

# **The Street Magazine *LiceUlice*: A Safety Net and a Platform for Social Activism in Serbia**

**By**

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## Abstract

This research aims to examine the role of the street magazine *LiceUlice*, both as a platform for social activism and as a safety net for marginalised groups. These two issues are explored via the discourse analysis of the magazine, and via unstructured interviews with the magazine employees and vendors. By examining the magazine's writings, this research illuminates their notions of poverty, homelessness, social inclusion, the role of the state and other safety net institutions. It sheds a new light on how the magazine is used as a platform for opening the questions on discrimination, poverty and mental health issues not discussed in the mainstream media. As such, the magazine serves as a tool for subversive social activism. However, this research also shows that despite the often radical rhetoric, the magazine still implies neoliberal work ethic on its vendors. The interviews with the magazine employees uncover troubling situation with the state institutions and the collapse of the safety net, and the attempts that the magazine is doing to offer support to its vendors. Such support often goes beyond a basic selling training, taking the role of the missing state institutions particularly regarding various trainings for job search and mental health support. Finally, the interviews with the vendors question the market model imposed on them, and ideas of sale efficiency as a mean to improve their social condition during the post-socialist transformation. I argue that the magazine *LiceUlice* is a valuable platform for both, social activism and support of its vendors, but it also reveals the extent of the neoliberal devastation of the state social institutions, overwhelming poverty and social stratification, and insecurity and risk that marginalised groups face daily in Serbia.

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## 1. Introduction

*“I read [the magazine] because I am interested in politics! Through politics, we fight for equality and social justice. LiceUlice promotes the values I believe in and strive for, a society that includes rather than excludes, in every aspect of existence. Good job LiceUlice!”<sup>1</sup>*

*Maja Savić, NGO Atina*

The group of non-governmental organisations in Serbia started a project in 2010 aiming to publish the monthly magazine *LiceUlice* as a platform to help poor people earn their living. They also hoped to raise awareness regarding poverty and its dramatic presence in the country, as well as the problems and challenges that the poor people face. Bringing together many notable intellectuals, activists, and public figures, the magazine also aimed to tackle social problems including discrimination and harsh living conditions of the homeless. However, from the first issue, the magazine decided that its mission has to be more than to inform. Instead, they intended to contribute to change the society basing its principles on “equality, democracy and humaneness.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to their writings, the magazine aimed to organise different initiatives to help in demarginalization of discriminated groups and individuals, fighting against racism, xenophobia, homophobia and hate.<sup>3</sup>

The name of the magazine suggests two meanings: *lice ulice* (face of the street), and *lice u lice* (face to face), as to emphasise the magazine’s commitment in solving daily problems.<sup>4</sup> *LiceUlice* is being sold by the homeless, the impoverished, and persons with disabilities. They retain fifty percent of the revenue. This represents the first initiative of its

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<sup>1</sup> “Back Cover,” *Liceulice*, April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Milosav Marinović, “Liceulice, glasilo onih kojima je stalo,” *Liceulice*, July 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Marinović, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Venesa Musović, “Liceulice: „rad, a ne prosjačenje“,” Kosovo 2.0, September 28, 2015, <http://www.kosovotwopointzero.com/sr/article/1885/liceulice-pune-e-jo-lemoshe>.

kind in South-Eastern Europe, thus requiring thorough scholarly analysis. Such need is amplified by the fact that social topics are seldom in focus on the mainstream media, while the media freedom in Serbia is deteriorating with the quality of the mainstream media often below professional standards.<sup>5</sup> In that sense, the *LiceUlice* magazine offers an alternative model, whose potentials are yet to be explored.

This research aims to examine how the street magazine could pose as a link between the impoverished people, broader society and the state. In order to shed light on this overarching question, this research will pose following research questions:

1. How the editors of the magazine represent homelessness, poverty, and mental health, and how it relates to their views on social intervention, inclusion, the role of the state, and the strategies?
2. What is the relationship between the magazine, the state and other safety net institutions?
3. What tactics do sellers use to increase their sales, and how it relates to the dominant market model?
4. How is the position of sellers correlated with the post-socialist transformation of Serbian society?

To answer these questions, my research methodology is based on discourse analysis of the magazine, and on interviews conducted with the vendors and the magazine employees. All these questions were observed from a theoretical framework that critically analyse neoliberalism, the production of work ethics, and theories centred around the notions of social and cultural capital.

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<sup>5</sup> See: “Freedom of the Press 2017 - Serbia” (Freedom House, 2017), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/serbia>.

Following that, the results of this research refer to other broader fields of study, such as social movements, political sciences and social economy.

## 2. Methodology

This research consists of two analytical parts. The first part of the analysis is based on discourse analysis of the magazine *LiceUlice*. All 44 issues of the magazine were obtained and scrutinised with discourse analysis. Magazines were not published regularly, often due to financial problems. Issues are usually 50 pages long, with 15 articles on average. Burr's definition of discourse analysis is of particular value for my work as the discourses are understood as sets of meanings, metaphors, notions, images, stories, and statements that produce a specific view of events. They are ways of constituting knowledge together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations.<sup>6</sup> Informed by Vivien Burr's approach, I analyse the magazine articles and the specific meanings they attempted to convey. The analysis will first address the explicit objectives of the magazine, then examine the topics and genres found in the data, and then offer in-depth discourse analysis of the texts. I will mainly focus on the notions of poverty, homelessness, and discrimination, as well as on social intervention, inclusion, the role of the state, and the strategies employed by the publishers and their relationship with the state and other safety net institutions.

The second part of the analysis consists of analysing the interviews. In order to learn about the magazine's agenda, editorial board's views on homelessness, and sellers' strategies and experiences, I have conducted in-depth interviews with the magazine's employees and their vendors. These interviews were not structured, allowing for the qualitative analysis.<sup>7</sup> I have interviewed three employees of the magazine, and five vendors. Interviewed employees in the magazine included an organisation's psychologist, a coordinator of sales, and the magazine assistant. Five interviewed vendors were of different age, very different education, with one

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<sup>6</sup> Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Pirjo Nikander, "Interviews as Discourse Data," in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, ed. Jaber Gubrium et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), 397–414.



homeless person. Information on them will be presented in general terms deliberately, and only when required for the analysis, as explained in further ethics consideration. These interviews had an open structure, with an idea to use in-depth reading to analyse required analytical categories. That being said, I had informally led interviews to obtain answers to the key research questions. After transcription, these interviews were coded with nVivo and analysed via several analytical categories set earlier.

I have also reviewed the official documents produced by the state and state institutions in Serbia that address the safety net for the impoverished people, providing me with the background understanding of the structural framework in which the magazine and the NGO behind it functions. Despite different nature of these two types of sources, all sources will be examined in relationship to each other and provide one coherent analysis.

## **2.1 Ethics Considerations**

As this study involves interviewed participants I have followed established research protocols in social sciences and humanities. Identities of the sellers are protected with codes, while the identities of the magazine employees are kept original with their agreement. The raw data of all interviews were coded, and password protected. Furthermore, acknowledging possible risk for the participants – particularly for the newspapers sellers – I have paid particular attention to protect their identities in the analysis and writing as well. I have deliberately used constructions such as he/she, or they, to conceal their gender. Participants were informed about the risks and provided consent.

### 3. Theoretical underpinnings

At this point, I will briefly establish the main threads of my theoretical underpinning used in this research. I will also expand some of these theoretical positionings further in the text, where it relates to the analysed content. Selected theoretical texts were deemed as the most useful for analysing previously set research questions.

#### 3.1 Neoliberalism

Focus on neoliberal technologies and subjectivities is at the core of this analysis. Serbia has passed through a process of transition from the self-management socialism to neoliberal capitalism, with many similarities to other East European countries. Since the early 1990s and the collapse of Yugoslavia, the process of neoliberal transformation was accompanied by the privatisation of the socially owned enterprises, the destruction of the safety nets and increased social stratification.<sup>8</sup> However, Serbian case was also followed by wars and destruction unlike in other East European countries,<sup>9</sup> while, to use Nancy Fraser's ideas, those citizens who are left behind in these processes have not challenged neoliberal hegemony yet.<sup>10</sup>

In order to consider economic and political changes in Serbia relevant for the analysis of the street newspaper activities, it is useful to observe some broader features of the neoliberal order. As argued by David Harvey, the usual framework of neoliberalism is based on strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade, with deregulation, privatisation, and

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<sup>8</sup> On Yugoslav self-management in the economy, see: Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment*, Library of Balkan Studies 5 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016) Contrary to other East European countries, companies were not owned by the state, but by the society and the companies' employees.

<sup>9</sup> Mimo Draskovic et al., "Levels and Factors of Transitional Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia," *Economics & Sociology* 10, no. 2 (June 2017): 21–32; On postsocialist transformation, see: Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Fraser, "The End of Progressive Neoliberalism," *Dissent*, January 2, 2017, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser).

withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision.<sup>11</sup> The basic idea behind those policies is that the governmental apparatus has become an economically and socially costly obstacle to the economic performance, while it also leads to the uncontrollable growth of the state. As Graham Burchell explains, instead of the government, neoliberalism imposes quasi-economic models of actions in all spheres of the society.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, for its consequences, neoliberalism is also a political order not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action.<sup>13</sup> All these features were present during the Serbian transition from socialist self-management to a market economy, supervised by the IMF, and crucial to the process of accession to the European Union. Furthermore, Serbian transition was often described as a road to crony capitalism, in which many people lost all social security, while a new class of capitalists emerged.<sup>14</sup> Such process was similar to the transition in other Eastern European countries, in which a small group of people connected to the old regime managed to use the state resources for personal enrichment. Just as in Russia, it was an insider-dominated privatisation process.<sup>15</sup> However, such trend is also observed more globally in the process of (neo)liberalisation. As argued by Harvey for the cases elsewhere, ‘uneven neoliberalisation has been the universal tendency to increase social inequality and to expose the least fortunate elements in any society.’<sup>16</sup>

The way such (neo)liberalisation works in *non-economic* processes in Serbia is easily observed, but I will use one instance to show how the public discourse disseminated by the

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<sup>11</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2–3.

<sup>12</sup> See: Graham Burchell, “Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Smith, ed., *The Renewal of Cultural Studies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Upchurch and Darko Marinković, “Wild Capitalism, Privatisation and Employment Relations in Serbia,” ed. Zsolt Bedo, *Employee Relations* 33, no. 4 (June 28, 2011): 316–33.

<sup>15</sup> See: Peter Rutland, “Neoliberalism and the Russian Transition,” *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (April 2013): 332–62.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 118.

politicians that vilified the poor, also found the way in discriminatory legislation. Namely, the idea that homeless and very poor people should earn their own money, or at least some of it, is very present and it is a part of the broader neoliberal framework. As an illustration, in 2015, Serbian minister for social affairs Aleksandar Vulin insisted that the unemployed and poor must earn social benefits by some form of forced labour.<sup>17</sup> The irony is that Vulin's political party carries socialism in its name and that he was a social affairs minister, and his ministry has managed to push such policy into the legislation.<sup>18</sup> That idea is embodied in the public discourse, normalised and questioned only by the alternative media. This shows the level of an embodiment of neoliberal ideas present in the society, with profound impacts on those who are deprived of the basic means of living, and who are gathered around *LiceUlice*. The stance that there is no 'free lunch' is deeply embedded in the neoliberal discourse, as if receiving social help is equalised to stealing.<sup>19</sup> In Vulin's words, "social benefits are not, and must not be an occupation,"<sup>20</sup> implying the laziness of those who are receiving benefits. In such atmosphere, and it will be analysed later in more depth, *LiceUlice* is trying to counter this narrative by arguing that its vendors have chosen 'work instead of begging'. However, this very idea carries the same neoliberal meanings.

Examining Serbian case within such paradigm is particularly useful due to growing social differentiation that accompanies the neoliberal transition. Mladen Lazić has demonstrated how Serbian society has reduced social mobility, while economic differentiation surged. Material means, and newly acquired control over economic resources were the critical

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<sup>17</sup> "Vulin: Radite i zaradite socijalnu pomoć," N1 Info, July 3, 2015, <http://rs.n1info.com/a74220/Vesti/Vulin-Radite-i-zaradite-socijalnu-pomoc.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Sovija Mandić, "Rad oslobađa," Peščanik, October 22, 2014, <https://pescanik.net/rad-oslobadja/>.

<sup>19</sup> Also related to the idea of "fairness", see: David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 63.

<sup>20</sup> "Vulin: Radno angažovanje nije prinudni rad," Zona plus, November 22, 2014, <https://tvzonaplus.rs/vulin-radno-angazovanje-nije-prinudni-rad/>.

factors for such differentiation, leading to widening the gap between the rich and the poor and closing down of the mobility.<sup>21</sup> The economic crisis of 2009 only contributed to the financial deprivation of the poorest. Furthermore, Perišić and Vidojević have argued that due to the post-socialist transformation, poverty and discrimination are the most important social challenges. However, as the social differentiation grew the new paradigm shifted towards personal responsibility and further marginalisation. Such paradigm about the poor is always determined by the non-poor. As the authors argued, “the poor are presented as irresponsible, criminal or inadequate and therefore they should be censored, feared or pitied.”<sup>22</sup> They fall under the category of the *undeserving poor*, those who are supposedly poor due to their individual behavioural or character flaws.<sup>23</sup> I intend to observe how working for the magazine contribute to the discourse on vendors as the deserving poor.

Data on poverty in Serbia is hard to obtain from the official state sources published in media. These data are often manipulated to depict a better situation, but the data from the EUROSTAT shows that the gap between the rich and the poor in Serbia is growing and the middle class is shrinking, while the Serbian population, in general, is among the poorest in Europe. Furthermore, those who are poor are socially excluded, being an easy target for political manipulation and domination, while solidarity among them is disappearing. The data shows that 10% of the population receives some form of the social benefits. Solidarity and social cohesion were the focus of a recent research project funded by the EU and published by the weekly political magazine *Vreme* (The Time), arguing that solidarity among the social groups

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<sup>21</sup> Mladen Lazić, “Postsocijalistička transformacija i restratifikacija u Srbiji,” *Politička misao*, no. 3 (2011): 123–44.

<sup>22</sup> Natalija Perisic and Jelena Vidojevic, “Divided by Poverty and Social Exclusion - Roma and Persons with Disabilities in Serbia,” *Politička Misao* 52, no. 4 (2015): 142–59.

<sup>23</sup> Khiara M. Bridges, “The Deserving Poor, the Undeserving Poor, and Class-Based Affirmative Action,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2017; Also see: Robert A. Moffitt, “The Deserving Poor, the Family, and the U.S. Welfare System,” *Demography* 52, no. 3 (June 2015): 729–49.

is decreasing. The authors of the reports searched for the reasons in social troubles and the facts that around 70% of the employed are receiving below average salaries and half of the retirees are receiving below average pensions. The data shows that only 10% of the population has an untroubled living.<sup>24</sup> I would argue that in such situation, and with other social problems that go beyond wages such as discrimination, stigmatisation, marginalisation, isolation, daily humiliation, which will be discussed later, the role of the street magazine is amplified. By examining it, we could observe whether it can challenge these dominant neoliberal trends. Political manipulation of those who are impoverished is beyond the scope of this research, but it should be observed within a clientelist system perfected by the ruling party.

The idea to use street newspapers to offer a platform for the poor to earn a living is not novel nor unique to the Serbian case. It is just one of the grassroots responses to a global process of dismantling social institutions of the state, their underfunding and understaffing. At the same time, there is a global process of blaming individuals for poverty and insisting on work ethics insensitive to individual situations, vital for the neoliberal order. Unsurprisingly, when Daniele Torck explored several street magazines in Europe and the United States and examined the idea of empowerment, her findings show that many texts in street magazines evoke a specific political and media discourse on poor and marginal people, reinforcing the negative social ethos of the homeless.<sup>25</sup> These findings will be explored in more details in the following chapters and considered for the Serbian case. At this point, I will draw on the second crucial concept from the literature, on producing the work ethic entailed in neoliberal order.

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<sup>24</sup> Ivana Milanović Hrašovec, “Siromaštvo – put ka društvenoj izolaciji,” *Vreme - Vreme solidarnosti*, April 12, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> D. Torck, “Voices of Homeless People in Street Newspapers: A Cross-Cultural Exploration,” *Discourse & Society* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2001): 371–92.

### 3.2 Producing the (neoliberal) work ethic

In relation to what was already discussed regarding neoliberalism, Zygmunt Bauman's insights into how the work ethic was imagined, and how it relates to the neoliberal economy are particularly useful for analysing the case of the street newspaper in Serbia. As Bauman explains, the neoliberal logic insists that "every action, every concession, every service must bring in its own profit, the cost of which should be borne by those who use it and not be spread over the entire community,"<sup>26</sup> which produces disastrous consequences in terms of social justice when applied. The underlying idea is that those who are hurt by such logic are not working hard enough. The application of this principle had various consequences worldwide, while the consequences of the most recent austerity drive are yet to be fully comprehended.

Observing how the neoliberal work ethic is produced is particularly interesting in the Serbian context, where the welfare state was destroyed in the last few decades. Serbia, as a part of socialist Yugoslavia, had very developed welfare state, which during the years became normalised and expected by its citizens. The idea that the state would ensure employment, social protection, free education and healthcare was part of the ruling Communist Party's programme. However, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and wars in Yugoslavia, Serbia also engaged in the process of the so-called transition, from welfare socialism to market capitalism.<sup>27</sup> Mechanisms of the old welfare state that still exist on paper are underfunded, understaffed, and troubled with complicated bureaucracy. An unwillingness to finance such institutions manifest the neoliberal approach in Serbia, while politicians value brutal market capitalism. Instead of offering meaningful social programmes, the problem of deprivation and

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<sup>26</sup> Zygmunt Bauman and Carlo Bordoni, *State of Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 58.

<sup>27</sup> See: Gøsta Esping-Andersen, ed., *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996); Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*

homelessness if often embedded in the discourse about work ethics and supposed laziness of those who are unemployed.<sup>28</sup>

The political structures amplify the issue of work ethic. For example, Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić often talks about his 20-hours work daily, praising imaginary protestant work ethic, and criticising those who are not adhering.<sup>29</sup> At the same, the state institutions are subsidising companies that are openly humiliating workers, not only by long shifts, low salaries, and poor working conditions but sometimes going to extremes in which workers are forced to wear diapers not to use the toilet breaks.<sup>30</sup> With a high level of unemployment, employment is seen as a thing of tremendous social value, putting additional pressure on the unemployed and homeless. To return to Bauman, this unemployment coupled with easy replacement of the workers and work-ethic propaganda, brings further insensitivity towards the poor and the deprived.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Bauman's analysis of how the term *underclass* is used in public discourse, that the poor fail or neglect to do what is needed to extricate themselves from poverty,<sup>32</sup> is very present in Serbia. As Bauman writes, "*Underclass* evokes an image of a class of people who are beyond classes and outside the hierarchy, with neither chance nor need of readmission; people without a role, making no useful contribution to the lives of the rest, and in principle beyond redemption."<sup>33</sup> By having such etiquette, the *underclass* cannot claim benefits or complain to be the victims. On the other hand, the street newspaper is trying to

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<sup>28</sup> B Stjelja, "Trećina Srba neće da radi," Večernje novosti, July 21, 2010, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/ekonomija/aktuelno.239.html:293337-Trecina-Srba-nece-da-radi>; "Mladi, drski i raspušteni," Večernje novosti, August 17, 2013, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:449505-Mladi-drski-i-raspusteni>.

<sup>29</sup> Jovana Gligorijević, "Portret savremenika – Maks Veber: Mušta za Srbina budućnosti," Vreme, August 17, 2017, <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1523122>.

<sup>30</sup> "Sloga: Tortura u Juri, radnicima savetuju da nose pelene," N1 Info, April 28, 2016, <http://rs.n1info.com/a155764/Biznis/Sloga-Tortura-u-Juri-radnicima-savetuju-da-nose-pelene.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 2nd ed, Issues in Society (Maidenhead, England ; New York: Open University Press, 2005), 71.

<sup>32</sup> Bauman, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Bauman, 71.



counter that narrative by showing that the poor have the work ethic and a will to work, but the magazine falls into the same trap. As Bauman argued, work ethic serves the purpose of justifying poverty and abandoning a large number of citizens.<sup>34</sup> The moment street newspapers attempt to show that homeless people are not lazy, or that they are the deserving poor, rather than to show that the entire notion is absurd, they accept neoliberal principles, just trying to mitigate those principles for one particular social group. How this relates to the magazine's writings, the managers' views and the sellers' positions will be analysed later.

### **3.3 Social and cultural capital**

Throughout the analysis, I aim to use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is a crucial element for reproduction of social status and social groups, depending on how that cultural capital is utilised and situated within different social spaces.<sup>35</sup> In this case, such concept is useful for analysing privileges of the magazine's managers and the NGO leaders, and position of the newspaper sellers on the street. For example, regarding the cultural capital of those who produce texts for the newspaper, and those who are selling them on the street and actually depend on the intellectual writers. Another thread that will be discussed deals with cultural capitals of the sellers, and their ability to navigate selling of the magazine to those who are more affluent.

It would be important to explore how the social norms and discrimination are reproduced even among those who intend to help homeless people. I examine if engaging with the magazine's programmes help homeless people's cultural capital, and how it relates to economic capital and earning independence that the magazine promotes. Finally, I will look at

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<sup>34</sup> Bauman, 77–78.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J Richardson (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

how social capital relates to being part of the vendors' group functions, considering Bourdieu's idea that it is linked to "possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition — or in other words, to membership in a group."<sup>36</sup> As the analysis will show, possession of such network and relationships proved to be of particular value to the vendors.

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<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

## 4. Scholarship

No academic literature addressed *LiceUlice*, street magazines in general or this form of activism in Serbia. To bridge the gap, I will use research from other contexts. Nevertheless, such inquiries into the street magazines worldwide illuminate the main concerns that street newspapers and related activism bring.

### 4.1 On the street newspaper

Street newspapers have spread rapidly during the 1990s throughout North America and Western Europe, and have been under scholarly scrutiny ever since.<sup>37</sup> However, a particular gap in the literature exists regarding street newspapers in societies that used to have a broad safety net provided by the state, as it was the case in socialist Eastern Europe. The literature I will discuss here always explored the role that the street newspapers have in the societies in which liberal, capitalist democracy is given, and in which these newspapers fill the gaps in welfare that already exist. We can only presume that the notions of homelessness, associated shame, stigmatisation, and discrimination are qualitatively different in societies where welfare state collapsed – in societies that are in the process of so-called transition from socialism to market capitalism.<sup>38</sup> Safety nets have different meanings, and implementation of Western models via street newspapers might have different outcomes. In that sense, discourse about homelessness should be observed from a more nuanced perspective – to include notions of safety net, market economy, individualism and collapse of state structures.

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<sup>37</sup> Tessa Swithinbank, “The Street Press: Homelessness, Self-Help, and Social Identity,” *Gender and Development* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 1997): 45–51; Claudia Magallanes-Blanco and Juan Antonio Pérez-Bermúdez, “Citizens’ Publications That Empower: Social Change for the Homeless,” *Development in Practice* 19, no. 4/5 (June 1, 2009): 654–64; Kevin Howley, “A Poverty of Voices: Street Papers as Communicative Democracy,” *Journalism* 4, no. 3 (August 1, 2003): 273–92.

<sup>38</sup> Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*

Since the early scholarly interest in this model that emphasised the concept of self-helping among the homeless, some researchers became more critical about street newspaper projects: they have questioned the transfer of responsibility from the state to individuals and charity organisations.<sup>39</sup> Tessa Swithinbankof argued that the concept of self-help, in which the idea is that homeless, ex-homeless and vulnerable people help themselves through the selling of newspapers or magazines, could break the dependency on state benefits, and is an alternative to begging. By examining the famous British magazine *Big Issue*, she concluded that the magazine contributed greatly to placing homelessness in the forefront of national consciousness. Swithinbankof also suggested that the magazine challenged existing stereotypes about homeless people and a real chance to gain experience for further employment.<sup>40</sup> However, if we engage in this argument more in-depth, we shall see several underlying neoliberal assumptions. First, it looks at the street newspaper as a charity that provides services to the poor – and indeed, many activists gathered in these newspapers see themselves that way. In that sense, the responsibility for the deprived is placed in private initiatives, and not within the social state structures. The second assumption is that individual sellers of the newspapers – the poor – are at least implicitly responsible for their situation. Their engagement and selling of the newspapers is then a noble way of escaping the poverty. This assumption is not only one of the crucial foundation of neoliberalism as argued by Harvey,<sup>41</sup> but it is also closely connected with the ideas of the neoliberal work ethics as suggested by Zygmunt Bauman.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Also see: Paul Koegel, “Through a Different Lens: An Anthropological Perspective on the Homeless Mentally Ill,” *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 16, no. 1 (March 1992): 1–22; Irene Glasser and Rae Bridgman, *Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999); Carin Tunåker, “No Place Like Home?": Locating Homeless LGBT Youth,” *Home Cultures* 12, no. 2 (May 4, 2015): 241–59.

<sup>40</sup> Tessa Swithinbank, “The Street Press: Homelessness, Self-Help, and Social Identity,” *Gender and Development* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 1997): 45–51.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*.

The case of the Swiss street magazine *Surprise* is an excellent example of how vendors were expected to play the neoliberal game, encompassed in the discourse of “second chance”. The poor and persons with drug addiction were recruited via billboards that implicitly promised reintegration into the society and the end of the underclass status.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, in analysing this case, Caroline Wiedmar argued that the magazine successfully challenges preconceptions about the poverty that the readers have and that we might assume that the change occurs. That is particularly important in a society, which Wiedmar characterises as one in which poverty “has typically been framed as a moral, religious, or pathological problem, constructed as, respectively, a crime to be contained, a sin to be punished, or a disease to be cured.”<sup>44</sup> When the sellers participate in such discourse, they are seen as those who accept the hand offered by the society, while the neoliberal order is reinforced. However, the issue of empowerment remains open.

Claudia Magallanes-Blanco and Juan Antonio Perez-Bermudez revisited the idea by exploring street magazines worldwide. They also concluded that street publications could empower the homeless, and sometimes lead to social change.<sup>45</sup> They argued that besides financial incentives, empowerment comes by giving voice to those who are discriminated, for example, by allowing the homeless to publish their experiences, ideas, and opinions in street magazines. As noted by Chris Dodge, contrary to traditional media that present homelessness as the issue of someone else, street newspapers provide grassroots and human perspective.<sup>46</sup> These findings will be questioned in Serbian case, particularly as the same authors claim that

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<sup>43</sup> Caroline Wiedmer, “The Politics of Reading Street Newspapers,” *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (2010): 437–42.

<sup>44</sup> Wiedmer, 438.

<sup>45</sup> Magallanes-Blanco and Pérez-Bermúdez, “Citizens’ Publications That Empower: Social Change for the Homeless.”

<sup>46</sup> Chris Dodge, “Words on the Street: Homeless People’s Newspapers,” *American Libraries* 30, no. 7 (August 1999): 60–62.

the activities around the magazines often lead to the creation of local networks of solidarity, and even international networks.

As mentioned above, one of the main criticism of such model is that it emphasises individuals and charity organisations, rather than on state, provinces and cities and their welfare policies. In a sense, this is a charity model. Furthermore, as noticed in Western Europe, it is not uncommon that the buyers of the magazine would pay, but decide not to take the magazine. Some would throw the magazine in the first bin, therefore denying any value to the texts and issues raised by the magazine. Instead, buyers would assume that they are giving charity to the sellers. Besides problematic underlying economic and ideological explanation in which individuals are responsible for their homelessness, this concept can have profound consequences on people's identities, sense of self-worth and further stigmatisation of those who are begging.

Finally, Daniele Torck has explored several street magazines in Europe and the United States, examining the idea of empowerment. Her findings show that many texts in street magazines evoke traditional political and media discourse on poor and marginal people, reinforcing the negative social ethos of the homeless. Nevertheless, she confirms that platform of street magazines is often significant in conveying problems of homeless people and discrimination.<sup>47</sup> This is in line with other scholarship that claims that in democratic countries NGOs provide a voice to the marginalised groups, while the communities and voluntary sectors have established advocacy roles, albeit with serious neoliberal constraints.<sup>48</sup> This, however, has to be examined in a particular Eastern European context.

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<sup>47</sup> Torck, "Voices of Homeless People in Street Newspapers."

<sup>48</sup> Sandra Grey and Charles Sedgwick, "Constraining the Community Voice: The Impact of the Neoliberal Contract State on Democracy," *New Zealand Sociology* 30, no. 1 (2015): 88–110.

## 4.2 Homelessness in Serbia

Following on the previous discussion on neoliberalism where I have also provided data on poverty in Serbia, in this section, I will briefly analyse the situation regarding homelessness. The first problem is that the issue of the safety net and its destruction in Serbian transition has received very little academic scrutiny.<sup>49</sup> Some authors observed that transformation from socialism to capitalism caused a social shock, but explained that it was a consequence of “the sharp collision of state socialist, and traditional values on the one hand and new values and social behavioural requirements on the other”.<sup>50</sup> Some other aspects, related to the *LiceUlice* initiative are more examined. For example, several authors have shown how such transition impacted the media, causing insecurity while the political elite repressed opposing opinions despite the assumed *liberalisation* from socialism to capitalism.<sup>51</sup> The literature on activism and social change in Serbia is also vast.<sup>52</sup> For example, Danilo Vuković has argued that NGOs, in general, are unable to initiate broader civic mobilisation or to establish stable institutional preconditions for government accountability.<sup>53</sup> The same question should be posed regarding the *LiceUlice* initiative.

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<sup>49</sup> Esping-Andersen, *Welfare States in Transition*; Bob Deacon, “Eastern European Welfare States: The Impact of the Politics of Globalization,” *Journal of European Social Policy* 10, no. 2 (May 2000): 146–61; Ivan T. Berend, “Social Shock in Transforming Central and Eastern Europe,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 3 (September 2007): 269–80.

<sup>50</sup> Berend, “Social Shock in Transforming Central and Eastern Europe,” 269.

<sup>51</sup> Jenny Pearce and Deborah Eade, eds., *Development, NGOS, and Civil Society: Selected Essays from Development in Practice*, Development in Practice Readers (Oxford: Oxfam, 2000); Marina Simić, *Kosmopolitska čežnja: etnografija srpskog postsocijalizma* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2014); T. Lee, E. Johnson, and A. Prakash, “Media Independence and Trust in NGOs: The Case of Postcommunist Countries,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 8–35; Danijel Jankovic and Nenad Dumanovic, “New Dog, Old Tricks: Serbia’s Continual Repression of the Media and Civil Society,” *Foreign Policy Journal*, November 27, 2015, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/11/27/new-dog-old-tricks-serbias-continual-repression/>.

<sup>52</sup> Danica Minić, “Feminist Publicist Strategies: Women’s NGOs’ Media Activism and Television Journalism in Serbia and Croatia,” *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 133–49; Danilo Vuković, “The Role of Civil Society in Fostering Government Accountability in Contemporary Serbia: On The Limits of Depoliticized Social Activism,” *Sociologija* 57, no. 4 (2015): 637–61; Srdjan Marinkovic, “Designing an Incentive-Compatible Safety Net in a Financial System in Transition: The Case of Serbia,” *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Vuković, “The Role of Civil Society in Fostering Government Accountability in Contemporary Serbia: On The Limits of Depoliticized Social Activism.”

Homelessness, however is under-researched in Serbian context. Not only that there are no sociological or anthropological studies that relate to homelessness and experiences of being homeless, but homelessness is barely researched as a social issue in general.<sup>54</sup> The lack of academic research is even more surprising considering vast social and political changes in last 30 years, which not only included wars and sanctions but already mentioned profound economic and social transformation from socialism to post-socialism. Besides academia, homelessness is also neglected by the state. Official data on homeless people are non-existent. Homelessness is only analysed by NGOs, while the availability of their reports varies. The most comprehensive report was published by an NGO *Housing Centar* in 2012, which observed homelessness as a social phenomenon but also provided much needed data. The report argued that homelessness is caused by economic restructuring (which reads as neoliberal transformation), inadequate shelters and lack of capacities, poor social security, meagre benefits, absence of social housing, and absence of any programmes for skills-buildings.<sup>55</sup> For example, in practice, there is only one shelter in the country's capital, able to accommodate only around 100 persons.<sup>56</sup>

More direct academic research is much needed on homelessness. I would have to make broad assumptions, particularly regarding the social context of homelessness in Serbia. It provides particular difficulties in historicizing the very concept of homelessness. The abrupt changes in post-Yugoslav society certainly affected homelessness. The violent break-up of Yugoslavia and subsequent wars created hundreds of thousands of refugees. Many of them found homes with relatives or in shelters, but we lack data on their permanent placements. We also lack data if some of the homeless people today in Serbia were actually refugees during the

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<sup>54</sup> Marija Sarajlija et al., "Assessment of Health Status and Quality of Life of Homeless Persons in Belgrade, Serbia," *Vojnosanitetski Pregled* 71, no. 2 (2014): 167–74.

<sup>55</sup> Branislava Žarković, Mina Petrović, and Milena Timotijević, "Bez kuće, bez doma: Rezultati istraživanja beskućništva u Srbiji" (Belgrade: Housing Centar, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Sarajlija et al., "Assessment of Health Status and Quality of Life of Homeless Persons in Belgrade, Serbia."



early 1990s.<sup>57</sup> Another major unforeseen event was hyperinflation and the state's pyramidal financial scheme that left many people broke. Again, there is no information on homelessness because of the major impoverishment of Serbian population during the 1990s. The second phase of Serbian post-socialist transformation came in October 2000 when Slobodan Milosevic was ousted from power, while democratic opposition led the country towards rapid democratisation and liberalisation of the economy. The already mentioned economic transition towards market capitalism model meant that old, non-profit and bankrupt firms and industries were closed, leaving many people without previous modest earnings. This created an entire subclass of people, in jargon called *losers of transition*.<sup>58</sup> We have insufficient data how many of them lost homes and became homeless. In a country with only basic support and one overcrowded shelter, one would assume that this group of people would be the most endangered. Another group would probably come from discriminated Roma minority. With minimal social care support, which is not enough for living sustenance, structural barriers epitomised in complicated bureaucratic procedures, and daily discrimination, homelessness requires outmost and immediate academic attention.

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<sup>57</sup> Housing Centar claims that around 20% of refugees are homeless based on their survey: Žarković, Petrović, and Timotijević, "Bez kuće, bez doma: Rezultati istraživanja beskućništva u Srbiji," 57.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example: Žene su najveći gubitnici tranzicije Jadranka Joksimović, "Žene su najveći gubitnici tranzicije," *Politika*, July 27, 2012, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/227331/Zene-su-najveci-gubitnici-tranzicije>.

## 5. LiceUlice

### 5.1 The Magazine's Goals

*LiceUlice* is distributed in three Serbian cities, but most sellers are located in the capital Belgrade.<sup>59</sup> Some of them are selling the magazine for years, often walking the central streets. As elsewhere with the similar projects, the magazine serves as a platform for the poor and homeless to earn some money by keeping half of the magazine's price.<sup>60</sup> In this chapter, I will explore the rationale behind the magazine, using the interviews with the magazine employees, and the magazine articles. I will also look at the magazine's position regarding the state institutions, the magazine's approach and support to the sellers, and their views on poverty.

The technology that *LiceUlice* uses is not novel elsewhere, opening a question why this project had started in 2010 in Serbia. Although not explicitly stated, it seems that the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009, which began to hit Serbia in 2010 played a role in establishing the *LiceUlice* magazine. Struggling state institutions came under even more pressure, opening a space for an initiative as *LiceUlice*. Therefore, from the very beginning, the importance of *LiceUlice* was augmented by economic deprivation, dismantling of social institutions, and stigmatisation of poverty that is indeed more present than in its Western models. As one of the magazine's manager explained, the idea was to offer a chance to the people who are struggling the most to find any employment. He also emphasised that this is particularly important in the contemporary economic and social climate. Furthermore, he said that due to the generally high unemployment rate, work with the marginalised and vulnerable groups is gaining even more importance due to the perceived inability for them to be employed.<sup>61</sup> Such perception is not

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<sup>59</sup> "Šta je LICEULICE?," *Liceulice*, December 10, 2017, <https://liceulice.wordpress.com/about/>.

<sup>60</sup> Milica Martinović, interview by Jelena Gajić, March 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Vuk Vučković, interview by Jelena Gajić, March 2018.

only external but internalised by the vulnerable groups. In that sense, the magazine is openly assuming the role of the state, offering a safety net and support that these people could not find elsewhere. This also creates a specific situation in which the original magazine's role – to inform – comes as secondary.

## 5.2 The Magazine and State and Institutions

From the interviews, it is clear that the main motivation behind employing socially marginalised groups was that the state was not doing enough to provide necessary support.<sup>62</sup> That stance was repeated several times by my interviewees, and it was also repeated as a motive for their own engagement with the magazine. For example, one of the magazine's employees explained that the state left the NGOs to offer support to the marginalised groups, while at the same time the state does not offer any or nearly enough support to the NGOs themselves.<sup>63</sup> The paradox is that only NGOs that are on good terms with the ruling party in Serbia are receiving the state funding.<sup>64</sup> In this case, this means that without adequate resources, the proper NGOs are struggling to maintain the initiatives and to offer long-term support. Offering long-term support is the main objectives of the *LiceUlice* initiative, and the employees emphasised that this add to the motive to be more engaged, giving more importance to such initiative because it manages to survive for years.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding their relationship with the state institutions, the magazine employees were understandably cautious during the interview sessions. Besides the state institutions that deal with marginalised groups, the magazine does not depend on the state financing. Approximately a sixth of the revenue is obtained from direct sales, while the vast majority is coming from

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<sup>62</sup> Vučković; Marko Tomašević, interview by Jelena Gajić, March 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Tomašević, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Such unfair competitions also produced public scandals. See: Tamara Skrozza, "Bez stida i srama," *Vreme*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1252174>.

<sup>65</sup> Martinović, interview; Vučković, interview; Tomašević, interview.

donations or project funding.<sup>66</sup> This also allows for the magazine to be independent, but being independent from the ruling party perhaps hinders their possibilities in dealing with the state administration.

My interviewees were careful to explain that the state institutions were not particularly interested in the magazine initiative, but the interviewees were more open in discussing the system of care offered by the state. Namely, the main problem with the social security system in Serbia, according to my interviewees, is that it is obsolete and inadequate in the contemporary situation.<sup>67</sup> The NGO organisations are not supported, and the state is not delegating some of the issues in their area of expertise. The formal procedures are overly complicated; the civil sector is usually not consulted while, on the other hand, there are expectations both of the public and of the state institutions that the NGOs would somehow deal with the problems. As one of the interviewees explained, it is a constant struggle between a bureaucratic state system and people who are daily working with the poor and homeless population.<sup>68</sup> The *LiceUlice* initiative is offering support to the state institutions, for example when a vendor needs help with the Centre for Social Work (which in the Serbian case deals with the benefits, but also issues such as adoptions, removal of children from families), but they usually face more bureaucratic procedures and “a closed door”. Even in issues when the magazine helps its vendors to obtain ID cards, they face legal barriers, they are sent for “one more document”, and discouraged to finish the procedure.<sup>69</sup> This issue is particularly important as having an ID card is a prerequisite for obtaining necessary documents on unemployment to get a health card, without which one’s treatment in the Serbian health care system is not possible.

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<sup>66</sup> Martinović, interview.

<sup>67</sup> Martinović; Vučković, interview; Tomašević, interview.

<sup>68</sup> Tomašević, interview; Vučković, interview.

<sup>69</sup> Vučković, interview.

The situation when the magazine sends vendors to the official shelter for the adults is even more problematic, as due to the overcrowding they are most often refused. As one of the interviewees explained, they know that the shelter has approximately 10% of the needed capacity, so they often do not bother even to try. The frustration on the magazine employee's side is augmented when the state institutions, without official delegating, still expect them to deal with the problems, and when they fail, they face criticism. As one of the interviewees said, then they tell us "why do you play of being social workers, when you don't know how to do it."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the state institutions, as my interviewees confirmed, do not possess even basic information on homelessness, the number of homeless people, or even a basic definition on who is counted as a homeless.<sup>71</sup>

Another issue is that in the process of Serbian integration in the European Union, Serbia is forced to bring many new laws that in theory should have a positive effect on social work and social entrepreneurship. However, as observed by my interviewees, these laws and strategies are often doing lip service, without any changes in daily practices.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the NGO behind the magazine has applied to several official funding competitions organised by the state and various ministries, never to win any funding for social work. The only competition they passed deals with the magazine publishing directly, therefore diminishing their role as anything more than just a media.<sup>73</sup> Their role as a platform for support of marginalised groups is not recognised. At the same time, and following on from their experiences with various state institutions, the magazine employees were often frustrated with incompetence, over-bureaucratisation, and politicism of the state institutions and administration.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tomašević, interview.

<sup>71</sup> Martinović, interview.

<sup>72</sup> Martinović.

<sup>73</sup> Martinović.

<sup>74</sup> Vučković, interview; Tomašević, interview.

Positive experience, as seen by my interviewees, comes only in individual cases depending on each social worker, rather than on the organised state system. It depends if a social worker is ready to go a step further and collaborate with NGOs for the interests of their proteges, outside strict and limiting administrative procedures.<sup>75</sup> Generally, my interviewees employed in the magazines all argued that the state should do more in making the procedures easier, that they should introduce some form of social housing which does not exist in Serbia, and that the state should invest more in the shelters for homeless people.<sup>76</sup>

The magazine, however, collaborates more successfully with other NGOs. For example, they have a good collaboration with the NGO Praxis, which offers free legal support and protection, often crucial for the vendors of the magazine in dealing with the state institutions. The magazine also has good relations with several organisations that provide mental health support for psychiatric patients and their families, working together to train vendors. Such connections with other NGOs seems to be crucial to obtain resources and help for their vendors, and generally, the NGO networks offer easier access for the vendors.<sup>77</sup>

### **5.3 The Magazine and its Vendors**

During my interviews, I was particularly interested in examining the relationship between the magazine and its vendors, observing how such relationship goes beyond simple employer/employee rapport. The magazine provides training to the vendors beyond selling techniques, and they are trying to keep in regular touch with them. Mental health support and education courses they offer will be analysed further in this chapter, but at this point, it is important to emphasise the ways that the magazine employees see their vendors. From the

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<sup>75</sup> Martinović, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Tomašević, interview; Vučković, interview; Martinović, interview.

<sup>77</sup> Tomašević, interview.

analysed interviews, I have observed a high level of understanding of the problems that the vendors face, high level of understanding of the issue of homelessness, and to my surprise, I did not notice any paternalising attitudes towards the sellers. Instead, my interviewees were highly knowledgeable about the topic and humble regarding their own position in the process.

Interestingly, regarding the issue of homelessness, the magazine employees were very critical of the neoliberal work ethic and rhetoric. The idea that homeless people should “deserve” home was heavily criticised, with the magazine employees being aware of the absurdity of such stance. As one of them explained:

“Just imagine a situation that you are on the street, sleeping rough, freezing, have nothing to eat, perhaps you are addicted to alcohol, gambling, or whatever, and then someone tells you, to you who are sleeping on the street and have nothing to eat, nothing to wear, now you have to come here once a week and prove that you deserve your basic human right for having a home...”<sup>78</sup>

As they argued, solving the housing problem should come first, then other needs, and only then some programmes for integration into the society. The magazine’s stance is that the right to have a home is a basic human right. Furthermore, in the interviews, they pointed that homelessness in Serbia is rife, just not as visible as in some other European places. Nevertheless, they pointed to the places where homeless people are rough sleeping during the night, that are central in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia, and then invisible during the day.<sup>79</sup> As the magazine spread in a few other cities outside Belgrade, they also become more aware of the problems of homelessness elsewhere, particularly as some of their vendors are homeless in Novi Sad, for example. However, the situation with the lack of institutions and state support

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<sup>78</sup> Tomašević.

<sup>79</sup> Tomašević; Vučković, interview.

outside Belgrade is even worse.<sup>80</sup> Being in daily touch with the vendors allows the magazine employees to develop a nuanced perspective, not found in the scarce academic literature on homelessness in Serbia.

#### **5.4 The Magazine and the Market**

By establishing that the magazine employees have very sophisticated views regarding the issues of poverty and homelessness, as well as being critical towards the idea that homeless should earn having a home, in this subsection, I examine how they deal with the contemporary neoliberal order in Serbia which favours the market orientation in all sphere of living. After all, the magazine necessarily has to function in such order, and the vendors primary job is to sell the magazine.

The way the neoliberal order and the market come to place is visible not only with the selling of the magazine but with how the buyers are treating the vendors and the magazine. Even though the texts in the magazine are of quite high quality as compared with the most popular magazines in Serbia, it is still assumed that the magazine is bought for charity and compassion, rather than for its (actual) quality. Texts in the magazine are often written by the most regarded Serbian intellectuals, while the translations are also closely following contemporary events. However, as noticed in Western Europe, it is not uncommon that the buyers of the magazine would pay, but decide not to take the magazine. Some would throw the magazine in the first bin, therefore denying any value to the texts and issues raised by the magazine. Others would leave the magazine on the table of the coffee shops where they had bought them, not bothering to bring them home. Instead, buyers would assume that they are giving charity to the sellers with potentially profound consequences on people's identities,

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<sup>80</sup> Martinović, interview.



sense of self-worth but also on further stigmatisation of those who are begging. This brings us to the crucial nexus of the analysis, showing how the neoliberal model is at work here. Namely, if the magazine is not valued for its quality, and if the sellers are not valued for their work, then it is again assumed that it is up to the charity organisations, in this case, the NGOs and individuals to work towards escaping poverty. Paradoxically, the fact that the marginalised groups are working on such endeavour could stigmatise further those who are not. The vendors are escaping the notions of laziness, but they stayed trapped in a sense that they are working, but not a real job, but still good enough for *them*.

Since the magazine is, due to its mission, forced to participate in such model, some of the employees internalised that the marginalised groups should be equipped with some skills to participate in the market. As one of the employees puts it, “the goal is not to give someone a fish, but to teach him to fish so that he can secure a dignified living long term.”<sup>81</sup> However, that person also added that economic independence is not the only goal, but that these vendors sometimes manage to leave their own social circles and isolation. Instead, they start to communicate and be in touch with other people, which as a consequence has empowerment.

Another issue to consider is already mentioned magazine’s dependence on donations. As there is no state support, the magazine has to maintain good relationships with the private companies. Usually, they target a company that aims to improve its image via socially responsible entrepreneurship, and that is willing to buy a large number of magazines, besides traditional donations. Sometimes these companies would buy magazines and gift them to different Centres for social work, the Red Cross offices, and other institutions. This puts the magazine in an interesting position in which they have to nourish these relationships, promote

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<sup>81</sup> Martinović.

socially responsible entrepreneurship, but still be critical towards the system that has marginalised these groups in the first place.

The magazine has also organised surveys into their audience that buys the magazine on the streets. In 2015 and 2016 they had volunteers, mostly social work students, who examined the profile of buyers in Belgrade. The results show that the persons most likely to buy a magazine are students and young professionals. These young professionals are usually 25 to 35 years old, and highly educated. This data shows that this model of the street newspaper has not become popular with an older population, perhaps because of its *modernity*, or because the older generation was used to having a developed safety net provided by the state. At the same time, if the younger generation is more willing to buy the magazine, it means that the new charity models resonate more and that they are more immersed into post-socialist transformation as the only mode of thinking.<sup>82</sup>

Besides these issues observed from the points of neoliberal transformation and pressures to adhere to imaginary work ethics, *LiceUlice* also offers a platform for subversive actions. Placed within a specific dehumanising neoliberal transformation from self-management socialism to market capitalism, *LiceUlice* is sometimes used as a platform for politically subversive texts that would not otherwise be published in the mainstream media. This issue will be further explored when I examine the writings in the magazine in the following chapter. At this point, it is important to stress that the magazine employees are trying to keep the content of the magazine that is not overly commercialised, centring their texts on social issues.

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<sup>82</sup> Martinović.

## 5.5 Support and Mental Health

The magazine employs a number of people with a role of helping the vendors. They organise different programmes and training, as well as mental health support. For example, vendors would meet with the magazine employees twice a week for a couple of hours to discuss the sale, their methods, ways of increasing the sale numbers. It is also an opportunity for the magazine managers to obtain the feedback from the sellers.<sup>83</sup>

The magazine employs professional psychologists to offer different programmes and mental health support to the vendors. They also offer support in work hunting, CV writing, and courses in communication and behaviour at work. As they have a good relationship with other NGOs, they often send their vendors on courses there if they have more developed programmes. That way, vendors are offered various courses including language courses, computer literacy.<sup>84</sup>

The training regarding the sells consists of basic information what is their role, how to communicate with the buyers, and how to approach them. The method of teaching these skills changed and varied, from individual sessions to group work. Sometimes, they organise workshops in which vendors share their experiences regarding the sales, approach to the people and general problems of working on the street. Such sessions could be seen as more empowering, as it allows vendors to be active agents in education. The magazine employees also provide individual sessions on topics such as personal finances. The vendors are trained in maintaining their income, finding the affordable home, paying the rent and the bills. They are also taught how to prioritise expenses, live independently and manage the long-term planning.

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<sup>83</sup> Vučković, interview; Tomašević, interview.

<sup>84</sup> Martinović, interview.

The magazine employees emphasised that these individual sessions are always adjusted to a vendor's needs.<sup>85</sup>

The magazine is also maintaining an open concept with the sellers, meaning that the vendors themselves decide on what kind of support they want. The magazine organisers are trying not to force sellers on the courses, or to keep in touch once they decide not to work for the magazine anymore. However, they do offer support if the sellers want to remain in contact, particularly as sometimes, the vendors leave the magazine for another job. Nevertheless, the job market instability in Serbia often forces them to return to sell the magazines again.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Martinović; Vučković, interview; Tomašević, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Tomašević, interview.

## 6. The Magazine Writings

In this section, I will analyse the writings of the magazine. All issues published until May 2018 were considered, with the aim of examining how issues such as poverty, homelessness, social activism, market relations and mental health are represented. This is particularly important, as I argue based on the interviews that the magazine texts influence not only its targeted audience but also the magazine employees and the vendors on the street. Overall, the magazine's main topics are centered about the issues of migrations, poverty, homelessness, water, human rights, but also charity and social entrepreneurship.

During the years, the magazine has developed a network of authors who are volunteering the articles. The authors are from all over the region, and as it depends on volunteering, the magazine works on constant expansion of its network. These contacts are carefully maintained, while the magazine is also part of the international network of street newspapers, from which they can take articles for translations. Some of the authors included famous names of the intellectual elite, such as Ivan Čolović and Dubravka Ugrešić. Furthermore, one could argue that the magazine is created by the liberal elite, targeting other educated readers, but attempting to facilitate support to those who are discriminated and marginalised. Many of the analysed texts were very complex in terms of their structure and the message, assuming a very educated reader. It opens a question of who has the required social capital to understand those texts, and perhaps initiate changes. There are, however, texts that are more popular, for example when the magazine interviewed sports celebrities such as a tennis player Novak Djoković, but even such texts are focused on discrimination, inclusion and

marginalised groups.<sup>87</sup> The way such texts speak to the vendors themselves and how it relates to Bourdieu's theories will be analysed in chapter 7.

## 6.1 Poverty and Work Ethics

The issue of poverty is at the core of the magazine's writing. The poor are sometimes defined as those who lack sufficient means for living,<sup>88</sup> while several issues offered numbers based on internationally accepted methods for evaluating poverty such as insufficient funds for food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, transport, sport and culture.<sup>89</sup> However, the magazine also offered more personal stories of poverty in Serbia faced by discriminated groups, but also by refugees passing through the country.<sup>90</sup> Since various authors tackled the issue over time, it is hard to track one line of reasoning. Nevertheless, some features are common to all texts, mostly when they relate to the poverty and work of their vendors, particularly as such texts were usually written by a single author for years.

The street newspaper *LiceUlice* is adamant to argue that selling of the magazine by its vendors is not street begging, but a job and meaningful work.<sup>91</sup> Placing this argument within Bauman's framework, one can observe how the issue of dependency here became a dirty word. The underlying idea is that welfare state is accused of cultivating dependency.<sup>92</sup> In that sense, when the magazine argues that *LiceUlice* sellers are breaking the chains of dependency, they are directly contributing to the neoliberal discourse, that is oppressive in the first place. The magazine is doing an admirable job in including those who were previously excluded and marginalised, but they do not challenge the reasoning behind the exclusion. When they try to

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<sup>87</sup> "I pogrešna odluka je korak ka cilju," *Liceulice*, December 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Biljana Mladenović, "Kako se meri siromaštvo," *Liceulice*, 2013, 13.

<sup>89</sup> "Siromaštvo u Republici Srbiji," *Liceulice*, 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Ivan Tokin, "Dolče vita," *Liceulice*, 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Musović, "Liceulice: „rad, a ne prosjačenje“."

<sup>92</sup> Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 86.

explain the circumstances, the blame is usually placed on the individuals and their bad choices such as alcoholism, drugs abuse, gambling.<sup>93</sup> Bauman shows that such discourse works as if it is the fault of the excluded that they did nothing, or not enough, to escape exclusion.<sup>94</sup> *LiceUlice* then positions itself as a platform where these individuals had an opportunity to overcome these vices and start a new life. The magazine featured many such articles while closer attention to the paragraphs such as this,

“Goran had made a decision eight months ago, and since then he does not drink, which resulted in increased self-confidence and more energy, brought him more cheerful outlook upon the world and plans for the future action. The main motivation for the permanent abstinence, as medicine defines escaping alcoholism, is to sell *LiceUlice* again. Once again to be one of the best!”<sup>95</sup>

uncovers the way in which the magazine sees successful selling of the magazine and a strong work ethic as therapeutic. Supposedly, it just needs a decision. A similar theme was repeated numerous times with other vendors, emphasising the work as beneficial for their mental health.<sup>96</sup>

Another issue deriving from this one is that the efficacy of the sellers and their strategies were praised in almost every issue.<sup>97</sup> Vendors’ numbers of the sales were proudly repeated, and even comparisons by claiming that some of them are the best sellers on the street. It is incorporating the market logic and the competition between the vendors. Such approach towards its vendors is hardly in line with the articles that criticised the neoliberal transformation

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<sup>93</sup> For example: Dragana Nikoletić, “Svi Acini talenti,” *Liceulice*, 2014; Maja Nedelkovska, “Don Kihot koji prkosi vetrenjačama života,” *Liceulice*, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 107.

<sup>95</sup> Dragana Nikoletić, “Prestao sam da pijem da bih prodavao *Liceulice*,” *Liceulice*, December 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Dragana Nikoletić, “Prodajom magazina samog sebe pokrećem!,” *Liceulice*, June 2017.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example: Dragana Nikoletić, “Ona je Madona, srce puno ljubavi,” *Liceulice*, November 2010, 12.

and Serbian transition. However, it is not in contrast with, for example, the translated articles from other similar publications, in which the issue of the work ethic in completely Western terms is also present. An article entitled “My Personality and My Work Ethics are my Strongest Features”<sup>98</sup> praises a vendor who joined the magazine, worked hard, earned enough to buy a new camera, and ultimately abandoned using drugs and alcohol. Similar translations also emphasised the embarrassment that vendors feel when someone considers working for a magazine as begging.<sup>99</sup> As one of the local authors explained,

“by working in the street newspaper people experience a chance to help themselves, to break isolation they feel after being on the margins for years, because this means a legal job. It is not begging, and vendors are protected and have an opportunity to gain life and practical experiences and skills that they would not be able otherwise.”<sup>100</sup>

In articles like this one, vendors are seen as hard-working, brave and full-hearted.<sup>101</sup> However, once again, there was no coherent editorial policy as some articles, for example by a notable Serbian intellectual Ivan Čolović, offered more nuanced perspective on poverty. He eloquently described that poverty is often not related to not working hard, but as something that could happen to anyone due to various circumstances.<sup>102</sup>

## 6. 2 Homelessness and Social Activism

The problem of homelessness is widely addressed by the magazine and such texts are more nuanced than those about their vendors. The magazine has devoted an entire issue to discussing

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Ascot, “Moja ličnost i moja radna etika su sada moji glavni atributi,” *Liceulice*, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> Street News Service, “Da nije bilo uličnih novina, bio bih skitnica,” *Liceulice*, 2015.

<sup>100</sup> Nikoleta Kosovac, “Ulične novine kao pokretači korenitih promena,” *Liceulice*, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> “#Kampanjanadar našim prodavcima,” *Liceulice*, November 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Ivan Čolović, “Gladni starac iz Marinkove bare,” *Liceulice*, 2012.



homelessness, starting with a position that everyone could easily become a homeless. This is particularly important as homelessness is hidden in Serbia media. Furthermore, the magazine featured very nuanced perspective on homelessness in Serbia, arguing that contemporary model by the Serbian government assumes social-pathological approach and not addressing the structural causes of homelessness. Instead, the government's model blames individual behaviour. This criticism was written by a university professor, while the experts contributed to the entire issue.<sup>103</sup> The magazine also criticised the state institutions for the lack of support and even basic monitoring of the number of homeless people. Particular criticism was placed on the decreased social housing due to post-socialist privatisation, structural poverty and unemployment, while the authors demanded housing to be established as a basic civil right, the state institutions to offer social care and develop programmes for prevention of homelessness. Furthermore, one of the articles claimed that an archaic discourse on homelessness, which is patronising and passivising is still dominant in the Serbian society.<sup>104</sup> The issue also featured articles on individual stories of the homeless people, emphasising the feeling of injustice and powerlessness.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, by interviewing these people, the magazine brought attention to the homelessness never considered before in the Serbian media, presenting daily struggles, insecurity and dysfunctional state institutions.<sup>106</sup>

Such nuanced and informative texts about homelessness, but also about other issues such as refugee crisis or environmental crisis can be seen as a specific form of social activism. Furthermore, the magazine has also served as a platform for very left-leaning texts, criticising Serbian neoliberal transformation and transition from socialism to market capitalism. Such articles examined social consequences of the neoliberal transformation, particularly focusing

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<sup>103</sup> Prof. dr Aleksandar Jugović, "Uvod u beskućništvo," *Liceulice*, 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Milena Timotijević, "Srbija - (Ne)razumevanje beskućništva," *Liceulice*, 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Danilo Ćurčić, "Saša - beskućnik posle iseljenja neformalnog naselja Belvil," *Liceulice*, 2013.

<sup>106</sup> Marko Tomašević, "Biti beskućnik u Beogradu," *Liceulice*, 2013.

on the people who lost their jobs and security.<sup>107</sup> Some texts also criticised rising social inequalities, exploitative work relations and the inability of the people to escape the cycle of deprivation.<sup>108</sup> These texts were not rare, particularly after the financial crisis, while some of them even called for a new rethinking of the union organisations, and protests.<sup>109</sup>

However, it seems that the magazine did not have a coherent editorial politics according to the left-leaning views. For example, when the magazine addresses its readers to buy the issue, it is once again emphasising the role of the individuals and charity organisations to support them so that sellers “could bring change into their dark daily life”.<sup>110</sup> Other times they would publish an image of a manager from a famous company showing how he reads the magazine. The image would be subversive if the manager is not depicted in the expensive latest fashion suite in a typical power-pose. The way it is presented, however, shows that such position is highly admired. The magazine is in a precarious position, struggling financially they depend on the sales and donations from the companies. Regardless of its thought-provoking texts they sometimes publish, this is a charity model of a voluntary association, for which Harvey argues to be one of the main features of neoliberalism.<sup>111</sup>

### 6.3 Mental health

Mental health was widely discussed in the magazine, and one issue of the magazine was entirely devoted to it. As mental health problems still carry much of a taboo in the Serbian society, and many of the magazine’s vendors are having mental health problems, the work of the magazine

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<sup>107</sup> “Ko krade rad?!,” *Liceulice*, June 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Nemanja Pantović, “Priče nemih ljudi,” *Liceulice*, December 2017.

<sup>109</sup> Luka Matić, “There’ll be power in Union! Novi oblici radničke borbe za nova vremena,” *Liceulice*, June 2017; Jelena Lalatović, “Zbog njih mi se još nije zgadio moj grad,” *Liceulice*, September 2017.

<sup>110</sup> “Novi, četrdeseti broj magazina LICEULICE: Budućnost će ili biti zelena ili je neće biti,” *Liceulice*, November 2, 2017, <https://liceulice.wordpress.com/2017/11/02/novi-cetrdeseti-broj-magazina-liceulice-buducnost-ce-ili-biti-zelena-ili-je-nece-biti/>.

<sup>111</sup> See: Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 69.

in this field is particularly important. The magazine has engaged in discussing the problems of the people with mental health problems, closely cooperating with a society *Duša* (The Soul) which offers an inclusive platform for the patients of the mental health hospitals.<sup>112</sup> The magazine also frequently addressed the stigma that these people face, the discriminatory language commonly in use, and prejudices widespread in the society.<sup>113</sup>

Some of the articles published were written by vendors who struggle with mental health issues. Such texts are often personal, written in the first person, aiming to destigmatise the illness and their daily experiences.<sup>114</sup> The magazine also published their poetry,<sup>115</sup> and translations of the practical advice how to help people with depression.<sup>116</sup> In other articles, the focus was on discrimination and exclusion. The magazine estimated that at least 300 000 people in Serbia have mental illness, while the number is probably higher due to the stigma preventing people to search for help. In such atmosphere, people are often isolated, with families that try to hide their illness and are afraid of the state institutions. Due to prevailing stigma, the Mental Hospital in Belgrade has launched some separate counselling offices. Nevertheless, it is also revealed that the majority of people in Serbia take anti-depressive medications to cope with the social and economic situation. The magazine pointed that poverty and job insecurity is the main reason for increased stress and mental illness. They located the second reason in the lack of support from the state institution and broader society.<sup>117</sup> In a very nuanced analysis in an interview with a psychologist, they argued that class and gender dimension were crucial in mental health policies that were aimed for exploitation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Milica Stefanović, "Na treći pogled," *Liceulice*, 2014.

<sup>113</sup> Dina Vojinović, "Stigma - Zaostalost moderne zajednice," *Liceulice*, November 2010.

<sup>114</sup> Vladimir Janković, "Izdnevnik jednog prodavca," *Liceulice*, July 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Nikola Repec, "Živi život," *Liceulice*, December 2016.

<sup>116</sup> Bet Mekol, "Šta možete da učinite kada je neko koga volite u depresiji?," *Liceulice*, December 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Jovana Netković, "Život sa psihičkom bolešću," *Liceulice*, May 2018.

<sup>118</sup> Bojan Marjanović, "Tolerisati i razumeti nije dovoljno, moramo poznavati jedni druge - Intervju sa Lidijom Vasiljević," *Liceulice*, May 2018.

Finally, the magazine proudly emphasised that they employ many people who are members of another NGOs that provide support to persons with mental health issues, with some of them travelling to London as a part of Hearing Voices method training for alternative approaches to the treatments in mental health. The magazine explained that this initiative is an encouragement for those who are on the margins of the society while acknowledging the need for further training for the experts in the field, particularly those working in the hospitals.<sup>119</sup> By analysing together these texts, the magazine's discourse regarding the mental health is progressive, aiming to destigmatise mental health assuming that the readers are inadequately informed or prejudiced. They also advocate full social inclusion, arguing that tolerance is not enough. The magazine was able to offer more nuanced perspective than other media in Serbia as they not only relied on experts but on their own vendors that they meet and collaborate with daily. How that collaboration looks from the other side, will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>119</sup> Jovana Viculin, "Hearing voices - Ohrabrenje za skrajnute," *Liceulice*, May 2018.

## 7. Experiences on the street

Finally, in this chapter, I will turn to the vendors' experiences of working for the magazine. The issues explored here are somewhat different than in the previous chapter, as I was mostly interested in what the magazine means to the sellers, what strategies they employ in selling the magazine, what support they receive, and how such work reflect their lives. As explained in the ethical considerations, I have deliberately hidden the identities of my informants, their interviews are not directly referenced, and I have also attempted to generalise their answers for my analysis.

### 7.1 Relation to the magazine

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, texts in the magazine are often quite intellectual, with quality that often precedes traditional media. However, some of my informants confirmed that they also read the magazine. One of them said that they read every issue, learning a lot about social problems. In that particular case, the magazine is also framing the way in which that person thinks about their own social position. This particular informant said that the magazine shares his/her values, describing themselves as being *humanitarian*. Such important reflection shows how the magazine informs not only the outside readers but the vendors themselves. Furthermore, besides reading the magazine, that informant explained that he/she also follows book recommendations offered by the magazine. That person saved the money and proudly bought a recommended book. Besides, that informant insisted that he/she feels fulfilled by reading and working for the magazine.

Of course, not all informants were reading the magazine carefully, but some were proud that the interviews with them were published as well. Bourdieu's social capital is crucial here. Some vendors who are more educated and able to understand the magazine's articles were using them to promote the magazine. Others that I have interviewed admitted that they do not read

the magazine and cannot advertise the texts to the passers-by. For them, the texts are too complex, demonstrating an unequal relationship, forcing them to change the strategy of selling the magazine, as discussed further in this chapter.

Several issues mark the relationship between the vendors and the magazine. First, almost all informants praised the magazine model for giving them a sense of independence. For some, that was particularly important due to a problematic relationship with their families, while feeling that the magazine employees are honest in their desire to help them. One interviewee explained that he/she has received every support their desired, while that support was mentioned by others as well. The second feature that marks the relationship is a feeling of being part of a safe collective, emphasised as an important reason why the vendors decided to work for the magazine. They felt like a part of the community they could not find elsewhere due to their exclusion and marginality. As such, they felt protected, with the magazine providing them with a missing safety net.

Social capital here relates to the social relationships that these vendors are able to make with the magazine managers, other vendors, and buyers. As my interviews reveal, the ability of the vendors to engage with others heavily varied but being part of the community was emphasised by all as valuable. Being part of the group was particularly mentioned. Even wearing a vendor uniform provided by the magazine made my interviewees feel safe and part of something larger. Safety on the streets was mentioned several times, but my informants refused to provide many details. Yet, they explained that being mobile sellers allow them to avoid problems, or cross the street when they encounter problematic groups, something impossible if they had worked in a kiosk or on their own. Perhaps due to their previous experiences of learning how to avoid troubles while being marginalised and discriminated, or while living on the street, my informants explained that they only rarely had problems, for

example by being insulted by the onlookers. The only more extreme case was when one seller's beg with the magazines was stolen.

Yet, while interviewing vendors, the employment itself was the most important thing. The magazine has vendors who have worked for a long time in other jobs but lost them in the process of post-socialist transition. One vendor has worked for 15 years in sales, and once they lost the job, the National Employment Agency did not offer any programme for additional training, or any job opportunity. That person managed to obtain a small state pension for her previous work, so the magazine job comes as a supplement. That case proved repetitive with other informants, who sometimes manage to earn more than their very modest pensions. Furthermore, the sense of working seems to be more important than just the income.

Following on the previous discussion on the brutal Serbian transition from socialism to neoliberal capitalism, it is not surprising to learn that my informants explained that working for a magazine has recovered their self-respect and dignity. This was particularly the case for vendors who have suffered a period of unemployment. These people were usually described in the Serbian media as the *losers of transition*.<sup>120</sup> The harsh unemployment rate in Serbia increased the need for the work in the magazine for some of my participants. One informant explained that he/she was giving private English and German languages lessons, being very educated, but that instability of such work forced him/her to look elsewhere. Interestingly, that person insisted that working on the street as a magazine vendor is also very fulfilling as it increases the sense of being worthy. In that sense, recovering self-respect and finding some people who support them was mentioned as a key benefit by several informants. One of them

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<sup>120</sup> See, for example: "Gubitnici Tranzicije Čitavog Života," B92, March 13, 2011, [https://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2011&mm=03&dd=13&nav\\_id=498795](https://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyyy=2011&mm=03&dd=13&nav_id=498795); For an academic analysis of how this term is conceptualised in the popular culture, see: Vesna Trifunović, "Konceptualizacija gubitnika i dobitnika tranzicije u popularnoj kulturi," *Etnoantropološki problemi*, no. 1 (2009): 107–21.

was working for a magazine since being a child, finding support not offered by his parents. Fulfilling the day was mentioned by several interviewees, particularly if they are retired, or having a disability pension. One of them explained that those few hours help him/her not to stay at home and watch the television. In that context, mental health was particularly discussed, but it will be analysed in the following chapters.

Finally, regarding their relationship with the magazine and its managers, my informants usually did not mention any problem when explicitly asked. The only case mentioned was when an informant did not return half of the sales in order to pay the rent, but even that was solved in a manner that the magazine board understood the problem, so the vendor returned to work. Surprisingly, all interviewees talked about the magazine employees in high regard, as supportive and understanding. I was trying to establish a less formal interview environment to try to obtain information that would suggest that there were troubles in relationships but to no avail. I can only assume that a more anonymous survey would uncover some stories, but that is also doubtful. In an environment of high unemployment, discrimination based on gender, mental health, age, or social status, the magazine provides a safety net for my participants, for which all of them expressed gratitude.

## **7.2 Space, territory and strategies**

Work in the magazine is, indeed, seen as meaningful employment by all my informants. However, it is sometimes faced with the problems due to the model in which the vendors keep 50% of the magazine's sales. The main issue for the sellers is the inability to predict how many magazines they would be able to sell. One of them explained that sometimes they manage to sell eight or more magazines, which would be equal to minimum wage if they keep such record every day, but sometimes they sell nothing. Most of the magazines they sell during big events, so they have to keep the balance of sometimes being able to earn a significant amount, and sometimes, for example, half of what a person is working in a coffee shop earns. Yet, similarly



as in the coffee shops, buyers occasionally tip the vendors, allowing them to keep the change. On the other hand, some vendors explained that now and then they give the magazine below the price if the buyers do not have the full value. In those cases, they would earn less than promised 50% but would supplement it with the tips. However, other vendors explained to me that they do not like to be tipped, as it looks to them as if they are begging. This was particularly emphasised by one vendor who is homeless, and who sees tipping as an attack on dignity. These different experiences I have collected demonstrate that all informants would like to have a steady sale record, as it would allow them more planning with their income.

Space and the territory where they sell the magazine was emphasised as crucial by all informants. An informal agreement divides the territory of the vendors. They would consider one particular street or a square their own, thinking that people recognise them there, which increases their sales and where they feel more comfortable working. Some places in the city centre sellers consider to be *traditionally* their own, but a few of them walk around the city. However, despite that territorial divisions, my informants confirmed that they help and teach each other in the selling strategy, particularly in the beginning. More experienced vendors would explain how to approach the people, how to talk about the topics and be polite. In the most basic form, drawing on the group's social capital and the social interactions within the group provides valuable support particularly to those who are economically disempowered.

Strategies that the vendors sell vary, and the majority of them think hard about them. As mentioned earlier, some of them are reading the magazine and selecting exciting topics that passers might want to read. In that sense, vendors are active participants in the process. They usually target after-work hours when passers-by return from work, as those employed are more in position to buy the magazine. They target the main squares, the central streets, their cafes and shopping malls. On the other hand, younger vendors target younger buyers, often being in front of the university. They approach them more informally, using jokes and informal language

as a tool to increase the sale. However, as mental health of my informants varied, it is clear that some of them did not think actively about a strategy for selling. Some of them would sing to attract attention, but I cannot argue that it is a conscious tactic. Nevertheless, all explained that being friendly and pleasant to the passers-by was the primary tool. Collaboration between sellers was also emphasised in friendly exchanges when the vendors meet, with one informant describing that it gives him/her additional energy and motive.

As this is the case of the street magazines, vendors also adjust their strategies to the weather, which is often a problem not discussed in other street magazine contexts. Namely, my informants faced the extreme cold, as Serbia is often hit by quite extreme weather encompassing of freezing winters and scorching summers. Sellers employ different strategies how to deal with the cold, usually trying to keep moving in their area, to visit cafes or to travel for a few stops in the busses. Interestingly, all informants mentioned that passers-by felt compassionated during the cold weather, inquiring if they are cold. During those days, sellers would usually work 2 to 3 hours, as longer work risked them to being exposed to freezing.

Finally, some of my informants implicitly reflected on the destruction of social institutions, neoliberal transformation and the loss of trust of the public for the social institution as it affects the sales. Namely, that informant feels that the failure of the charity model and several scandals that erupted in the past with the unclear money spending decreases the sale of the magazine. Due to the marketisation of the social security, and even collecting the money via SMS messages for children to find health treatment abroad, people are uncertain which institutions are genuinely helping those in need. A vendor explains that he/she has to argue that the *LiceUlice* magazine is genuine, while is allowed to keep half of the profit, which is helping him/her directly. In that sense, a vendor is explaining that the magazine has to take a role of the failed state social security net to distrusting buyers.

### 7.3 Homelessness and the Magazine

The magazine also employs people who are homeless either temporarily or for a more extended period. I have interviewed a few such cases. Initially, these people were approached directly in the shelter by the magazine managers offering them work. In the previous chapters, I have reflected on the scarce literature that reflected the situation in the shelters, and poor conditions were confirmed in my interviews. As explained by one of my informants, the shelter is massively overcrowded, while the living conditions are “bad, bad, really bad.” Despite the efforts of the social workers there, that vendor explained that the shelter is understaffed, while at the same time being home to a variety of people with mental health problems, and returnees from prisons. In such conditions, as my informant explained, being able to leave the shelter during the day and sell the magazine is particularly rewarding and liberating. Furthermore, as working for the magazine is seen as trustworthy employment, that vendor enjoys more freedom to stay outside the shelter late, while also being allowed to watch films in cinemas for free where they sell the magazines. An economic capital, in Bourdieu’s terms, indeed leads to increased social and cultural capital in this case as well.

Reasons for joining the magazine by homeless people are various but not only financial. One of the vendors I have interviewed joined the magazine when he/she was underage, using the services of the shelter for children. Once again, they insisted that the reason behind joining the magazine was not purely financial, but due to the magazine’s values for justice and for being a form of a social organisation. Another person I have interviewed was in the shelter and not able to find any employment due to health issues. He/she was also approached by the magazine and has been working as a seller since the beginning of the project. His/her main motivation was the income, but also the stability of such employment and flexibility of the work hours. As that person is using the homeless shelter more permanently, he/she sees the magazine income as additional money that humanises his/her life.

For others who left the shelter and managed to rent a flat, money they make from selling the magazine is the only income and the only barrier from returning to homelessness. During the interviews, it became clear that these people have mastered not only sales but the ways to save the money and create small saving pots if the sales decrease. In all these cases, besides the money, the sense of dignity and self-respect was crucial. Even basic things such as being able to buy a coffee independently was mentioned as a significant motivation, particularly as that leads to the ability to socialise with other people outside the shelter. One informant explained that being able to buy own coffee instead of his/her friend buying it for him/her means the sense of pride. Also, while working on the street, just being asked how he/she feels is rewarding, while people also gift him/her different things such as gloves and hat.

Additional income from the selling, as one of my interviewees explained, helps the homeless to buy “more luxurious” items such as cigarettes. However, they also emphasised that the income serve them to buy healthier food than what they receive in the shelter and even basic clothing such as socks and underwear when the shelter is only able to provide such clothing for the other gender. Some vendors explained that working for the magazine allowed them to buy a mobile phone for the first time, to buy credit, and even a phone for their elderly parents. However, the magazine support goes further as in this case, when a vendor manages to rework his/her old house to be liveable, the magazine promised to donate the furniture. Importantly, that person sees this opportunity to have a home, move his/her elderly mother there, find a partner and start a family. The desire for stable family life was repeated several times by that vendor, being confident that the magazine work helps in that process, and in finding a partner.

By looking at the motivations behind the work in the magazine for these vendors, we can notice that Bauman’s notions of neoliberal work ethics are internalised. Not feeling comfortable to accept the tips as it could mean begging and that strong desire to work in order to recover the sense of dignity are the prime examples. For one to socialise outside their

marginalised social circles in the shelters, they have to work and be able to demonstrate the ability to earn money and consume the products bought by that money, in this case, coffee or cigarettes. However, also according to the neoliberal work ethics, cigarettes are seen as a luxurious item, one that has to be deserved by their hard work. My informants had to justify themselves as such *luxurious* item is not seen appropriate to their social status and poverty. Instead, they have to work harder and earn more.

## 7.4 Support and Mental Health

As I have already mentioned in the previous chapters, the magazine employs many people with mental health problems, while at the same time offering the support via different programmes. The magazine collaborates closely with several other NGOs that provide mental health support, one of them being *Duša* (The Soul). That organisation offers support to the users of psychiatric institutions and their families, while several of its members work as the magazine vendors. Some of these people, besides their mental health problems, also have caring responsibilities, therefore making their financial situation even worse. Furthermore, people with mental health problems are probably one of the most discriminated groups in Serbia, facing daily problems to access their basic rights.<sup>121</sup> In that sense, it seems that for some of the vendors selling the magazine is the only way in which they see themselves “as useful” and are able to work.

Some of my informants were ready to talk about their time in the mental hospitals and their problems. For some of them, the daily routine offered by the magazine is very valuable, emphasising that they come to the magazine offices to pick up the magazines, later to leave the money, but also to meet and socialise with other people. Being social was particularly

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example: Ivona Milacic Vidojevic et al., “Internalized Stigma among People with Mental Illness in Serbia and the Psychometric Properties of the Ismi Scale,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, June 1, 2014; and: Ivona Milačić Vidojević, Nada Dragojević, and Oliver Tošković, “Experienced and Anticipated Discrimination among People with Major Depressive Disorder in Serbia,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 61, no. 7 (November 2015): 638–44.

mentioned, either with other vendors or for the meetings with psychologists that the magazine offers daily. Such mental health support offered by the magazine was also mentioned as valuable by the interviewees. The level of that support, however, depends on the individual motives of the sellers to ask for help. Furthermore, it seems that less shy sellers ask for help and talk with a therapist more.

One particular problem, albeit beyond the scope of this work, is the issue of the persons whose work capacity was taken away by the Serbian courts. Discrimination that these people face, often with mental health problems, was also brought before the international courts. In the Serbian case, when one's right to work capacity was officially denied, that person practically becomes a non-citizen not only unable to work, but to inherit properties, have a bank account, a sim card, or any other necessary things in daily life.<sup>122</sup> *LiceUlice* employs some of these people, and as one of them said, it gives them hope and strength through the day. Such stance was repeated by an informant with mental health problems, explaining that due to work in the magazine he is able to get out of his/her bed and go out to socialise with people. These people explained to me their troubles, problematic relationships with their families, and harsh living conditions, and yet the importance of work was mentioned by all. Furthermore, for some of them, the very fact that they worked seems to be more important than the money they earn particularly as some of my informants followed heavy medication therapies of their mental hospitals.

All informants mentioned the desire and love for communication with other people as important and rewarding part of the job. Escaping isolation of being discriminated and

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<sup>122</sup> Dragana Ćirić Milovanović and Lea Šimoković, "Poslovna sposobnost kao osnovno ljudsko pravo: Vodič kroz domaću praksu i moguće alternative starateljstvu" (Belgrade: Inicijativa za prava osoba sa mentalnim invaliditetom MDRI-S, August 2012); The magazine has also written about this, explaining the nuances of the law and how it is implemented with catastrophic consequences for the targeted persons. Tijana Dazdarević, "Imam problem, ali imam i dostojanstvo," *Liceulice*, June 2017.

marginalised in the past was beneath all their answers. People who had mental health problems in the past, also mentioned that the magazine work helped them therapeutically to communicate more with other people. Since mental health is still a taboo in Serbia, with mental problems carrying a significant stigma, approaching unknown people and talking to them in order to sell the magazine creates a situation in which these vendors are accepted, and not shunned away. One of my informants explained that being listened to by buyers offers a particular satisfaction in that context. He/her also mentioned that working for the magazine provides crucial stability for his/her mental health.

My informants confirmed support mentioned by the magazine managers in the previous chapters. They also mentioned various courses offered by the magazine as valuable. In some cases, the magazine helped the vendors finish the courses offered by other institutions, providing them with the support they had not received elsewhere. One young interviewee emphasised that the magazine offers more support than his/her troubled family. While his/her family often restrains his/her talents and desires, the magazine helped him/her finish a photography course, after which he/she had several exhibitions. Furthermore, that person is very active in other magazine activities, organising a charity party for other vendors, while the magazine supports his/her desire to start his/her own social enterprise, which would work with women in shelters. Other vendors also mentioned mental health support they receive, or even additional financial support as the magazine also helps its vendors by buying them items or clothing they ask for their hobbies, for example by buying them a pair of joggers for running.

Finally, while working on the street vendors usually listen to the variety of people, being accessible to strangers and sometimes to other vulnerable populations. My informants often mentioned anecdotal stories in which strangers talked about their problems, gave them “weird” advice, or just asked for directions. In that sense, already vulnerable and marginalised people are being in touch with problems that other people face, something that is often invisible to the

general population. At the same time, as my informants claimed that they felt empowered by working for the magazine, they are gaining specific insights that should be listened to not only by the magazine itself but by other social institutions.



## 8. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have examined several research questions deriving from the analysis of the street magazine *LiceUlice*, and interviews with the magazine employees and street vendors. These questions focused on the relationship between the magazine and the state institutions; the magazine's support to the vendors; the magazine's writing on the issues such as homelessness, poverty, and mental health, and how it relates to their views on social intervention, inclusion, the role of the state, and the strategies; and the experiences of the vendors on the street. The overarching issue is how all these correlates with the post-socialist transformation of Serbian society.

Serbian society is one of the poorest in Europe, with the highest level of social stratification and the ever-rising gap between the rich and the poor. Overwhelming poverty augments other social issues such as discrimination, stigmatisation, marginalisation, and isolation of certain groups. Furthermore, with Serbian post-socialist transformation from socialism to market capitalism, the state institutions have collapsed, while safety-net institutions such as shelters for the homeless are overcrowded, underfunded and understaffed. At the same time, the state bureaucracy is not reformed, being inefficient and often creating problems for the users. In such situation, the street magazine *LiceUlice* is going beyond its role of informing or even just offering valuable employment for its vendors. Instead, it takes the role of the safety net and the state institutions.

The interviews with the magazine employees uncover troubling situation with the state institutions and the collapse of the safety net. High unemployment coupled with stigmatisation of the poor, homeless, people with disabilities and mental health issues increase the importance of their initiative, as they offer not only employment but also daily support to its vendors. Such support often goes beyond a basic selling training, taking the role of the missing state

institutions particularly regarding various training for job search and mental health support. Analysed interviews demonstrate that the magazine employees have very nuanced positions on various social problems, holding left-leaning views, but also growing frustration with the collapsing institutions.

The articles published in the magazine often lack coherent editorial policies. Texts on the vendors who work with the magazine are simplistic but completely immersed in neoliberal work ethic discourse. This issue was analysed via the lenses offered by David Harvey on neoliberalism and Zygmunt Bauman's insights into how the work ethic was imagined. The magazine regularly features articles on hard-working vendors who are escaping poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, and drugs on their own merit, thanks to the opportunity brought by the magazine employment. In such articles, the neoliberal economy was assumed as normal, while the vendors' subjectivities are constructed in the discourse of free market, hard work, and supposed equal chances. Implicitly, those who do not fit the neoliberal work ethics are vilified.

On the other hand, many articles in the magazine, written by notable left-leaning intellectuals are offering more nuanced perspective on poverty, homelessness and mental health. Considering that these topics are hidden in the Serbian mainstream media, the magazine *LiceUlice* is one of very few where these issues are tackled. Furthermore, many of the analysed texts offer very subversive stances, not only regarding political economy but in demystifying homelessness and mental health, for example. Still, the magazine depends on the monetary donations from companies that toy with social entrepreneurship, which limits the critique of marketisation and privatisation, and subsequent exploration how it affected homelessness and mental health in the first place.

Finally, this thesis has explored experiences of the vendors on the street. By interviewing a dozen of sellers, I have observed how all interviewees valued the magazine employment, and the opportunity to escape marginalisation and isolation. Furthermore,

escaping the isolation of very limited social interactions in the homeless shelters or social interactions limited to the close relatives they care for, proved to be more valuable than the income brought by the magazine sales. In a society where mental health is stigmatised, and the state institutions are in a poor condition, acceptance of the magazine employees and fellow vendors was explained as life-saving by my informants. Furthermore, selling the magazine in the street creates a social situation in which these vendors are not shunned away, but listened to and accepted. Such instances were mentioned as particularly therapeutic, offering stability for one's mental health.

The position of the vendors in relation to the magazine employees and other sellers was observed within the notions of social capital as offered by Pierre Bourdieu. Vendors are, indeed, depending on the magazine employees and the magazine buyers who are more affluent, but the importance of the social capital that the magazine employment brings was demonstrated in the feeling of belonging to a community of vendors. Marginalized and discriminated in other situations, vendors draw on social and cultural capital of the group for advice and safety in a very general sense. Seen as the *losers of transition* in the dominant media, informants emphasised recovering self-respect and finding some people who support them was mentioned. Finally, through numerous programmes offered by the magazine, they gained training, skills, and more importantly support to pursue various interests not necessarily related to employment. All these, in Bourdieu's terms, help vendors' cultural capital, not only with skills but with possession of a network of acquaintances where they are recognised and appreciated.

Beyond prior research questions, this research has demonstrated the value of the street newspaper and the ensuing initiatives and supports offered to the marginalised people in a situation of the collapse of the welfare state and safety nets, with high unemployment rate, rising gap between the rich and poor, while the homeless shelter is in appalling condition, bureaucratic procedures burdensome and often real obstacles for those unable to fight them.

The case of *LiceUlice*, a street magazine that goes beyond its original mission to inform about social problems and employ discriminated people, shows how such initiative can ameliorate the effects of neoliberal transformation, at least on a small-scale level. It illuminates the space for subversive action but also magnifies the need for proper social programmes offered by the state, municipalities and cities, instead of relying on charities. Future research should examine how the magazine buyers and managers of the companies that donate to the magazine interact with the vendors and explore impacts of the magazine articles on its audience. Such inquiry would offer insights into the constructions of neoliberal subjectivities on the side of those who are *succeeding* in Serbian post-socialist transformation, once they are faced with the realities of deprivation and discrimination.

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