

**BRAIN WASTE & BRAIN DRAIN:  
As Reflected in the Lives of Croatian University Students \***

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**Abstract.** *The present paper systemizes the experience of the author as a Fulbright professor at the University of Zagreb. It analyzes the society in transition, in an attempt to include the voices of the future leadership class, the youth of Croatia. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2004, on 400 students from four faculties at the University of Zagreb. The study revealed that the problems that young people face in this transition to adulthood are a function of problems in education, as well as in the economy. For that reason, programs that create an educated, open-minded leadership class among the next generation of youth are the best way to secure world peace, democratic nation building, a strong economy, and thereby protect against brain waste and brain drain and a scientific diaspora.*

**Key words:** *brain waste, brain drain, leadership class, youth, education, democracy, economy*

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

This study grew out of my two-year experience as a Fulbright lecturer at the University of Zagreb in the Faculty of Philosophy during the academic years 2002-2004. In my capacity as an exchange scholar I had the pleasure to meet, talk with, and teach hundreds of university students – the future leadership class, the future scholars, scientists, intellectuals, public servants, and politicians of this small country of 4.4 million people in Southeastern Europe. The population of Croatia is literate: Youth are well educated in primary and secondary school. However, Croatia is emerging from a decade of war, destruction, and suffering. It is a society that is attempting to understand its past, as it builds its future.

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When I stood in front of my big classes in Zagreb and looked at the lovely faces of these young people, I wondered aloud how they have been affected by growing up with war. What are their hopes, wants, beliefs about their futures and the future of their country?

I was struck by the fact that only one third of the students who enroll at the university actually complete their undergraduate degrees and that the average time for completion of a bachelor's degree is seven years. Approximately 8% of the Croatian population has completed a four-year college degree, another 4% have completed two years of higher education. This figure is lower than European countries by more than half.

My students were highly restrained and passive when I arrived. But they began to emerge from behind their reserved, refined Central European manners in discussions - at my home, at cafes, in class - to talk about their fears and hopes for the future. Their comments support the findings of my social science colleagues.

In our conversations, they expressed their frustration, resignation, disappointment, and sadness after heightened expectations of economic growth and political change at the end of the recent war. They expressed concern about the unemployment rate, high prices, the stagnating economy, governmental corruption, and nepotism. They expressed worry that future European Union membership will bring not only hoped for reforms in education, politics, and the economic sector, but inflation and competition with more advanced EU countries. They are the first generation that must find work for itself, they

remind me, and they are at a loss to know where and how to begin and how to evaluate their prospects. Leburic calls them the "Skeptical Generation."

At the same time, they are proud of their beautiful country, they highly value friendship and family, they love their café culture, and they concentrate on short-term goals.

#### INCLUDING THE VOICES OF YOUTH

This study is my small contribution to this discussion on youth in societies in transition, an attempt to include the voices of the future leadership class - university students, young intellectuals, future scientists and business leaders. And to share how the Croatian Society for Children's Human Rights and my university, Texas A&M at Corpus Christi, are beginning to collaborate to curb brain drain by treasuring young brains, by empowering them to take an active role in the productive and political life of their society.

In the spring of 2004, I conducted a survey of 400 students from four faculties at the University of Zagreb, the largest and most prestigious institution in the country, with more than 60,000 students. The university attracts the best and brightest students in Croatia. The students surveyed are enrolled in the faculties of law, medicine, economics (which includes business), and philosophy (which includes the humanities & social sciences).

This pilot study relies on a convenience sample and its questions and results are presented with clear recognition of its limitations. These descriptive data are offered as a small contribution to understanding some trends and patterns of the brain drain phenomenon in Croatia.

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Recent studies by Croatian social scientists Anci Leburic and I. Tomic-Koludrovic (2001, 2002) found that in all outward respects the youth who grew up during the past decade of war and instability resemble privileged young people in the industrialized world - they are healthy, well educated, and articulate. But inwardly, their mental framework most closely resembles that of post-World War II German youth. They feel deeply depressed, hopeless, and that the future holds little for them.

Census data (2001) show that the rate of unemployment among Croatian youth is high. According to the official labor force figures for 2004, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24, those who are out of school and have been unsuccessful in finding work, is 36% (34% for males, 38% for females). In all age categories women have approximately 10% higher unemployment rates than men. The overall employment rate is between 15% and 18% (depending on the source). Almost one third of the unemployed registered at the National Employment Agency are young people with no work experience. This situation has led to extended adolescence and resulted in young people living with their parents well into their twenties, lengthening their undergraduate education, postponing marriage and permanent relationships - generally unable to establish independent lives (Horvat 2004).

The country's external debt at the end of 2003 was almost \$21 billion, or more than seventy per cent of its GDP (Horvat). Tomic-Koludrovic writes, "While for many of their peers in the West, the threat of unemployment and the drive for individuality spur ambition and a willingness to take risks, young people in Croatia face obstacles which make this kind of reflexive individualism almost unachievable" (2001). Leburic says that "while young people haven't lost faith in their own strengths, they do not, or feel they cannot, rely on the state's help" (quoted in Horvat 2004). According to Vlasta Ilisin of Zagreb's Institute for Social Research, this period of extended youth is "merely the logical consequence of a situation in which the labor market is incapable of absorbing many new workers" (Horvat).

The problems that young people face in this transition to adulthood are a function of problems in education, as well as in the economy. Slavko Kulic, a researcher from Zagreb's Institute of Economics says "today's education system in Croatia reflects a woeful lack of vision for the country's development. We educated our young people either for [a life on the street] or [a life abroad]. We lose the capability to produce from our own human and natural resources. The youth are not able to use the tools of their grandparents and still cannot afford to utilize expensive advanced technologies" (quoted in Horvat's article). They are "lost between two worlds, one dying, the other waiting to be born."

This study of brain drain emerged in response to a growing realization of the burden under which Croatian society functions, particularly its youth. A burden of passivity taught from the age of seven in school, taught through pedagogy that gives power and authority to the teacher, and demands obedience and self-deprecation from students. The long-term consequences of early indoctrination in passivity are, of course, a threat to the democratic future of the country.

## THE SURVEY

The survey asks students whether they have considered leaving Croatia to study and/or work, if so to what country, and would they return upon completion of their studies or work experience. What was the main reason for wanting to go abroad to study and/or work? Do they believe that they will be able to contribute to the development of their country if they stay? Would they prefer to stay in Croatia if they can get the job or education that they want? Do they feel that they can find work in their homeland that is commensurate with their skills and talents, that pays a salary good enough to live a comfortable life? What factors most influence landing a good job in Croatia? Do they think they will be able to advance their careers if they stay, and if not, why not? What factors most influence their desire to leave to study and/or work? How probable is it that they will realize their desire to leave, and what obstacles to leaving do they face? How permanent would their stay abroad be? Have their feelings about the US changed since the war in Iraq, and has their desire to study and/or work in the US been affected by these feelings?

Three well respected colleagues, one each from the law, medical, and economics faculties administered the anonymous survey to willing students in their classes. All three had reputations for being excellent teachers, had done post-doctoral work abroad and returned to Croatia, and were interested in the results. I administered the survey to students in three of my classes in the faculty of philosophy where I taught Crime & Punishment in Literature, Juvenile Delinquency, and Crime & Society. Of the 400 respondents, approximately 28% are philosophy students, 33% medical students, 23% law students, and 17% economics/business students.

## SOME FINDINGS

The majority of students (52%) are in their second formal year of study, 19% third year, and 21% are fourth year students. Over two thirds are female (68%). We visited the websites of all the faculties and could not find data on gender. But this ratio may in fact be representative of these faculties where there has been a feminization of higher education.

Of those students surveyed, 45% responded that they considered leaving Croatia to study or work or both. For them, the top destination choice was Continental Europe (45%), the US was second (36%) and Great Britain third (14%). Almost two thirds of those who contemplate going abroad want to return to Croatia after completing their studies or gaining work experience. Only 5% said they did not want to return, while another 31% did not know.

Asked for the main reason for wanting to go abroad to work, only 5% of the respondents said they were generally dissatisfied with life in Croatia. The two main reasons for wanting to leave to work were more 'exciting job opportunities with chances for advancement,' and 'higher income and a higher standard of living.'

Almost 40% of the respondents did not want to leave the country to work. The majority of respondents believed that they would be able to contribute to the development of Croatia after completing their degree (63%). (Nine per cent said they did not believe they could contribute to the development of their country, and 27% didn't know.) It is important to note that 88% of the respondents said that they preferred to stay in Croatia if they

could get the job or advanced education they desired. But 29% of the respondents did not believe or did not know if they could find work in Croatia that made good use of their skills and talents. Sixty per cent believed that they could not find work in Croatia that paid a salary good enough to have a comfortable life.

The majority of respondents (50%) felt that finding a good job in Croatia required not only education and competence, but family connections and perhaps bribes. While half of the respondents felt that they would be able to advance their careers if they stayed in the country, more than a third did not know (39%) and 10% did not feel that they could. The two main factors contributing to the respondents' wanting to leave to study or work were the 'poor economic situation and low salaries' and 'slight chances of getting a good job soon after graduation.'

Only 5% of the respondents were certain that they would leave Croatia to study or work, another 20% felt that it was more probable that they would leave than stay. The major obstacle to leaving was 'attachment to family and friends' (51%). Were they to leave the country, only 3% want to leave permanently.

Asked if their feelings about the US had changed since the war in Iraq, 55% answered yes, they had changed for the worse. Another 11% said that their unfavorable feelings toward the US had been confirmed. Two thirds expressed negative feelings about the US as a function of the war in Iraq. Asked to explain their answers, they discussed illegitimate intervention, hypocrisy and double standards, sacrificing lives for economic interests, ignoring international law, disappointment with the American people, and abuse of power.

How might the fact that their feelings about the US had not changed for the better affect their desire to study or work in the US? Approximately 48% said they would not want to work and/or study in the US. More than 27% of the students felt that there were advantages to working in the US - the two most favored responses were 'better job opportunities and higher income' and 'higher standard of living.' Only 17% of the sample said they had a desire to work in the US. "Brain drain" takes on another meaning when we wonder how the US will fare if many of the best and brightest from around the world decide not to come to the US to study and work.

Male students were more likely than female students to believe that they can find work in Croatia that makes good use of their skills and talents, that pays well, and that enables them to advance their careers. A larger percentage of females than males said that the factor that most influences their desire to leave Croatia is the "slight chance of getting a good job any time soon after graduation.'

Were there differences in responses to the questionnaire by students from different faculties? Yes. Students from the Faculties of Philosophy and Economics were significantly more likely to want to study and/or work abroad. Some of these differences are likely related to the fact that the students from these faculties were on the average farther along in their studies (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year) and have begun to think more seriously about finding work or entering a post-graduate program. Humanities and social science graduates might have a harder time finding work in Croatia. Students from the economics/business faculty expressed a desire to gain management experience outside of the country. Law is rather country specific, thus making it difficult to find work in another country.

Economics students were more likely than students from other faculties to select the US as the country of destination, less judgmental about US involvement in Iraq, and less

likely to let their feelings about the war in Iraq affect their desire to study and/or work in the US. Economics students more often responded that they could contribute to the development of their country if they stayed in Croatia after completing their degree. And they expressed greatest confidence about advancing in their careers (63%) if they stayed. Admission to the Economics Faculty is highly sought after these days. The building, located on John F. Kennedy Square, is modern, well maintained, and buzzing with activity.

In contrast, the Faculty of Philosophy is housed in a run-down building on a back street. Students smoke in the corridors and at the front entrance in tight, depressed clusters. Students from the Faculty of Philosophy were significantly more likely to believe that they will leave Croatia. Many of the respondents majored in foreign languages and most likely want the experience of living among native speakers of the language.

Studies suggest that students in the natural sciences have greater success in obtaining scholarships, fellowships, and work abroad. Data from the Ministry of Science & Technology for the past two years show that Croatians with J1 visas seeking "No Objection Statements" from their home country to waive the two year rule (which requires them to return home for two years after completing their academic training and before seeking permanent positions abroad) are researchers in the field of medical science who went to the US for masters and Ph.D. degrees.

Matko Marusic, in his analysis of the post-doctoral training of 70 Croatian medical doctors under the age of 30 who went to the USA and Germany between 1980 and 1996, found that half of them did not return to Croatia (Marusic, 1996). These 70 were all students whom he had handpicked for post-docs and whom he made sign a statement promising that they would return. His study found that unemployment at the time of departure for training proved to be the only independent variable predicting emigration. He concluded that "education of post-doctoral fellows from small, developing countries in scientific institutions in developed countries calls for extreme caution" (p. 273) because they often don't return to Croatia. It's a tragic loss for a country after making a great financial and emotional investment in the education of its young people to have them leave. Dr. Marusic expressed deep sadness at the loss of these fine scientists.

Mirjana Adamovic in her study of 536 young employed Croatian scientists (in the natural and social sciences) in the year 2000 found that those who desired to leave were not satisfied with the field of research, their salaries, the commensurability of their training and the jobs they performed, and with job security. The main attractions for going abroad were quality of life issues, then science environment and infrastructure (push and pull factors).

She herself has worked in the field of culture for the past twelve years, although she is trained as a social scientist and would love to work as a researcher, but is unable to get a position. Over dinner one evening she said, "In 1992 I enrolled in school. I saw myself as a young scientist. But in that time because of the war and all sorts of things I had to find a job and I found it in culture. I worked eight hours a day. I got married to a young social scientist, but he found work. I just moved myself aside, so he could take the job. After that I undertook my master's degree to study brain drain. By the time I completed it I was over 30, and that is the cut-off age for acquiring a position as an assistant...."

Our preliminary study found that the majority of students surveyed would like to stay in Croatia to work and study. They want to be part of the productive life of their society and contribute to their country's development. But uncertainty about the work situation,

lack of commensurability between education and actual jobs, financial insecurity, and the belief that getting a job is related to family connections not only to education and competence, contribute to their decision to leave. As Mirjana said, "Movement is a natural pattern for young scientists. They want to work and produce. If they smell a lab, they will go to it and they will never come back." Would it be any wonder if a young scientist in a newly emerging democracy were to get an offer to work abroad in a technically advanced laboratory that he/she would take it? Of course not. As Mirjana Adamovic said at dinner, "Love of country is one thing. But life and work are another."

#### PROPOSED PROJECTS & SETTINGS

The Croatian Society for Children's Human Rights -- an NGO that attempts to address the real problems Croatian youth face as they enter the school system, as they move from childhood to adolescence, and then to the world of work -- and Texas A&M University have begun to collaborate on four interrelated projects that grow out of our desire to empower the next generation of Croatian youth and to protect against brain drain: The World Youth Human Rights Camp; Isles of World Youth; Light, Love, and Learning -- A Primary School Pilot Project; Science & Society: Environment and Ecology.

Our programs begin with primary school children and place high value on imaginative, creative thinking and activity, applied science, and the development of emotional as well as intellectual intelligence. We also tie academic institutions to business, industry, and scientific enterprises - globally and locally - developing partnerships and internships that enable young people to get a clearer sense of their future work environments and the concrete skills that are needed to succeed. A holistic approach to the problem of brain waste and brain drain starts with primary school children.

#### THE SETTING FOR OUR PROJECTS: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Texas A&M University is a large land grant, sea grant, and space grant (one of a kind in the US) university system with numerous campuses across the state of Texas. The main campus in North Texas has approximately 45,000 students. It houses the George Bush, Sr. Library, the George Bush School of Government and Public Service, and it is scheduled to have a Homeland Security Center for research and education. In other words, it has had a huge influx of monies from the Republican administration in Washington. The President of the University is Robert Gates, the former head of the CIA. It also has a large oceanography center that includes the Sustainable Coastal Margins Program.

My campus of Texas A&M is situated in South Texas on the Gulf of Mexico on a 350 acre island paradise. We have 9,000 students, many of whom are Mexican-American. We recently received a \$46 million private gift for coastal marine research. We're working to make my island university the US setting for the World Youth Human Rights Camp.

### **Dugi Otok, Croatia**

This idyllic island will, we hope, be the Croatian setting for the international human rights camp. The island has school buildings and dormitories that are partially renovated. We are negotiating cooperation on this project and use of the facilities. It is a long, slow process.

### **Brestje Primary School, Zagreb, Croatia**

A beautiful, five year-old school with 850 multi-ethnic children aged 7 – 15. Located in a Zagreb suburb, it has excellent technical facilities, a young teaching staff, an enterprising principal who has been able to attract financial support from private firms, and church approval for his activities (essential in a country where 96% of the population is Catholic).

## THE WORLD YOUTH HUMAN RIGHTS CAMP & ISLES OF WORLD YOUTH

It is our hope that camps on Dugi Otok and on my island university campus will bring together Croatian and Texas children in a program that encourages cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding. The camp will promote children's rights and duties, democratic expression and understanding, learning and dispersing the concepts of children's place in the world, based on principles of freedom, mutual love, and truth. The camp will focus on ethical, moral, ecological, democratic, creative, scientific, and humanitarian activities.

To accomplish this, the participants will live in beautiful, natural surroundings and engage in study and enjoy sports activities. Through direct experience and with the help of professionals and volunteers (local, national, international) who are experts in the field, as well as university students who will receive college credit for participation, the children will study human cultures, communication and conflict resolution skills, ecology, astronomy, archeology, art, music, botany, architecture, democratic expression, and peace education. The island settings provide a perfect environment for swimming and sailing, deep sea diving, and team sports to promote good health, pleasure, and collective human activity.

The longer-term goals of this project are to extend the idea of the Human Rights Camp to include sites - Isles of World Youth - and children from around the world with support from UNESCO and the UN. We also want to promote the concept of a World Youth Union to protect the rights of young people, as well as to empower them with skills of participatory democracy and hope.

The camp is intended, through its organization and structure, to promote democracy and civil society. The young people will explore their island world and its neighboring towns, they'll grow organic vegetables for their own table with the assistance of local farmers, plant olive and fig trees, learn archeological techniques from experts as they explore ancient ruins (Roman and Native American), and solve real problems as they arise in their community of children using methods of social conflict resolution.

The world is not passively perceived and thereby known. Active engagement with the environment is essential in the learning process. Our curriculum focuses on learning by doing, on activities that rely on experience and practice. John Dewey's (1859-1952) con-



tribution to educational thinking – in particular his philosophical pragmatism and insights into community and democracy – has guided our work. For young people to learn democratic principles, they must be given the freedom to make choices about their education. Democracy entails the power to choose, to decide, and to act collectively and individually.

#### LIGHT, LOVE, AND LEARNING – PRIMARY SCHOOL PILOT PROJECT

In cooperation with Primary School Brestje and the Ministry of Science, Education & Sports we are working to establish a pilot project at this primary school that has three components - *Family Place*, *What I Want to Be*, and *Ecology & Me*. In this period of democratic transition in Croatia, parents want to participate in decisions concerning their children's education. Yet, since this has not been the tradition, there is uncertainty about how to proceed and resistance from teachers and administrators. Our intention is to provide concrete activities that bring these groups together.

##### **The Family Place**

Seminars and workshops are to be conducted weekly for parents and families by experts on topics that include building children's self-esteem; helping underachievers become successful students; effective ways to balance work and family life; helping children heal after divorce or separation; curbing youth violence and aggression; warning signs of depression; improving family communication; and coping with post-traumatic stress disorder. We plan to link the school to worldwide *Odyssey of the Mind* and *Destination Imagination* programs.

##### **What I Want To Be**

This program helps children understand the world of work. We take children on field trips to oceanographic centers, fire stations, government offices, factories and business enterprises, and bring guest speakers into the classroom. Schooling in Croatia often bears little relationship to the real world of work, to practice as well as theory. Children are tracked into gymnasias and specialized high schools at age fourteen, but receive little or no information about those career fields. It's not until the end of schooling and university education that they begin to think concretely about work. Educational institutions offer no career counseling services, nor information on availability of work in the chosen field upon graduation. We want to establish partnerships between business/industry/civil service, scientific laboratories and schools. We are arranging meetings with major corporations in Croatia.

##### **Science & Society: Environment and Ecology**

In October 2003, we hosted Dr. Mahlon Kennicutt, director of a project at Texas A&M that leads the world in oil spill control, environmental protection of waterways, sustainable coastal margins, and Antarctica research. He came to Croatia to establish cooperative partnerships between Croatia and Texas A&M University. Grants from the National Science Foundation and long-term ecological grants in the US now require an international component, an applied science component, and an educational component. Dr. Kennicutt hopes to make Croatia a chief partner in these activities.

He spoke at length with scientists and administrators and won support for partnerships in National Science Foundation grants, in exchanges of faculty, researchers, and students, and for environmental education.

### **Ecology & Me**

We want to develop proposals for the National Science Foundation and the Environmental Protection Agency that will educate children about environmental protection, informing them as citizens and encouraging them to become scientists. Our collaborative efforts are making environmental protection and ecology an important component of the curriculum at our World Youth Human Rights Camp and we hope at Primary School Brestje. The point is for the children to engage in ocean observing and to tie environmental issues to their understanding of the world they inhabit and inherit.

Dr. Kennicutt is the US delegate to two international initiatives – The International Polar Year and the International Geophysical Year – both of which are planning international celebrations of polar research and fifty years of science since Sputnik. We hope that Southeastern Europe will become a site for the educational outreach that these celebrations will generate.

### TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY'S ROLE

Texas A&M University is also a partner in a national initiative called the American Democracy Project that seeks to promote civic engagement of youth. We are working to link our World Youth Human Rights Camp and our primary school project to this effort with an exchange of young people from both countries to our campus and to Croatia. This year the *International Herald Tribune* is initiating a European Democracy Project and my university wants to support this through the Alliance of Universities for Democracy.

We believe that our university has much to contribute and to gain from relationships with Croatia in the form of exchanges, research, and access to the Adriatic coast for study. Perhaps some funds from the Homeland Security Center can be directed toward the programs that we have started. While most of those funds will likely go for hardware and anti-terrorism projects, we hope that some may be channeled toward a token human rights project and we want it to be ours.

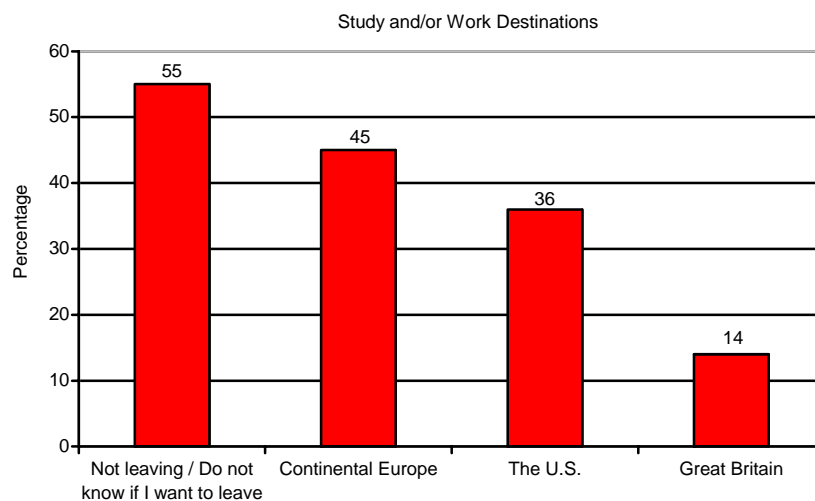
We are looking for partners for our efforts from countries around the world. In August of 2005, we are hosting the First International Conference on Children's Rights & Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Corpus Christi, Texas. We are inviting interested parties to join us in establishing Islands of World Youth in their countries.

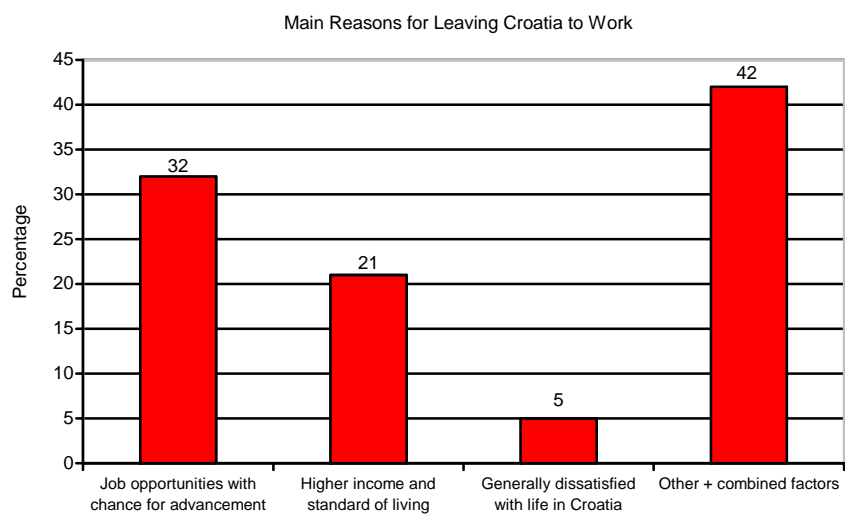
### CONCLUSIONS

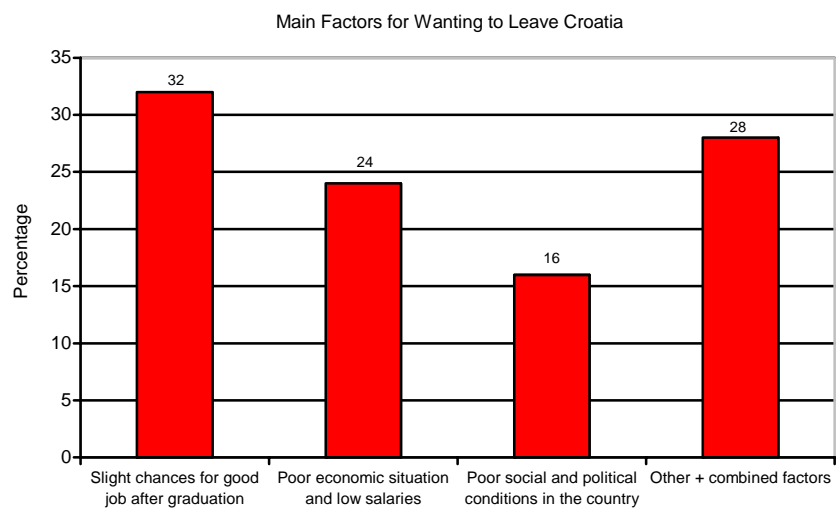
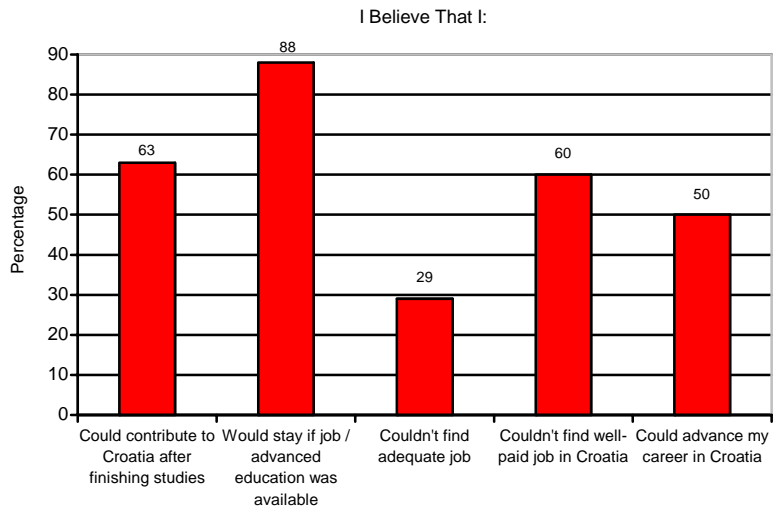
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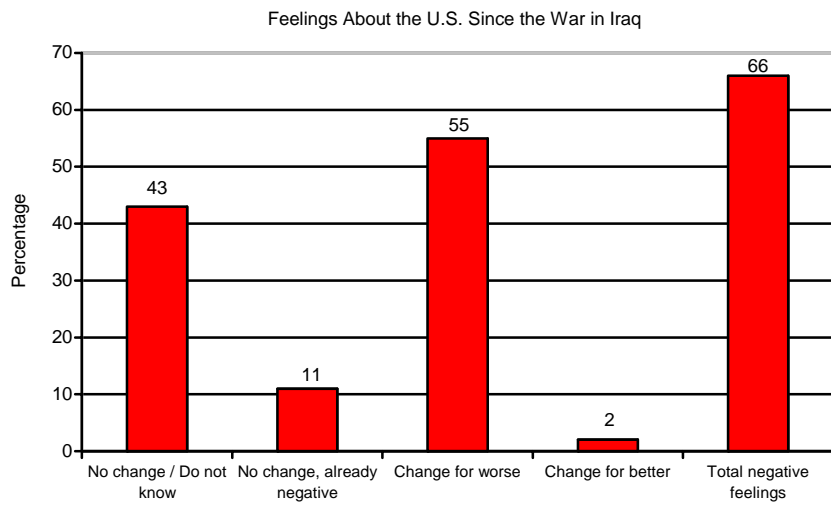
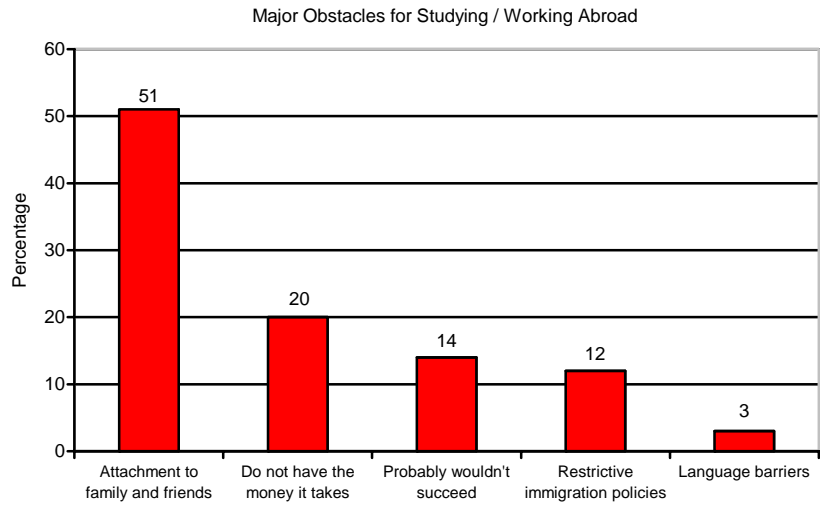
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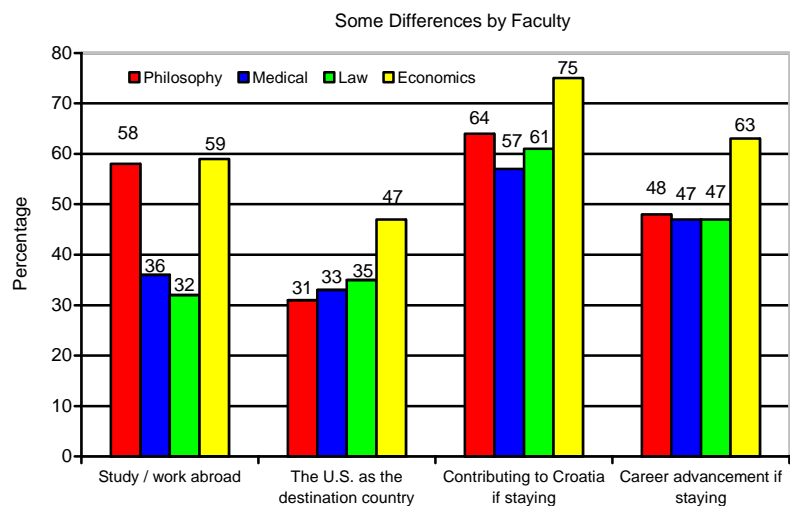
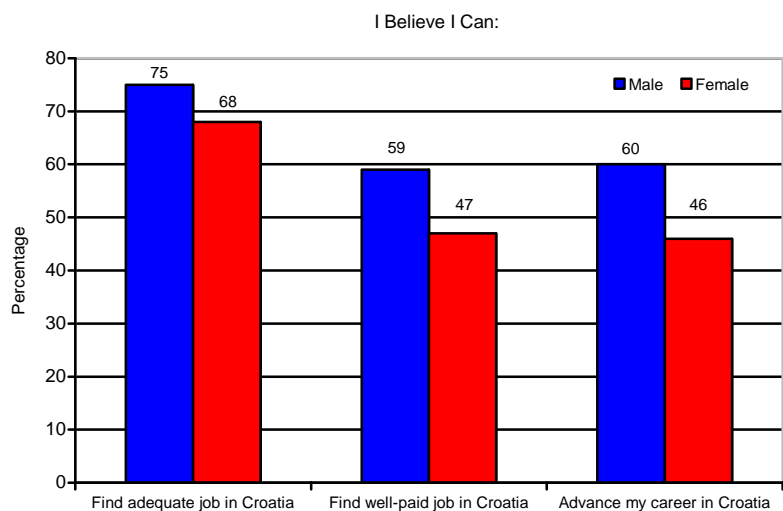
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## **NEISKORIŠĆENOST I ODLIV MOZGOVA: Uticaj na život studentske populacije u Hrvatskoj**

**Dorothy S. McClellan**

*U ovom radu se sistematizuje iskustvo autora koji je bio na Fulbrajtovoj stipendiji na Univerzitetu u Zagrebu. U njemu se ukratko analizira društvo u tranziciji u pokušaju da se čuju glasovi mladih u Hrvatskoj kao budućih lidera u društvu. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u proleće 2004. godine na uzorku od 400 studenata Univerziteta u Zagrebu. Studija je utvrdila da su problemi sa kojima se mladi susreću na prelazu u zrelo doba funkcija problema u obrazovanju kao i u privredi. Iz tog razloga, programi koji pripremaju obrazovanu klasu predvodnika širokih nazora u sledećoj generaciji mladih predstavljaju najbolji način da se obezbedi mir u svetu, nacionalna demokratija, jaka privreda, te da se tako društvo zaštiti od propadanja i gubljenja mladih stručnjaka kao i nauče diaspore.*

*Ključne reči: neiskorišćenost i odliv mozgova, klasa lidera, mladi, obrazovanje, demokratija, privreda*