



Article

Reflexivity and Structural Positions: The Effects of Generation, Gender and Education

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Abstract: This article examines how reflexivity, as understood by Margaret Archer, is affected by the structural settings in the context of morphogenetic social and cultural transformations. It draws on the Slovenian national case as an example of swift structural and cultural shifts towards late modernity. For that purpose, we apply a new measurement tool developed through our previous research, which upgrades Archer's existing ICONI model by distinguishing between the intensity and the concurrent practicing of the reflexivity modes within the inner dialogue. Based on a general national sample, we confirm not only the reflexivity changes from the older to the younger generations but also the role of education and gender in reflexivity levels and modes. We refer to the problem of deprivation and the importance of linking fractured reflexivity to the challenges, women are facing nowadays. Thus, the article confirms some of the critics of Archer's work, demonstrating—despite significant individual differences—the clear impact of the individual's background and her/his position in the social structure.

Keywords: reflexivity; Margaret Archer; structure; Slovenia; morphogenetic transformation

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide an empirical observation on how individuals' reflexivity is affected by their positions in the social structure. Studying reflexivity on a general population in a detailed national case for the first time provides us with an opportunity to compare the reflexivity of individuals belonging to various social categories with each other and to place the individuals' reflexivity in the context of macro-level structural and cultural transformations.

Reflexivity as a concept is far from novel, although it has become widely popular in academia only in recent decades. The empirical considerations of the concept, however, are quite an innovative scholarly endeavour. It has been initiated by Margaret Archer's (2007, 2012) attempt to sociologically ground the concept in theoretical terms, recognising it as a process of inner dialogue changing over time, and differing among individuals as well. Archer argues that reflexivity is "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer 2007, p. 4).

As we are drawing on Archer's exploration of reflexivity, we lean on the philosophical tradition of critical realism, primarily related to the work of Roy Bhaskar. The most important premise of such thinking is that there is a "causally efficacious world" (Mingers et al. 2013, pp. 794–95), which exists independently of our constructions and knowledge. Critical realism advocates that the reality cannot be reduced only to empirical observations and measures as implied by classical positivism, while it also defends against constructivism conditioning the existence of the world with the human knowledge. It also recognises that our relation to the world is always resulting from evaluations ensuing from our

perceptual and theoretical lenses. It gives credence to epistemic relativity that knowledge should be considered through the lens of its local and historical dimension, but it advocates against judgmental relativity referring to the existence of equally valid views and opinions (Mingers et al. 2013).

On the basis of Bhaskar's critical realism, Archer rejects the "elision of structure with agency" (Archer 1988, 2013, p. 6) and considers human persons and society as two emergent entities, which cannot directly determine each other. In that regard, she draws a sharp line between her dualism and Giddens' structuration theory (1984), and the extended reflexivity further elaborated by Beck (1992). She rejects the conflation between structure and agency, as well as the understanding of reflexivity as a mere observation and monitoring of the continuing flow of activities and structural settings. Instead, Archer sees reflexivity as enabling the individuals to adopt certain "stances" towards society, which constitute the micro-macro link and produce the "active agent". In that sense, reflexivity is a mediator between structure and agency (Archer 2003, 2007). Being a part of the inner dialogue, reflexivity is seen as an emergent property of individuals, which can activate the causal powers of structures and allows individuals to deliberate on their future actions.

In terms of social theory, critical realism thus implies the division between structure and agency seeing both of them as emergent realities. They have their own powers or tendencies, which may be exercised all the time or only when triggered and not countervailed by an opposing mechanism (Mingers and Standing 2017). In terms of methodology, as it places itself beyond the positivist compared to the constructivist divisions, it implies methodological triangulation combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009, p. 15). This has been demonstrated by Archer herself: By using a qualitative approach, she has recognised different modes of reflexivity, which preceded the quantitative tool ICONI, enabling her to identify consistent practitioners of each mode (Archer 2007, 2012).

However, despite these theoretical and methodological orientations, we can notice a significant gap in the empirical research on reflexivity, which may also affect the theoretical conclusions. A clear limitation of the research adapting Archer's work is that it has been typically based on the studies of specific populations, for example observing particular groups of students (Porpora and Shumar 2010; Archer 2012; Mills 2016; Kahn et al. 2017; Golob 2017; Golob and Makarovič 2018), or local authorities in particular regions (Sackmann et al. 2015). Archer's theory of reflexivity clearly entails the possibility of identifying and explaining the divergence of life journeys of individuals with similar social circumstances. Our research, however, intends to take a step further to elucidate how different positions of individuals in social structure might affect their reflexivity. It thus provides a clearer empirical insight in the relationships between reflexivity and social inequality, as well as between reflexivity and macro-level social and semantic transformations.

This gap has been well noticed by the latest concerns on the matter. Several authors have critically pondered Archer's only partial acknowledgement of the social structure and/or over-emphasising reflexivity on the account of the eliding agency with reflexivity (Akram and Hogan 2015, p. 606), thus minimising the role of social origins, family socialization, processes of internalization of exteriority, and the persistence of social reproduction (Caetano 2015, p. 1). Similar concerns regarding the neglected role of the structural settings in one's reflexive deliberation can also be derived from the contributions of a broad variety of other theorists and empirical researchers (Mutch 2004; Dyke et al. 2012; Farrugia and Woodman 2015; Mouzelis 2007; Sayer 2010; Atkinson 2010; Porpora and Shumar 2010).

Our own research, presented in this article, addresses this gap—being the first one to empirically observe reflexivity levels and modes in a sample representing a general national population. We are thus able to assess for the first time in a systematic way how reflexivity can be linked to generations, gender and education—in the overall structural and cultural context.

For this purpose, we, firstly, provide a brief review of the reflexivity modes, connect them to the structural and semantic transformations, as well as to the differential positions of individuals in the social structure. We derive this perspective from Archer's categorization of the reflexivity modes and her understanding of morphogenetic cycles.

Secondly, we present our methodological perspective, together with our quantitative methodological tool intended to assess reflexivity levels and modes through survey sampling. The tool has already been developed within our previous qualitative (Golob 2017) and quantitative research (Golob and Makarovič 2018, 2019). The quantitative methodological tool is based on the broader methodological framework ensuing from the existing theory and research and, in particular, from our previous in-depth biographical interviews (Golob 2017; Golob and Makarovič 2019) serving as an inspiration to advance the key questions of our present study.

Thirdly, we place reflexivity and its modes in the context of the Slovenian national case. Within this framework, we hypothesize whether structural and semantic transformations at the macro level and the individuals' positions in the social structure in terms of generation, gender and education have actually affected their reflexivity levels and modes and, particularly, through which mechanisms has taken place.

Finally, we review, interpret and discuss the results obtained from a national representative sample of the Slovenian population. This allows us to observe a certain interplay between structural conditioning, social interaction, and reflexivity in a temporal perspective while arguing that structure always predates agency (cf. Archer 2012). Moreover, it enables us to observe the relationship between the individuals' structural positions and reflexivity, confronting the concept with the problems of social inequality and unequal opportunities. Our intention in this regard is not to produce any (positivistic) sweeping generalisations, superficial or deterministic conclusions. Instead, in line with critical realism, we understand the statistical relationships obtained through the path analysis merely as an indication of event causality elucidating sufficient but not necessary causes. It, however, enables us to venture into the causal mechanisms of the structural and cultural realities that may affect personal reflexivity in the historical context of the given society.

2. Reflexivity as a Mental Process in The Context of Structure, Semantics, and Inequality

Archer sees reflexivity and its modes as contextually dependent. Based on biographical interviews, she defines four different modes of reflexivity (Archer 2007): (a) Communicative reflexivity, which needs to be confirmed and completed by others before it leads to action, (b) autonomous reflexivity, which stems from instable initial context, (c) meta-reflexivity that critically evaluates previous inner dialogues, and is critical about effective action, (d) and fractured reflexivity, which cannot lead to purposeful courses of action and only intensifies personal distress and disorientation.

All these modes are being practiced in late modern society, though there is a certain connection between the modes and social change. Archer (2007) has argued that different time periods induce particular modes of reflexivity. Nowadays, the dominant mode is supposed to be meta-reflexive, because, "the old routine guidelines are no longer applicable and new ones cannot be forged because nascent morphogenesis is inhospitable to routinization" (Archer 2012, p. 64). This reflexivity mode implies a "driving ultimate concern, i.e., to go no further than insisting upon relative autonomy of the structural and the cultural domains" (Archer 2012, p. 13).

In order to understand the contemporary emergent relationship between society and the humans' agency, we follow Archer's idea of the morphogenetic cycle as an explanatory framework for such relations and as a toolkit for analysing the emergence of particular social formations, institutional structures and organisational forms (Archer 2012, p. 55). As she says, the context shapes the situation in terms of potential causal powers, which individuals need to activate. By drawing on the particular national case, we intend to empirically observe in what manner the structural-cultural context can influence reflexivity and its modes.

Archer says that the structural-cultural context affects reflexivity through the accessibility of resources (structural settings) and the prevalence of belief (semantic/cultural environment), in which agents find themselves. However, she has been criticised for neglecting to a certain extent the role of different embeddedness of individuals in a social environment. The main point of the critics has been whether people can perform any substantial routine, habitual behaviour based on a person's social

background (see [Akram and Hogan 2015](#)). This debate is also related to the dilemma of an explicit connection between the modes of reflexivity and social origins ([Caetano 2015](#)). We follow Archer's claim that causal social powers are dependent upon the existing human "project" ([Archer 2012](#), p. 64) but we would like to explore how agents confront common societal challenges while being differently positioned and having different tools available to them based on the different contexts of their socialisation processes. If they experience these challenges differently, does this apply to the differences among the generations as well as to the structural differences and the corresponding inequalities in terms of gender and education?

Moreover, besides the morphogenetic cycles of the society, one should also consider the morphogenetic cycles of each individual life-span that may also reflect her or his reflexivity. Reflexivity modes are not only changing due to the "context contributed by the socio-cultural structure" but also because of the transformations in the individual's personal concerns ([Archer 2003, 2015](#)), which are constantly reconfiguring through a self-referential inner dialogue. Based on critical realism, [Archer \(2003, p. 260\)](#) refers to the idea of the stratified human being evolving through the four strata to become an actor. In the life-course, the person evolves from a primary agency to corporate agency and then to an actor phase ([Archer 2003](#), p. 124). Personal concerns reflecting the individual's present "I" are changing through her/his interpretations of the past and the future self, depending much on the stage in the particular life course.

What we find particularly relevant for our research is what [Bernardi et al. \(2018, p. 3\)](#) call "the shadows of the past" and the "the shadows of the future". The first refer to the time-locked values, expertise and attitudes linked to the particular social environments, in which persons are located and that influence their process of decision-making and behaviour. The second are based on the uncertain expectations about the consequences of a given action. The generalised future orientation and expectations thus seem to be crucial in understanding individual action ([Hitlin and Johnson 2015](#)).

When elaborating life-course processes, [Bernardi et al. \(2018\)](#) show that through different life stages, individuals are seeking to sustain or develop the positive aspects of their physical and mental wellbeing over time. Their pursuit of these aspects is based on their individual attributes (psychical, biological and also social in terms of their structural embeddedness) and supra-individual attributes (macro-structural settings). While to a large extent, these processes are spontaneous and unconscious, actors are making their choices also in relation to their agential potentials (based on their reflexivity). We can therefore speak about an interplay between the social change and individual's change. This leads us to our central issue, namely how one's reflexivity levels and modes are, on the one hand linked to one's personal life course and, on the other hand, one's positions in the changing social structures.

3. Methodology

The main purpose of this paper is not to advance the methodological aspects of reflexivity research. Therefore, our major research interest here is not in the details of realist methodology but in the results: Leading towards the identification of the *causal mechanisms* through which macro-level structures and semantics may affect the reflexivity of different social categories in the Slovenian national case. Based on the critical realist stratification between the real, actual and empirical domain of reality, the empirical part of our research can only deal with aspects that can be observed and recorded, i.e., the empirical domain, which is only a subset of the other two.

This description of the methodology is meant to allow full replicability of our survey and to place it in the context of our broader research on reflexivity in the case of Slovenia. As an isolated, stand-alone case, the present paper might seem to be close to a positivist perspective since it applies a survey style questionnaire and statistical methods. However, when placed in the broader context of our research, it is a contribution to the methodological triangulation necessary for critical realism.

Admittedly, there is no precise set of methods strictly prescribed within critical realism. Due to its ontological and epistemological grounds, the need for triangulation is beyond question. As argued already by [Zachariadis et al. \(2010\)](#), [Mingers \(2006\)](#), [Pratschke \(2003\)](#), the application of statistical

methods is thus not in contrast with the search for the real causation (in [Mingers and Standing 2017](#), p. 182; [Wynn and Williams 2012](#), p. 796). Testing statistical hypothesis at the empirical level may be an important step leading to the retrodiction regarding the event causality at the level of the actual. As argued, this form of causality is “never determinate but always multiple and contingent” ([Mingers and Standing 2017](#), p. 179).

In this paper, we are providing a quantitative aspect of this broader research to obtain an indirect detection of the intransitive dimensions of social structures and their causal mechanisms operating independently of actors’ subjective interpretations. (cf. [Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009](#); [Wynn and Williams 2012](#)). The causal powers of social structures may be exercised when triggered and when not overrun by countervailing mechanisms.

The empirical hypotheses formulated in the empirical section of this paper are intended as the orientations needed for the inferential statistical tests. In the context of critical realism, however, their confirmations should not be seen as deterministic generalizations but only as referring to the empirical domain. They are meant as a part of a broader empirical *corroboration* intended to contribute to the identification of the demi-regularities in the causal mechanisms between individuals’ structural positions and their reflexivity ([Wynn and Williams 2012](#)). Our empirical hypotheses should thus not be confused with the explanatory hypothesising the real causal mechanisms. They are just a cornerstone positioned on a longer path towards a more plausible identification of such mechanisms. Consequently, the present research should be seen as based on previous studies involving methodological and theoretical triangulation. It is a part of our broader abduction process, and it is supposed to continue—with in-depth qualitative insights and longitudinal research in the long run.

To put it more explicitly in terms of critical realism, the goal of our broader research is to identify certain causal mechanisms in social structure affecting individuals’ reflexivity levels and modes. This means to discover whether and how the specific properties and powers of individual’s position in social structure (manifested through a certain demographic feature, i.e., gender, education, generation/age), while interacting with the macro-level events in terms of morphogenetic cycles, contribute to higher/lower reflexivity levels and modes of individuals as generative mechanisms.

3.1. Measurement Tool

The reflexivity measurement tool that we are applying has already been carefully developed and tested in terms of validity and reliability through our previous qualitative ([Golob](#)) and quantitative ([Golob and Makarovič 2018](#)) research. For the purposes of this paper we will only summarise it briefly in this section.

The original Archer’s quantitative tool ICONI, consists of 13 items. The autonomous, meta, and communicative modes of reflexivity are measured with three items each, whereas fractured reflexivity is measured with four items (detailed description in [Archer 2007](#)). Since there have been doubts about the validity ([Meriton 2016](#)) and internal reliability ([Dyke et al. 2012](#)) of the index, we upgraded the measurement tool.

We applied the exploratory-sequential model, in which qualitative research precedes the quantitative one, thus considering the limitations of deductive quantitative research.

Our research tool in the questionnaire applied for the purposes of this research have thus been developed and tested through the following stages:

- a series of interviews with the Slovenian students (presented in [Golob 2017](#)) as a qualitative approach to develop and test the validity of our subsequent quantitative instrument to measure reflexivity;
- a pilot application of the measurement tool on a convenience sample of Slovenian students;
- a pilot application of the reflexivity tool in a survey on the mass media (administered on-line on a convenience sample) within the project *Innovative Approaches of Encouraging Responsible and Pluralist Media in Slovenia*;

- an application of the tool on the students from Slovenia (administered on-line on a representative sample of the Slovenian students engaged in the Erasmus students' mobility and convenience samples of other students from Slovenia, Lebanon, and the USA) (presented in [Golob and Makarovič 2018](#)).

Our reflexivity measurement tool consists of nine statements to which the respondents can reply on the Likert scales ranging from zero (never) to four (all the time). Five of them are taken from the Internal Conversation Indicator (ICONI) ([Archer 2007](#)) upgraded by [Porpora and Shumar \(2010, p. 212\)](#), asking “how often do you”:

- plan your own future;
- rehearse what you would say in an important conversation;
- imagine the best and worst consequences of a major decision;
- review a conversation that ended badly;
- clarify thoughts about some issue, person or problem.

These five statements have proven to be practical in obtaining reflexivity levels. In the procedure presented in our previous work ([Golob and Makarovič 2018](#)), we first apply these five items, as suggested by Porpora and Shumar, to calculate the reflexivity levels:

$$R = r_1 + r_2 + r_3 + r_4 + r_5 \quad (1)$$

where the values from r_1 to r_5 indicate the answers to each of the reflexivity items on the Likert scales ranging from zero (never) to four (all the time) and R indicates the reflexivity level, which is an index ranging from zero (no reflexivity) to 20 (maximum reflexivity).

Then, we use the four statements listed in Table 1 (second column) to determine each of the reflexivity modes. We should strictly distinguish between the Likert scores (L) for the statements from the questionnaire listed in Table 1 and the actual scores for the corresponding reflexivity modes (M). For instance, individuals can take decisions with or without the full agreement of others, but neither of these necessarily means such decisions are linked to reflexivity. Decisions may arise from impulses or traditional habits, and not reflexivity. Consequently, the frequencies of behaviours listed in Table 1 should only be seen as indicators of different reflexivity modes when combined with the levels of reflexivity (our R reflexivity level index). For example, a person cannot be meta-reflexive without being reflexive at all. In contrast, the Likert scores attained from the question dealing with meta-reflexivity would multiply with the reflexivity levels: For example, if a person indicates a certain meta orientation (L_{met}) higher than zero, this orientation will multiply with her/his overall reflexivity level (R): Thus, generating the actual score for a given reflexivity mode (M_{met}).

Unlike that of [Porpora and Shumar \(2010\)](#), our measurement instruments do not make an arbitrary binary opposition between the reflexive and the non-reflexive, since we are dealing with Likert scales, not binary variables. We thus do not see people as divided between reflexive and non-reflexive but as being more and less reflexive. In addition, when compared to the original ICONI, our instrument enables us to distinguish between the intensity in terms of the reflexivity level and the concurrent practicing of the reflexivity modes within an inner dialogue, whose conflation has been problematised in previous research ([Dyke et al. 2012](#); [Meriton 2016](#)).

Table 1. Statements indicating different reflexivity modes and the formulas for their calculation ¹.

Reflexivity Mode	Mode of Reflexivity Indicator: Five-Level Likert Scale Each Transformed into Scores from Zero (Never) to Four (All the Time): During the Last Year, How often Did You ...	Score based on the Likert Scale (L) and Its Threshold	Formula for the Calculation of the Reflexivity Mode (M)	Threshold for the Reflexivity Mode (M)
Communicative	Make important decisions with full agreement and support of the people close to you only.	$0 \leq L_{com} \leq 4$	$M_{com} = L_{com} \times R$	$0 \leq M_{com} \leq 80$
Autonomous	Make important decisions based on your own best judgement regardless of what others think or say.	$0 \leq L_{aut} \leq 4$	$M_{aut} = L_{aut} \times R$	$0 \leq M_{aut} \leq 80$
Meta	Carefully consider the key priorities of your life and why you are doing what you are doing.	$0 \leq L_{met} \leq 4$	$M_{met} = L_{met} \times R$	$0 \leq M_{met} \leq 80$
Fractured	Feel lost and did not know at all what to do because of the things happening around you.	$0 \leq L_{fra} \leq 4$	$M_{fra} = L_{fra} \times R$	$0 \leq M_{fra} \leq 80$

¹ Adapted from: (Golob and Makarovič 2018).

3.2. Sampling and Survey Administration

The survey sample used in our research has been drawn from the electronic version of the Slovenian national level phonebook based on random sampling, stratified in terms of ten Slovenian statistical regions to provide proper regional representation. Eighty per cent of the sample has been drawn from the list of mobile phone users, and 20 per cent from the list of fixed-line phone users. The survey was conducted under the authors' supervision on 5–8 March 2018 using the Computer Aided Telephone Interviews (CATI), by trained interviewers, coordinated by Parsifal SC, LLC, a spin-off company of the School of Advanced Social Studies, Slovenia, specialised in quantitative and qualitative public opinion polls and market research. The obtained national representative sample consists of 715 adults (a significantly larger and broader sample than for previous reflexivity research).

To provide consistency of the obtained sample with the demographic structure of the general population residing in Slovenia, sampling weights have been calculated, using the raking method (cf. Little 1993). Based on this, the consistency of the sample with the population has been provided in terms of gender, education, settlement type, and age, using the Register-based Census 2011 of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Statistical Office or the Republic of Slovenia 2011). The demographic structure of our sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic structure of the sample ².

Demography	Category	%
Gender	Male	50.0
	Female	50.0
Age (mean = 49.9; std. dev. = 16.7)	18–34	22.3
	35–54	38.0
	55–	39.8
Education	Primary or less	16.8
	Vocational	24.2
	Secondary	35.6
	Tertiary	23.4

² Statistical analyses presented in this paper have been conducted using the Stata software (StataCorp 2015).

4. Tentative Mechanisms of How Structural and Semantic Transformations and Different Structural Positions Affect Personal Reflexivity: The Role of Generation, Gender and Education in the Case of Slovenia

To analyse in what terms reflexivity and its modes are related to social and cultural contexts, on the one hand, and the individual's life course on the other, we selected Slovenia as the national case. As a post-communist country, it has experienced a quick shift from a comparatively predictable social

environment, maintained through the communist rule, to the sudden exposure to the global neo-liberal pressures. Among the former communist countries, it is particularly interesting because of its good starting position at the beginning of the democratic and market reforms (Crowley and Stanojević 2011) and a comparatively successful transformation integrating it into a wider European environment.

In Figure 1, we provide the structural and cultural/semantic context in terms of morphogenetic cycles (cf. Archer 2012) of the recent Slovenian transformations. They should be seen as resulting from both the national specifics and from the global morphogenesis linked to digital capitalism (Carrigan 2019) and other global trends in terms of structures and semantics (Genov 2012, 2018; Robertson and Buhari-Gulmez 2018).

Morphogenetic cycle		Nation Building (1988–1992)	Marketisation (1992–2008)	Crisis (2008–2013)	Alternatives (2013–)
Initial conditions (T1)	Structural	One-party communist rule, relative openness to the West, economic crisis with hyper-inflation, civil society as opposition, isolated cases of political repression	Political system consolidated through grand coalitions and left-centre hegemony, cases of uncontrolled privatisation	The impact of global financial and economic crisis, high vulnerability of Slovenian economy	Economic recovery based on the strong export orientation, personalised political parties
	Cultural (semantics)	Legitimacy of the Yugoslav and the communist narratives lost	Broad support for Euro-Atlantic integrations	The lack of unifying national narratives	A search for ‘new faces’ in politics
Interactions (T2→T3)	Social	Negotiated transition, democratic opposition wins the first free elections, consensual nation-building: Declaring independence, withdrawal of the Yugoslav army, losing Yugoslav markets	Cautious market reforms, limited openness for the global markets, controversial privatisation, joining the EU and NATO, exposure to global neoliberal trends, left-centre hegemony challenged by the centre-right government	Re-establishment of the centre-left hegemony, failure of the major managerial privatisation attempts, austerity measures, ‘people’s uprisings’	Elections typically won by personality based political parties established just before the elections, increasing foreign direct investment following the failure of the managerial privatisations
	Socio-cultural (semantics)	High consensus in favour of Slovenian independence, separation from ‘the Balkans’, Western model as an ideal	Controversies regarding privatisation and foreign direct investment (‘national interest’), ‘cultural struggle’.	Increasing distrust in the political and economic institutions and elites, the rise of the narratives on corruption and social injustice	Searching for political, economic and social alternatives
Elaboration (T4) – becoming a new T1	Structural	Adoption of the new constitution, consolidation of democracy, Slovenia recognised as an independent state	Membership in the EU and NATO, euro currency adopted, presiding over the EU Council	Personalisation of politics, unstable political parties, and coalitions	(in progress: Cannot be determined yet)
	Cultural (semantics)	High levels of national pride, strong pro-EU orientation	Lack of consensus on the future goals after the Euro-Atlantic integration has been achieved	Widespread distrust in politics, anti-capitalist, anti-globalist orientations	(in progress: Cannot be determined yet)

Figure 1. Morphogenetic cycles of the Slovenian post-communist society.

Slovenia is a perfect environment to observe not only a quick shift, according to Archer (2012) towards more morphogenetic social structures but also how individuals placed on different positions in these structures are affected by these sudden changes: How people of different generations, gender and education may experience and respond both to emerging individual risks and to persisting structural constraints—in terms of developing different reflexivity levels and modes.

As mentioned above, in Archers’ view, the social context plays a certain role in contributing to the mode of reflexivity, and it is a trigger to a deliberated consideration of someone’s concerns and actions. Our agential powers evoke particular social emergent properties (i.e., enablements and constraints)

on which we can deliberate (Archer 2012). However, there are social and cultural contexts that can influence social action unconsciously or condition the imagination of individuals to deliberate on these contexts (Sayer 2010). Different resources play a crucial role in conditioning our social embeddedness, which affects one's concerns and agential abilities. This can result in the presence/absence of reflexive deliberation or its mode. Therefore, we examine the demographic data to elucidate the role of social structure in the reflexivity process and pave grounds for discussing its relation to reflexivity.

It should be emphasised that we are not suggesting any kind of structural determinism. As Elder is saying, "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder et al. 2003; Bernardi et al. 2018, p. 3). Reflexivity as a part of the individuals' agential properties is situational and bounded—if we borrow the terms from Evans' (2007, p. 93) understanding of agency. In that regard, it should be seen as 'influenced but not determined by environments'. Structural positions may affect reflexivity levels and modes but never determine them—these relationships should be observed as elective affinities, implying that certain structural positions tend to be more likely to imply higher or lower reflexivity levels (but never no reflexivity or full reflexivity) and a higher or lower presence of particular reflexivity modes. In addition, despite the similarities we are discussing below, one should always be aware that generation, gender or educational level are far from being homogeneous categories. Moreover, an enormous variety of crosscutting categories and sub-categories, even the individual varieties should not be ignored—they are just not explicitly observed in the present study.

4.1. Reflexivity and Generations

Since the young people are more likely than the rest to be preoccupied with defining their position in the social contexts, one may expect them to engage in more intensive internal dialogue and thus indicate higher reflexivity levels. Disagreements and conflicts between younger and older generations regarding values and lifestyles are nothing new. At the same time, the intensity levels of their internal dialogues can also be affected by the transformations in social structures demanding from individuals to reconsider their positions and roles in the social contexts. According to Archer social origins are not adequately preparing the new generation for the contemporary social challenges, which thus encourages higher levels of reflexivity among young people. However, her claim requires further empirical validation, which is one of our key concerns in this paper.

Changes of the structural and cultural setting brought forward by each of the successive morphogenetic cycles require rapid mental and behavioural adaptation to increasingly morphogenetic social and cultural dynamics. In Slovenia, modernisation is thus supposed to produce inter-generational differences in the reflexivity modes, since different generations are socialised and play the most central roles in different periods of time. While the first two post-communist cycles of Nation Building and Marketisation have been particularly marked by the Post-War Generation (prevailing at that time within the active population and in the leading occupational positions), their role has been mostly taken by Generation X in the periods of the Crisis and the search for Alternatives (see Table 3).

Generation Y is the first generation not to have experienced communist and Yugoslav society directly and has always been confronted with neoliberal market pressures. Challenges of completing education and entering labour markets have been accompanied by individualised risks and insecurity. Due to the erosion of traditional roles and the fast pace of social transformation, they are a social group being most severely influenced by contemporary risks (Beck 1992) and uncertainties (Ule 2008). While these factors may encourage reflexivity of the youth, there may also be opposite mechanisms within the global social morphogenesis. These may include the "digital distraction" in terms of being unable to cope with the "cultural abundance" provided by the internet. This could lead to blind following to the social media (with their potentially limitless but actually quite limited variety) or to the algorithms of commercial search engines (Archer 2017; Carrigan 2017). In fact, our own subsequent research on Slovenian youth shows that the excessive use of digital technology for leisure and social interaction has negative impact on being concerned about oneself and one's future goals (Golob and Makarovič 2019).

This can be seen as an example of two mutually countervailing hypothetical causal mechanisms, i.e., between the increased dynamics encouraging higher reflexivity levels and meta-reflexivity among the youth and, on the other hand, the impeding socio-technological effects of digital distraction. Our following empirical Hypotheses 1 and 2 are meant to lead to the understanding of the event causality that may help us towards further consideration of which mechanism prevails. This is how the empirical domain of reality will help us to identify the actually operative mechanisms (cf. [Mingers and Standing 2017](#)) within our subsequent research.

Table 3. Generations.

Generations	Morphogenetic Cycle	Nation Building	Marketisation	Crisis	Alternatives
Pre-war		Loosing leading positions, ¹ retiring	Retiring	Retired	Retired
Post-war		Assuming leading positions, holding most positions in the labour market	Especially those with lower education seriously affected by marketisation	Loosing leading positions, retiring	Retiring
X		Completing education, beginning to enter labour markets	More able to adapt to the market forces, secure jobs available for more educated, especially in the public sector	Assuming leading positions, dominating in the labour market	Holding leading positions
Y		/	Childhood	Completing education, entering labour markets, individualised risks and insecurity from the beginning	

To address these conflicting claims in empirical terms, we formulate the following empirical hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *Younger generations display higher levels of reflexivity than the older ones do.*

Hypothesis 2. *Younger generations are characterised by higher levels of meta-reflexivity and lower levels of communicative reflexivity.*

4.2. Reflexivity within Generations: The Role of Social Embeddness

While hypothesising differences between generations, we should not neglect differences within one generation as well. There may be various mechanisms that generate such differences. Therefore, our following empirical hypotheses (no. 3, 4, 5, 6) are intended to indicate sufficient causes to generate reflexivity differences. While testing these hypotheses, we are not making any claims about the necessity as there may be other causal mechanisms contributing to reflexivity yet to be revealed.

To start with youth, one can see that while younger generations are competing for the positions in the social structure and to become winners in that social game, they also depend much on their parents' positions. As [Beck \(1992\)](#) was saying, contemporary challenges and risks are unevenly distributed, which places individuals in an unequal position while attempting to perform any efficient actions. Trends of individualisation based on neoliberal market demands has “in-built internal contradictions” ([Honneth 2004](#)), which are producing tensions on the level of individuals and on the macro social scales (see [Genov 2014](#), p. 2). In Slovenia, various studies show ([Ule 2008](#); [Slovenian Youth 2013 2014](#)) that youth is facing changing structural challenges in different manners due to unequal social settings, including the parents' education, their place of living (i.e., urban, rural) and their formal and informal education opportunities.

¹ As “positions” in this context we understand occupational positions.

As Caetano (2015, p. 5) highlights, the question remains, to what extent does this lead to new social trajectories or just to the reproduction of the family's cultural and socio-economic circumstances. Based on our previous qualitative study concerning the role of mobility in reflexivity of Slovenian youth (Golob 2017), we have been able to detect that young people are exercising different modes of reflexivity and are doing this to a different extent. The students' narratives revealed that those involved in international study mobility are more equipped with resources enabling them to cope with structural changes and seem to be more able to distance themselves from prevailing historical and social memories. They are much more reflexive, not just in terms of observing themselves, but also in terms of planning and performing concrete actions in order to achieve their life goals. They seem to act more independently from their parents' views and rely less on their support. However, students' mobility is not just a matter of personal choice but also reflects their socio-economic status, as the majority of mobile students come from wealthier and more educated families (Bevc and Ogorevc 2013).

We find the differences within other generations, just as equally important. The inequalities in terms of the class position might have played a more significant role in the past (Beck 1992), but differences in income, education and gender may still be of great relevance. As Genov says, the technological, economic, political and cultural resources enabling efficient individual action in the current social situation, are generally scarce (Genov 2014, p. 2). To address these issues in terms of reflexivity of individuals, we consider education and gender to be the most important factors.

4.2.1. Education

To test the claim that individuals' reflexivity is significantly affected by their ascribed and achieved positions in the social structure, we also need to test the relationship between educational levels and reflexivity. Although the educational levels are often seen as individual achievements, they are also clearly linked to the individuals' social background, as indicated not only by the well-known existing theory and broader research (Bourdieu 1977) but also by the extensive studies specific for the Slovenian society. Flere and Lavrič (2005) demonstrate the persistence of significant impact of parents' social statuses to the achieved educational levels for the period from 1961 to 2002. More recent research has re-confirmed the impact of the parents' class to their children's educational performance (Ferjan et al. 2008). Even the decrease of this impact during the recent decades has been mostly a result of the almost universal secondary education and the enormous increase in enrolment in the tertiary education. Education is relevant both for placing individuals to certain positions within the social structure and for providing them with certain cultural features (cultural capital), equipping them to participate more decisively in the semantic aspects of the society. In addition, existing research indicates that education can be a good predictor of class position in Slovenia, in terms of the classical Goldthorpe's class schema. This research demonstrates the relative openness of the system during the post-communist times—with the higher vertical mobility than in Germany, Italy or Poland (Jereb and Ferjan 2008). Class positions, however, remain relevant since they still affect certain features, such as health (Farkas and Zafetel-Kragelj 2011).

Consequently, education is a major indicator of the unequal positioning within the social structure, clearly relevant for our analysis of the impact of structural inequalities on reflexivity. It may be a factor distinguishing between the structurally (and culturally/semantically) endowed individuals and the structurally (and culturally/semantically) deprived ones. The former may be more likely to respond to the growing (neoliberal, competitive, individualistic) structural risks through increasing their reflexivity levels and becoming more meta-reflexive. The latter may be more likely to develop fractured reflexivity or remain on lower reflexivity levels. Based on this tentative distinction, we formulate:

Hypothesis 3. *Reflexivity levels are higher among the more educated individuals.*

Hypothesis 4. *Reflexivity modes are affected by education.*

4.2.2. Gender

The impact of gender on reflexive capacities has already been illustrated in some previous studies (McNay 1999; Mitchell and Green 2002), showing in which ways reflexivity is becoming tightly knitted with social inequalities and pre-reflexive possibilities. Based on the interviews with working class young mothers, it has been argued that life-style choices are significantly bounded with socio-economic resources and opportunities (Mitchell and Green 2002; Adams 2006, p. 524). Despite the improved opportunities both in structural and cultural terms, women are still faced by a possible mismatch between the declared and expected gender equality and the actual choices that are available to them due to structural and cultural path dependencies.

We are inspired by the structural-semantics contradiction exemplified by gender differences (see Adkins 2003; McNay 1999), seeing women as “reflexivity losers”, often being denied the positions of “reflexive authority” (Adkins 2003; Adams 2006, p. 519). We argue that someone can be highly reflexive and able to recognise enablements or constraints of the social environment. However, there is no guarantee that this will end up in effective action. This is in line with the observations that the semantics offered by social environments has become contested and overlapping due to the regular circulation of images, messages, and ideas, enabled by the expansion of technology and communication. Individuals are constantly confronted with ambivalent meanings and images and are thus triggered to more actively respond to a social context. For example, in the prevailing semantics, women are expected to compete with men for all professional positions while at the same time still assuming a disproportional share of responsibility for child care and domestic labour. In that regard, we intend to elucidate whether women as a part of the general Slovenian population, are indeed triggered to express a higher level of reflexivity but are compelled to reduce their post-reflexive choices. It is not just a process of reflexivity that is important but also “what comes” after that moment of reflexive awareness (Adams 2006, p. 523). This is consistent with the argument that the reflexivity of women has been intensifying, but the remaining issue is, how this leads to post-reflexive choices (cf. Adams 2006) in terms of actual reflexive deliberations.

It has been shown that women in Slovenia are still playing a protagonist role in redistribution of the household chores, although both genders invest a lot in their professional life. Consequently, women perceive themselves to be more severely affected by the reconciliation of the job and family. It has been argued (Möller-Slawinski and Calmbach 2016, p. 14) that labour market conditions and the still-dominant role ascription serve as the strong counteraction against equal opportunities.

Accordingly, we argue that the lack of certain resources ensuing from particular structural embeddedness can influence reflexivity to become fractured in the manner of displaced or impeded modes (Archer 2012). However, this does not necessarily imply lower levels of reflexivity or non-reflexivity as stated elsewhere (Meriton 2016). On the contrary, contradictory contexts and expectations may provoke even higher levels of reflexivity.

Therefore, we intend to test:

Hypothesis 5. *Reflexivity levels are affected by gender.*

Hypothesis 6. *Women are more likely to experience fractured reflexivity than men do.*

5. Results and Interpretation

The distribution of reflexivity levels in the Slovenian national sample obtained through our survey presented in Figure 2 approximates quite closely to the standards of a normal distribution with a mean of 10.50, standard deviation of 4.22, skewness of 0.08, and kurtosis of 2.75. Normality can also be assumed for the distributions of the reflexivity modes. In statistical terms, obtaining a normal distribution for the general population is encouraging, at least as it enables the use of parametric statistics for further analysis. In addition, it is also—when we consider Hypothesis 1—consistent with

our previous research on the sample of Slovenian students: Their mean reflexivity level has thus been significantly higher, i.e., 13.2 (Golob and Makarovič 2018).

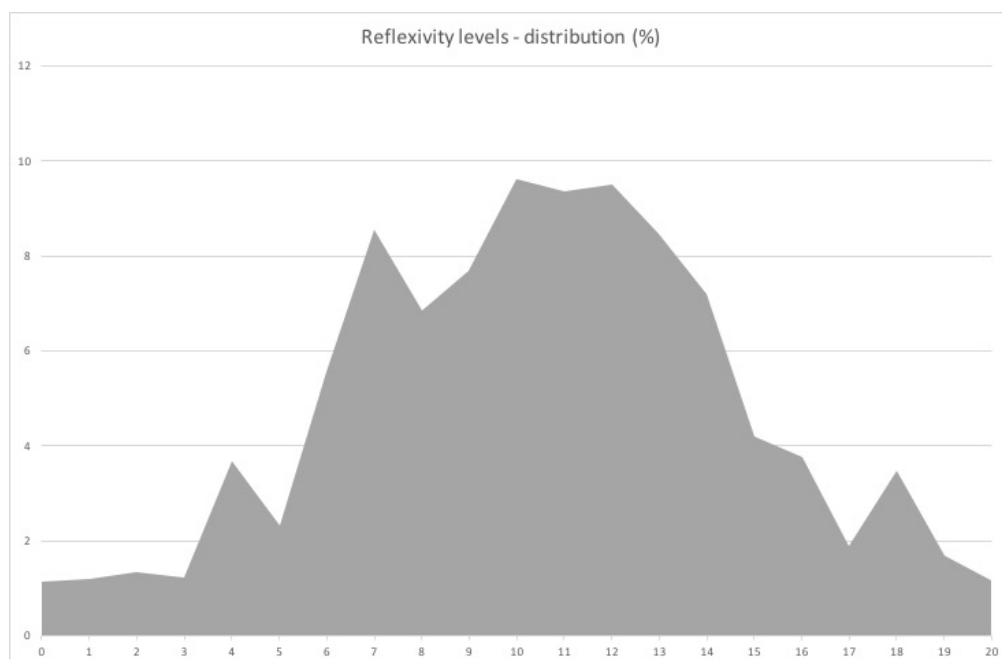


Figure 2. Distribution of the reflexivity levels.

5.1. Younger Generations Are More Reflexive and More Meta-Reflexive

The results indicate a negative relationship among the age and reflexivity levels, with the Pearson correlation coefficient equalling -0.243 (significance equals 0.000)—i.e., older people in Slovenia seem to show lower reflexivity levels than the younger. The intergenerational distribution of the reflexivity levels is consistent with Hypothesis 1: Younger generations indicate higher levels of reflexivity (see Figure 3).

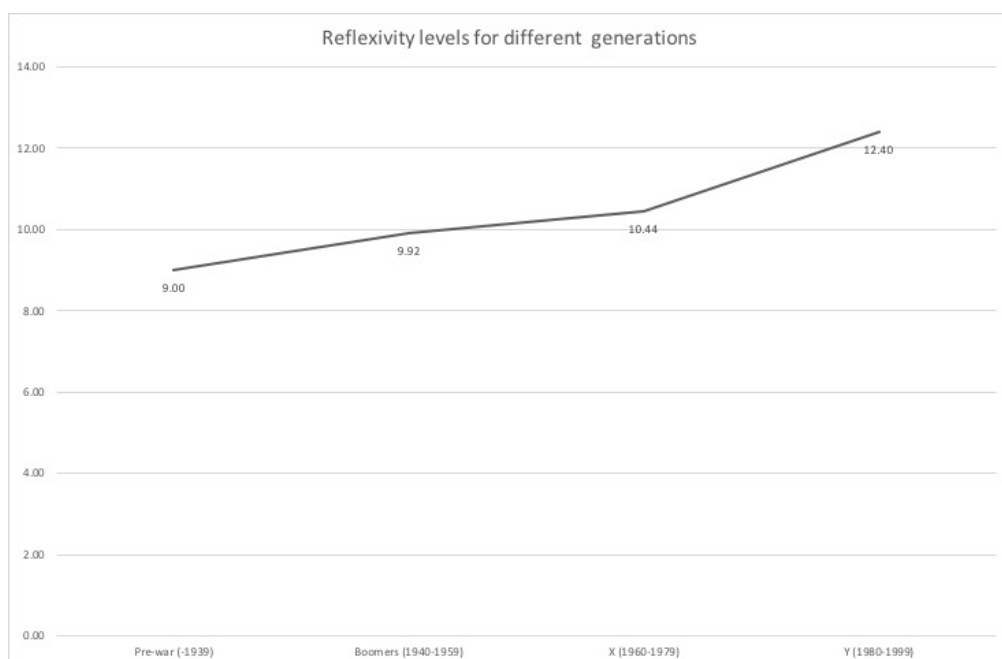


Figure 3. Reflexivity levels for different generations.

While considering the reflexivity modes, the combination of meta-reflexivity (with the mean value of 30.8) and autonomous reflexivity (29.8) prevail. The mean score for the communicative reflexivity level is 26.7 and 16.5 for the fractured reflexivity. The domination of meta and autonomous reflexivity is in line with the expectations based on Archer's theory for a country like Slovenia. As a society entering 'the second' modernity, comparatively high scores for meta-reflexivity are normal. However, despite being a part of the modernising core in the global terms, Slovenia does not belong to the group of the most advanced European countries in terms of human development, (post)modernisation, and globalisation. This explains why the mean levels of autonomous reflexivity are practically at the same level as the meta-reflexivity scores.

As indicated in Figure 4, all reflexivity modes are more intensive with the younger generations, most particularly with Generation Y, which is not surprising since the overall reflexivity levels are higher with younger generations.

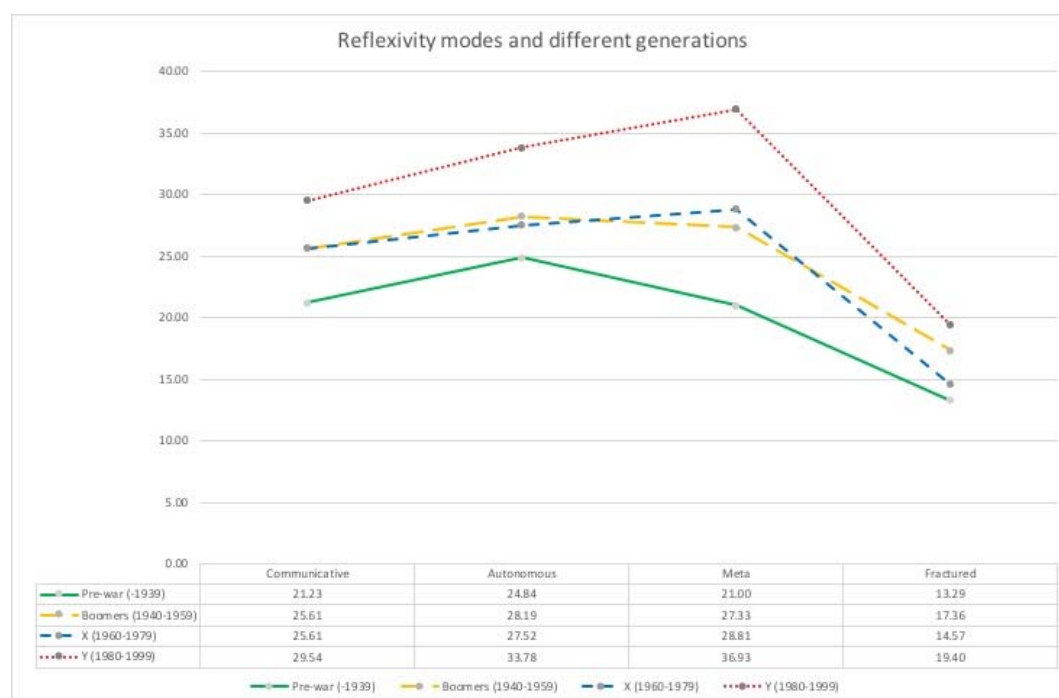


Figure 4. Reflexivity levels for different generations.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, generations also differ from each other in terms of the prevailing reflexivity modes. In the generation born before World War 2, autonomous reflexivity seems to be the dominant mode of reflexivity, and there is no significant difference between the communicative and the meta-reflexivity scores. Reaching adulthood during the Second World War and the early post-war years, this generation has been typically able to experience modernisation in a classical sense—as a modernisation of a traditional society or, according to Beck (1992), as the early or first modernity. The collapse of the old system and more intensive globalisation processes beginning with the late 1980s and the early 1990s mostly corresponded with the time of their retirement. Although the Yugoslav type of the socialist/communist society was an example of a modernity with a deficit (Parsons 1971), deformed modernity (Adam 1989), or fake modernity (Sztompka 1991), it characteristically shared some typical features of early modernity, in terms of industrialisation, increased social mobility, and growth-related optimism. Autonomous reflexivity is the most consistent with these types of societies, according to Archer (2007) or Donati (2011).

While the pre-war generation played no major role in the post-communist morphogenetic cycles, it has been the socialising agent for its descendants: Post-war Generation, who played the major role in Nation Building and Marketisation. Both cycles implied broad consensual visions (nation building

and Europeanisation), which might have been consistent with communicative reflexivity in terms of gaining broader support from the (national) community, while the Marketisation especially implied autonomous reflexivity.

Today, both Post-war Generation and Generation X are characterised by an almost fully balanced relation between the autonomous and the meta-reflexivity modes. They are more reflexive in all respects, when compared to the pre-war generation. Higher reflexivity may be explained by the stage in the personal morphogenetic cycles and/or by the transformations in the social structures, as it is their meta-reflexivity that has increased the most. This relationship between the personal and the social change could only be fully understood through a longitudinal study, which has only begun with our research.

Both the Post-war Generation and Generation X share the fact that they grew up in socialist times. While they both saw early/classical industrial modernisation from their childhood, they were more likely to take it as self-evident from the beginning, not so much as a special achievement. While their earlier socialisation has still been typically affected by the narratives of the post-war (socialist) modernisation triumph, this has been followed by the experience of its crisis and gradual decline of this modernisation model during the 1970s and the 1980s. These contradictions, combined with the most recent disappointments from the post-communist morphogenetic cycles, might have resulted in more critical stances, expressed in the higher levels of meta-reflexivity, in comparison to the pre-war generations.

Another crucial step in terms of the reflexivity levels and modes has clearly been made by Generation Y. For them, meta-reflexivity has become the dominant reflexivity mode. Again, this may be attributed partly to the personal development, typical for the younger people, and partly to social change. Clearly their social contexts are significantly different from those experienced by the previous generations. The failure of the old socialist model happened during the earliest years of their lives or even before they were born. The globalising and dynamic social context of late modernity and increasing digitalisation is the only reality they have experienced. The gradualist model of Slovenian post-communist transition (see: Šušteršič 2009; Golob and Makarovič 2017) with highly regulated labour markets, has been comparatively soft for the Post-war Generation and Generation X, at least for the somewhat more educated middle class. However, this has been typically compensated by the higher job- and career-related flexibility demanded from Generation Y (cf. Stanojević and Mrčela 2014). They entered the labour market during the recent two morphogenetic cycles, characterised by increasing levels of globalisation, digitalisation, and flexibilisation in most spheres of one's life, resulting in the domination of meta-reflexivity—combined with high levels of reflexivity in general. Again, the findings confirm the trends one could expect based on Archers' and Donati's (Archer and Donati 2015) theoretical contributions. They understand globalisation as a structural shift from older social orders signified by segmented and stratified segmentation to the social order based on functional differentiation, and toward what he calls "relational differentiation". While the autonomous reflexivity complies with the functional differentiation, the relational differentiation corresponds to increasing meta-reflexivity.

Although we cannot reconstruct how different generations reflected and acted within the past morphogenetic cycles (when they took place), we can observe their results in different social categories today. They also include failures, when an individual is unable to conceive and implement proper actions based on her/his reflexive deliberations are present in all generations to similar extents, manifested through fractured reflexivity. Although it is the highest among Generation Y, this can also be attributed to the fact that this generation has the highest reflexivity levels, which also affect their fractured reflexivity. Compared to the reflexivity levels, it is the Post-war Generation that indicates disproportionally high scores in fractured reflexivity. This may be linked to the fact that the major systemic changes of the 1990s began when this generation was typically at the later stages of its careers; it has had to adapt to the processes of globalisation, flexibilisation, and digitalisation with the most difficulty. In contrast, the pre-war generation did not need to adapt anymore because they typically

retired before the major shifts, and Generation X found it somewhat easier to adapt as they were still at the earlier stages of their careers. Moreover, Generation Y was (as already mentioned) confronted with the new late modern situation from its very beginning.

5.2. Structural Positions Matter: The Impact of Gender and Education

Furthermore, our results indicate that both the reflexivity levels and reflexivity modes are not only affected by age and time but also by gender and education as major features of the individual's structural position within a social system. The t-test-related statistics for each category whose reflexivity is significantly higher than for the rest are provided in Table 4. These statistics indicate that women have significantly higher reflexivity levels and higher scores of all reflexivity modes, but even more so for fractured reflexivity, which is in line with Hypotheses 5 and 6. Consistently with Hypotheses 3 and 4, higher educational levels (particularly higher than the basic vocational education) imply a higher general reflexivity level as well as higher reflexivity scores for all reflexivity modes except for the fractured one. Regarding the latter, having no more than a primary education makes higher scores more likely.

Table 4. T-test statistics comparing the categories with significantly higher reflexivity than the rest.

Categories with Significantly Higher Reflexivity Than the Rest		Reflexivity Level	Communicative Reflexivity	Autonomous Reflexivity	Meta-Reflexivity	Fractured Reflexivity
Women	t-test	2.84	3.77	3.69	2.15	3.89
	t-test sig. (p)	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000
	Equal var. assumed (f)	Yes (0.89)	Yes (0.85)	Yes (0.75)	Yes (0.81)	Yes (0.79)
At least secondary education	t-test	3.63	2.11	2.61	2.77	
	t-test sig. (p)	0.000	0.035	0.009	0.006	
	Equal var. assumed (f)	Yes (0.89)	Yes (0.87)	Yes (0.79)	Yes (0.71)	
Not having vocational education	t-test		2.21	3.11		
	t-test sig. (p)		0.027	0.002		
	Equal var. assumed (f)		Yes (1.17)	No (1.38)		
No more than primary education	t-test					2.39
	t-test sig. (p)					0.017
	Equal var. assumed (f)					Yes (0.53)

However, to conclude the testing of Hypotheses 1 to 6, we need to test the effects of each demographic variable separately while controlling for the rest. For this purpose, we apply a path analysis method (see: Figure 5 and Table 5) based on the following assumptions:

- We consider age, gender, and education as independent or exogenous variables that may affect the reflexivity levels and reflexivity modes;
- we consider reflexivity as one of the causes for each of the reflexivity modes because based both on the theory and on our construction of the measurement instruments, a person cannot be characterised by any reflexivity mode without being reflexive;
- in addition to being affected by reflexivity levels, each reflexivity mode can also be affected by other variables.

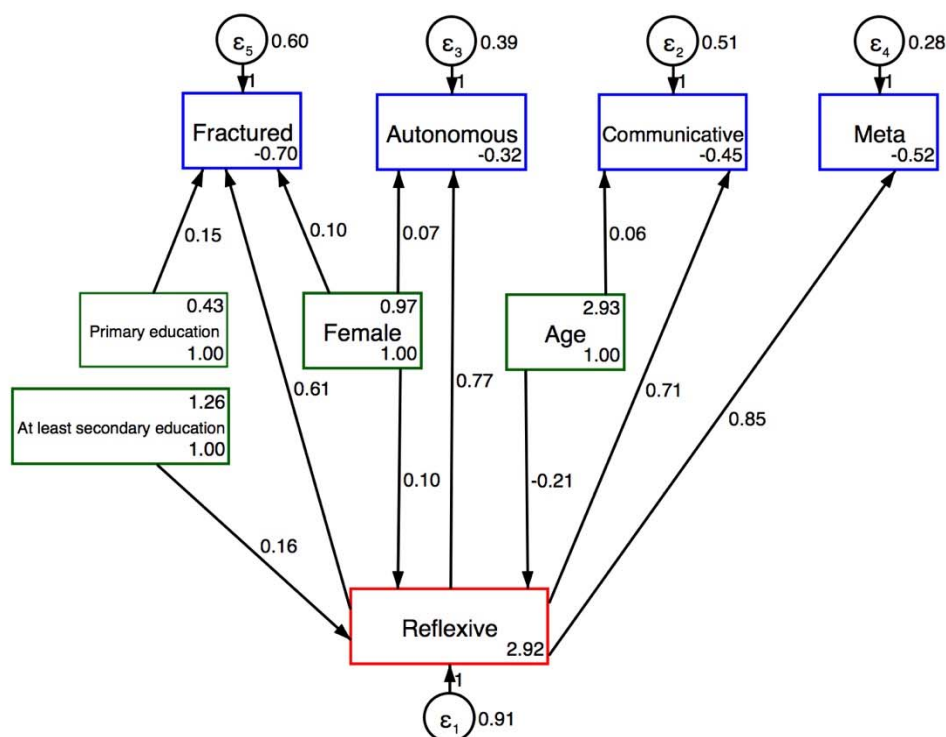


Figure 5. Reflexivity levels for different generations.

Table 5. Standardised coefficients, significance levels, and variances explained for the variables in the reflexivity model.

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Standardised Coefficients	Significance	Variance Explained
Reflexivity level (Reflexive)	Age	−0.21	0.000	0.10
	Gender (Female)	0.10	0.029	
	Education (At least secondary)	0.16	0.001	
Communicative reflexivity	Reflexivity level (Reflexive)	0.71	0.000	0.50
	Age	0.06	0.079	
Autonomous reflexivity	Reflexivity level (Reflexive)	0.77	0.000	0.62
	Gender (Female)	0.07	0.010	
Meta-reflexivity	Reflexivity level (Reflexive)	0.85	0.000	0.72
Fractured reflexivity	Reflexivity level (Reflexive)	0.61	0.000	0.40
	Gender (Female)	0.10	0.008	
	Education (Primary)	0.15	0.003	

A comparatively low level of variance of the reflexivity level explained by exogenous demographic variables (10%) does not support the claims of the individuals' reflexivity being strongly determined by their structural positions. However, the impact of the latter should not be ignored since our data indicate not only the impact of social dynamics, visible through the inter-generational differences, but also the effects of the structural features, such as gender and education.

Our model also implies that meta-reflexivity can be seen as the ‘purest’ reflexivity mode, since it is most clearly derived from high reflexivity levels as such. We are unable to identify any other variable in our dataset influencing the meta-reflexivity mode in a direct way (i.e., not through the reflexivity level). Moreover, its determination coefficient of 72%, indicates that its variance is almost entirely explained by the reflexivity level. In other words, people with high reflexivity levels will also have high scores in meta-reflexivity.

We can confirm that age significantly affects the reflexivity level with the older generations being less reflexive and is positively related to the communicative reflexivity mode. In other words, while controlling for the reflexivity level, older generations have higher communicative reflexivity than the younger ones do. This is fully consistent with the theoretical assumptions linking communicative reflexivity to the more traditional social order (cf. [Archer 2007](#)). Communicative reflexivity has thus declined with the further modernisation that has affected the younger generations more than the older ones. In contrast, although we note that younger generations have higher scores for all reflexivity modes than the older ones do, this is not a direct result of age. In other words, it is the general reflexivity level that makes younger generations more reflexive in terms of meta, autonomous, fractured and even communicative reflexivity.

Higher levels of reflexivity are somehow expected when considering young people to be the most substantially affected by individualisation, technological development, and communication. Due to the unstable and precarious social conditions of their education, career and personal dimensions, they are also considerably exposed to social risks and uncertainties ([Ule 2008](#)). Adolescence has always been a period of troublesome and risky circumstances denoting the transition from childhood to a mature person capable of taking over adult roles and responsibilities. However, in the era of substantial structural changes, the adolescence transition has become even more challenging ([Golob 2017](#)). They are expected to take responsibilities for their actions in an unstable and unpredictable environment and to construct a sense of individual identity in relation to fluid social settings and undermined traditional social semantic anchors.

Our path-model also confirms that women demonstrate higher levels of reflexivity than men do. Moreover, independently from the fact that this also implies higher scores for all reflexivity modes in an indirect way, they also have higher autonomous and fractured reflexivity, which is consistent with Hypothesis 6. Due to the erosion of traditional social roles and expectations, women are often facing contested and contradictory social contexts. They are often torn between family life and career options. As it has been shown elsewhere, it is commonly perceived that women have to sacrifice more in order to achieve a successful professional life ([Möller-Slawinski and Calmbach 2016](#), p. 14). The higher level of reflexivity is thus required ensuing from contradictory expectations, while higher scores in autonomous reflexivity reflect the initial lack of stability in the social context. This can be linked to the issues of the high employment rates of Slovenian women, even from the communist era, forcing them to make autonomous decisions balancing between work and family life ([Cigale 1992](#)). However, reflexivity does not necessarily lead to any purposive action and can become fractured.

The reason can be found in the dissonance between the social semantics triggering reflexivity, and the actual social embeddedness impeding social actions. As we argued elsewhere ([Golob and Makarovič 2018](#), p. 15), “women are supposed to compete for all social positions, just like men but, on the other hand, they remain unable to escape from certain traditional gender-based limitations and expectations”. It has been shown that particular embeddedness within a certain field referring to wealth, education or gender stratification significantly influences someone’s ability to escape such positions ([Adkins 2003](#); [Bottero 2004](#); [Adams 2006](#)).

Finally, having at least a secondary education (i.e., more than primary and basic vocational), implies higher reflexivity levels. Education, as such, does not directly affect the reflexivity modes but it only influences them indirectly, i.e., through higher reflexivity levels. The latter not only enables more intensive reflexive deliberations in terms of internal dialogue but also makes the individuals’ successful intentional actions on this basis more likely. This helps explain why individuals with only

the most basic levels of education find it difficult to adapt to the increasing challenges of the social context and are more likely to “feel lost”. This problem is demonstrated by significantly higher levels of fractured reflexivity among the people having only a primary education.

Education is an essential cultural resource, enabling individuals to deliberate upon future concerns and actions, and it is also a source of social mobility, causing dispositional clashes. Participation in the contested and overlapping social context acts as a trigger to reflexivity. Education also allows one to occupy certain critical positions toward the social and cultural contexts thus provoking inner dialogue, which can lead to purposive social actions. More educated individuals can define personal concerns, which are oriented towards creating better life opportunities.

6. Discussion

Our study shows that it is essential to shift the research scope from comparatively homogenous, typically one-generational, populations, seen in the previous empirical research on reflexivity (Archer 2007, 2012; Porpora and Shumar 2010; Golob and Makarovič 2018), to broad representative national samples exemplified through our study. This enabled us to provide clear empirical evidence of the significance of the individual’s background and her/his position in social structures for reflexivity. At least some of the reflexivity differences can be seen as a result of different social backgrounds. The lack of cultural/social capital, experienced by people with lower educational levels, indicate that they find it more difficult to respond to the structural and cultural contexts through their internal conversations and are less likely to generate post-reflexive choices. This makes their reflexivity more likely to be lower and more fractured. While this does not exclude some other viable strategies beyond reflexivity used by the lower social classes, it makes it clear that reflexivity is not something universally based on the social morphogenesis but also a subject to social inequalities and perhaps even an additional mechanism for their reproduction. Limited abilities of the deprived social groups to question their situation through internal conversation, to generate post-reflexive choices and develop a broader critical stance through meta-reflexivity may contribute to the reproduction or even an extension of existing inequalities—despite the morphogenetic social processes.

Our preceding qualitative research have shown that despite the general morphogenetic processes, the specifics of the social environments still affects the individuals’ reflexivity modes to a certain extent. Structurally deprived students, for example, are less likely to decide for mobility experiences, which play a crucial role in their empowerment process. Focusing on those who have experienced a study mobility, one can see that the narratives referring to their biographies, aspirations and future goals express a higher presence of meta-reflexivity. On the other hand, those who are more attached—physically and emotionally—to the local environment predominantly tend to express communicative reflexivity.

Moreover, our study has benefited from the distinction between the reflexivity levels and reflexivity modes. Similar reflexivity levels can lead to different agential outcomes due to different modes expressing particular structural/cultural context. To observe late modern society from a critical perspective, more attention should be devoted to the fractured reflexivity as an indicator of structural deprivation. When observing the structural position of women, indicating a generalised claim about women as “reflexivity losers” may be misleading. While their reflexivity is more likely to be fractured, their situation seems to make them, on average, more reflexive than men. This may illustrate a reaction to a clash between the emerging semantic that focuses on equal opportunities and expectations in all spheres of life and, in contrast, the persisting structural and semantic constraints still affecting women. Higher reflexivity levels among women can thus be seen as a reaction of a deprived social group to these inconsistencies, perhaps indicating an additional emancipatory potential of reflexivity, which is definitely worthy of further research.

However, there can be several causes, sufficient for the reflexivity differences. Our previous interviews with the Slovenian students indicated the effects of the social environment, education and study mobility. The latter has been linked to autonomous and meta-reflexivity. On the other hand, the young women that have not experienced study mobility have reported the indications of

communicative reflexivity, reporting their strong dependence on their families, partners and thus the lack of ability to take decisions independently of their direct social environment.

The reflexivity differences among the respondents can be seen not only as a result of their different backgrounds but also through the changes in social contexts in terms of social morphogenetic cycles. The situations, in which older generations have been socialised, may still affect their current reflexivity levels and modes, despite massive social transformations.

This can be linked to Archer's claims regarding the relationship between reflexivity and modern social change towards increasingly morphogenetic structures. By placing generations in the context of broader structural and cultural/semantic context of morphogenetic cycles, we have demonstrated that contemporary generational differences cannot be reduced only to the changes within an individual life course. The post-communist macro-level cycles have generated new structures of an independent democratic state, of the globalising open markets, the Euro-Atlantic integration. These structures have been linked to the corresponding cultural shifts represented through the semantics of multi-party democracy and national self-confidence, neoliberal ideas, and Westernisation. During the recent two cycles, they have also challenged them through the Crisis and the Search for Alternatives. This has placed the members of Generation Y entering their careers during the recent two cycles in a situation incomparable to any before: In terms of dynamics, unpredictability, contradictions, inconsistencies, inability to rely on the pre-established patterns. The higher levels of reflexivity combined with the higher meta-reflexivity scores for this generation are thus consistent with Archer's theory and far from surprising. The same can be said for the communicative reflexivity decreasing with younger generations since they find it more difficult to rely on external confirmations with the rise of individualised risks.

On the other hand, there is no guarantee that the reflexivity levels and meta-reflexivity will continue to increase with the younger generations, particularly with the digitally native Generation Z. The reverse mechanisms based on distraction derived from the morphogenesis of the global digital capitalism may prevail (cf. Carrigan 2017). As indicated by our subsequent research (Golob and Makarovič 2019) this may mostly depend not on the technology itself but on the prevalent uses of digital technology by the youth.

Our present research should thus only be seen as a part of the greater picture of understanding some of the causal mechanisms affecting reflexivity in Slovenia. It has been built upon the previous methodological and theoretical triangulation and it is intended to continue. The empirical insights are a basis for further considerations regarding the interaction between social structures and individuals, both as an example of the generative mechanisms. The complete answer regarding the precise relationship between the personal transformations and social transformations in terms of morphogenetic cycles affecting the reflexivity levels and modes could only be provided by the combination of further longitudinal research and further qualitative studies based on in-depth interviews to provide a deeper analysis, whether and how precisely the differences in the reflexivity levels and modes are influenced by the structural positions in the context of morphogenetic social change.

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