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IS POST-COMMUNISM STILL A USEFUL CONCEPT? EVIDENCE FROM STUDIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIFE STAGE TRANSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes adding a post-communist type to the existing ideal-types of European youth transition regimes - Nordic, Southern, Central (high apprenticeship), and neo-liberal. It is argued that in much of the former communist bloc a new pattern of youth transitions has been created as a result of the legacy of communism, path dependence from outcomes during the immediate post-communist transformation, and late-development effects. The definitive features of this post-communist regime are: a middle-lower class division in social origins and destinations; relatively small primary and relatively large secondary labour market segments; prolonged dependence on families of origin; weak public and voluntary sector leisure provisions, thus young people's leisure is typically a mixture of the private/informal and commercial. There is no implication or assumption that all former communist countries will match this type more closely than existing (Western) ideal types. Rather, this paper proposes using the post-communist type alongside existing ideal-types to assess the directions of change in different East European and ex-Soviet countries and regions therein.

Key words: education, housing, labour markets, post-communism, youth

È ANCORA UTILIZZABILE IL CONCETTO DI POST-COMUNISMO? TESTIMONIANZE DALLO STUDIO DEI MOMENTI DI PASSAGGIO DEI GIOVANI ALLE DIVERSE FASI DELLA VITA

SINTESI

Nell'articolo viene formulata la proposta di introdurre, accanto all'esistente tipologia di ideali tipi di regime di transizione dei giovani- nordico, meridionale, centrale (prolungato processo di applicazione) e neoliberale- il concetto di transizione post-comunista. Viene presentata la tesi secondo cui in gran parte dell'ex blocco comunista è nato come retaggio del comunismo il fenomeno di un nuovo modello di emancipazione dei giovani, dipendente dai risultati dei percorsi intrapresi (path dependance) tanto nella fase di transizione post comunista immediata, quanto dagli effetti nella fase della sua successiva evoluzione. Le caratteristiche di questo regime post-comunista sono: la suddivisione in classe medio-bassa a seconda dell'estrazione sociale e delle aspirazioni, un relativamente limitato mercato del lavoro primario e relativamente più esteso mercato del lavoro secondario; una prolungata dipendenza dalla famiglia d'origine; nelle attività legate al tempo libero una debole presenza del volontariato pubblico e privato sostituita da un mix di iniziative private/informali e commerciali. Non ci sono ipotesi o supposizioni che confermino come rispetto alle esistenti tipologie ideali (occidentali) il succitato modello sia di fatto più vicino agli ex paesi comunisti. Nell'articolo viene pertanto formulata la proposta di utilizzare nella valutazione della possibile direzione dei processi di trasformazione nei Paesi e regioni dell'Europa dell'Est e dell'ex Unione Sovietica il modello post-comunista parallelamente agli altri già presenti.

Parole chiave: educazione formale, esistenza, mercato del lavoro, post-comunismo, giovani

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

As we approach its third decade, we need to ask whether post-communism has become a redundant concept. If it retains value, as the following passages argue, we need to be clear about exactly what this value is. Does the fact that countries were once communist explain any current conditions? For our purposes the relevant conditions are those of young people in former communist countries.

There are many generalisations in the following passages. These are meant to apply to young people in former communist countries in general, not everywhere. One must bear in mind throughout that most of the young people 'in general' live in the parts of the ex-Soviet Union that have not become new European Union member states. They are in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, the South Caucasus, the five Central Asia states, Mongolia and of course Russia, where conditions in Moscow and St Petersburg are not typical of the entire country. Nor are conditions in the North Caucasus where young people, along with other citizens, are probably continuing to experience greater difficulties than anywhere else in the entire ex-Soviet bloc (see Cava and Michael, 2006). Small countries, situated adjacent to the pre-2004 European Union, probably have the least typical post-communist histories. That said, the experiences of young people vary immensely from place to place within most countries. Most of the quantitative evidence available for making international comparisons is about countries, yet 'country' may not be the ideal unit for distinguishing different youth conditions.

There will probably be no dispute that at a particular historical moment post-communism was a useful concept. Its explanatory power was most vivid in communism's immediate aftermath – when lives were clearly being reshaped (shattered in many cases) by the end of the old system (see Gros, 1997). This led to the closure of factories, governments running out of money, state services being drained of cash, salaries unpaid for months, daily breakdowns in electricity and water supplies in some places, and a weakening of law enforcement. The persistent differences between conditions of life in West and East Germany show that, in this particular unified state, a communist past continues to make some difference (see Steiner, 2009).

History certainly matters, but different ex-communist countries have now built very different post-communist histories. Some have been able to recover and, in some ways, resume national histories that were interrupted when the countries became communist. This has been most likely in countries that became modern industrial states and political democracies prior to becoming communist. Countries without pre-communist histories as independent states, such as the central Asian republics, have been busy discovering and recovering or inventing lengthy national histories and associated identities.

The following passages make a case for retaining the post-communist concept, at least for the time being. The case is made tentatively, though as persuasively as possible. At present it seems reasonable to insist that the possibility of some of the countries developing a distinctive 21st century version of modernity deserves to be treated as seriously as orthodox transition theory, which regards the countries as (ideal-typically) becoming more-and-more like the older market economies and democracies of the West.

The challenge of diversity

All the countries that were once communist began their post-communist histories from similar (though not identical) starting-points. Each of them had been countries where all major economic assets were state owned, where the economies were state planned (except Yugoslavia), and where communist parties monopolised political power. Today they are more significantly different from one another.

Some of the countries have become multi-party western-type democracies where presidents and governments change according to how votes are cast, and defeated candidates go into opposition rather than exile, prison or enforced retirement. All the countries that have joined the European Union can pass these elementary democracy tests. In contrast, apart from the Baltic states (now in the EU), Ukraine and Moldova (where the president is elected by the parliament) are the sole ex-Soviet countries in which a president has been ousted by an election.

There are now huge differences in how the ex-communist countries' economies have performed. When communism ended the populations in all the countries shared a similar way of life. In the immediate aftermath of communism they nearly all experienced steep declines in economic output. Actual household incomes fell dramatically. Since then growth has resumed everywhere, but at different rates, leading to widespread inter-country inequalities. There are differences among the new EU member states, for example, Slovenia is much better-off than Bulgaria. There are similar contrasts among the countries of the former Soviet Union. Salaries in Kazakhstan are now roughly four times as high as in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan's oil, gas and other mineral exports are responsible for the disparity.

There were urban-rural differences under communism, but these were lessened by the extent to which the countryside was industrialised. Agricultural production was concentrated on state and collective farms except in most of Poland, though even in Poland the distribution

of agricultural produce was part of the planned economy. Communism built factories everywhere, and cultural facilities were also opened in main towns in rural regions. This was part of an attempt to modernise the countryside and to close the economic, social and cultural gaps between the urban and rural populations. Urban-rural differences have widened under post-communist systems. Most of the factories in rural regions have closed. They would never have been established by, and have been proven unsustainable by market forces. Most of the cultural facilities in rural regions have also been victim of the new economic realism (see Clark, 2002). Farming has become a private enterprise which has resulted in many village households returning to subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. Meanwhile, capital cities have become very different places than they were in 1989. At night time they are now ablaze with neon. They are their countries' main centres of consumption, the sites of major cultural facilities, centres of government, and host the headquarters of banks, inward investors, foreign delegations and NGOs. Then there are new boom towns. Wroclaw in Poland is one, once again located at the centre of Europe's trade routes. Under communism it was a backwater town, at the end of a road to nowhere except the Iron Curtain. It has now become Poland's new Nowa Huta, one of the icons of communism which produced the metals that were to make Poland a leading industrial country. Present-day Nowa Huta is not an extreme case, but it is an example of the many towns whose main industries closed or downsized radically as soon as communism ended (Stenning, 2005a). Vanadzor in Armenia is a more extreme case; it is one of post-communism's economic wastelands. It was developed under communism as an industrial city, producing for the Soviet market. The end of the Soviet Union and its integrated market, combined with a devastating earthquake in 1988 and the economic blockade imposed by all Armenia's Muslim neighbours during the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh, closed all Vanadzor's main industrial plants (Tarkhnishvili et al., 2005). Kotayk is another region of Armenia that became mainly industrial under communism which is now mainly rural and agricultural (Roberts et al., 2008). Can the post-communist label handle this new diversity?

There are economic, social and cultural differences within the populations in all regions, as was the case under communism, and also in the West, and indeed universally. However, class, ethnic and gender differences and divisions do not prevent us from generalising about Western or developing countries. Indeed distinctive features of their internal differences and divisions may characterise and distinguish groups of countries. Are the ex-communist countries distinctive in any of these respects? Gender roles have changed since communism ended. Women have usually been particularly vulnerable when unemployment has risen. Their rates of non-employment (unemployment and economic inactivity) have risen more steeply than those of men. Women today are also less present in politics than under communism (see Bridger et al., 1996; Predborska, 2005). In the immediate aftermath of communism all this was sometimes described as women grasping their new opportunities to live 'normally' as housewives or even to become sex objects (see Bridger et al., 1996; Roberts and Jung, 1995). New class divisions have been created. Some communist and pre-communist strata are no longer recognisable – nomenklatura and intelligentsia for example. New rich classes, capitalist classes, have been created. The gaps between rich and poor have widened dramatically. We shall return to the subject of class inequalities later on. New ethnic majorities and minorities have been created, partly by migration, but mainly due to the break-up of former multi-ethnic states, namely the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

None of these differences require us to abandon post-communism as an analytical tool, but its virtue, insofar as it retains any value, must lie in identifying the remaining or emerging commonalities that make all or some of the countries similar to each other while different than the rest of the world despite their new diversities. Before seeking these commonalities we need to specify more closely where youth researchers should focus their gaze.

Life stages, cohorts and generations

Youth is a life stage, and the issue at stake in this paper is whether, in any of the relevant countries, the life stage group has distinctive post-communist characteristics, conditions and/or experiences. More on this will follow. A cohort is composed of persons who reach a given age or have a particular experience such as being born or graduating from university at a particular time (a year or group of years). Members of the first post-communist youth life stage group were a rather special cohort. They had extraordinary experiences. The futures for which they had been prepared in education (especially most of the jobs and everything that was formerly associated with membership of a work collective) were suddenly whisked away. This could be experienced as devastating or liberating since so much more seemed possible. These cohorts personally experienced the arrival of genuine markets in which they had to seek employment, and in which they could buy whatever they desired, provided they were able to pay. Some were personally involved in the movements and demonstrations that brought down communism and, in some places, led to the creation of new independent states. They experienced the abolition of internal passports where these had formerly been mandatory, which meant that they could live and work wherever they wanted within their

own countries, provided they could find jobs and accommodation. Youth in those countries which became candidates for EU membership suddenly found that visas were no longer required either to leave their own countries or to visit Western Europe. Anyone could go and experience life in the capitalist west; all that was necessary was to board a bus with a passport. Almost immediately, thousands of young people who lived in the EU border states began to do just that. Some members of this cohort fought in the wars that accompanied the end of communism in the Balkans and Caucasus. Some did not return, some returned permanently disabled, some young women were widowed.

For young people today, and indeed ever since the mid-1990s, the market economy and multi-party politics have not been innovations but simply part of the societies into which they have grown (Markowitz, 2000). They have not experienced liberation from, or the destruction of personal hopes and plans, as a result of the end of the old system. For them, communism and indeed the wars of the early-1990s, where these occurred, are just history, learned about in school (maybe) or from elders. Their knowledge of events in the 1980s and 1990s, and their long-term significance, is probably on a par with Western youth's knowledge of the recent histories of their own countries. Today's young people in ex-communist countries appear to have internalised the uncertainty of the market economy; they experience this as simply normal, a feature of life with which they need to cope (see Reiter, 2008).

If post-communism as a concept has enduring value, if it helps to make sense of youth in present-day ex-communist countries, this will not be the result of cohort effects but generation change. This occurs when members of a youth cohort *and their successors* have life experiences that set them apart and make them permanently different from their elders. In the case of post-communism the relevant life experiences should also make them different from peers in countries without communist histories. All post-communist cohorts of young people have clearly experienced a very different youth life stage compared with their elders. Education has changed. So have the economies. The post-communist cohorts have entered labour *markets* and have been able to purchase in consumer *markets.* In what ways, if any, has their youth life stage been and remained different from the life stage in the West?

A SOLUTION

Youth as a transitional life stage

Youth is a transitional life stage. The ages at which youth begins and ends are historical variables and may be fuzzy rather than precise. The point is that young people's lives change as they pass through the life stage, and accurate portrayals of youth need somehow to capture this biographical and longitudinal dimension. During the youth life stage individuals experience a series of transitions covering all aspects of their lives.

- From child in the parents' or guardians' household to parent.
- From living as a junior to a householder.
- From pupil/student to worker.
- From having purchases made on one's behalf to being an independent consumer.
- Acquisition of adult political rights.
- Acquisition of adult welfare rights.
- Acquisition of full adult legal liabilities and responsibilities.

Some of these transitions are particularly crucial. These are the transitions from student to worker, and in family and household statuses. Exactly how and when these transitions occur may not determine, but creates variable contexts in which other youth transitions are experienced. The crucial transitions do not occur automatically on reaching a given age. The ages are variable, and the transitions may never be completed, which has serious implications for those concerned and their wider societies. The sequences of events – always sequences rather than single events – through which the crucial life stage transitions are accomplished vary enormously, as do the destinations. Thus a task for those who study the sociology of youth is to discover whether, beneath the complexities, a limited number of main routes link different childhood origins to different adult destinations.

This definition of our subject-matter may discord with how young people themselves interpret their lives. There is plentiful evidence that nowadays (and probably yesteryear also) young people do/did not regard themselves as following pre-set routes but as negotiating their own ways forward in life, reflexively constructing what are now called choice biographies (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Du Bois-Reymond et al., 2001; Dwyer and Wyn, 1998). Young people may be willing to take personal responsibility: to credit themselves for their achievements and to accept blame when things go wrong. However, it is always unwise for sociologists to accept everyday commonsense at face value. How young people interpret their lives is data to be explained, not necessarily accepted as how things really happen. We have evidence independent of young people's minds that specific career routes do indeed link particular childhood origins to particular adult destinations. For example, in all countries where the evidence exists, progression through higher education is related, on the one hand, to social class origins, then, on the other hand, to the types of occupations that young adults enter.

If the post-communist concept retains analytical value this will be because there is something common and distinctive in some combination of young people's origins and/or destinations, and/or the routes that link

them. Any such common and distinctive features will need to be sketched as ideal-types against which the situations in particular countries, and socio-demographic groups therein, can be measured, thereby handling the diversity that has arisen between and within former communist countries. The value of a single post-communist ideal type needs to be judged against other possible contenders.

- Youth transitions under communism: how far and in what ways have youth transitions in particular countries departed from how these transitions were accomplished in the past? Probably too far and in too many different directions for a communist ideal type alone to retain analytical value in examining the situations of today's young people.
- Youth transitions in the West, but the West is not a uniform entity. Within Western Europe youth researchers have found it useful to contrast the Nordic countries with their universalistic welfare regimes, the high apprenticeship countries (Germany and some adjacent states), southern Europe where families of origin typically support and house their children into their late-20s and even beyond, and the neo-liberal UK (see Gangl, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005; Ivacovou and Berthoud, 2001; Pohl and Walther, 2007; Szdlik, 2002). Is there a need for a further post-communist ideal type? If the ex-communist countries really are in transition, gradually becoming more and more like the West, which is most likely in the post-2004 EU members states, we should then ask which West is being created in different ex-communist countries.

Path dependence

Seeking commonalities in post-communist youth life stage transitions is easier once we understand how any such commonalities are most likely to have arisen, and why they remain in place. Here we need the idea of path dependence. This may mean no more than the idea that that history matters – that the legacy of history is never totally destroyed. Even if all social institutions are rebuilt, earlier knowledge, experience, and social relationships are likely to survive. The slate is never wiped completely clean. Thus communism itself will have left a legacy. However, the idea of path dependence is empowered when allied to the notion of critical moments – historical junctures when the outcomes are uncertain, indeterminate, but courses of action, once taken, and the immediate outcomes, leave enduring consequences.

During the immediate transition from communism some key decisions were made which have had long-term consequences. One set of decisions was how to privatise state assets. These could be sold to foreigners (transnational corporations), or to rich nationals (who then became much richer), or new forms of recombinant property could be created with ownership shared between the state, private investors and senior managers, thus creating new politico-economic ruling classes (Eyal et al., 1998; Stark, 1996).

As regards to youth transitions, the key decisions were in accord with a Washington Consensus in the early-1990s which recommended:

- Rapid privatisation of state assets.
- Price liberalisation.
- Balancing of budgets by governments.

This led to:

- Labour markets in which employers were able to hire and fire, and set terms and conditions of employment at their own discretion.
- The privatisation of socially-owned housing to occupiers.
- Cutbacks in state spending on what were considered non-essentials, which included leisure services (sport and culture) in countries where there were no established voluntary associations, and at a time when commercial goods and services, and consumer cultures, were sweeping into the countries.

Paths were thereby created into which the lives of subsequent cohorts of young people have been channelled.

Labour market career groups

By the mid-1990s the following career groups had been formed in all ex-communist countries from which relevant evidence has been assembled.

- Fully-employed, that is, working continuously, full-time, for a full salary.
- Self-employed.
- Under-employed.
- Unemployed or inactive.

The size of the self-employed career group has varied depending mainly on how many young people have needed to resort to survival self-employment, which has been most likely to mean subsistence agriculture on small landholdings (in rural regions), or petty trading (typically in cities). In most places between 7 % and 9 % of young people appear to have established businesses that operate long-term, and whose proprietors intend to remain in business indefinitely and are not seeking other employment. Higher proportions of young people working for themselves usually means that they are doing so only due to their inability to obtain proper jobs (see Roberts et al., 1998).

Under-employment means working discontinuously, part-time, temporarily, for a low salary (by local standards) – any combination of these. In some investigations this has been the largest career group. This career group includes young people who spend periods working away from home (pendulum migrants).

The unemployed and inactive categories are partly inter-changeable. It depends on how the individuals elect

to define themselves. Some who select one of these self-definitions may be working unofficially but argue that they are doing this only because they are unable to obtain proper jobs. Thus the boundary between the unemployed/inactive and the under-employed is also blurred.

In Western Europe's mature market economies, the unemployment rate is typically the preferred single statistic for assessing the degrees of difficulty that individuals face when looking for jobs. In the new market economies the proportion who are fully-employed (still likely to be a minority) is a better indicator. In most countries in some regions, and sometimes everywhere, there is still intense competition for full-time permanent jobs (see, for example, Round et al., 1998). Vocational courses in education, where these still operate, are often 'zombie institutions', preparing young people for careers that no longer exist (see Walker, 2007, 2009).

Young people have tended to remain in the same career groups that they entered early-on after completing full-time education. Normal labour market processes can explain this (Roberts, 2006). More significant for present purposes, the career groups themselves are being perpetuated, and have become the labour market segments that await new cohorts of beginning workers (see Roberts et al., 2008). This is an example of path dependence. Economic growth may or may not swell the size of the fully employed career group. Alternatively, the benefits of (jobless) growth may raise salaries and enhance career opportunities within the fully employed career group while its size remains constant.

Family and housing transitions

Fully-employed young people, even fully-employed couples, are often still unable to afford to purchase or to rent a dwelling even where loans for purchase are available (for those who can afford the repayments). This means that young people must rely on family assistance. This may mean continuing to live with parents after young couples marry and become parents themselves, maybe eventually inheriting the dwelling, or moving into another available family dwelling, or purchasing or building with substantial assistance from family resources. All this was common under communism, and the practices are continuing (see Filiopovic, 2006; Mandic, 2008; Roberts et al., 2009a).

Multi-generation living may or may not be a cultural preference. This varies from country to country, sometimes between age groups, and males and females. Irrespective of this, there are material advantages in the multi-generational family household. Household costs are pooled, there is assistance with child rearing. Also, young couples can marry and become parents without incurring the costs of new household formation.

In Western countries with mature housing markets it is common for parents to assist their grown-up children with the costs of house purchase or rental. However, in these cases the parents are assisting grown-up children who are expected to be primarily responsible for accommodating themselves. In much of Eastern Europe the tradition where housing grown-up children remains a family responsibility is being perpetuated. This gives their elders exceptional control over young people. There is evidence that it tends to perpetuate traditional gender roles (Tomanovic and Ignjatovic, 2006). It may help to maintain conventional sequences in family transitions (low rates of unmarried cohabitation, and multiple sequential partnerships, for example). Alternatively, depending largely on young people's own aspirations, their inability to accommodate themselves may delay family formation and depress fertility.

Leisure

In the early-1990s, following the end of communism, participation fell to near-zero in many leisure activities that are normal parts of youth scenes in the west – playing and watching live sports, going to the cinema, pop and rock concerts, disco clubs, bars and cafes, not to mention high culture (opera, ballet, classical concerts, galleries and museums). The catalysts were the disappearance of the Pioneers and Komsomol, and the closure or lack of investment in public leisure facilities (parks and swimming pools, for example) (see Roberts, 2009; Roberts et al., 2009b). The cinema, when it revived, like the new sports clubs that opened, was for those who could pay. Many young people's (and adults') leisure became almost cashless and mediatised. Television became commercial, and popular (see also Clark, 2002; Jung, 1990, 1994). Pirated videos (subsequently DVDs) became available, plus fake designer label clothing. Young people's limited spending has typically gone on relatively low cost goods and services that have been marketed strenuously, such as cigarettes and alcohol. Cigarette smoking has become more common among youth in Eastern Europe (especially males) than in the West. Levels of alcohol consumption and drug use are relatively modest in Eastern Europe. In Russia in 2006–07 only 32 % of 15-29 year olds were drinking alcohol (beer was the favourite beverage) at least once a week, and 92 % said that they had never taken drugs (Dafflon, 2009; see also Pilkington et al., 2004). Young people in the new market economies are different from Western youth, firstly, in being able to spend so little money on themselves. The exceptions are young people in major cities, and then only the minorities who are on middle class life trajectories (see below). It is true that ownership of mobile phones has spread rapidly since the end of the 1990s, that by then internet cafes were opening everywhere and have subsequently become scarcer as more-and-more households have gone online. Everywhere, as soon as communism ended, and some-

times before then, young people found themselves in a market place for styles and the associated identities (see Kirmse, 2009). Young people in former communist countries manage to look much the same, listen to much of the same music, and watch the same films and follow the same sports as Western youth, but do all this at a fraction of the cost. Young people in the new market economies are also different in being less likely to belong to any voluntary associations, and rarely use still run-down public leisure facilities.

Origins and destinations: class divisions

It has now become apparent (it could not have become apparent before the new market economies began to mature) that three new socio-economic classes are being formed in Eastern Europe (see Roberts and Pollock, 2009). Class, here, means an aggregate of people who occupy a common labour market situation. If they are earning they do so in occupations with similar market positions and workplace relationships. However, an aggregate can constitute a class only if the individuals concerned occupy the definitive position continuously, throughout their entire working lives in the extreme ideal-typical case. Thereafter members of an economic class may acquire shared social and cultural characteristics, which will then strengthen the likelihood of intergenerational continuity. Classes that are formed in this way will not have clear and definite boundaries. The conventional practice in sociology has been to treat the family-household as the unit that is classed. The case for classifying individuals is not entirely convincing in the West (where it has now become a common practice in sociology), and in Eastern Europe the case for individual classification is unpersuasive. The core family-households in any class will have all adults of working age in the definitive labour market situation. Other family-households will be scattered in various directions and at different distances from the core.

One of the new classes is an upper class, a capitalist class, likely to be referred to locally as the rich. This class is always tiny (but it is likely to be extremely powerful), and it is never adequately represented in surveys of young people.

The second emergent class is a middle class, the label that those concerned are most likely to use. Its adult members are fully and continuously employed, usually in non-manual jobs, because this is where most opportunities to be fully and continuously employed are found. The jobs may be in the public or private sectors. Young people who enter these occupations today are typically higher education graduates (though higher education does not guarantee that young people will obtain such jobs). The young people tend to be from families where the older generation became higher education graduates when they were young, and/or were and maybe still are employed in professional or management occupations. Thus there is substantial intergenerational continuity, and distinctive class experience starts before those concerned begin their own employment careers. This new middle class is now exhibiting distinctive socio-cultural characteristics. Among young people these include relatively late marriage and parenthood, (compared with the rest of the age group) and relatively high and sustained engagement in formal out-of-home leisure throughout their 20s.

The third class is best described as a lower class. Within the countries its members may be referred to as the poor, but there are different degrees of impoverishment. Core family-households in this class have adult members who are unemployed, inactive or underemployed.

The new market economies have destroyed or at least seriously weakened the old, and are not creating new working classes. The decline of employment in extractive and manufacturing industries, and the precarious nature of the manual jobs that have been created in new service sectors are inconsistent both with the formation of critical masses who are continuously and fully employed in such jobs, and with high levels of intergenerational continuity.

The self-employed cannot be said to constitute a distinctive petit bourgeoisie. Their businesses are too varied, and too many are practising survival self-employment, to be regarded as a stable class with common labour market experiences.

The class structures that are currently emergent in Eastern Europe may be prototypical, but at present they are different from class formations in Western Europe mainly in the absence of distinct working classes. In the new market economies, the working classes have not only diminished numerically, but have become culturally and ideologically invisible (Simonchuk, 2004; Stenning, 2005a, 2005b). This means that for young people there is just one desirable destination; the new 'holy' middle class. The different start and end points, the different divisions in their origins and destinations alone, would be sufficient to make youth a different life stage in ex-communist countries than anywhere else in the world.

Mindsets

Nowadays young people all over Europe have broadly similar outlooks on life. They are more liberal and tolerant than their elders, more likely to accept plural forms of family life and alternative sexualities. Intergenerational relationships within families have become more equal, less authoritarian and less paternalistic. The similarities are partly due to cultural globalisation, albeit a globalisation that flows mainly from the West to the rest. Young people throughout Eastern Europe are aware

of the Western way of life (see Pilkington et al. 2002). They may not know what life is really like for different categories of people in different Western countries, but they believe that they know and they like what they believe. Youth in the EU's new member states have been the continent's most enthusiastic Europeans, meaning that they have wanted their countries to become part of the West (see Niznik and Illasiewicz, 1992).

Western youth are less familiar with East Europe's cultural products – films, music and TV programmes. They know that the countries are poorer than their own. They know this on account of the migrant labour that has entered their countries. Young people in Britain know that many Poles are working in their country, but this does not necessarily mean that they personally know any Poles. There are now thousands of students from Eastern Europe at universities in Western countries. Students from the West are less likely to venture eastwards. They may not even learn from visiting students about what is similar and what is different in higher education and the student experience in the EU's new member states. Even so, convergence in mindsets is underway. The extent to which this helped to cause, and the extent to which it is a product of the change of system in Eastern Europe, remains a matter for debate, and likewise whether the reshaping of mindsets in the east has been partly in response to, or would have happened independently of, economic and political conditions in the east since 1989.

A further set of reasons for convergence is that young people in all parts of Europe have become more aware of their individuality and less conscious of belonging to any social categories. This is likely to be due to the retirement of the metaphorical public transport vehicles that used to convey large numbers of children from particular neighbourhoods to the same local schools, then into the same local factories. Youth has been extended, and as this has happened experiences in education and the labour market have become more varied. In addition, all the steps forward in life that young people can take have become risky. Outcomes are less certain than in the past, whether the next step is into higher education, a vocational training programme, or marriage. Meanwhile, consumer markets enable everyone to express their individuality through the goods and services that they purchase or simply desire. Sections of the populations in all countries (males and females, on different class trajectories) continue to share advantages and disadvantages, but without their personal experiences making them fully aware of what they share with others. The individualisation that has occurred is a structured individualisation, and the agency that young people exercise is a bounded agency, but young people themselves are more aware of their individuality and agency than the structures and binds (Evans, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Roberts et al. 1994). This will be related to current cohorts of young people being far more likely to seek personal, private, rather than collective solutions to problems that they face (Ceplak, 2006; Sociometr, 2004/05; Spannring, 2005; Ule, 2005). Social capital, trust relationships, are privatised. In 1989 there was enthusiasm for an impending rebirth of civil societies in Eastern Europe, but this has simply not happened (see Lomax, 1997). In Bulgaria less that 10% of young people belong to any kind of voluntary association. Across the enlarged, 27 member EU it was 22% in 2008, though 49% of young people said that they belonged to sports clubs (European Commission, 2009).

Amid these east-west similarities there are differences, though these may diminish. Young people in post-communist Eastern Europe have been the continent's optimists (Mussuri, 2003). They have believed that their parents paid the price for the change of system, often a heavy price, but that their own generation will reap the benefits. They have continued to subscribe to the theory of transition – that once the transition is complete full employment will return to their own lands, there will be decent jobs for all, and the Western way of life will then become embedded in their countries. There is just one inspirational future vision – the Western way of life, exemplified by the American way of life as seen on film and television – the new religion among youth in Eastern Europe. However, there are signs, in Bulgaria for example, that the optimism of the 1990s is starting to fade.

Western youth are more sanguine about their way of life. Many sections of the populations in Western countries have experienced no improvement in their standards of living for several decades. Parents tell young people how much easier it was to grow into adulthood when they themselves were young (Halsey and Young, 1997). Young people worry about whether they will be able to maintain their parents' standards of life. Economic restructuring is experienced as a threat, like climate change. There is no inspirational vision of a better future.

IMPLICATIONS

Theory and research

Sociology's original theories of modernisation (then called evolution) were uni-linear. All societies were believed to be heading in the same direction, with Europe leading the way. Then, during the 20th century, sociologists were forced to acknowledge that there were different kinds of modern European societies. Fascism proved short-lived. Communism was more resilient. Communism could be regarded as a different, long-term viable way of becoming and remaining modern. Alternatively, convergence/industrial society/end of ideology theories suggested that capitalism and communism were just different routes towards a common end-state. But by then unitary modernity was being further challenged by

the rise of new industrial countries, notably Japan to begin with, but now joined by dozens of others including Brazil, China and India. Even so, the end of communism inspired claims of an 'end of history' with capitalism, the market and democracy destined to triumph all over the world in an American (21st) century. Also, a new version of technological determinism has contended that the latest generation of new technology will spread a knowledge economy worldwide, and create a global information-based network society.

Long-term, the 'one best way', singular modernity theory may be vindicated. Right now, we are clearly in an era of multiple modernities. The larger question raised in the preceding passages is whether ex-communist countries are all becoming part of an expanded West (closely resembling one the types of Western societies that are now recognised), or whether we need to add post-communist to existing varieties of modernity. The answer is likely to vary from country-to-country, and also between locations within countries. Up to now, Western governments, and their own governments also, have deemed former communist countries to be in transition (with Westernisation as the goal). Progress was measured, initially, by the pace at which countries were implementing market reforms, democratising their polities, and privatising the economies. Today GDP and unemployment rates have largely taken-over.

Part of the case for prioritising young people in social research agendas is that youth are the future: that in their minds and lives we may glimpse the kinds of adults and societies that are in the making. Therefore, a challenge for the next generation of youth studies in Eastern Europe is to critically interrogate the latest version of singular modernisation/Westernisation. An alternative scenario is that that all or some of the ex-communist countries will remain forever different due to a combination of:

- Legacies from communism,
- Path dependence following the outcomes of initial transformation processes, and
- Late-development effects (Dore, 1973, 1976).

The preceding passages indicate that common features of a post-communist variant of modernity will include:

- Labour forces divided into relatively small (vis-à-vis the West) primary segments and large secondary segments.
- Extended families resuming traditional functions while, in some places, conjugal relationships become less stable. However, the question remains, will this mix be sustainable in the long-term?
- Weak civil societies in terms of membership of voluntary associations.
- Prototypical network societies which are atomised with individuals and small local and private 'cells' linked through electronic media.

One possibility that youth researchers need to entertain is that, in some respects, post-communist countries have become the leaders: that the conditions of young people in these countries are the conditions towards which the West is now heading. In 2008 throughout the EU-27, over a third of 15–24 year olds were not registered in educational institutions, some form of employment or in training, and 40% of those in employment were on temporary contracts. Also, 62% of those who could have done so had not voted in an election during the last three years (European Commission, 2009).

Youth policies

Up to now the highest impact youth organisations in ex-communist countries have been modelled on their communist predecessors. As yet, Russia and Georgia are the only countries where the regimes have created youth movements linked to the 'parties of power'. These movements have been able to mobilise tens of thousands of young people in sustained programmes of politico-recreation activities (Hammerschlag, 2006). Parents may encourage participation, feeling that their children are otherwise missing experiences that they themselves enjoyed in the Pioneers and Komsomol. Young people have also been mobilised in the colour revolutions and their predecessor in Yugoslavia 2000 (Collin, 2007). Young people seeking political careers, and others who have perceived possible career advantages, may have sustained their involvement, but otherwise in all these instances the crowds drifted away once the revolutions were over. Nationalist parties have sometimes provided a veneer of legitimacy for the thuggery of certain types of youth groups (see Avanisian et al. 2006).

Western-backed initiatives have made less impact. These include efforts to draw young activists into networks of young European citizens, developing and then working to implement visions of how their countries should develop (European Commission, 2006). EU-supported measures to address youth unemployment via training and vocational or remedial education have not led to the decent jobs that young people seek.

Governments are all in denial. They cannot afford to admit (even if do they suspect) that we are now in an era of relatively jobless growth in which the quest for decent work for all is doomed to failure (Bowring, 1999; Forrester, 1999). They cannot afford to openly accept that equalising opportunities is impossible when families with economic, social and cultural assets will always do their best to ensure that only their own benefit.

If we ask what is actually being done via state policies for young people, we realise that throughout present-day Europe, east and west, governments are tending to do less, not more. Costs of higher education and nurseries are being privatised. Public sectors are no longer, even in part, operated as job creation schemes.

Leisure is left to the market. State interventions are targeted at core problem groups, so-called excluded groups – persistent offenders, drug-abusers, and the destitute. Thus ordinary young people depend more than formerly on their families. East Europe's local NGOs are more likely to flourish as offshoots from international NGOs than through support from local grassroots or governments. Young people who join these associations often do so for private purposes (a travel grant, for example) rather than because they subscribe to the associations' stated objectives (see Kirmse, 2009).

Youth research is patently policy-irrelevant, not least in Eastern Europe when it assumes that it has only to identify wants, then governments will surely respond, especially when the wants are the gaps between young people's aspirations, or what has been normal in the West up to now, and existing realities in former communist countries. Policy-relevant youth research in Eastern Europe must identify needs in the context of current East European realities, using ideal types as recommended above, but we should note that all these types and the East European realities include the (very limited) capabilities of post-communist national governments.

ALI JE POSTKOMUNIZEM ŠE UPORABEN KONCEPT? DOKAZI IZ ŠTUDIJ PREHAJANJA MLADIH SKOZI ŽIVLJENJSKA OBDOBJA

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POVZETEK

Približujemo se tretjemu desetletju post-komunizma in potrebno se je vprašati, ali ni postal ta koncept odvečen. Pričujoči prispevek predlaga, da se obstoječim idealnim tipom režimov tranzicije mladih – nordijski, južni, centralni (dolgotrajno uvajanje) in neoliberalni – doda postkomunistični tip. Zahodnoevropskim raziskovalcem mladine se je zdelo koristno primerjati nordijske dežele, kjer vladajo univerzalnimi socialnimi režimi, z deželami, za katere je značilno dolgotrajno uvajanje (Nemčija in nekatere sosednje države), z južnoevropskimi deželami, kjer izvorne družine običajno podpirajo svoje otroke do poznih dvajsetih let in dlje ter jim nudijo stanovanje, in z neoliberalnim Združenim Kraljestvom. Ali je dodaten post-komunističen idealni tip zares potreben? Članek razlaga, da je v velikem delu prejšnjega komunističnega bloka nastal nov vzorec osamosvajanja mladine kot rezultat dediščine komunizma, odvisen od poti (path dependence)) – tako od rezultatov neposredne post-komunistične tranzicije kot od poznejših razvojnih učinkov. Tam, kjer bivše komunistične dežele postajajo vse bolj podobne Zahodu, se moramo vprašati, katera vrsta Zahoda je ta, ki se poraja na različnih prizoriščih. Pregledani so dokazi iz študij, ki se ukvarjajo z mladino celotne Srednje in Vzhodne Evrope in Evrazije, in vodijo k identifikaciji naslednjih prepoznanih značilnosti post-komunističnega tranzicijskega režima:

- Delitev na srednji in nižji razred glede družbenega izvora in usmeritev.
- Razmeroma majhen primarni in razmeroma velik sekundarni sektor trga dela.
- Nezaposlenost in podzaposlenost kot običajni izkušnji mladih s trgom dela.
- Podaljšano obdobje odvisnosti od izvorne družine.
- Šibka zastopanost javnega in prostovoljnega sektorja pri prostočasnih aktivnostih, zaradi česar prosti čas mladih zaznamuje mešanica zasebnega/neformalnega in komercialnega.

Poleg naštetih značilnosti, dokazi nakazujejo, da sodobna mladina v vseh delih Evrope deli podoben pogled na življenje. So bolj liberalni, tolerantni do različnih življenjskih slogov kot njihovi starši. Bolj občutljivi so glede lastne individualnosti kot glede pripadnosti katerikoli družbeni kategoriji. Bolj kot h kolektivnim rešitvam za probleme, s katerimi se soočajo, težijo k zadovoljevanju na oseben/zaseben način. 'Zahodni način življenja' je danes standardna težnja. Ni implikacij ali domnev, da bodo vse bivše komunistične države ustrezale temu tipu bolj od obstoječih (Zahodnih) idealnih tipov. Namesto tega prispevek predlaga uporabo post-komunističnega tipa vzporedno z obstoječimi idealnimi tipi za oceno smeri sprememb v različnih vzhodnoevropskih in bivših sovjetskih deželah in regijah. Dodatek post-komunističnega tipa k obstoječim tipologijam bo omogočil raziskovalcem, ki se ukvarjajo z mladino, oziroma jih bo prisilil, da se soočijo z (veliko) verjetnostjo, da je v nekaterih ozirih mladina v tako imenovanih tranzicijskih deželah postala najnaprednejša, in da se pogoji, v katerih odraščajo mladi po vsem starem Zahodnem svetu postopoma navzemajo Vzhoda.

Ključne besede: izobraževanje, bivanje, trgi dela, post-komunizem, mladina

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