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Research Article

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The 2011 Census in Croatia – A (partial) role model for the Western Balkans?

Anna-Lena Hoh*

Within the framework of EU enlargement, the population and housing census is a pre-condition for EU membership. The 2011 census in Croatia was conducted according to EU regulations¹ and considering this, it should present a good example for the region. However, there are some aspects which are not addressed by EU regulations, but are of importance when looking at censuses in the Western Balkans: the so-called sensitive issues (ethnicity, language and religion²). Answers to these questions are not required by the EU; nonetheless all Western Balkan countries have included these questions in their censuses. In Croatia, the census results are used to determine political participation by proportional representation of ethnic minorities, and this has led to ethnic tensions³. This article looks into the historical perspective of censuses in Croatia, as well as the EU conditionality of census-taking in the Croatian census of 2011. In addition, the practice of linking political participation to census results will be taken into account, before finally posing the question of whether the 2011 census in Croatia can really be taken as a role model for census-taking in the Western Balkans.

Keywords: Census-taking, Ethnicity, EU conditions, proportional representation

Introduction

Census-taking in Croatia has taken place long before the European Union (EU) existed. However, under the *acquis communautaire*, it is now part of the accession process. Regarding Croatia's accession process, compliance with EU conditions has not always been a strong point⁴. Nonetheless, Croatia has been seen as the undisputed leader in the region in terms of both progress towards EU accession and its capacity for policy-making and implementation. It is regarded as the "poster child" of the Western Balkans,⁵ securing EU membership in July 2013.

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¹ Eurostat. 2014. [2011 Population census framework- Factsheet on population censuses in the Enlargement countries](#). (accessed: 23. October 2015).

² Kertzer, David and Arel, Dominique. 2002. *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*: Cambridge: University Press.

³ Pavelic, Boris. 2014. [Croatia's Language Dispute Leaves Minorities Nervous](#). *BalkanTransitional Justice*, 12 August 2014 (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁴ Roter, Petra and Ana Bojinović. 2005. Croatia and the European Union: A Troubled Relationship. *Mediterranean Politics*, 10(3), 447-54.

⁵ Börzel, Tanja. 2013. *When Europeanization hits limited statehood- The Western Balkans as a test case for the transformative power of Europe*, in *European Integration and Transformation in the*

Since its independence in 1991, Croatia has conducted two censuses: the first in 2001 and the second in 2011. The basic concept of census-taking is to gain information about a state's population and certain aspects of their living standards. It is "a massive continuing national enquiry, a key anchor for much of the official statistical system"⁶. It provides information for national statistics and helps to formulate policies accordingly; it is used for example as a tool for the collection of taxes and the distribution of subsidies and national account systems. On average, countries connected to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) conduct a census every ten years; the last was the 2010 census round⁷. Within the EU the decennial collection of population data is mandatory⁸. By categorizing the population according to statistical variables the census helps to create social reality⁹ and identifies the hard lines of the population, which has consequences for social and political rights¹⁰.

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics,¹¹ all relevant EU regulations were transposed in the 2011 census and its results were widely accepted. Even though Croatia has been an EU member state since July 2013, at the time of the census Croatia was still a candidate country, therefore the intense control measures which EU members need to comply with during census-taking were not yet in place. However, while the census data of 2011 have been accepted overall, there were some contestations of the results¹². Most criticism had to do with the count of the Serb minority, as the number of this minority continues to have an important role in political disputes three years after the census¹³. The aspect of the Serb minority opens up the question of the so-called sensitive census aspects, which look at ethnicity, language and religion¹⁴. Questions regarding these aspects are not required by EU rules and are non-core aspects considering the UNECE census recommendations, but still were included in all the censuses in the Western Balkans in the 2010 census round. In the Western Balkans these are often connected to the proportional representation of ethnic minorities in political participation, such as special representatives in the

Western Balkans: Europeanization or Business As Usual?, edited by Elbasani, Arolda. Routledge: Chapman & Hall, 180.

⁶ Cook, Len. 2004. The quality and qualities of population statistics, and the place of the census. *Area* 36(2), 111-23, 111.

⁷ This covers all the censuses conducted in the time period from 2005 up to 2014. United Nations Statistics Division. 2013. *2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme*. (accessed: 23 October 2015).

⁸ European Parliament and Council of the European Union. 2008. Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council of 9 July 2008 on Population and Housing Censuses. *Official Journal of the European Union*.

⁹ Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 36.

¹⁰ Ruppert, Evelyn. 2007. *Producing Population*. CRESC Working Paper 37; Urla, Jaqueline. 1993. Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics: Numbers, Nations, and the Making of Basque Identity. *American Ethnologist* 20(4), 818-43.

¹¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. nd.-a. *Census 2011 - First Results* (accessed: 23. October 2015).

¹² Pavelic, Boris. 2012 *Croatia Sees Population Drop Over Decade*. *Balkan Insight*, 18. December 2012 (accessed: 23. October 2015).

¹³ Pavelic, *Croatia's language dispute*.

¹⁴ This article focuses foremost on the Serb minority in Croatia. Nonetheless other minorities, such as the Italians and Roma are of importance as well. However with regard to the census the Serb minority is most often mentioned and including other minority groups in this research is beyond the scope and the focus of this article.

Parliament or the use of minority languages¹⁵. This policy linkage leads to the politicization of censuses.

This article assesses the impact of EU conditions on census-taking in the enlargement process, as well as the practice of linking political participation to census results. It relies on the single case study of Croatia and focuses on the 2011 census, because the aspect of census-taking has only been regarded as an issue of importance for EU accession after the 2000 census round. It concludes by assessing whether the 2011 census in Croatia meets the EU requirements for census-taking and consequently whether it can be taken as a role model for censuses in the other Western Balkan countries.

Censuses in the Western Balkans

The practice of census-taking is believed to be over 6000 years old¹⁶. It has been described as the historical origin of the term ‘accountability’¹⁷, and censuses are labeled as a “social contract with society”¹⁸. Census-taking is a major statistical exercise and the “costs to poll and compile data on each person and household in a country can be enormous”¹⁹. Therefore, an ever-increasing statistical capability and infrastructure is required²⁰. The difficulties and challenges of a census are to be found in the different steps of the process, including the formulation of the census questionnaire, the collection of the census data and the compilation of the data. The population and housing census helps to provide an overview of the living conditions of the population, and gives an overview of a country’s statistical infrastructure. The population figures are used for, and in tandem with, other important statistics, such as a country’s GDP per capita. However, critical aspects can arise when conducting a census, including, among others, the definition of who to count, where, when (and whether or not to include the diaspora), and how to address sensitive aspects in a country (such as ethnicity, language and religion).

As an international practice, censuses have been conducted in the Western Balkans long before the countries were even considered a future territory for EU enlargement. However, the quality of these censuses is questionable²¹. The last census in Yugoslavia took place in 1991:

“Once the totalitarian structures were removed and Yugoslavia dissolved, the issues of ethnic belonging, geographic placement, and group size

¹⁵ Petričušić, Antonija. 2002. Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia. *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 2, 607-29.

¹⁶ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. 2006. *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing*. New York and Geneva: United Nations Publication.

¹⁷ Bovens, Mark. 2007. Analysing and Assessing Accountability: A Conceptual Framework. *European Law Journal* 13(4), 447-68.

¹⁸ Eurostat, and Romanian National Institute of Statistics. 2012. *Conference on Population and Housing Census*. Paper presented at the Conference on Population and Housing Census, Bucharest.

¹⁹ Tickle Miller, Terri. 2002. The Census Online: Internet Census Resources for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 3(4), 51-63, 51.

²⁰ Cook, *The quality and qualities of population statistics*, 121.

²¹ Visoka, Gëzim and Elvin Gjevori. 2013. Census politics and ethnicity in the Western Balkans. *East European Politics*, 1-20.

became important tools of inter-ethnic conflict/bargaining in the setting of new borders, minority rights, and representation schemes. Measuring group size, identifying ethnicity, mapping ethnic geography, and then allocating rights again became one of the most important and delicate processes in the Balkans in general and Western Balkans in particular.”²²

Although the history of the Balkans makes it increasingly difficult to collect information on sensitive issues (of ethnicity, language and religion), the politics of numbers still play an important role in the region²³.

The problem of counting ethnicity

As Urla²⁴ has shown through the example of the Basques in Spain, censuses can map ethnic identities through the selection of different options in constructing a census questionnaire and subsequent census categories and aggregation practices. This is also described by Kertzer and Arel²⁵: “[The] examination of the relationship between the census and the formation and evolution of collective identities, as we have seen, involves us in the messy process of politics. We witness the struggle among a multiplicity of actors over that most basic of powers, the power of name, to categorise, and thus to create social reality.”

Ethnicity, language and religion are sensitive issues which make up a part of a social structure and its categories²⁶. “The census [...] emerged as the most visible, and arguably the most politically important, means by which the states statistically depict collective identities”²⁷. Through the categories of the census, identities and the aspects of differentiating identities, such as ethnicity, language and religion, become increasingly visible and influence the actual census-taking²⁸. Thus, the consciousness of ethnic divisions can increase due to the census, and this in itself can affect the process of census-taking²⁹. This is especially problematic in situations where certain political rights are granted if a group makes up a certain percentage of the population: “In polities where the ability to influence political representation, local governance, budgetary policies, education policies, and cultural policies is dependent on a group’s share of the total population, census-taking becomes inextricably connected to population politics”³⁰.

In the Western Balkans the concept of ethnicity has been very important, particularly in the 20th century. For example, in Yugoslavia ethnic tensions were appeased by using “a complex state structure based on national and

²² Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*, 6.

²³ Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*.

²⁴ Urla, 1993. *Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics*.

²⁵ Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 36.

²⁶ Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*.

²⁷ Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*, 3.

²⁸ Kertzer and Arel, *Census and Identity*; Ruppert, Evelyn. 2011. Population Objects: Interpassive Subjects. *Sociology* 45(2), 218-33; Urla, *Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics*; Yanow, Dvora. 2003. *Constructing "Race" and "Ethnicity" in America: Category-making in Public Policy and Administration*: M.E. Sharpe.

²⁸ Visoka and Gjevori, *East European Politics*.

²⁸ Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*, 3.

historical group characteristics”³¹. However, to do so, information was needed on the population of the various ethnic groups. Therefore, it has been vital to include questions on the sensitive identity issues in the census. As mentioned above, in the 2010 census round all Western Balkan countries included these questions in their census questionnaires³². The censuses became part of a highly politicized process, “which revealed the unstable and contested nature of citizenship, ethnic belonging, and a weak civic identity”³³.

Since the political change towards the EU in 2000, Croatia has made major steps with regard to minority rights³⁴. Of particular importance was the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities of 2003³⁵. Since the creation of this law, Croatian minorities are entitled to more rights if they make up more than a certain percentage of the population: “Members of national minorities, in accordance with Article 19 of the Constitutional Law [on the Rights of National Minorities], constituting more than 1.5 % of the total population of the Republic of Croatia are guaranteed a minimum of one and a maximum of three representative seats for the members of that national minority”³⁶. Further, representation in local governmental bodies depends on the population numbers (the threshold is 15%)³⁷, and if a certain minority makes up more than 30% in a local self-governed unit the “equal official use of the minority language and script must be stipulated by the statute of a local or regional self-government unit in compliance with the provisions of the Minority Language Law”³⁸. The political representation of minority groups and their language rights are therefore directly linked to the results of the census.

Census taking in Croatia – the historical perspective

The Croatian Bureau of Statistics provides a very good overview of the historical censuses on the territory of Croatia³⁹. According to their website, the first census “covering the territory of the present-day Republic of Croatia”⁴⁰ dates from 1746 and 1754. However, these were incomplete as they did not count gentry and clergy, and the “[p]opulation was enumerated according to the affiliation of holdings to particular noblemen or towns.”⁴¹ The next census was in 1857, but it too was incomplete⁴². However, these data are used to indicate changes in the population, and the population numbers are used for comparison with the census data of 1869, 1880, 1890, 1900 and 1910⁴³. From then on censuses have been held relatively regularly every 10 years, with an

³¹ Minority Rights Group International. 2003. *Minorities in Croatia*, 7.

³² Eurostat, *2011 Population census framework- Factsheet*.

³³ Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*, 2.

³⁴ Tatalović, Siniša. 2006. National Minorities and Croatian Democracy. *Politička misao*, 43(5), 45-59, 46.

³⁵ Additional also “laws regulating education and the official use of of the languages and the alphabets of national minorities” have been implemented. (see Tatalović, *National Minorities*, 46.)

³⁶ Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*, 617-18; see also Tatalović, *National Minorities*.

³⁷ Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*.

³⁸ Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*, 615.

³⁹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. n.d-c. *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2011, Frequently Asked Questions* (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁴⁰ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

⁴¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

⁴² Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

⁴³ Šterc, Stjepan and Ivan Crkvenčić. 1996. The population of Croatia. *GeoJournal*, 38(4), 417-24.

interruption in 1941 due to the war⁴⁴. Due to the historical developments the sources for the population data by Šterc and Crkvenčić⁴⁵ derive from the “statistical population censuses of the former Yugoslavia (i.e. of Serbia, as the central statistical bureau of the former Yugoslavia was located in Belgrade and it was there that census regulations were determined, data was compiled and stored, etc.)” At the last census of Yugoslavia in 1991, the population of Croatia was about 4,784,265, living on “56,538 km², or 84,62 persons per square kilometre.”⁴⁶

As a result of the recent war (1991-1995), there have been two major population flows⁴⁷. The first was in 1991, resulting from the establishment of Serb Krajina, Western Slavonia and Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium by the Yugoslav People’s Army and the Serb rebels⁴⁸. This led to approximately 84,000 Croats fleeing from regions under Serb control, and 70,000 displaced Serbs settling in the Danube region⁴⁹. The total estimated number of displaced people during the war varies between 430,000 and 700,000⁵⁰. “By mid-1995, the figure had decreased to 591,123 registered IDPs [internally displaced persons] and refugees (mostly ethnic Croats), whereas a year later, due to the flight of ethnic Serbs, it increased to 688,169.”⁵¹ This increase was a consequence of military operations in the summer of 1995 which caused the second major population flow. This “was four years later [than the first population flow] when the Croatian government seized control over the Serb-occupied territory during two rapid military operations, Flash and Storm, in May and August 1995 respectively.”⁵² Serbs leaving these territories found refuge in Serbia (about 300,000) and in the Republika Srpska in Bosnia (about 40,000)⁵³. By September 2009, about “34% of Serb minority refugees had been officially registered as officially returned to Croatia.”⁵⁴ After the war the difficult relationship between Croatia and its Serb minority continued: “The deterioration of the relationship between Croatia and its Serb minority could be traced to the first days of the Croatian democracy. The victory of the right wing HDZ [Croatian Democratic Union, in Croatian: *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*] in the 1990 elections had far-reaching consequences for the relations of the Croatian state vis-à-vis the Croatian Serbs which, consequently, greatly influenced the Serb minority perceptions regarding the

⁴⁴ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

⁴⁵ Šterc and Crkvenčić, *The population of Croatia*, 422.

⁴⁶ Šterc and Crkvenčić, *The population of Croatia*, 417.

⁴⁷ Blitz, Brad. 2003. Refugee Returns in Croatia: Contradictions and Reform. *Politics*, 23(3), 181-91, 182.

⁴⁸ Barić, Nikica. 2008. *The Rise and Fall of the Republic of Serb Krajina (1990-1995)*, in *Croatia since independence: war, politics, society, foreign relations*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. / Clewing, Konrad and Reneo Lukic. Muenchen: Oldenbourg; Djuric, Ivana. 2010. The Post-War Repatriation of Serb Minority Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees in Croatia—Between Discrimination and Political Settlement. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(10), 1639-60.

⁴⁹ Blitz, *Refugee Returns*, 182.

⁵⁰ Djuric, *The Post-War Repatriation*, 1640.

⁵¹ Živić, 1999, in: Djuric, *The Post-War Repatriation*, 1640.

⁵² Blitz, *Refugee Returns*, 182.

⁵³ Djuric, *The Post-War Repatriation*, 1640.

⁵⁴ Djuric, *The Post-War Repatriation*, 1639.

nature of the emerging state”⁵⁵. The census outcome clearly shows the effects of these population flows and refugee returns.

As noted, Croatia has conducted two censuses (in 2001 and 2011) since its independence. The 2001 census, according to the European Commission, was “in line with the UNECE/Eurostat recommendations for the 2000 censuses of population and housing in the ECE region.”⁵⁶ The Croatian censuses cannot be directly compared, due to “the different statistical definition of the total population used in the 2011 Census”, which “was partly changed according to the international standards.”⁵⁷ (This will be discussed more below.) In comparison to the 2001 census, where Eurostat assisted the Croatian Bureau of Statistics with the census, Eurostat was less involved in 2011. Nonetheless, the 2011 census was, in most aspects, in line with the EU regulations on census-taking: “Since the Republic of Croatia is a candidate for the membership in the European Union, the Census is, in terms of definitions and classifications, fully harmonised with the EU Regulation on population and housing censuses”⁵⁸.

However, both censuses were disputed by the Serb minority⁵⁹. “Since many Serbs either fled Croatia during the war or were driven out, the number of Serbs living in Croatia declined so that while Serbs accounted for just over 12% of the population in 1991, they constituted just 4.54% of the population in 2001, according to the official census results”⁶⁰. These numbers have been used to show the difficult re-integration of Serb refugees in Croatia after the war. “At that time [the 2001 census], 89.63% of the population was ‘Croat’ out of total population of 4,437,460”⁶¹, whereas in 1981 only 75.08% of the population of Croatia declared themselves as ‘Croat’ (out of a total population of 4,601 469)⁶². (For a complete overview of the Croatian population by ethnicity from 1991 to 2011 see table 1 on page 15.) This reflects the idea of consolidating an ethnically homogenous state since independence⁶³. This process has also been termed “ethnic engineering”⁶⁴.

⁵⁵ Koska, Viktor. 2012. Framing the citizenship regime within the complex triadic nexuses: the case study of Croatia. *Citizenship Studies* 16(3-4), 397-411, 405.

⁵⁶ European Commission. 2006. Screening report Croatia, 9.

⁵⁷ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. n.d-b. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2011 - Notes on Methodology (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁵⁸ European Statistical System. 2011. Republic of Croatia: First results of the Census 2011. (accessed: 23 October 2015).

⁵⁹ Hipkins, Dominic. 2002. Croatia: Serb Fury Over Census Result. *Global Voices*, 14 June 2002 (accessed: 23 October 2015); Minority Rights Group International. 2008. World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Croatia: Overview. (accessed: 23. October 2015); Pavelic, *Croatia Sees Population Drop*; One of the aspects this article is neglecting is the focus on the Roma community in Croatia. In the 2011 census, 16,975 people declared themselves ‘Roma’ (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2006-2014a). This is a group which is vulnerable to undercount and further research would be necessary to investigate the implications of the census on their living situation.

⁶⁰ Ramet, Sabrina. 2008. *Politics in Croatia since 1990*, in *Croatia since independence: war, politics, society, foreign relations*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. / Clewing Konrad and Reneo Lukic Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 40.

⁶¹ Ramet. *Politics in Croatia*, 40.

⁶² Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2006-2014b. *Population By Ethnicity, 1971-2011 Censuses*. (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁶³ Barić, *The Rise and Fall of the Republic of Serb Krajina*; Blitz, *Refugee Returns*.

⁶⁴ Koska, *Framing the citizenship*; Štiks, Igor. 2010. The Citizenship Conundrum in Post-Communist Europe: The Instructive Case of Croatia. *Europe-Asia Studies* 62(10), 1621-38.

One of the problems related to this is the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, which links the proportional representation of ethnic minorities to political participation and to “the official use of a minority’s language and script if it makes up more than a third of the population in a particular area.”⁶⁵ To implement this provision, the country needs to know the numbers of the minority in the population. Even though in Croatia this is not as influential as the Dayton⁶⁶ and the Ohrid Framework⁶⁷ agreements⁶⁸, there are now ethnic tensions in some of the districts where minorities have the right to certain privileges.

The principle of EU conditionality

When the EU extended the membership perspective in 2000 they pronounced support for the Western Balkan region, with this support associated are the “obligations en route”⁶⁹ to EU membership. The support of the EU towards the Western Balkans has developed from a post-war stabilizing approach towards EU enlargement. Therefore, EU rules and practices have to be implemented by the candidate countries. As part of the *acquis communautaire*, census taking is one of the requirements which need to be implemented.

The instrument of conditionality “is the principle mechanism available to the EU to bring about change in the domestic opportunity structure of political actors”⁷⁰ and to “press for democratic reforms and to monitor compliance with its core political values”⁷¹. With the EU setting the agenda for membership the “instrument of EU conditionality is not always, strictly speaking, democratic, based as it is on an unequal and asymmetric relationship of imposition, pressure, control and, partly, threats”⁷². To achieve this, the EU uses incentives, which are seen as an essential driver of “democratic institutional change” which need to be strong enough to compensate for eventual perceived loss of power or popularity.⁷³

With regard to census-taking one needs to make the distinction between the often addressed democratic conditionality and the compliance with the *acquis communautaire*.⁷⁴ Democratic conditionality is the first criterion for accession and focuses on the political transformation towards democratization and (EU

⁶⁵ Pavelic, *Croatia’s Language Dispute*.

⁶⁶ Sarajlić, Eldar. 2010. A Citizenship Beyond the Nation-State: Dilemmas of the ‘Europeanisation’ of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *CITSEE Working Paper Series*, 371.

⁶⁷ Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*, 12.

⁶⁸ See on this topic also the contributions by Valery Perry on Bosnia and Roska Vrgova on Macedonia in this special issue.

⁶⁹ Trbovich, Ana. 2008. *A Legal Geography of Yugoslavia’s Disintegration*: Oxford University Press, USA, 365.

⁷⁰ Noutcheva, Gergana. 2012. *European Foreign Policy and the Challenges of Balkan Accession: Conditionality, legitimacy and compliance*. Taylor & Francis, 18.

⁷¹ Noutcheva, Gergana and Senem Aydin-Düzgit. 2012. Lost in Europeanisation: The Western Balkans and Turkey. *West European Politics*, 35(1), 59-78, 59.

⁷² Anastasakis, Othon. 2008. The EU’s political conditionality in the Western Balkans: towards a more pragmatic approach. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 8(4), 365-77, 366.

⁷³ Noutcheva and Aydin-Düzgit, *Lost in Europeanisation*, 59.

⁷⁴ This has also been called *acquis conditionality* by Schimmelfennig, Frank and Ulrich Sedelmeier. 2005. *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. Cornell University Press, 211.

member) state building.⁷⁵ It comprises the Copenhagen criteria, and includes, for example, the aspect of minority rights.⁷⁶ The *acquis* conditionality is regarded more as a technical approximation, to “promote[...] a growing body of laws, agreements, resolutions, declarations, and juridical decisions and take[...] part during the negotiations on the 35 chapters and more than 80,000 pages of legislative text.”⁷⁷ Census-taking is part of the chapter on statistics, and encompasses the UNECE recommendations on the population and housing census⁷⁸ and the EU regulations on the census.⁷⁹ This process is meant to harmonize data on the population and housing censuses across Europe, to be able to compare the data of the member states. Nonetheless in the area of the census the outcomes are not always as expected, when considering, for example, the aborted census in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.⁸⁰ This example shows that the technical issue of census-taking is in fact highly politicized. Even though the UNECE recommendations advise not to, and the EU regulations do not require asking for sensitive issues such as ethnicity, religion and language, all the Western Balkan countries included questions addressing these in their census questionnaires, at times with negative effects⁸¹.

The EU conditions for census-taking

The whole process of census-taking is a major exercise: starting with the census law, the preparation of methodology and the questionnaires the selection of the enumerators, and the data collection process itself; then the data aggregation and if applicable a post-enumeration survey, to test the quality of the census; and finally the publication of the data. In every step of this exercise, there are aspects which require special attention. Even though census taking is only a small part of the *acquis* chapter on statistics, it is one of the most challenging tasks of the national statistical offices, because these data are used as the

⁷⁵ Keil, Soeren. (ed.). 2013. *State-building in the Western Balkans: European approaches to democratization*: Routledge.

⁷⁶ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier. *The Europeanization of Central And Eastern Europe*, 211; European Commission. (2014-a). *Conditions for membership*. (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁷⁷ Anastasakis, *The EU's political conditionality*, 367.

⁷⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. 2006. *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing*.

⁷⁹ Commission of the European Communities. 2009. Commission Regulation (EC) No 1201/2009 of 30 November 2009 implementing Regulation (EC) 763/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council on population and housing censuses as regards the technical specifications of the topics and of their breakdowns. *Official Journal of the European Union*; European Commission. 2010. Commission Regulation (EU) No 519/2010 of 16 June 2010 adopting the programme of the statistical data and of the metadata for population and housing census provided for by Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council. *Official Journal of the European Union*; Commission of the European Communities. 2010. Commission Regulation (EU) No 1151/2010 of 8 December 2010 implementing Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on population and housing censuses, as regards the modalities and structure of the quality reports and the technical format for data transmission. *Official Journal of the European Union*.

⁸⁰ On the tenth day of the enumeration process, the Macedonian Parliament annulled the earlier adopted Census Law in effect cancelling the planned census owing to political disagreements, poor preparation and high expectations of irregularities yielding suspicions of potentially incorrect census results (Daskalovski, Zhidas. 2013. Census taking and inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 13(3), 1-15). It was suspected that the insecurity regarding the methodology of the census would “have [...] an effect on the numbers of the majority Macedonians and the minority Albanians” (Daskalovski. *Census taking*, 2).

⁸¹ Eurostat, *2011 Population census framework- Factsheet*.

backbone for other statistical equations and for selecting survey frames. As mentioned above, in the Western Balkans these numbers are also used to ensure the political representation of minorities.

As the rules and regulations of census taking stated in the UNECE recommendations are only recommendations, the EU has formulated more concrete rules on census-taking. These are given in the statistical compendium,⁸² which refers to the EU regulations on the population and housing censuses.⁸³ The EU cannot oblige candidate countries to comply with the legal rules (yet), because those countries are (or were in the case of Croatia) not yet member states. However, the UNECE recommendations are in fact very similar and should ideally be taken into account by the candidate countries in the Western Balkan region. The main difference of interest with census-taking in the Balkan region is in regard to the sensitive questions of ethno-cultural characteristics. These questions are not required by the EU while the UNECE lists these as 'non-core'. Even so, these questions are part of the census questionnaires in the Western Balkans and are already causing tension.⁸⁴

The 2011 census in Croatia

The Croatian census of 2011 was conducted without any major problems and is "in terms of definitions and classifications, fully harmonised with the EU Regulation on population and housing censuses."⁸⁵ As described above, Croatia had already conducted a census in 2001, which, according to the European Commission, was in line with the UNECE/Eurostat recommendations for the 2000 censuses.⁸⁶ However, the census results cannot be compared due to different statistical definitions of the total population, mainly with regard to refugees and the diaspora: "Firstly because the intention of staying was not collected in the 2001 Census, and, secondly, due to the fact that the 2001 Census included in the total population persons absent for longer than a year who returned to their residence on a seasonal or monthly basis (these persons are not included in the total population in the 2011 Census)"⁸⁷.

The 2011 census was carried out "according to the Conference of European Statisticians [the UNECE] Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing."⁸⁸ The census law was adopted by the Croatian Parliament in July 2010 and the census data were collected from 1 to 28 April in 2011.⁸⁹ The census law outlines the deliverables for the census data

⁸² European Commission. 2014-b. *Statistical requirements compendium*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁸³ Commission of the European Communities. 2010. *Commission Regulation (EU) No 1151/2010*; European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2008). Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council of 9 July 2008 on Population and Housing Censuses. *Official Journal of the European Union*.

⁸⁴ some examples: Daskalovski, *Census taking*; Perry, Valery. 2013. The 2013 Census in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *DPC, Policy Note* (New Series #3); Visoka and Gjevori, *Census Politics*.

⁸⁵ European Statistical System. 2011. Republic of Croatia: First results of the Census 2011.

⁸⁶ European Commission, *Screening report Croatia*, 9.

⁸⁷ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. *Census of Population*, (accessed: 23. October 2015).

⁸⁸ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2011, First Results by Settlements*. Zagreb.

⁸⁹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. n.d. *Census -Notes on Methodology: Croatian Parliament. 2010. Decision on the adoption of the act on the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the*

collection, as well as the costs of the census. These were covered by the Croatian government. Some of the tasks related to ensuring the correctness of the census, such as the Post Enumeration Survey, were funded by the EU through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).⁹⁰ The statistical office in Croatia had the knowledge of the previous census and knew what to expect; it had the experience and capacity to conduct the 2011 census without major external support. “The first results of the Census were obtained by a direct summing up of census units (persons, households and dwellings) at the lowest spatial unit level. The results were then aggregated at the level of higher spatial units, that is, for settlements, towns, counties and the City of Zagreb as well as for the whole of the Republic of Croatia.”⁹¹

Although, the census probably played only a minor role in the whole accession process, the overall acceptance of the census data was a good sign. The EU Progress Report for 2011 states that, “[g]ood progress has been made in the area of statistics. A good level of alignment has been achieved.”⁹² On the first view it seems as if Croatia has been fully compliant with the implementation of the EU rules of census taking. However, it has been stressed that the alignment has been foremost with regard to the “terms of definitions and classifications.”⁹³ Looking at the questionnaire,⁹⁴ it includes questions on ethno-cultural characteristics – questions which are not required by the EU. Regarding the question on ethnicity, the questionnaire provides an answer box for people who declare themselves as ‘Croat’, a box for ‘not-declared’, and an open field for other ethnic declarations. According to the UNECE recommendations “questionnaires should include an open question and interviewers should refrain from suggesting answers to the respondents” and “[r]espondents should be free to indicate more than one ethnic affiliation or a combination of ethnic affiliations if they wish so.”⁹⁵ In this regard the Croatian questionnaire is not in line with the recommendations. Including the box for ‘Croat’ does not reflect the idea of an open question, which can lead to measurement errors during the enumeration process. Also, this questionnaire suggests that only one ethnic affiliation is possible. Almost the same issues hold for the questions regarding language (‘mother tongue’ in the Croatian census questionnaire) and religion. With regard to the question on religion there has been criticism by the media, as census takers were suspected of not (or wrongly) declaring the religious preference of Serb residents.⁹⁶ Considering these issues, the census questionnaire of Croatia should be assessed critically and improved before the next census round in 2020.

Republic of Croatia in 2011. Zagreb. (accessed: 23. October 2015); Eurostat, *2011 Population census framework- Factsheet.*

⁹⁰ Eurostat, *2011 Population census framework- Factsheet.*

⁹¹ European Statistical System, *Republic of Croatia: First results of the Census 2011.*

⁹² European Commission, *Croatia 2011 Progress Report.*

⁹³ European Statistical System, *Republic of Croatia: First results of the Census 2011.*

⁹⁴ Republic of Croatia and Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *Personal questionnaire Census 2011.* (accessed: 23 October 2015).

⁹⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing. *United Nations* 96.

⁹⁶ N.D. 2011. *Census takers sanctioned for not taking down orthodox religious preferences.* *Croatian Times*, 04 April 2011 (accessed: 23. October 2015).

At the time of the 2011 census, Croatia was already relatively well advanced in the accession process and did not consider the census as a major obstacle before accession. By the time of the census in 2011, the progress of Croatia's accession was tangible.⁹⁷ In the Progress Report of 2011, the same year as the census, the accession date of July 2013 was already stated.⁹⁸ Even so, it has been argued that EU conditionality varies in effectiveness throughout the different stages of the accession process.⁹⁹ The population and housing census of 2011 was "harmonised with international standards that define the joint rules for the collection of data on population and housing and prescribe definitions that countries are obliged to apply in their censuses in order to provide the international comparability of data."¹⁰⁰ Even though candidate countries do not need to comply with the EU regulations (yet), the Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on Population and Housing Censuses and the Commission Regulation (EC) No 1201/2009 of 30 November 2009 implementing Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 are mentioned as two of the most important documents for international standards, together with the UNECE recommendations.¹⁰¹ Eventhough the EU has more means to steer the compliance of countries through conditions during the accession process, in terms of the census, the check-ups on whether rules and recommendations were implemented were not as thorough (in comparison to member states and other accession countries), though in general the results of the 2011 census were accepted (and are available on the website of Eurostat). In the next census round the check-ups of the EU will be more thorough, as Croatia now has EU member state obligations.

The implications of counting ethnicity in Croatia

Croatia has had problems with xenophobia and integration of its Serb and Roma communities.¹⁰² Mostly as a result of the war, the relationship between Croats and the Serb minority was difficult:¹⁰³ "[A]fter the military operation Storm, and a mass exodus of Serb refugees from Croatia to neighbouring republics, Croatia implemented a set of discriminatory practices that de facto excluded them [Serb refugees] from state membership and impeded their sustainable return."¹⁰⁴ The Croatian policy towards Serb returnees after the war has been described as "hesitant"¹⁰⁵ and citizenship criticized as a tool for

⁹⁷ European Commission, *Croatia 2011 Progress Report*.

⁹⁸ European Commission, *Croatia 2011 Progress Report*, 4.

⁹⁹ see for example: Rechel, Bernd. 2008. What Has Limited the EU's Impact on Minority Rights in Accession Countries? *East European Politics & Societies* 22(1), 171-91; Steunenberg, Bernard and Antoaneta Dimitrova. 2007. Compliance in the EU enlargement process: The limits of conditionality. *European Integration online Papers*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2011, First Results by Settlements*. Zagreb, 8.

¹⁰¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Census, First Results by Settlements*. Zagreb, 9.

¹⁰² Minority Rights Group International. 2008. World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Croatia; Ramet, Sabrina and Marius Søberg. 2008. *Challenges facing Croatia since Independence (An Introduction)*, in *Croatia since independence: war, politics, society, foreign relations*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. / Clewing, Konrad and Reneo Lukic., Muenchen: Oldenbourg.

¹⁰³ Barić, *The Rise and Fall of the Republic of Serb Krajina*; Djuric, *The Post-War Repatriation*; Leutloff-Grandits, Carolin. 2008. *Croatia's Serbs Ten Years after the End of the War*, in *Croatia since independence: war, politics, society, foreign relations*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. / Clewing, Konrad and Reneo Lukic. Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 141-67.

¹⁰⁴ Koska, *Framing the citizenship regime*, 401.

¹⁰⁵ Leutloff-Grandits, *Croatia's Serbs*, 157.

“ethnic engineering.”¹⁰⁶ By comparing the census results from 1991 and 2011 (see table 1), the Serb minority decreased from a population of 581,663 in 1991¹⁰⁷ to just 186,633 in 2011.¹⁰⁸ Apart from the Serb population, other minority groups also decreased in numbers. For example, whereas in 1991 there were 22,355 people who declared themselves Hungarian in the census, in 2001 there were only 16,595.¹⁰⁹ Looking at the table from the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, the biggest minority groups after the Serbs in the census of 1991, were ‘others’ with 3.91%. In another source these are specified as ‘Yugoslav’ (2.22% of the total population) and ‘Muslim’ (0.91% of the total population). These categories are followed by undefined (anonymous) categories such as ‘no national declaration’ (1.53% of the total population) and ‘unknown’ (1.32% of the total population).¹¹⁰ The definition of the categories, even though they seem rather small, can affect the population count. In the table of the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2011 the biggest minorities were formed by ‘Bosniaks’ (0.73% of the total population), ‘regional affiliations’ (0.64% of the population)¹¹¹ and ‘not declared’ (0.62% of the total population).¹¹² The most important reason for this decrease is probably the war, but also nationalist policies and migration to urban areas, as well as abroad.¹¹³ However, there is also the probability that minorities are vulnerable towards being undercounted – particularly the Roma. The changes might also be a result of the formulation of the census question on ethnicity, as it strongly encourages the ticking of the box ‘Croat’. Another reason of undercount could be due to the fear of discrimination, leading people to not state their ethnicity, but to opt for other options, such as ‘not-declared’.¹¹⁴

Table 1: Population by Ethnicity, 1991-2011 Censuses

	1991 Census		2001 Census		2011 Census	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Republic of Croatia	4.784.265	100	4.437.460	100	4.284.889	100
Croats	3.736.356	78,10	3.977.171	89,63	3.874.321	90,42
Albanians	12.032	0,25	15.082	0,34	17.513	0,41
Austrians	214	0,00	247	0,01	297	0,01
Bosniaks ¹⁾	20.755	0,47	31.479	0,73
Bulgarian	458	0,01	331	0,01	350	0,01
Montenegrins	9.724	0,20	4.926	0,11	4.517	0,11
Czechs	13.086	0,27	10.510	0,24	9.641	0,22
Hungarians	22.355	0,47	16.595	0,37	14.048	0,33
Macedonians	6.280	0,13	4.270	0,10	4.138	0,10
Germans	2.635	0,06	2.902	0,07	2.965	0,07
Poles	679	0,01	567	0,01	672	0,02

¹⁰⁶ Koska, *Framing the citizenship regime*; Štikš, *The Citizenship Conundrum*.

¹⁰⁷ Šterc and Crkvenčić, *The population of Croatia*, 418.

¹⁰⁸ Croatian Bureau of Statistics. n.d. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2011, 3. [Population by Ethnicity, 1971 - 2011 Censuses](#). (accessed: 23 October 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Minority Rights Group International, *Minorities in Croatia*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Šterc and Crkvenčić, *The population of Croatia*, 418; Looking at the table on page 418, also in 1991 “regional affiliations” was quite a strong category chosen by 0.95% of the population.

¹¹¹ When looking at the detailed classification table of the 2011 census, these are presumably people declaring themselves as “Istrian” or “Dalmation” (see: Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2006-2014a. [Population By Ethnicity – Detailed Classification, 2011 Census](#). (accessed: 23 October 2015).

¹¹² Croatian Bureau of Statistics. n.d. *Census, Population by Ethnicity, 1971 - 2011 Censuses*.

¹¹³ Minority Rights Group International, *Minorities in Croatia*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Minority Rights Group International, *Minorities in Croatia*, 14.

The 2011 Census in Croatia – A (partial) role model for the Western Balkans?

Roma	6.695	0,14	9.463	0,21	16.975	0,40
Romanians	810	0,02	475	0,01	435	0,01
Russians	706	0,01	906	0,02	1.279	0,03
Ruthenians	3.253	0,07	2.337	0,05	1.936	0,05
Slovaks	5.606	0,12	4.712	0,11	4.753	0,11
Slovenians	22.376	0,47	13.173	0,30	10.517	0,25
Serbs	581.663	12,16	201.631	4,54	186.633	4,36
Italians	21.303	0,45	19.636	0,44	17.807	0,42
Turks	320	0,01	300	0,01	367	0,01
Ukrainians	2.494	0,05	1.977	0,04	1.878	0,04
Vlachs	22	0,00	12	0,00	29	0,00
Jews	600	0,01	576	0,01	509	0,01
Others ²⁾	152.803	3,19	21.801	0,49	18.965	0,44
Regional affiliation	45.493	0,95	9.302	0,21	27.225	0,64
Not declared	73.376	1,53	79.828	1,80	26.763	0,62
Unknown	62.926	1,32	17.975	0,41	8.877	0,21

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 2006-2014b. Population by Ethnicity, 1971–2011 Censuses.

[As a] result of external pressure from the EU, as part of the accession process constitutional changes in 2002 improved the legal situation of the Serb minority.¹¹⁵ However, the Serbs still dispute both census results since Croatian independence,¹¹⁶ as they see it as the continuation of ethnic cleansing and link it to the difficult return of Serb refugees.¹¹⁷ As described above, the constitutional changes of 2002 link the implementation of minority rights with the outcome of the census results of 2001.¹¹⁸ Population politics are still visible in the current legislation, where political participation depends on the proportions of the population and official use of a minority language is allowed if in a particular area the minority makes up more than a third of the population.¹¹⁹ Census results can lead to tensions: There were about 20 municipalities in Croatia where Serbs make up more than 30% of the population, meaning that Cyrillic script could be introduced as an official language. This caused major protests and even a referendum on changing the constitution to increase the needed threshold.¹²⁰ The tensions were especially visible in the city Vukovar, which in 1991 “was besieged and part demolished by the Yugoslav Army and Serbian paramilitaries during Croatia’s war of independence, becoming a symbol of independence.”¹²¹ Now, it is one of the municipalities which could introduce Cyrillic script, and where most of the protests took place.¹²² This shows that in spite of the existing constitution, which is protecting minorities, a part of Croatian society does not support the acceptance (and integration) of ethnic minorities. While the referendum on constitutional change was blocked by the Constitutional Court,¹²³ it nevertheless shows that including the sensitive categories in the census

¹¹⁵ Koska, *Framing the citizenship*; Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*.

¹¹⁶ Hipkins, *Croatia: Serb Fury Over Census Result*; Minority Rights Group International. 2008. World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples; Pavelic, *Croatia Sees Population Drop*.

¹¹⁷ Hipkins, *Croatia: Serb Fury Over Census Result*.

¹¹⁸ Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*, 615.

¹¹⁹ Pavelic, *Croatia’s Language Dispute*; Petričušić, *Constitutional Law*.

¹²⁰ Milekic, Sven. 2014. *Croatia Referendum Ruling Less Clear Than it Seems*. *Balkan Insight*, 13 August 2014 (accessed: 23 October 2015); Pavelic, *Croatia’s Language Dispute*.

¹²¹ Pavelic, Boris. *Croatia to Introduce Cyrillic Script to Vukovar*. *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 03 January 2013 (accessed: 23 October 2015).

¹²² Jergović, Miljenko. 2013. *Der kroatische Kampf um Vukovar*. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 30 April 2013 (accessed: 23 October 2015).

¹²³ Pavelic, *Croatia’s Language Dispute*.

questionnaire and linking them to proportional representation in political participation and language rights can cause political and especially ethnic tensions. By linking political participation and mandate representation quota's with the census results, it is very likely that the census will be politicized and its results disputed. This also raises the question of the use of the census results and whether it will ever be possible to leave these sensitive questions out of the census questionnaire. The current legislation has sparked protests¹²⁴ and discussion around the aspect of minority rights, but also around the aspect of ethnicity.

Conclusion

The 2011 census in Croatia can be regarded as the most complete census in the history of Croatia. This shows that Croatia had the needed structures and capabilities of conducting such a large scale project. It was in line with most EU regulations and most of the UNECE recommendations. This does not come as a complete surprise, considering that in the same year the census was taken the accession date for EU membership was set. The census was not regarded as a major obstacle considering that the overall process of census-taking went smoothly.

Although the core aspects of census-taking as part of the *acquis* conditions by Eurostat are regarded as simply technical, by opting to ask for ethno-cultural characteristics the census becomes connected with issues regarding minority rights and therewith could be part of the political conditions. By the time of the serious EU approximation of Croatia "the major problems for minorities had already been resolved."¹²⁵ Therefore, it seems as if the possible politicisation of the census categories was never considered to be a major problem. So far these aspects have been neglected by the EU, and there is no general EU guideline. The EU regulations on the population and housing census do not even mention this aspect, but refer to the UNECE recommendations. With regard to the sensitive ethno-cultural aspects, the Croatian census (questionnaire) is not in line with international recommendations. As mentioned above, on the one hand the collection of this data is connected to the political representation and protection of ethnic minorities. On the other hand, however, the possible implementation of some of the minority rights sparked protests, and a rise of ethnic intolerance has been observed in Croatia.¹²⁶

Can the census in Croatia serve as a role model for the other Western Balkan countries? Croatia certainly seems to have the statistical infrastructure to conduct a census. This cannot be stated for all the countries in the Western Balkans and is one of the aspects where Croatia can be taken as a role model. Following the general lines of EU regulations, it can to a certain extent be regarded as a good example. On the one hand there are good aspects, such as

¹²⁴ Milekic, *Croatia Referendum*; Pavelic, *Croatia Sees Population Drop*; Pavelic, *Croatia's Language Dispute*.

¹²⁵ Glüpker, Gitta. 2013. Effectiveness of EU Conditionality in the Western Balkans: Minority Rights and the Fight Against Corruption in Croatia and Macedonia. *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 9(2), 223-41, 237.

¹²⁶ Milekic, Sven. 2015. *Croatian Politicians 'Fuelling Hatred of Serbs'*. *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 15 June 2015 (accessed: 23 October 2015).

the availability of the data, the organization of the census (for example the allocation of a census budget, the collaboration and integration of the EU rules etc.) Whether Croatia follows upon the rules after its EU accession remains to be seen in the next census round (2020). On the other hand, there are various problems with regard to sensitive issues, such as ethnicity, which in other Western Balkan countries may cause even more problems than in Croatia, as has been shown by the aborted census in Macedonia.¹²⁷ The EU should not underestimate the effect these aspects can have on the census, but also the social and political position of ethnic minorities in the region. This also links to the question: if political participation is connected to census results will it *ever* be possible to overcome the construction of the ethno-cultural concepts (and therewith the politicization of the census) in countries with contentious recent histories? Not only is this important in the Western Balkans, this paradox has been also identified with regard to discrimination in other European statistics.¹²⁸ The collection of sensitive data via surveys such as in the Netherlands could be considered a possible solution, but whether this actually solves the problem should be the subject of further research.

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¹²⁷ Daskalovski, *Census taking*.

¹²⁸ Simon, Patrick. 2005. The measurement of racial discrimination: the policy use of statistics. *International Social Science Journal* 57(183), 9-25.

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