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Autonomy as Mode of Inclusion and Participation of Distinct Communities and Persons Belonging to them

The article as introduction to the following articles on (minority) autonomies suggests autonomies might be tools of diversity management that can contribute to peace and stability in contemporary societies, to inclusion, integration and participation of ethnic, national and other minorities as well as persons belonging to them. The case of Catalonia in Spain serves as context for discussion on socially relevant diversities and divisions in contemporary societies, approaches to, concepts and strategies of regulation and management of diversities and autonomy; it pays special attention to ethnic, cultural and linguistic pluralities, diversities and divisions. Articles that constitute a thematic section of the Journal discuss autonomies as specific approaches, concepts, forms, models, policies and practices for development and implementation of holistic and sustainable strategies for regulation and management of socially relevant diversities in contemporary societies.

Keywords: autonomy, socially relevant diversities, diversity management, nation-state, minority protection.

Avtonomija kot način vključevanja in participacije specifičnih skupnosti in njihovih pripadnikov

Članek – kot uvod ostalim člankom o avtonomijah – ugotavlja, da (manjšinske) avtonomije predstavljajo orodja upravljanja različnosti, ki prispevajo k miru in stabilnosti sodobnih pluralnih in raznolikih družb ter k boljšemu vključevanju, integraciji in participaciji etničnih, narodnih, jezikovnih in drugih manjšin in njihovih pripadnikov. Primer Katalonije v Španiji služi kot izhodišče razprave o družbeno relevantnih pluralnostih, različnosti in delitvah v sodobnih družbah; članek obravnava pristope, koncepte in strategije urejanja in upravljanja različnosti in avtonomij ter njihove etnične, kulturne in jezikovne dimenzije. Članki tematskega segmenta o predstavljajo avtonomije kot pristope, koncepte, oblike, modele politike in prakse za oblikovanje in implementacijo celovitih in trajnostnih strategij za urejanje in upravljanje družbeno relevantnih različnosti.

Ključne besede: *avtonomija, družbeno relevantne raznolikosti, urejanje in upravljanje različnosti, nacionalna država, varstvo manjšin.*

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1. Introduction

The article[1] written as an introduction to a series of articles on autonomy and, particularly, on minority autonomy is a logical continuation of the scholarly discussions presented in the special thematic issue of this journal on inclusion, participation and self-governance published in 2017. This thematic issue explored several issues connected to inclusion, integration, social and political participation of individuals and distinct collective entities in contemporary plural and diverse societies (Žagar 2017). The majority of authors focused on political participation and self-governance of (national and ethnic) minorities in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe presented as case studies (Alber 2017; Bešter et al. 2017; Galičić 2017; Matichescu & Totoreanu 2017; Vidau 2017; Wutti 2017). In this context, one could consider autonomy (as a concept and possible model) and different autonomous arrangements available options and tools that can ensure and contribute to better inclusion, participation and self-governance of diverse distinct communities and persons belonging to them in contemporary plural and diverse societies.

The first initiative within the editorial board of the Journal to address the issue of autonomy and particularly minority autonomies appeared more than two years ago, stimulated by media reports and particularly political and scholarly discussions on the contemporary developments in Catalonia and Spain. Other cases – such as autonomy of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the UK, the position of Quebec in Canada, discussions of federalization and/or regionalization of Belgium and Italy, discussions on minority and cultural autonomy in different European countries and world-wide – were discussed as well. When presented the idea, a number of scholars expressed their interest to write on the topic and sent their contributions. The first ones are published in this issue of the Journal, while some are in different phases of the review process. Consequently, we hope that scholarly discussions on autonomies and particularly on minority autonomy will continue in the Journal in the future.

In 2017, we observed the escalating conflict between Barcelona and Madrid, more precisely between the central Spanish authorities and government of then Prime Minister Rachoy and the Catalan autonomous authorities. Analyzing developments and processes, we discussed possible outcomes and their impact on regional, national and global developments. Particularly, we considered possible consequences of those developments in specific environments, usually described as divided societies. When the editorial board asked me write to some scholars studying autonomies and invite them to consider writing on minority autonomies for the Journal, our basic intention was to describe, discuss, analyze and evaluate different concepts and practices of autonomy, particularly good practices and experiences of autonomies in diverse environments. Additionally, the goal was to develop alternative approaches to, types and models of autonomy in diverse and plural societies, considering specific environments

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and spheres of life, specific historic (past) and current experiences, situations
and processes as well as trends of development and public discourses on the fu-
ture. Being aware of limitations in applicability and impacts of scholarly fin-
dings, results and initiatives in contemporary political world, still, we hoped
that findings and recommendations regarding autonomy could be helpful in
the search of alternative, peaceful and democratic approaches to and solutions
of escalating crises and conflicts in diverse societies, particularly in divided ones.
In this context, it was decided to study, analyze and elaborate diverse types,
forms, contents and practices/experiences of autonomy as well as their conse-
quences. At the time of the publication of this issue of the journal on (minority)
autonomy, in the relations between the (current) new Catalan and Spanish
authorities, more precisely the socialist (minority) government the collision
course continues. Simultaneously, nationalistic discourses in Catalonia, by both
supporters of strengthened autonomy and independence (whose share is
slightly increasing according to polls) as well as opponents of autonomy and
independence continue and intensify; the same is true in other parts of Spain,
particularly among Spanish/Castilian nationalists and other opponents of the
Catalan increased autonomy and/or independence. Consequently, tensions in
Spain in general as well as in Catalonia increase and it is difficult, if not impossible
to predict the outcome. However, these developments confirm that discussing
(the topic of) autonomy continues to be relevant and timely. Consequently,
searching for and developing alternative solutions to ethnic and regional tensions
and conflicts, including new and alternative concepts and models of autonomy
is becoming even more important and necessary for the future existence and
development of individual states, broader (trans-border) regions, Europe and
the world. In other words, this article tests the hypothesis that autonomy should
be considered one of the possible tools for effective and peaceful regulation
and management of all socially relevant diversities that exist in contemporary
societies, including ethnic ones.

2. The Broader (Theoretical and Geographic) Context and the Case of Catalonia

Wherever on the Globe we might be and whenever we look around, it should
be obvious to each of us that our realities and contemporary societies, in which
we live, are plural, diverse, asymmetrical, complex and dynamic (internally).
Simultaneously, we should recognize that all contemporary societies are diverse
and specific in comparison with other societies. These diversities are logical,
considering that every individual and every distinct collective entity are unique,
at least in some characteristics different from every other individual or group.
Consequently, diversities, including those that are or can become socially rele-
vant (such as ethnic ones) are normal phenomena and state of affairs; these

pluralities and diversities are numerous, one could say countless and multi-dimensional.

However, we often fail to realize and recognize these diversities. Nation states and their institutions are eager to promote their prevailing (political) ideologies and the concept of (single) nation-states as ethnically homogenous states of titular (ethnic) nations. Socialized in (public and/or private) educational institutions and systems shaped and dominated by respective nation states and exposed to public discourses and (mass) media that promote such (exclusive) concepts usually individuals and the public tend to accept such views. Consequently, our perceptions might miss the very existence of diversities, their content and essence, dimensions and interactions as well as their social relevance and value. Believing in and promoting ideologies and political slogans that declare unity and homogeneity desired ideals that societies should follow and realize individuals and the public often consider existing pluralities and diversities problems. Furthermore, diversities can be declared undesired obstacles that complicate lives, effective decision-making and execution of decisions, thereby reducing efficacy of respective states. Politicians often declare that pluralities and diversities make the functioning of societies and states more expensive; possibly, they claim diversities can endanger the very existence of our societies and states by undermining and endangering the desired national homogeneity and unity. These exclusive, divisive and often hegemonic political ideals and ideologies, usually created, dominated and promoted by respective nationalistic political leaders, elites, parties and movements as well as uncritical acceptance of the concept of (single) nation-states might blur our perceptions of reality.

Not only have been and are pluralities and diversities facts or our lives and societies, they have made and make our living environment more interesting, richer and better. Just imagine how the quality and richness of our lives would be reduced, if we could not enjoy the richness and choice of dishes, cuisines, produce, products and services, information, literature, music and art in general from different parts and environments of the world. In reality, we all benefit from diversities. Consequently, we should present and promote diversities in our societies as the facts and desired reality stressing their contribution to the richness and wellbeing of our societies and all individuals that live in them. Everybody should realize that rather than problems and obstacles pluralities and diversities are added value, comparative advantages and opportunities of specific environments. However, I would stress that (socially relevant) diversities in our societies need to be regulated properly (by law), governed and managed to ensure their coexistence, inclusive and productive cooperation, social stability, security and predictability as preconditions for successful sustainable development that is in the interest of all individuals, groups and communities.[2]

The concepts and ideologies of (single) nation-state that promote the idea of ethnic homogeneity of a respective state have always contradicted reality.

However, politicians, particularly nationalist presented and understood those concepts and ideologies as the ultimate tools for the realization of national interests of titular (ethnic) nations. Scholars need to explain that the concepts of ethnically homogenous (single) nation-states are and have been myths that, however, utilized and promoted in different social contexts in the past two or three centuries, have impacted and continue to impact respective societies and their development. The actual consequences of the concepts and policies of (single)nation state conceived, presented and promoted as a possibly neutral theoretical model of the organization and internal cohesion of a respective society by politicians and some scholars revealed the exclusive, divisive and often hegemonic nature of such concepts and policies. Usually political and social leaders, particularly nationalists, nationalist movements and parties that follow and are built upon nationalistic ideologies, strategies, policies and practices proclaim and defend ethnic homogeneity, unity and the dominant role of titular nations within (single) nation-states as the desired goals and state of affairs in contemporary societies.

In practice, such concepts, (nationalist) ideologies and policies by proclaiming different social diversities problems and undesired obstacles that prevent desired social homogeneity and reduce efficiency of nation-states, promote domination of the titular (ethnic) nations in respective nation-states and result in marginalization and exclusion of others, particularly minorities. Those who are or feel marginalized and excluded are likely to become dissatisfied with their status and position, the current divisions, social arrangements and nation states. Their dissatisfaction might translate into the opposition to and/or rebellion against the existing nation states as well as their requests for alternative social and administrative arrangements, including (increased) autonomy and/or new nation-states, thereby deepening (social) divisions and possibly escalating tensions and conflicts within the existing nation-states. Consequently, I would claim that the actual problems are not the past, existing and future pluralities and diversities that can be found in all societies, but rather exclusive concepts, ideologies and policies of nation-states as well as their institutions that are unable to deal peacefully, democratically and inclusively with pluralities, diversities, crises and conflicts. All too often, nation-states with their institutions and particularly their (nationalism driven) policies and politics fail to address the needs as well as are unable to realize interests and expectations of all diverse individuals, distinct groups and communities. Consequently, these states do not succeed to stimulate, promote, ensure and enable their voluntary, equal and full (social) inclusion and integration. This way, rather than developing creative potentials of all individuals, distinct groups and communities as well as stimulating their inclusion, integration and contributions to the societies in which they live (thereby contributing to and maximizing wellbeing in those societies), states can create and increase their dissatisfaction that can result in

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resentment. As consequence, with their exclusive ideologies, policies and actions (single) nation-states might contribute to the escalation of crises and conflicts (Žagar 2015).

The concept of (single) nation-state as well as nationalistic exclusive, homogenizing and potentially hegemonic ideologies and policies of nation-states frequently accompanied and characterized by coercion and repression that attempt to reduce or in some cases eliminate the existing pluralism and diversities are not viable solutions and alternatives for stable democratic development of diverse contemporary societies. Rather, such policies and exclusive concepts of (single) nation-states can be considered problems and potential sources of conflicts that in long term can reduce stability and efficiency of our societies and states as they provoke and escalate the dissatisfaction and resentment of minorities and other marginalized individuals, groups and communities. In such cases, minorities, marginalized individuals and communities can feel that the existing nation-states do not recognize, at least not adequately, their identities, statuses, needs and interests as well as that they treat them inadequately, unequally and discriminate against them. Consequently, the dissatisfaction of minorities, distinct communities and/or regions might provoke and/or strengthen their secessionist desires, claims and movements. Ironically, in the absence of viable alternatives and concepts, such as truly multiethnic, decentralized and inclusive states that not only recognize but also stimulate and integrate different autonomies, dissatisfied national minorities and other distinct communities as well as marginalized regions within the existing states often demand their independence and establishment of their independent nation-state. Minorities and distinct communities expect that such a development would establish them as new titular nations in newly established states. (e.g. Guibernau & Rex 2010; Keating & McGarry 2001)

Recent developments in Spain in Catalonia in 2017 and 2018 as well as preceding processes and historic developments in this context in the past decades, even centuries might serve as cases in point. The Catalans, one of Europe's historic stateless (ethnic) nations,[3] have often faced rejection, exclusion and repression by the Spanish (Castilian) state upon the inclusion (that some interpret as annexation) of Catalonia in Spain. During the Franco's (dictatorial and fascist) regime in the past century, the very existence of the Catalan nation and their culture were denied and threatened, while the Catalan language was prohibited. Their hopes and expectations that the Spanish state in the process of democratization would apologize for the past wrongdoings and try to undo them also by granting the distinct region and (stateless) nation adequate autonomy and self-rule have not realized to the desired extent. There have been some successes, but many failures (*Catalonia Calling: What the World has to Know* 2013). The tensions were growing and they culminated in 2017. The rejection of proposals for the increased autonomy and self-rule of Catalonia in the past

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decades as well as exclusive, ignoring and homogenizing policies of Spanish government of then Prime Minister Rajoy regarding Catalonia, particularly its repressive reactions to initiatives, policies and actions of the provincial government pushed the Catalan authorities to radicalize their demands for increased autonomy and independence. In this context, the government of Spain utilized the rulings of the supreme and constitutional courts, particularly the ones that declared unconstitutional and annulled certain provisions of the autonomous statute as well as decisions, documents and actions of Catalan authorities, including the referendum and declaration of independence thereby criminalizing also corresponding activities of the people of Catalonia that supported them. Regardless of our view of the legality and legitimacy of those decisions and activities of Catalan authorities and people supporting them, we should recognize (and admire) the democratic and peaceful nature of these political processes as well as reactions to the repressive policy of the Spanish government. Then Prime Minister Rajoy and those supporting his policy and reactions might have believed that the described policies of his government and the imprisonment of some Catalan political activists, politicians and members of the provincial authorities would resolve the problem. They hoped to ensure the victory of their vision of Spain, strengthen their position, authority and power as well as reestablish the rule of law, thereby reaffirming the existing constitution and the unity of the Spanish state. However, the results of the early provincial elections and developments in 2018 showed that this was not the case; Catalonia remains divided, dissatisfaction of those who oppose the current arrangements and policies increases; tensions and conflicts continue to exist and occasionally escalate. Social and political developments and their outcomes are uncertain, their impact on democratic political process in Catalonia and in Spain unknown and their consequences impossible to predict.[4] Considering the recent developments, we might guess the reactions and policies of the current and future Madrid governments as well as pro-independence Catalan authorities. However, nobody really knows what might happen in Catalonia and Spain in a longer run – regardless of who wins at any particular moment. We can just hope that developments will be peaceful and democratic, that the uncontrolled escalation of conflicts can be prevented and there will be no violence.

I would suggest that nonconflictual, dialogue-based and democratic approaches to addressing such problems and claims for autonomy and/or independence can be more successful and productive strategies and policies, particularly in the longer term. The experiences and results of the Scottish referendum in the United Kingdom, as well as their handing of demands for devolution and stronger autonomy, Canadian government's attitude to demands of Quebec, including the referendum, constant negotiations in Belgium and federalization of the Belgian state, for example, confirm such a position. On the other hand, I would argue that repressive and exclusive policies, particularly

brutal and violent responses of authorities to peaceful democratic actions that people consider legitimate can hurt undermine/endanger and, possibly, destroy democratic processes and the very existence of democracy in a respective society. Although the respective government and authorities consider and declare such peaceful and democratic actions and policies unacceptable and illegal, they should be confronted by democratic and peaceful reactions, counteractions and policies of institutions of the state. I would consider repressive and violent responses of authorities, particularly asymmetric and excessive use of force in specific situations in which they utilize repressive mechanisms (e.g. police, military, in some cases paramilitary formations) of states unacceptable systemic violations of human rights and liberties.

I believe that the international community and organizations, institutions of other states and the critical public should record and condemn such actions and violations of human rights. Additionally, the international human rights institutions and (criminal) courts should consider prosecuting such violations adequately. However, repeatedly, as a scholar and human rights activist, I am surprised and disappointed by the lukewarm reactions of the international public, media, political and public leaders to such cases, particularly in the countries considered democratic. It seems that we are not aware of the fact that such developments are possible in all environments and, potentially, can hurt democracy in our countries as well as our (own) human rights, status and situation.

Pluralism and diversities, including plurality and diversity of interests that can result in conflicts that, possibly, can escalate and transform into violent conflicts are normal phenomena and state of affairs in all complex contemporary societies. I would argue that in order to ensure the necessary social stability, prosperity and development of diverse societies, socially relevant diversities need to be regulated and managed, hopefully in a democratic and peaceful way. My research in the past decades and a substantive volume of scholarly, particularly analytical literature that addresses and studies pluralism, diversities, social relations, strictures and divisions, regulation and management of (socially relevant) diversities, ethnicity, peace, crises and conflicts in contemporary societies confirm such a conclusion. Particularly relevant are analyses on relations, divisions, cleavages, peace, crises and conflicts in divided societies, thorn apart along diverse politicized ethnic and other division lines that indicate the need for successful diversity management that should include prevention, management and resolution of crises and conflicts. (see e.g. Burton 1996; Byrne et al. 2019; Freire 2001; Galtung, 1996, 2000, 2001; Galtung et al. 2002; Graf & Brousek 2014; Lederach 2004; Máiz & Requejo 2005; Sandole et al. 2009; Senehi et al. 2010; Žagar 2010)

3. Approaches to Studying Complex Societies, Socially Relevant Diversities, Strategies of the Regulation and Management of Diversities and Autonomy as an Important Component of Diversity Management

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As indicated, there is a substantive volume of analytical literature, studies and sources on socially relevant diversities in contemporary societies, regulation and management of social relations, divisions and cleavages, peace and conflict(s) as well as diversity management and the prevention, management and resolution of crises and conflicts. They present and analytically discuss specific cases and/ or their segments as well as some comparative and global contexts. With their analytical approaches, such case and comparative studies, usually in a form of focused comparisons can provide more or less detailed analyses that can describe, analyze and, to a certain extent, interpret studied phenomena, particularly their segments. They can detect and determine specific problems and segments of complex social phenomena, to a certain extent broader frameworks. They can and do provide important information and knowledge considered the necessary basis and building blocks for synthetic approaches and syntheses that can contribute to the formulation and development of longer-term strategies, particularly strategies of sustainable development that need to take into account and integrate all spheres and dimensions of life and societies. However, such approaches do not show and explain the whole picture that is important for the holistic understanding of the broader context and complexity of contemporary societies. In other words, we lack the adequate synthesis. Although necessary for any synthesis, without adequate syntheses analytical approaches alone cannot produce an adequate and necessary basis for holistic discussions on socially relevant diversities as well as for the elaboration and development of strategies for the regulation and management of diversities.

Considering the current situation(s) in different societies and countries as well as globally, detected problems and crises, particularly their environmental, climate, political and other social aspects, one could argue that the world urgently needs adequate integrated and holistic strategies of sustainable development. Such strategies of sustainable development that include strategies for the regulation and management of socially relevant diversities as well as measures and plans of actions deriving from these strategies require adequate and socially engaged research and science. One could claim that only research and science – with their approaches and methodologies – can provide the necessary foundations, framework, concepts, yardsticks and tools needed to address different socially relevant issues and develop adequate development strategies and policies. Research and scientific approaches, methodologies and methods were

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developed to objectivize research and science. However, we should stress that regardless of the used research approaches, methodologies and methods research and science(s) cannot be absolutely objective, socially neutral and non-ideological or ideology free. Science(s) in general as well as research approaches, methodologies and methods are products of specific environments, societies and time. In other words, research and science, researchers as individuals, research institutions and systems, every research project and program as well as research policies and strategies at all levels are socially conditioned and determined.[5] Consequently, I argue that scientists and science(s) need to be ethical and socially engaged; we should follow, strive for and promote common good, particularly basic common values and principles agreed upon in specific historic contexts and environments. In this context, we could speak of ethical science. At present, in studying social phenomena and particularly regulation and management of socially relevant diversities such consensual basic common values and principles are, for example, human rights and freedoms including minority rights and protection, equal rights and equality, justice, recognition and respect of diversities, tolerance, inclusion and integration, solidarity, democracy, peace and stability, "green" sustainable and balanced long-term development, etc. (see e.g. Piciga et al. 2016). Ethical science requires that researchers and scholars in their texts and publications, scholarly ones as well as popular ones directed to the broadest public clearly state and carefully explain all methodological and other limitations and uncertainties of their research, research results and interpretations. Particularly in social sciences and humanities, but also in other sciences they should present their values, principles and goals as well as their value and ideological background and orientation that could affect their interpretations and conclusions. I would suggest that ethical scholars and researchers should do their best to promote the basic commonly agreed principles and values, such as the ones mentioned above.

This applies also to studying and discussing autonomies as complex social phenomena, concepts, models and (social) tools that can contribute to the development of strategies, policies and practices of diversity management, particularly to successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities in contemporary societies. Methodologically, studying complex social phenomena and concepts requires multi-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches and research methods developed in social sciences and humanities as well as in other sciences, when relevant and applicable. As an optimal approach to studying ethnicity, diversities, diversity management, autonomies and other social phenomena, I would suggest to follow and develop the practice, approaches, methods and apparatus of methodological pluralism.[6] I utilize this approach in my research of ethnicity, nationalism, ethnic relations, (socially relevant) diversities as well as their regulation and management. My research has focused on the rights and protection of minorities, regionalism and federalism, autonomies,

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prevention, management and/or resolution of crises and conflicts in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and globally. I have done theoretical, qualitative and quantitative research, specific case and comparative studies and comparisons. In my research, I have consulted a considerable volume of scholarly literature, research reports, data-bases and statistics, reports of diverse institutions and organizations/associations, political and legal documents, policies, programs and measures, media reports, etc.[7]

From different perspectives and considering specific cases, articles in this issue of the Journal examine autonomy, more specifically different concepts, approaches, types and models as well as practices of autonomy as possible tools and segments of diversity management that can contribute to successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities in different environments. As the common basis and framework, the following paragraphs briefly present and define those terms and concepts.

Socially relevant diversities are all those social pluralities and diversities that exist in contemporary societies and that individuals and distinct communities in these societies – from their respective perspectives and considering their specific needs and interests – consider relevant and important. This applies particularly to all diversities that can be socially and political mobilized. In other words, we refer to diversities that can be (mis)used and politicized to attract the attention of people and/or distinct communities with the intention to mobilize them (socially and politically); among those diversities – in the context of articles in this section – I would mention ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and regional/territorial ones.

In order to ensure stability, peace, cooperation, inclusion and integration of all individuals and distinct groups and communities in contemporary diverse societies, those societies need to elaborate, activate and develop adequate regulation and management of all socially relevant diversities, particularly those that are long lasting and can be mobilized as potential division lines and cleavages. Simply, we could define diversity management as permanent (social and political) processes that addresses all relevant issues of diversities and asymmetries in contemporary societies. It encompasses the regulation and management of socially relevant diversities, including the prevention, management and resolution of crises and conflicts. It requires understanding, recognition, acceptance and respect of diversities as well as effective modes of coexistence, voluntary and equal inclusion, integration and cooperation of all individuals and groups based on principles of democracy, human rights and freedoms, including the rights and protection of ethnic, national, linguistic, religious and other minorities. Considering that tensions, crises and conflicts as well as their potential escalation are normal phenomena and state of affairs in plural and diverse societies, sensitivity of individuals and all collective entities to all factors that might signal escalation of tensions, crises and/or conflicts is an important element of

successful diversity management. Successful diversity management strategies, policies and practices in diverse societies should build capacities to develop and apply activities and measures that include all relevant (individual and collective) actors and could prevent the escalation of tensions, crises and conflicts. In this context, we could consider the regulation and peaceful management of social relations and diversities, early detection of escalation of crises and conflicts, adequate warning systems as well as mechanisms, procedures and measures for (hopefully peaceful and democratic) prevention, management and/or resolution of crises/conflicts key components of successful diversity management. The introduction, activation and development of adequate diversity management policies, measures and activities require concerted short, medium and long-term strategies at all levels, from local, subnational and national to international and global ones, thereby increasing their synergetic effect; these strategies need to be coordinated, evaluated and developed continuously (Žagar 2008).

Finally, considering concepts and definitions presented in the scholarly articles on autonomy in this issue (Brezigar & Vidau 2018; Brousek 2018; Kössler 2018; Oloke et al. 2018), this paragraph tries to define the phenomenon. We could say that the broadest and most general definition of autonomy would be that it refers to different organizational and institutional arrangements, forms and models that give certain (clearly defined) segments of the system and/or distinct communities powers, competences and capacities to regulate and manage certain issues, relevant to them by themselves. In accordance with existing legal and/or political arrangements, autonomies have the right, power and capacity to decide on those issues, formulate and execute respective policies, measures, decisions and activities – more or less – independently from other authorities within the system. Traditionally, autonomous arrangements based upon and regulated by constitutions and/or legislation and/or political agreements existed within states, usually conceptualized as nation-states. Consequently, autonomies – often reflecting territorial, regional, ethnic, cultural, religious and/or other diversities and administrative organization within states – have been considered sub-national arrangements in states; autonomies could exist in unitary states, including regionalized ones as well as in federations as composed states. In any case, autonomies are the expression and reflection of decentralization of states and certain independence of their autonomous segments. However, trans-border regions, such as peace regions indicate that autonomies and autonomous arrangements might be possible also at the international level, thereby establishing their trans-border framework. In any case, so defined autonomies can be considered important legal and/or political arrangements at subnational and trans-border levels as well as a possible segment of effective diversity management at those levels that include minority autonomies. Considering the concepts and cases presented in the articles in this special thematic segment of the Journal, we could confirm the hypothesis that autonomies should be considered possible

tools for effective and peaceful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities, including ethnic relations and diverse minority-majority relations that exist in contemporary societies.

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4. Conclusion

Social phenomena and concepts need to be observed, studied and interpreted in the context of the time and situation, considering contemporary social and natural realities conditioned by historic trends and developments. The present determine trends and developments, often declared negative and possibly deviant in their nature and social consequences that include the erosion of democracy in several environments, rise of populism and militarism, social and economic exclusion, increasing social and economic imbalance, inequality and injustice, nationalism and xenophobia, social and economic crises, escalation of conflicts. Interventions in and limiting of independence of judiciary in Poland and other countries, problematic appointments of officials, such as the appointment of justice Brett Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court, erosion of free media and democratic institutions, repression against and prosecution of political opponents and dissidents in several countries further erode and threaten democracy in several environment. Ecological and climate changes and challenges are growing, while the world is unable to concert and realize the necessary measures for the limitation of global warming and other ecological and climate disasters. Consequently, it is possible to claim that that we might be entering the era of post-democracy, post-decency and ecological/climate crisis. In such situation and time, societies hope for positive alternatives, concepts, ideologies and strategies that could reverse negative trends and stimulate progress and positive trends of development. In my view, positive concepts, ideologies and strategies of development need to be based on the principles and practices of balanced, inclusive, just, equal and green economic and social development and progress that are no longer growth and profit based, but promote social, economic and political inclusion and participation, solidarity, economic and social justice, creativity, integration, autonomy and democracy. Although such concepts of sustainable development might be considered (unlikely) utopias considering the mentioned negative trends and developments, they might be even more important in sustaining human desire and in mobilizing all relevant social actors, individuals and collective entities for a better future.

In contemporary plural and diverse societies, successful diversity management might be considered a key component of social peace and stability based on the concept and strategies of balanced, green, just and inclusive sustainable development. It requires adequate regulation and management of socially relevant diversities that, among others, can ensure and guarantee rights and protection of ethnic and other minorities that promote and facilitate their volun-

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tary, just and equal inclusion and integration. Autonomies, more precisely different concepts, forms, models and practices of autonomy, including minority autonomies explored in contributions to this special section of the Journal could be considered effective (democratic) approaches to as well as segments and tools of successful diversity management in this context. Hopefully, adequate, peaceful and democratic autonomy arrangements can be found and enacted also in Catalonia and other environments where currently we can detect growing tensions and conflicts.

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Notes

[1] This article bases on research and expert activities, funded by the ministries responsible for science, research and development of Slovenia, Slovenian Research Agency, European Commission, Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations and specialized agencies as well as other sources.

[2] Comprehensively and in more detail, I addressed these issues, particularly problems regarding the concept and myth of single nation-states and the need for successful diversity management in diverse contemporary societies in Žagar (1994, 2008).

[3] The concept of stateless nations, its characteristics and implications as well as specific cases are presented in Guibernau (1999). For some criticisms of her views, see, e.g. Tice & Nelson 2004, 1293–1297.

[4] The Catalan perspective of the history and present of Catalonia and the Catalans can be found in *Catalonia Calling: What the World has to Know* (2013). It is difficult to find accurate, in-depth and complete reporting on, information about and analysis of recent history and developments in Catalonia. Among the available internet sources that can be helpful and can provide at least a chronological overview and some insight, one could list, e.g. BBC World News; Bloomberg Politics; Reuters; etc.

[5] A few decades after the publication of the famous text of Gunnar Myrdal (1969) on objectivity of and in social sciences, we could hope that scholarly and general public would recognize that – regardless of all attempts to achieve and improve objectivity – science(s) and research results are always socially conditioned and cannot be absolutely objective. If nothing else, the availability of information and data, volume and limits of knowledge as well as limits and problems of research approaches and methodology limit and condition the work and interpretations of researchers and scholars that, simultaneously, are exposed and conditioned also by value(s) and ideologies to which they are exposed.

[6] Discussions on research approaches and methodology that traditionally have existed in sciences in the past have intensified in social sciences and humanities. In this context, I consider important discussions on the application and relevance of different approaches and methods in studying complex social phenomena, particularly discussions on inter-disciplinarity and methodological pluralism in social sciences (e.g. della Porta & Keating 2008).

[7] The list of relevant sources and references would be several pages long. An overview (bibliography) of relevant published scholarly books, articles, materials and sources on ethnicity, protection of minorities and diversity management titled Suggested readings prepared as a draft study material for international doctoral students of Diversity Management and Governance at the University of Primorska/Littoral (2012–2013) had 40 pages.