.

My sociological findings about the long-term processes of social change strengthen my belief that we need to resist the simplified interpretations of the local-national/global alternative. Globalisation does not a priori negate the sensibility of our engagement on the national scale, but requires that we look for and direct ourselves toward the comparative advantages offered by spatial closeness for a creative association of the present diversity, particularly in the sense of inter- and transdisciplinarity.

This book moves beyond general and foggy ideas about what sociological work in practice can even mean (for example, for young people wishing to study sociology at the university). Yet, we certainly cannot stop at mere knowledge of what sociologists in general actually do since this is one of the premises and starting points for consciously guiding this area of work in the future.

Zdravko Mlinar, Editor  
Ljubljana, October 2015

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