

# SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL EQUALITY OF LOCAL POPULATION IN RURAL AREAS

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper presents the results of the study of attitudes toward social equality of local population in rural areas in the municipalities of Apatin and Sombor (Republic of Serbia, Province of Vojvodina). The survey includes questions that explore the attitudes of respondents in relation to: equality of elderly, national minorities and ethnic groups, persons with special needs and gender equality. The survey was conducted in August 2012 and March 2013. The sample was obtained from 82 respondents. For the analysis of the data, the following statistical methods were used: the descriptive analysis, the t-test for independent samples and the ANOVA variance analysis.*

**Keywords:** *attitudes, social equality, rural areas, the municipalities of Sombor and Apatin*

## INTRODUCTION

As an agricultural and multiethnic area, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina has numerous potential for sustainable development of rural and cultural tourism. With the abundance of different cultures, religions and nationalities in Vojvodina, rural festivities and picturesque villages represent the base of anthropogenic rural tourism attractions (Dragićević et al, 2013). The territory of the municipalities of Sombor and Apatin belong to the administrative district of the western Bačka. Administrative district of the western Bačka is located between 45° 16' and 46° 22' North Latitude, i.e. 18° 36' and 20° 37' East Longitude. It encompasses 2.74% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. 11.25% of the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The entire region covers the area of 2,420 km<sup>2</sup>, out of which 1,178 km<sup>2</sup> belong to the municipality of Sombor and 350 km<sup>2</sup> to the municipality of Apatin. Other municipalities that belong to the district of the western Bačka are the municipalities of Odžaci (411 km<sup>2</sup>) and Kula (481

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km<sup>2</sup>). The municipality of Sombor is comprised of 16 settlements and the municipality of Apatin of 5 settlements.

There are 24 nationalities inhabiting the area among which the most numerous are: Serbs, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Croats, Montenegrins, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Albanians, Turkish, Czechs, and Slovaks; the fact that makes this whole region a multiethnic one (Blešić et al, 2014). All ethnic groups with their authentic traditions, culture and language make up a rich ethnic diversity.

The Republic of Serbia is the home to numerous national minorities. Their legal status is regulated mainly by ratification of international agreements, Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and specific laws such as the Law on the protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities and Law on national councils of national minorities. There are also some other legal regulations in other laws that can be applied to the issues connected with national minorities inhabiting the territory of the Republic of Serbia such as the Law on official use of language, Law on local self-government, Law on registers, Law on culture etc. Although the existing normative frame is rather developed, members of national minority groups face many difficulties (Research on public opinion, 2012).

On 27 June 2013 the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Strategy for the prevention of and protection against discrimination for the period 2013 - 2018. This important document represents support for the implementation of antidiscrimination regulations (<http://www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs/>).

The Parliament of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on prevention of discrimination of disabled people in April 2006. This is the first antidiscrimination regulation ever adopted in our country. However, discrimination of disabled and handicapped people whether direct or indirect can be found in all spheres of public and private life while it is the most expressed in the area of employment, education and access to public facilities and services. Their positions can be better understood when we take into consideration high level of unemployment, low level of education, poverty, violence, limited access to public facilities and areas (Report on public opinion research, 2012).

The area of gender equality in Serbia is characterized by structural form that is very often called *third discrimination*. It implies that certain prejudices towards women are deeply conditioned by opinions in the society about gender role, i.e. roles determined by "nature". Inequalities have an especially negative influence on life of women and men and consequently on society that functions with less women in public sphere and low participation of men in family life ([http://www.sombor.rs/media/files/studija\\_finalni\\_srpski1.pdf](http://www.sombor.rs/media/files/studija_finalni_srpski1.pdf)).

Taking into consideration the fact that the above mentioned laws are important for the improvement of human rights in our country, especially in the domain of protection against discrimination, and that they certainly represent a step forward, everyday life unfortunately brings much less, especially where the position of women, older people and minority groups are concerned ([http://www.sombor.rs/media/files/studija\\_finalni\\_srpski1.pdf](http://www.sombor.rs/media/files/studija_finalni_srpski1.pdf)).

The object of this research is finding about the attitudes towards social equality on the territories of the Sombor and Apatin municipalities.

The aim of this research is studying the link between the attitudes towards social equality and certain socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Attitudes towards the questions of social equality have been classified into four thematic areas:

- attitudes towards older population,
- attitudes towards national minorities,
- attitudes towards people with special needs and
- attitudes towards gender equality (divided into four dimensions).

With this research the authors wanted to learn more about the perception of social discrimination on the territory of the Sombor and Apatin municipalities of all aimed at creating a solid scientific basis necessary for creating measures for diminishing gender, age and national discrimination as well as discrimination against people with special needs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study represents a pilot project performed on a representative sample. The research included 82 respondents. All of them took part in trainings and workshops during the international project Sycultour (August 2012 and March 2013). The questionnaire was based on available literature from the field of sociological research (Džamonja Ignjatović et al, 2009; Gray, Dowds, 2010; Baxter, 2000; Hanak, Dragojević, 2002; Staniland, 2009; <http://www.ucd.ie/issda/static/documentation/nda/nda-literature-review.pdf>) and adapted to the needs of this particular research. All the questions were grouped according to the topics relevant for the aim of this research. Five-point Likert type scale was used for measuring the attitudes of local residents (where 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

## RESULTS

The sample included 45 (54.9%) males and 37 (45.1%) females among the respondents. The main age group was 51 - 60 comprising the 28% of the respondents. Most of the respondents (39%) hold a graduate degree. Regarding their occupation, the majority of the respondents are employed (67.1%). When municipalities where respondents come from are in question, 59.8% come from the Municipality of Sombor and 40.2% come from the Municipality of Apatin. The majority of the respondents are of the Serbian nationality (70.7%).

Mean values for the attitudes regarding the position of older people in the society (first four questions) vary between 3.2073 and 3.4878 with standard deviation above 1. The results of the fifth question which refers to the contribution of older people in tourism have much higher values (4.4390) and standard deviation of 0.66847. Similar tendency can be seen in the group of questions that refer to attitudes towards national minorities. The first four questions have very low levels (from 2.1951 to 2.3780) with standard

**Table 1.** Demographic information of respondents (n = 82)

Variables	Sample size	%
<b>Age</b>		
≤ 20	4	4.9
21 - 30	13	15.9
31 - 40	14	17.1
41 - 50	15	18.3
51-60	23	28.0
61-70	10	12.2
≥71	3	3.7
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	45	54.9
Female	37	45.1
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary education	24	29.3
Higher school	32	39.0
Graduate degree	18	22.0
Master's degree	4	4.9
PhD degree	4	4.9
<b>Average income</b>		
≤ 300 €	26	31.7

Variables	Sample size	%
301 – 500 €	28	34.1
501 – 700 €	15	18.3
701 – 1,000 €	6	7.3
No income	7	8.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	4	4.9
Employed	55	67.1
Retired	15	18.3
Unemployed	8	9.8
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Sombor	49	59.8
Apatin	33	40.2
<b>Nationality</b>		
Serbian	58	70.7
Hungarian	8	9.8
Croatian	5	6.1
Šokci	3	3.7
Bunjevci	6	7.3
Ruthenians	2	2.4

deviation above 1 while the attitude about the importance of cultural heritage of national minorities has higher value (4.5488) and standard deviation of 0.52476. Mean values for the questions that refer to the attitudes towards people with special needs vary between 3.8293 and 4.0976 with standard deviations from 0.59215 to 1.27468. Questions that refer to the attitudes respondents have towards gender equality were divided into four dimensions: “Attitudes towards gender differences in professional areas” (5 questions), “Attitudes towards family roles” (8 questions), “Attitudes towards participation of men and women in different activities” (6 questions), “Attitudes towards feminism” (4 questions). Mean values for these 21 questions are lower than 4 and vary between 2.2195 and 3.9512. Two questions (I 32 and I 33) that refer to the importance of women in the development of tourism in the municipality have high mean values (4.6098 and 4.7683).

In order to understand better the differences in respondents’ opinions regarding their socio-demographic characteristics we applied the statistical analyses ANOVA (Tables 3, 4, 5) and t-test (Table 6).

The application of ANOVA analysis and post-hoc LSD test showed that the attitudes of the respondents differ depending on their age group, i.e. the respondents older than 50 years of age provided significantly different answers than the younger respondents. These results are probably connected with the experiences older people have in problems presented in the questionnaire. The results of the survey indicate that younger re-

**Table 2.** Mean ratings of items

	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Attitudes towards older people			
I 1	I am familiar with the cases of workplace discrimination against older people by younger colleagues.	3.2195	1.28644
I 2	I am familiar with the cases of workplace discrimination against older people by their employers.	3.2683	1.25756
I 3	I am familiar with the cases when older people are treated with less respect.	3.2073	1.22462
I 4	I am familiar with the cases of discrimination against older people in health and other institutions.	3.4878	1.28854
I 5	Older people can contribute to the development of tourism in my municipality.	4.4390	0.66847
Attitudes towards national minorities			
I 6	I am familiar with the cases of workplace discrimination against members of national minorities by their colleagues.	2.1951	1.26138
I 7	I am familiar with the cases of workplace discrimination against members of national minorities by their employers.	2.3780	1.45416
I 8	I am familiar with the cases when members of national minorities are treated with less respect.	2.3659	1.34726
I 9	I am familiar with the cases of discrimination against members of national minorities in health and other institutions.	2.3780	1.04987
I 10	Cultural heritage of national minorities represents treasure that can help build up the image of tourism product of Vojvodina.	4.5488	0.52476
Attitudes towards people with special needs			
I 11	I am familiar with the cases of discrimination of people with special needs when finding employment.	4.0976	0.98895
I 12	I am familiar with the cases when people with special needs are treated with less respect	4.0732	1.07474
I 13	I am familiar with the cases of discrimination against people with special needs in health and other institutions.	3.8293	1.27468
I 14	People with special needs can contribute to the development of tourism in my municipality.	4.0854	0.59215
Attitudes towards gender differences in professional areas			
I 15	Employers are far more tolerant towards people of the opposite sex	3.6585	1.22947
I 16	Women are better and more successful employers.	2.8902	1.37891
I 17	Women have same possibilities for 'professional development as men.	3.4146	1.22677
I 18	I am familiar with the cases of mobbing or discrimination against women by their colleagues at work.	2.8415	1.12732
I 19	I am familiar with the cases of mobbing towards women by their employers.	3.0000	1.05409

Attitudes towards family roles			
I 20	I am familiar with the cases of women being victims of domestic violence.	3.2073	1.03920
I 21	Father cannot successfully replace mother in her role regarding child care.	2.6463	1.20053
I 22	Men can equally successful take care of sick and dependent family members.	3.0610	1.13690
I 23	It is acceptable for a man to consider his career more important than family obligations.	3.0000	1.09994
I 24	Woman should not neglect housework because of her career.	2.2683	1.08922
I 25	Man should equally take part in housework.	3.4268	1.40572
I 26	When a woman earns more than a man it can cause problems in their relations.	3.8171	0.72227
I 27	Man is the one that should financially take care of his family.	3.1585	1.01190
Attitudes towards participation of men and women in different activities			
I 28	I would feel safer if my surgeon is a man and not a woman.	3.6951	1.17262
I 29	Men are better in science.	3.2927	1.65915
I 30	There would be fewer problems in the world if there were more women in politics.	3.0976	1.33897
I 31	I would like more my children to have a female and not a male teacher.	3.9512	1.28527
I 32	There are a lot of women in the sector of tourism.	4.6098	1.03623
I 33	Participation of women from rural areas in numerous activities can contribute to the improvement of tourism in my municipality.	4.7683	0.55107
Attitudes towards feminism			
I 34	Feminists are more aggressive than other women.	3.3780	1.16153
I 35	There are no beautiful and attractive women among feminists.	2.2195	0.86101
I 36	Feminists are more self confident than other women.	2.4024	0.90075
I 37	Feminism is not a serious social movement.	2.2927	1.03623

spondents did not experience problems that the older population faces (disrespect by the young, disadvantageous position when searching for employment, and unequal treatment in health care and other public institutions).

Numerous studies have indicated that ageism is in most cases a product and result of socialization (Đorđević et al.). The adoption of certain attitudes, ways of thinking and behavioral patterns that are deemed desirable in certain societies can and most often lead to the adoption of prejudices against age. The modern system of values promotes ideals like speed, strength, success, power, beauty, health, which are values exclusively associated with youth. The claim that the prejudice against age and old people is acquired and learned, and therefore not inherent, is corroborated by studies, which mostly show the existence of positive attitudes towards age in younger children (Davidović et al, 2007).

**Table 3.** Attitudes towards older people with respect to the age group of the respondents (The results of ANOVA)

Items	Means							F-value	P	LSD test
	age group 1 ≤ 20	age group 2 21-30	age group 3 31-40	age group 4 41-50	age group 5 51-60	age group 6 61-70	age group 7 ≥ 71			
I1	2.5000	2.6154	1.9286	2.6667	4.0435	4.8000	4.0000	16.951	0.000	1, 2, 3, 4 < 5, 6, 7
I2	2.5000	2.5385	2.0000	3.0000	4.0000	4.8000	4.0000	15.188	0.000	1, 2, 3, 4 < 5, 6, 7
I3	2.5000	1.7692	2.1429	3.0667	4.0870	4.8000	4.0000	35.887	0.000	1, 2, 3, 4 < 5, 6, 7
I4	2.5000	2.2308	2.2857	3.1333	4.6522	4.6000	5.0000	32.311	0.000	1, 2, 3, 4 < 5, 6, 7
I5	4.0000	4.0769	4.1429	4.1333	4.7826	5.0000	5.0000	6.131	0.000	1, 2, 3, 4 < 5, 6, 7

**Table 4.** Attitudes towards national minorities regarding the nationality (The results of ANOVA)

Items	Means						F-value	P	LSD test
	group 1 Serbian	group 2 Hungarian	group 3 Croatian	group 4 Šokci	group 5 Bunjevci	group 6 Ruthenians			
I6	1.6724	3.0000	4.0000	4.0000	2.8333	5.0000	15.597	0.000	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
I7	1.7414	3.5000	4.4000	4.6667	3.3333	5.0000	16.426	0.000	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
I8	1.7931	3.7500	4.0000	4.3333	2.8333	5.0000	15.617	0.000	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
I9	2.0690	2.8750	3.6000	3.0000	2.8333	4.0000	5.166	0.000	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
I10	4.3793	4.8750	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000	5.310	0.000	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

The development of prejudices against the elderly usually goes unnoticed and one possible solution is to identify and eradicate ageist attitudes.

Attitudes of the respondents towards national minorities significantly differ with respect to their nationality; the members of the Serbian nationality are of opinion that there is no discrimination present in Sombor and Apatin municipalities.

Numerous studies (Manić, 2011; Orlović, 2011) have been conducted with regard to the problems that arise between ethnic groups, and between ethnic groups and the majority they live with within the national framework, and the attempts at avoiding conflict by implementing appropriate legal and constitutional regulations (Manić, 2011; Orlović, 2011). The Serbian nationality is of the opinion that national minorities have all the rights specified under the law (the right to their language, education, culture, information, etc.). On the other hand, the national minorities are of the opinion that those rights exist, but are not sufficiently observed.

With the application ANOVA analysis it was determined that there is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the respondents towards people with special needs. High mean values show that respondents of all age groups are highly aware of difficult position of handicapped and disabled people.

The results of these surveys must be taken with caution, for the sample did have a single person with disability. The review of the literature showed that in practice, persons with disabilities face numerous problems. The study that Ljubinković et al (2008) carried out among employed invalids showed that a large number of persons with disabilities faces a series of problems in many areas of life (employment, financial security, transport, appropriate aids, etc.), meaning that their capability to work did not significantly diminish the difficulties these persons face. Among the problems that disabled persons face when looking for employment are: lack of information regarding free job positions, employers' prejudices, working conditions, discrimination, etc.

Where questions regarding gender equality are concerned the analysis of t-test showed that the answers of the respondents significantly differ; male respondents are of the opinion that women have equal position as men. At the same time, male respondents are of the opinion that family and household obligations are reserved for women while men should put their careers first so that they could be the ones who provide financial means for the family. It is interesting that both men and women think that when a woman earns more than a man that can cause problems in their relations. Moreover, similar they have opinions towards certain professions. Both men and women answered that they trust male surgeons more. All respondents agree that the role of women in tourism sector is significant. Where questions regarding feminism are concerned, there is statistically significant difference in such a way that men think that feminists are more aggressive than other women (I 34) and that feminism is not a serious movement (I 37).

The Law on Gender Equality represents the basic institutional and legal framework for establishing and improving gender equality in Serbia. It is an anti-discrimination law that regulates in more detail the right to gender equality, which is guaranteed under the Constitution and norms of the international legislation. Despite the official recognition and improvement, gender equality is still not present in everyday life. In practice,



**Table 5.** Attitudes towards people with special needs regarding the age group of the respondents (The results of ANOVA)

Items	Means							F-value	P
	age group 1 ≤ 20	age group 2 21 - 30	age group 3 31 - 40	age group 4 41 - 50	age group 5 51 - 60	age group 6 61 - 70	age group 7 ≥ 71		
I11	4.5000	3.5385	4.2857	3.8667	4.2174	4.2000	5.0000	1.579	0.165
I12	4.5000	3.6154	4.1429	3.6667	4.3043	4.2000	5.0000	1.490	0.193
I13	4.5000	3.3077	3.9286	3.6667	3.7391	4.2000	5.0000	1.202	0.315
I14	4.0000	4.1538	3.9286	4.0000	4.0870	4.4000	4.0000	0.724	0.631

**Table 6.** Attitudes towards gender equality regarding the respondents' gender (The results of t-test)

Items	Means		t-test
	Male	Female	
Attitudes towards gender differences in professional areas			
I15	4.0444	3.1892	3.323*
I16	2.0222	3.9459	-8.730*
I17	4.2889	2.3514	11.554*
I18	2.0444	3.8108	-11.315*
I19	2.2889	3.8649	-10.098*
Attitudes towards family roles			
I20	2.7333	3.7838	-5.248*
I21	1.9778	3.4595	-7.030*
I22	2.3333	3.9459	-9.022*
I23	3.7778	2.0541	11.319*
I24	1.8222	2.8108	-4.563*
I25	2.3333	4.7568	-15.289*
I26	3.8667	3.7568	0.683
I27	3.8444	2.3243	10.208*
Attitudes towards participation of men and women in different activities			
I28	3.7778	3.5946	0.702
I29	4.4667	1.8649	11.339*
I30	2.2667	4.1081	-8.493*
I31	4.5111	3.2703	4.939*
I32	4.6000	4.6216	-0.151
I33	4.6889	4.8649	-1.449
Attitudes towards feminism			
I34	3.9333	2.7027	5.597*
I35	2.0889	2.3784	-1.527
I36	2.2444	2.5946	-1.775
I37	1.8222	2.8649	-5.216*

\* $p < 0.01$

women and men do not have the same rights. Social, political, economic and cultural inequalities are still present. This is best reflected in differences in salaries, unequal representation in the domain of politics, unequal division of work and responsibilities in the private sphere, etc. These inequalities are basically the result of social relations built on many stereotypes that are present in family, education, culture, media, business world, public institutions, state administration, etc. These inequalities can be changed by adopting new approaches and structural changes in all domains of public life, and by supporting changes in the private sphere (Todorov, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the attitudes towards social equality of the citizens of the Sombor and Apatin municipalities it can be concluded that there are some stereotypes regarding gender and age equality as well as equality of national minorities. Moreover, respondents do not have completely opposite attitudes but only more or less expressed differences in opinions regarding the position of people with special needs. However, the sample used in this research consisted of only 82 respondents and members of certain socio-demographic structures were not equally present in the sample.

Suggestions are that some future researches should include a larger sample, stratification of the sample based on gender and age structure and nationality of the respondents. More socio-characteristics (religion, belonging to certain social groups etc.) should be taken into consideration as well.

Furthermore, recommendation is that this kind of research should be conducted in several time phases in order to better understand the factors that influence the changes in opinions towards social equality. The research of this problem area gave useful results that can be used in practical work. For example, the results can help conceptualise practical work through different trainings and educations which would emphasise the importance of gender equality for general prosperity of social community especially in less developed rural areas.

Aspiration towards gender equality should represent priority for our society and one of the preconditions for the development and exploitation of the potentials of each individual while future researches and social practice should show how to accomplish that.

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