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The Contemporary Context of Youth Socialization:
The Specificity of Post-Communist Countries[1]

Abstract: The article focuses on the attempt to define socialization specificity in post-communist countries without which the understanding the youth's characteristics and (in particular) their role in further system transformation is limited. We reconstruct the new logic in creation of a socio-cultural space in which the youth grow up (emphasizing the importance of national trajectories of departing from communism, and on the other, inevitability of globalization with its specific cultural offer). Socialization space is seen as a Lewin's active field of coexisting, interdependent social facts through focusing on such significant socialization agendas as: the mass media, the state, religions and Churches, the school, the family, peers and the internet. The style in which these agendas appear in the socialization field increases its dimorphic nature, which in turn will not support the youth socialization, and it seems not to generate the conditions for the young generation of a historical chance.

Keywords: socialization, youth, post-communist countries

Socialization is one of the spheres through which social change and the process of becoming a society can be observed; it is an interesting starting point because it provides an inside and bottom-up view. By introducing individuals to the standards, values, and ways of thinking of their culture, socialization provides social life with specific frameworks and dynamics, that is, it shapes people's ideas, habits, and expectations concerning social life and their own lives. These ideas and expectations eventually clash with socio-economic and political realities and the dominant culture, and the result determines the area of possible change and potential social problems. Thus young people, who are most affected by socialization, are perceived as a natural source of tensions and social change (Mannheim 1938, 1943). The faster and deeper the changes, the greater the amount of youth activity and the higher the probability that youth's preferences and motivational lexicon will derive from something new, beyond the existing repertoire. At the same time, the potential of the system may not at all keep

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pace and may be limited. In the context of the rapid changes of dual etiology and intensity to which post-communist countries are subject (systemic transformation plus opening to global impacts) there is a need to observe both youth and youth socialization more closely.

We are interested in a social sphere of a very specific nature. While experiencing the social trauma connected with departing from the old order and creating a new one, post-communist countries are opening to the globalized world and feeling its impact. This has become a source of new problems and complicates the context in which the socialization of youth takes place. What direction will systemic changes take when they are determined, on the one hand, by the innovations of the young generation (their skills, aspirations, and life orientations), and, on the other, by the structural opportunities created by the system—with its numerous internal deficiencies and difficulties, and the pressure exerted by global impacts? Can the processes of systemic transformation in these countries be expected to support the contribution of the young generation, or will their (potential) energy be used to a rather low degree?

The prospect of a globalizing world involves twin challenges for countries with a communist past. In what directions such countries can and will go is a question as intriguing as it is important. We assume that interesting information in this regard can be obtained by considering the situation of the young generation, which in the sociological tradition is thought to be an important factor in social dynamics and change. We question whether the young generation is the part of the post-communist world that separates it from its past, helping it to enter more smoothly into the sphere of new challenges (a transformative springboard) or whether, paradoxically, it is an albatross hindering the process of departing from the old order.

In treating the post-communist countries as a specific sphere with a common political core, we do not forget that they have taken various transformative paths and have different—local—problems to solve. The subject of our interest is both the young generation in the former Eastern bloc in Europe and youth in Asian countries that are undergoing systemic transformation. We assume that due to the processes of globalization the young people living in these countries are exposed to the same possibilities and models that are currently addressed to all youth, and the processes of systemic transformation only strengthen the effect. At the same time, the differing conditions and differing prospects of growth in the poorer countries, where change is occurring less intensely, mean that youth aspirations must surely be lower there and some frustrations must be faced. Regardless of local possibilities and conditions, though, the aspirations of young people have shifted the limits of life satisfaction above past standards and have become both a source of positive change and of problems in regard to native cultures. It can be presumed that youth's pressure on the system in post-communist countries will generally grow, although that pressure will be different in each of them.

This paper aims to present the specificity of socialization in the countries that interest us. Does such specificity exist at all? It is important to answer a few questions here. First, what rules currently organize the new socio-cultural space in post-communist countries? Second, under whose or what influence (which social agendas and which cultural content) does the social upbringing of youth proceed? Only partial replies can be expected. The data on the subject is incomplete and does not make direct comparisons possible. On the other

hand, this is not our goal. Our focus is to make a diagnosis requiring not so much a battery of comparable empirical data but various structuring categories, organizing information about contemporary trends and socialization practices in post-communist countries. This paper provides further analyses within a certain framework of categories and sociological knowledge, making it possible to capture the local specificity against a background of broader, global transformations and depicting the socialization sphere as an active field of coexisting, interdependent social facts (processes, social actors, cultural messages, and impacts) (Lewin 1943: 293–310), that can be described in terms of globalization (Robertson 1992, Bauman 1997).

New Ideas of Constructing the Local Socio-Cultural Space

In communist times, socialization of the young generation occurred (in principle) in a closed socio-cultural area and involved strong political indoctrination and party and state control. Despite progressing liberalization in many countries, the possibility of choosing life models and lifestyles was limited, and contacts with the other world were filtered and available to few. When communist societies moved away from communism and opened to the world, this also meant changing the rules and shape of the socio-cultural area in which the young generation would grow up. Today, that socio-cultural area is doubtless borderline (Szafraniec 2014), with all the consequences in the form of institutional mismatches (Ogburn 1975: 255–260), immature cultural areas (Goldberg 1941), social anomy (Durkheim 1999, Merton 1982), and unfinished, fragmented socialization (Giddens 1991, Szabó 2009).

Within this area, which is rapidly being shaped, not only is a clash between global patterns and local socio-economic determinants occurring but also a clash between global content and local patterns. Each constitutes a dynamic structure. A conglomerate of national traditions with elements of the communist legacy is characteristic, and the relationships between these and the new socio-economic solutions have not been conclusively defined in many countries. Transformation is still an open process whose results are not yet a foregone conclusion. In this context, global offerings appear in the form of the values and symbols of the postmodern world (with its individualism, consumerism, emphasis on freedom, right to equal treatment, etc.) and spreads at the local level in a very selective form, devoid of original context but given a specific sense by local media.

The internal movement and matching of these areas is closely connected with the varying pace of moving away from the former systemic trajectory in different countries, and the duration of this process and its course are not unimportant in regard to socialization. In Poland, this process had already started in the seventies and it produced the socialist-rearguard generation, whose experience encompassed not only widespread participation in the Solidarity social movement but also ideas concerning their own lives and social life that had been shaped in early youth. The systemic change at the end of the eighties, although it had a shock character,[2] was not a strong mental or cultural shock for the Poles—it was so-

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[2] It was symbolically related to the Round Table talks in 1989, with the result being the first free elections establishing the "Contract Sejm."

cially expected, accepted, and constituted an element of previous endeavors, experiences, and plans (Adamski 2014, Reykowski 1993). Even if it was paid for with social trauma, for the young generation—growing up in post-communist Poland—it meant growing into a world with a much clearer and more cohesive normative structure, with relatively legible vectors of change. It also meant growing up under the eyes of a different kind of parent (parents who had been changed by their political experience).

In contrast, Russia is the country that has probably experienced the most traumatic change. The dissolution of the Soviet Union meant not only moving away from the former system, it meant the fall of the empire, the far-reaching paralysis of state institutions, and economic collapse resulting in numerous social dysfunctions whose consequences were visible in the increased threats to the development of children and youth (Zouev 1999). The change was particularly painful for Russians because the system in which they had been living had not previously experienced major legitimization crises and society's identification with the former system appeared to be authentic. When reform and reorganization of the country was begun at the end of the nineties, and the path of a strong central power was chosen, Poland and Polish society had already moved on.

The socio-cultural spheres of the remaining European countries of the former Eastern bloc—Latvia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria—were shaped quite differently. Having been surprised by the historic change, being strongly Sovietized, and not having a tradition of social resistance, they chose a pro-European policy by political decision (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005: 112–131). The imitative nature of the changes in the absence of proper institutional and intellectual infrastructure, the implementation of Western models in connection with numerous local shortages and a lack of experience of civil society, not only extended the path of moving away from communism but also made it more bumpy and considerably less intelligible for society, in which the results of socialization can be most accurately and clearly described in terms of social anomy (Szafraniec 2002).

The above examples do not constitute a continuum on which particular countries can be arranged and assessed. They only illustrate the different transitions from communism shaping the socio-cultural area and creating the context for youth socialization. The logic of this transition, though important, is not decisive for socialization. An important role is played here by yet other factors which caused these processes to take place quite quickly and smoothly and produce a legible cultural message in some countries, while in other countries they caused the vectors of change to solidify and the matching of institutional rules to new models to be a long, difficult process involving many internal tensions, from which a new, adaptive culture (Ogburn 1975: 255–260) emerged at various speeds.

The opposition of the cases of Poland and Russia is not particularly apt. In fact, it is not Poland that is the example of a quick transition from one socio-cultural area to another but Germany, where the unification of the Eastern, communist state with the democratic, Western state did not involve either the necessity of looking for new models or the necessity of searching for means of their implementation. Everything was present—there were ready solutions, ready institutional infrastructure, political leadership, and financial support. The social enthusiasm of the Germans after the fall of the Berlin Wall, especially on the Eastern side of Elbe, and a sense of the obvious primacy of the Western models, which were implemented with great determination in the area of the former Eastern state, pro-

vided a relatively quick unifying effect, although—as we shall see—it did not even out all the differences between the states, which are still visible today in the characteristics of East and West German youth (Jugend 2015). [3]

The example of Germany recalls the instance of Vietnam, a country where the joining (though much earlier) of two systemically different parts, the communist North and the democratic South, occurred. However, here the communist order became the dominant order. It is from this level (and from the level of postcolonial backwardness) that Vietnam is opening to global impacts, adopting, as in China, a strategy of selective and controlled change, allowing the marketization of the economy but excluding the possibility of political change and negation of the communist ideological order. This creates a situation in which economic changes inevitably become a vehicle for global cultural content and systemically foreign models, while overt ideological indoctrination is carried out to maintain political loyalty to the system.

The socio-cultural area in which the socialization of the young generation takes place becomes an area of dual message, in impoverished Vietnam as well as in rich China. In both places the youth grows up in an environment full of conflicting cultural messages, whose dimorphic character is not officially problematized. These countries are crucially differentiated—including in regard to socialization consequences—by their attitude to traditional culture and their different positions on the economic and political map of the world.

China, which has been consistently building its power for many years, is providing its young citizens with many new opportunities, which stimulate their efforts, life aspirations, ideas concerning the world, and assessment of their own country. Simultaneously, in connection with the Cultural Revolution's destruction of tradition, global processes have more strongly penetrated local structures, which have lost their natural immunological filter. This indubitably constitutes an important element of China's specificity. Vietnam, which shares the developmental ambitions of China, is a considerably poorer country. Nevertheless, the changes that are occurring there are also stimulating youth endeavors and life activities that are different than those of the past, while at the same time increasing young people's distance from traditional models, which are clearly present in the lives of older generations (Zhong and Liu 2014; *Vietnamese Youth in the Modern Era*). The differences create essentially differing attitudes to adopting new models from beyond the local area.

Post-modernity and Global Culture as an Unavoidable Context

"Post-modernity" appears to be the most appropriate term for describing the global context where local identities, which are significant in terms of youth socialization, are redefined. Post-modernity, which is also called late (Giddens 1991) or second/other (Beck 1992) modernity, is the conventional name for the developed society of the second half of the twentieth century. Today there is no speculation over whether this society exists but at most its direction of evolution is questioned. Postmodern society is the most technology-

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[3] To this time some percentage of Germans in the Eastern states regret that in 1990 some of the GDR's tried solutions were not retained, e.g., the system of preschool childcare. The winding-down of unprofitable—from the Western perspective—East German industrial plants has also been criticised.

filled society in history; it is characterized by a remarkable degree of life complexity and an unprecedented pace of change. It is full of internal contradictions: for instance, on the one hand it encourages sophisticated consumption and promises endless prosperity, on the other, it falls into ever deeper crises. In post-modernity, sociologists accentuate such features as fluidity, reflectiveness, and risk, to highlight that the world in which we live has ceased to be structured, predictable, and stable (Bauman 2006).

In fact, post-modernity denotes culture's increasingly absolute distancing from ready models and practices, with the consequence that social life is subject to ever greater individualization and de-traditionalization. The crumbling of traditional institutions and authority figures, the fluidity and non-transparency of the environment, make the world (even its closest aspects) lack predictability—it becomes a world "to be made," with the basic task of creating strategies and life models that will be adequate for new situations and challenges. To this end, the traditional or previous solutions and traditional or previous authority figures do not necessarily function. At the same time, the inevitability of these processes allows no possibility of non-participation in the transformations that post-modernity brings (Giddens 1991). Thus these processes have also reached post-communist countries; increasing in force, they are defining there the frameworks of individual and collective life.

Nonetheless, what constitutes the core of late modernity is other/late—postmodern—capitalism, which has "disenchanted work" and "enchanted consumption" (Bell 1998: 111). In this new capitalism, which has been growing in the Western world since the 1960s, consumption and a high quality of life are not only considered to be a basic indicator of status and achievement but have also become a legitimate goal of the economy's functioning and the basic force driving its growth. The post-communist countries' opening to the world at this exact moment meant entering on a path the Western societies had been following for a long time, while omitting the important earlier stage—the capitalism of accumulating resources and the ethos of effort, patience, and deferred reward.

Under the pressure of consumerism, a life based on deprivation, restraint, and shortages, which was characteristic of communist times, has fallen into oblivion as a cultural pattern. In the strategies of economic growth, pleasure and affluence are overly propagated. The world of consumption becomes obligatory, normal, and without alternative. This is very important in terms of the circumstances in which young people grow up. Because of marketing activities and advertising, which are the major creator today of youth aspirations and dreams, consumption has been transformed into a need whose satisfaction is a prerequisite for self-fulfillment. At the same time, the cultural pressures devised by the system are not felt as forms of oppression: what they promise is mainly pleasure and joy, which youth naturally likes and does not view as problematic.

Peripheral struggles with the postmodern form weaken control over sui generis forms, which have already been weakened by the years of communism's supremacy and local cultural codes, making the post-communist countries into areas where the colonization of everyday life by patterns of consumption succeeds and sets the essential tone for the socialization of youth. In such a context, the search for self-identity starts to concentrate around the idea of "having" and the striving for a promoted lifestyle. Paradoxically, the dreams of freedom and a "Western life," which are typical of post-communist countries, have started to be fulfilled thanks to the market, which has become a major opponent of

society's homogenization, of the conformity it practiced for years. The pressure of lifestyle-oriented culture has caused submission to consumption addiction to become a condition of individual freedom—the right to dissimilarity and identity based on one's own tastes and arrangements (Bauman 2006: 129–135). The sense of freedom—a basic thing for young people—is more strongly coupled here with a desire to have and use items (the "have" philosophy) and less frequently with a more sophisticated treatment (the "have in order to be" philosophy). This is very noticeable in comparisons of German and Polish versus other Eastern European and—especially—Asian youth.

When consumerism as a main message gets to societies once described as "equal in poverty," it is impossible to perceive solely its friendly and attractive side. It is not a friendly feature that only those who can afford it, can benefit from it, and such distinctions are on the rise in post-communist societies. As John Seabrook notes (1988: 168–169), the poor and the rich do not live in separate cultures. They have to live together in a world that has been contrived for the benefit of those with money. When consumerism is equally alluring to the rich and the poor, "the poor cannot avert their eyes, as there is nowhere they could avert their eyes to. (…) The more choices the rich seem to have, the less bearable to all is a life without choosing" (Bauman 2006: 137).

This dramatic difference of life situations and life opportunities has become a source of many frustrations in post-communist societies, particularly because there are also growing inequalities, to which the previously egalitarian societies are mentally unaccustomed. These frustrations find expression in various types of anomic behaviors, the violation of social norms (either in order to obtain desired goods, or to vent aggression or anger), and in rising statistics of emotional disorders (Szafraniec 2011: 305–315).

The problem seems to be the more complex as the situation in the post-communist countries resembles not only early capitalist Western societies of the first half of the twentieth century ("on the rise") but also the rich, consumption-oriented Western societies of the second half of the century, where the anomy of poverty was replaced by the anomy of prosperity (Simon, Gagnon 1976). The globalization processes occurring in post-communist countries have undoubtedly dominated the sphere of culture and social expectations (endeavors) faster than any other sphere of life, and the incommensurability of the rate of these transformations has meant that we experience not only those tensions that appear in early capitalist societies (functioning in conditions of chronic economic depression) but also those generated by rich consumer societies. Furthermore, elements of the communist past, which are still visible in some countries and have been retained in styles of governance, in the media, and in the mentality of older generations, should not be overlooked.

All in all, three distinct cultural offerings, from different social orders, function in the cultural sphere of post-communist countries: a slightly archaic socialism with its social security; the homespun liberalism of young native capitalism; and the sophisticated consumerism of the rich Western world. The first lauds modesty and imitation, the second, the moral duty of success (*there is nothing wrong in striving for wealth and high social position, if you work for it yourself*), the third, self-celebration (*enjoy life, live according to your own imagination—be rich*, but also "*be cool,*" "*be inspired*"). Today, this last message is the loudest and has the greatest clout—especially for youth. In the case of the youngest

generation, the value of success has become separated from effort and become a claim of success as a socially recommended attractive lifestyle. This is not a good trend. Nevertheless, the lure of consumption is unceasing and post-communist countries' adoption of the late-capitalist principle of consumption-driven growth only enhances the market actions that feed the trend. Simultaneously, other messages of post-modernity such as the right to equal treatment, civic values, respect for minorities, environmental protection, and healthy lifestyles, have hardly entered local grounds.

A situation where various normative orders coexist next to one another for years produces social conditions characterized by indeterminacy, lack of clarity, and lack of fixed points of reference. People, and youth in particular, do not cope well with such situations. Symbolic confusion, the instability and non-transparency of standards, and an inability to understand the world either suspend the regulative functions of personality or push it in the direction of developmentally unconstructive behaviors (McClosky, Schaar 1965). However, it can be assumed that over time the socio-cultural area in which the young are raised in post-communist countries is subject to cohesion, but the pressure on youth to obtain individual success and the structural limitations in achieving it, which are typical of developing countries, can still be a source of problems.

The above-mentioned attributes of post-modernity and the local specificity of the post-communist space are only seemingly innocent. They put both people and institutions, which have to face new challenges, in difficult positions. Functioning in such an environment requires mastering many specific abilities, among which openness and reflectiveness, and activeness in everyday life, are basic. Does the youth of post-communist countries have this awareness and ability? How do basic institutions and socialization agendas, which are accustomed to function according to other patterns, cope with new challenges and problems? What do they have to offer and what signals do they send to youth?

Messages of the Main Socialization Agendas

A quarterof a century of change shows that the systemic transformation has considerably altered the socialization context in a majority of post-communist countries. Political indoctrination, which focuses on collectivity and praise of modest living, has been replaced by an ideology of consumerism and thinking in categories of individual success. Other models have very little impact. As a result, young people plan their lives and identities in a sphere that is dominated by consumption—and this is not problematized by politicians, parents, or teachers.

The market and the Media

Mass media plays a key role in this process but the state, school, family, peers, and—increasingly—new technologies do as well. They are the senders of particular messages promoting particular values and ways of thinking, which are more or less consciously

addressed to and received by youth. Today, traditional media not only plays the role of a source of information about the world or a provider of entertainment or culture but is also a mouthpiece of the free market and marketing operations. It is these media that extensively promote the models of life to which everyone is supposed to aspire.

Magazines and televisions in all the post-communist countries are full of advertisements encouraging a lifestyle based on consumption. Everywhere, they aim to create needs that may be neither real nor important nor have any natural relationship with the local cultural context—what is crucial is that they teach acceptance of specific values and ways of thinking. They look surprisingly similar in every country—the only difference (though not always) is the actors playing the roles set by the script. The advertisements feature the same gadgets, the same goods, the same manners of spending free time, the same wedding ceremonies, apartment interiors, and offices. The number of studio programs or serials that are exact copies of Western productions (such as *You Can Dance*, *America's Got Talent*, *Let's Talk About*, *Master Chef*) is astonishing. In each of the countries analyzed, there are television channels that broadcast selected international films, their own contemporary productions (presenting the everyday life of various groups and milieus), traditional culture (mostly folk), and "nostalgia" programs calling to mind communist times—its ethos, legends, and heroes. The differences are in the proportions. The most sentimental and "nostalgic" are Asian (Chinese and Vietnamese) and Russian television broadcasting. But if one looks for dominant features, Vietnamese television is the most ideological and pro-Western, while Russian TV is quite ambivalent, being mainly focused on national values and imposing patriotism as well as consumerism at the same time. Chinese television is the most eclectic but is also open and strongly emphasizes the significance of one's chosen path. Television broadcasting in the post-communist countries of Europe is certainly less "nostalgic," less traditional, and definitely makes more frequent use of the products of Western culture. There are more imitative elements, especially those referring to lifestyle and consumption symbolism. In German media, consumerism and consumer lifestyle is offered much more often in the context of, and in relation to, other values—tolerance, openness, political correctness, good interpersonal relations, or a healthy lifestyle. These are not so prominent in the media offerings of the other countries.

Although television is being supplanted by the internet and ICT technologies and is less and less popular among the youth, 60 to 80% still declare that they watch it. The poorer the country/region and the greater the poverty of the cultural infrastructure, the greater is the presence of television in youth's time budget and surely the greater is its influence on shaping preferences, attitudes, and life orientations. On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that the main audience for television programs is the older generation—parents and grandparents, who thereby not only become acquainted with what is "trendy" but are also subjected to particular influences. This contact with new lifestyles—in advertisements, motion pictures, and serials—can contribute to better understanding of the new times and new generations, but it can also increase the distance between the generations and increase resistance to the new models (when these seem too remote from tradition and undermine the sense of safe rootedness).

The State and Public Sphere

On the map of significant socialization agendas, the state is undoubtedly present—not in the role of youth educator or patron but as an entity making important decisions and sending by that means significant signals to youth. In the case of countries that are undergoing systemic transformation and deep reforms, the behavior of the government in general and in regard to youth in particular determines the treatment of social issues and demonstrates the political imagination of the rulers.

Essentially, some kinds of programs or policies addressed to youth exist in all the countries analyzed and in each the presence of government-adopted guidelines in this area can be pointed out. Where the countries have not fully parted with communism (China, Vietnam), there is a continuing habit of formulating party and state programs by various entities (ministries, media, schools, socio-political organizations, trade unions) to set the directions for work with children and youth. The duties of young people toward the party and state, their patriotic obligations to the country and readiness to face new civilizational challenges, are accentuated. In addition, although these programs are no longer as politically obligatory as in the past, they still determine the preferred influences to which young people are subject.

In Russia, the government document highlighting a need for specific educational impacts on youth was developed at the end of the nineties as a reaction to the inevitable negative effects of a period of major social and political change. "These events have had a negative impact on public morality, civic consciousness, people's attitude to society, the state, law and labor, on the relations between people"—as is declared in the governmental "Spiritual and Moral Development and Education of the Individual Citizen of Russia."[4] According to the conception presented there, educational institutions—in cooperation with families and other influences on socialization such as the media, the government, and the Church—must work to raise young Russians to be citizens and patriots ("respecting the mother tongue, culture and its unique values, memory of ancestors, and every page in the history of their own country"), capable of living in the competitive world of high technologies (Ibid.). This document should be considered special—not because of its impact but because of the context in which it was developed and because of the directions it sets.

In the rest of the post-communist countries, calls for a more ideological and moral upbringing of youth have not been spotted, although historic policies referring to national values are conducted with great commitment. In the majority of the countries there are no official programs or documents guiding the state's policy on youth. Parts of economic growth programs are dedicated to young people and the skills they should have,[5] but most frequently various types of programs developed by the European Commission, and adopted under cohesion policy by national governments, have the status of official documents. These are educational programs concerning youth mobility, cultural and scientific exchange, or civic education. These programs are most frequently implemented with EU funds by foundations and organizations that are independent from the state and their purpose is to build

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[4] http://mosmetod.ru/metodicheskoeprostranstvo/nachalnayashkola/inklyuzivnoeobrazovanie/fgos/kontseptsiya-dukhovno-nravstvennogo-razvitiya-i-vospitaniya-lichnosti-grazhdanina-rossii.html (available on: 13.11.2014).

[5] The *National Development Plan of Latvia* or *National Youth Strategy* in Bulgaria are examples.

European identity, social inclusion, the civic activation of youth, and youth's discovery of the tradition and history of its own country, town, or region.

The most significant area in which state policy on youth is revealed is obviously the education system. In principal, the state has exclusivity in this field for all types of decisions and activities, while only occasionally assigning part of its prerogatives to local governments,[6] or minimally to parents, who in most post-communist countries are still timid stakeholders. Irrespective of whether changes in education result from the ideas of the transformation, supranational obligations (as in the EU), or international pressure (for comparable standards of education), it is exclusively the state (the government and political elites) that decides about expenditure on education and what is crucial in school—with what knowledge and competences it equips the youth, what the content of textbooks will be, how history and the contemporary world is interpreted, and what entities are allowed to co-decide about the school's life. There is a trend to limit the number of these entities and to close the curriculum within frameworks defined by the interest of the state.

In terms of socialization, normative signals—emblems and symbols—received by youth have important persuasive significance; the state uses them to emphasize its own identity and expected social identifications. Such signals appear in various places and in different forms, creating telling elements of the cultural and political landscape in a given country. In China and Vietnam, communist symbolism coexists with free market symbolism and attributes of the state in the role of guardian of public order. Effigies of party leaders and party symbols appear in the public sphere on an equal level with billboards advertising expensive cars, designer clothing, or modern apartments. Currently, Russia is distinguished by national, patriotic symbolism as well as by symbols of the Western world, including consumption, especially in big cities. The European countries have sunk into consumption and market symbolism, simultaneously emphasizing their membership in the EU and their own national specificity. While Germany emphasizes federation and diversity, in Poland it is monoculturality and Catholic emblems and symbols that are stressed. In the Balkan countries historical resentments are visible, with former days of glory being mentioned. All these have significance for socialization, especially in confrontation with other cultures and communities, and when a sense of collective SELF is at stake.

Religion

Religious institutions were marginalized in communist countries, pushed to the peripheries of social and public life, and sometimes persecuted as a result of the doctrinal exclusion of any institution—other than the Communist Party—capable of controlling human minds and souls. Religion was viewed as the Party's greatest competition. Since the nineties, religious activity in the public sphere of post-communist countries has become an increasingly strong fight "for souls." This is not solely the result of religions having recovered the status of full participants in public life (of which they sedulously make use), but also due to their far-

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[6] Poland and Hungary are examples, but even with such solutions governments retain the right of greatest interference—self-government means here mainly education management and partially bearing the costs of school maintenance.

reaching ambitions of enlarging their sphere of influence by entering areas that have so far been the exclusive domain of the secular state.

From this perspective, the countries analyzed can be arranged in order from most to least presence of religion in the sphere of youth socialization. Poland comes at the top of the list: it is a country where the position of the Catholic Church was always strong and was further enhanced after 1989, as was confirmed in 1993 by a state treaty (*concordat*) between Poland and Vatican City (Krukowski 2010: 95–112). [7] Polish schoolchildren have Catholic catechesis throughout the entire period of their school education (from kindergarten to the secondary school leaving exam), at a level comparable with other subjects. Grades in catechism class are written on students' report cards at the end of every school year and count toward the secondary school average. Classes are taught by clergymen or lay catechists, who are employed full-time and paid by the state, which does not have the right, however, to intervene in the contents and methods of catechetical teaching. Formally, classes in the Catholic religion are not compulsory, but to opt out parents must submit to the school signed declarations of unwillingness to participate. The alternative, which takes the form of ethics or general religion classes, is rarely implemented due to reluctance on the part of schools and the conformism of most parents.

Although religion at school is common in Europe, [8] the situation in post-communist countries is specific, as a result of the political power game between the Catholic or Orthodox Church and the state authorities, which has built its position in the new conditions with difficulty and needs Church support. The political ambitions of these two centers of power and the agreements they have made between themselves have led to an excess of institutional solutions. Church promotion of school catechesis, which does not include religious minorities and tends more toward indoctrination than education, does not always suit parents and is not always fancied by youth. It has started to be the cause of many tensions, and sometimes there are social protests or official complaints to the highest state authorities. One example is a teacher complaint in Romania, where the constitutionality of submitting declarations of a lack of interest in school catechesis by name was denied (the case was won in Romania's Constitutional Tribunal), or the broad civic initiative called "Secular School" in Poland, which protests against school catechesis in its existing form.

It is not solely the Catholic Church in Poland that is very expansive. The Orthodox Churches are very active in Russia and Romania (engaging in broad activity not only of a catechetical but also social and cultural nature) and are changing attitudes to religion, mainly among adults. In Russia, indicators of trust in the Orthodox Church have increased to 69%; in Romania 90% of parents send their children to religion lessons at school. In the other post-communist countries, the weak position of the churches results either from the effects of the state's secularization in communist times or from additional historical

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[7] After 1989, concordats (that is, international agreements between Vatican City and the highest national authorities), were signed by many countries of Central and Eastern Europe (and also Germany's Eastern Lands), but only the provisions of the Polish concordat gave the Catholic Church such a strong position and provided such stringent solutions.

[8] In Germany it is even compulsory, although it takes into account the alternative of ethics class. In Russia such teaching focuses on knowledge of religion and lay ethics.

circumstances. In Hungary, it is from lack of a strong tradition (Rosta 2013: 356–357). [9] Today, the influences of post-modernity join these factors, making religion an internal, very individual, and individually satisfied need. This makes it hard for religious messages to penetrate—via the Church—to youth (Mariański 2010, Jugend 2015), or makes religion an object of fashion (as frequently happens in China, see: Li Suju, Liu Qifei 2000, Chen Jinan 2003, Zhang Wei, Li Ge 2011).

School

The school system has undergone a crisis in the majority of post-communist countries and this is only partially for bureaucratic and financial reasons. First of all, it is a crisis of purposes and identity connected with the transition period and cumulative changes of a dual—endogenous and exogenous—origin. In communist times, the tasks of education were clearly determined. Irrespective of type and level, schools had to produce loyal citizens and staff for the national economy. The move away from communism and the series of systemic transformations changed everything. Above all, the social context of schools changed. The new context is neither as simple, as familiar, nor as easily controlled, as formally. It is indefinable. Surely this is the primary reason why more comprehensive reforms of the education system were not undertaken. The processes of adaptation occurred impetuously and chaotically, under pressure of the new values (the ideology of success), new civilization-related trends (the idea of a knowledge-based society and economy), new economic circumstances (globalization), social needs (social promotion), and new social convictions (credentialism).

In the new conditions, school has become an institution that is completely confused as far as its aims and duties are concerned. Memory of times when education was not only "for success" and not only "for the employer" has started to clash with strong pressure (from employers, parents, and youth) to be pragmatic. The need to understand the new conditions and anticipate new trends is losing against pressure to assimilate the past (tradition, national roots) or against political indoctrination (still taking place in China and Vietnam). School, which is bureaucratically managed, underfinanced, and treated as a field of political influences, becomes an institution favoring instrumental education, fully concentrated on the transmission of knowledge and abilities considered adequate in terms of external expectations (economic, political, civilization-related).

Apart from the canon of traditional subjects, compulsory classes in computer science appear—as something new—and there is an enlarged package of foreign-language learning, entrepreneurship, and religion (in European schools). Civic upbringing and civil education is mainly subordinated to historical and national policy. German schools are an exception in this regard, as their civic education (the *Sozialkunde*) is strongly rooted in the broader context of contemporary democracies and includes—as equal—national and supranational

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[9] Although within the group of those classifying themselves as religious, those practicing religion "their own way" are still the clear majority, and the general trend based on figures for 2012 is not individualization but rather secularization and growing indifference to questions of faith.

identifications. [10] Schools become increasingly powerless in educational issues; they have difficulty coping with problems having their source in family life or the maladaptation of youth. Another problem concerns new expectations in regard to schooling. The majority of students complain that the education system is not well adapted to the current world of work. In Latvia, 54% of young people aged 16–25 believe that their education will be useful on the labor market; in countries like Poland and Hungary the figure is 48–47%; in Romania and Bulgaria 37% and 35% respectively. In comparison, the indicator in Germany is 78%. [11] In China and Vietnam the relation between education and the labor market is highly criticized. [12]

Is it, in this manner, successful in regard to socialization? Does it support the integration of youth with society? Partially at most. School curricula are oriented to the past—the knowledge needed to understand national heritage and the existing culture is still preferred. Translation of contemporaneity and the changes that are occurring in it are not a priority. When education operates in a very dynamic environment and is simultaneously enclosed in old schemes (in schemes of transmitted knowledge as well), socialization cannot be successful—it starts to be fragmented and unfinished. The problem is undoubtedly more universal and does not concern post-communist countries alone (Rorty 1989: 167–179), but due to the character of the changes and problems that have taken place in these countries, they are probably the most affected.

Family

As schools introduce children to broader socio-cultural circles and build connections with the past, families focus on the child and his or her future. The family traditionally gives social status to individuals and is one of the basic institutions of the social structure. Thanks to families and the continuity of generations, elements of stability counterbalance processes of change. This happens because children are introduced to cultural practices and to their parents' lifestyle, which is most connected with their social class but also with the political era in which they grew up (Bourdieu and Passeron 2006).

The period of dynamic change in post-communist countries calls into question family roles in regard to children's futures. Does family as a social institution assist the systemic transformation (and through socialization practices contribute to the adaptive success of children), or is it rather a repository of past values, past ways of thinking, and past models (weakening both the adaptive chances of children and slowing the processes of systemic transition)? The systemic functions of the family are not homogenous. In some countries we can observe the mental readiness of the parent generation to embrace the new changes; in other countries, such readiness is still very slight.

Research conducted in Poland in the nineties, and even previously, showed a quite common acceptance of the ideology of success, preferences for the market economy, and the

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[10] The question of how civics should be taught (in an integrated way or separately) is still discussed by experts.

[11] Flash Eurobarometer of the European Parliament (EP EB395) EUROPEAN YOUTH IN 2014 ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2014/youth/eb_395_synthesis_youth_en.pdf

[12] Youth Employment Report—Analysis Report of China's Survey on School to Work Transition (2005).

guaranteed freedom of democracy (especially among youth and the middle-aged genera-
tion) (Reykowski 1993, Szafraniec 2001, Adamski 2014). Today, after the years of difficult
transition, pro-democratic and pro-market preferences and belief in the value of individual
success, though weaker, are still common in these generations. In Romania, an understand-
ing of the nature of the post-communist order took society much more time and an axio-
normative reorientation took place much later. At the same time, the extent of social ac-
ceptance of the changes is lower there and commitment to them has not been as durable. In
2012 nearly 60% of adult Romanians and over 40% of Romanian youth claimed that people
lived better in Ceauşescu's times (IRES Surveys 2010, 2016). The weakening enthusiasm
for the systemic transformations that has been observed in more advanced countries (ad-
vanced but not successful enough from the perspective of youth) has not, however, greatly
diminished the level of acceptance for the values of individual success.[13] This has essential
significance for the nature of family socialization. Paidocentrism, which places a child, and
his or her future and needs, in the central position, is a basic factor organizing the fam-
ily micro-world, including substances and styles of family upbringing. Parents in China,
Vietnam, Russia (and in poorer Eastern European countries) exert strong pressure on their
children to achieve—the approach can be described in terms of "you must"—while in Ger-
many (particularly in Western rather than Eastern Germany), and (significantly) in Poland,
the typical approach can be expressed in terms of "you can if you want" (Jugend 2015).

Despite the similar attitudes of parents, the styles and effects of family life are differ-
ent depending on the socio-economic status of the family. In one Polish study (Szafraniec
2001), among other research (Konstantinovskiy et al. 2015; Xueyi Lu 2004), new contexts
and challenges are found primarily to mobilize families with high or medium socio-eco-
nomic status. Children from families with rich cultural and economic capital demonstrate
high educational and life aspirations and plan unconventional careers involving completion
of university studies, usually at renowned universities in the country or abroad (particularly
popular among the youth of Asian countries). Anticipation-oriented parents, with high so-
cial status (freelancers, senior white-collar workers, managers), support their children with
all the capital (intellectual, social, and material) they have: they pay for the best education
for their children, take care to foster appropriate interests in them and direct their abilities,
and help them in making important life decisions. Not only do they transmit their wisdom
to their children but also their ability to move in a world which is little legible and full of
risks.

Young people from families of medium status (office and technical employees, teachers,
new services) have more conventional life aspirations. Parents promote their children's life
ambitions (mainly related to social advancement), but do not have the capital that would
translate into unquestionable life success for their children. The parents' investments, which
are mainly of an educational nature, encourage the children to make efforts and maintain
faith in their success, while not guaranteeing an effective adaptation to the world and weak-
ening their chances of success. The youth from these families often plan an education that

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[13] In Poland and Bulgaria, for instance, the level of acceptance for democracy, freedom, and the new free market
economy brought by the systemic transformation is still high among young people (40% in Bulgaria and over 70%
in Poland), but in the case of Poland the acceptance for new economic solutions is visibly less than at the end of
the nineties, and criticism of democracy is increasing.

includes higher education, though frequently in simpler variants (non-academic schools, fields of study and institutions of higher education with easier access). Their choices enhance their chances of success but do not guarantee it.

Youth from low-status families (workers, small farmers, the non-formal sector, the unemployed, ethnic minorities) have the lowest life aspirations; the majority are concentrated on social security and dream of having money for things that are emblems of a desired lifestyle (new high-tech equipment, designer cloths, leisure time). Here life strategies based on investments in education are not planned; nonetheless, dreams of prosperity are clear. Parents struggle in the new conditions. They do not have any capital (material, social, or mental) that would help their children compete for a place in the world of success. Cautious in their strivings and taking life realistically, they communicate with difficulty with their children, who are under the impact of mass culture, which diverges from family models. In these families the intergenerational gap is the largest, and children leave the parental home earlier then those from more affluent families.

What happens in families with high and medium status not only assists children and helps them move in the new reality, but also assists and dynamizes the processes of systemic change. The young people from such families—with their skills, life aspirations, and background—become the locomotive of change. The young people who are raised in families of lower status act rather as a brake. The proportions of such families (and socializational spaces) differ in various countries; they are determined to a large degree by the country's general level of civilizational development, social policies, and education system (whose availability and social functions determines intergenerational mobility) (Jugend 2015, Peng and Shao 2013, Quing 2014).

Peers and New Media

Peers become the most significant normative point of reference for youth—more important than parents or school. The socializing influence of peers manifests itself in various areas—generally wherever there is an opportunity for mutual contact, especially in connection with spending free time. In communist times, there was a tradition of organizing opportunities for youth contacts "under special surveillance." There were various types of organizations and associations (sports, artistic, hobby, political, and para-political), youth centers, community centers, and sports centers—all more or less controlled by the communist state. Today, this type of custody over the youth is becoming a thing of the past (in its most developed form it still remains in Vietnam and China). In the place of past organizations, organizations of "a new type"—NGOs and voluntary organizations—have made their appearance.

In general, however, institutions, organizations, or associations are not places where young people live their lives and like to spend time. Today that place is the internet. Access is not a problem in almost any of the post-communist countries. Today, over 98% of German youth have access to the net, as do 95% of Polish, Latvian, and Bulgarian youth (Leven, Schneekloth 2015: 121), 84% of young people in Hungary (Gergely 2012: 355), but only 69% of young people aged 16–29 in Romania (Stoica 2014: 98).

In China, 60% of 740 million users are people under 29 years of age. To see a young person with a smartphone is equally common on the streets of Göttingen, Moscow, and Riga, or Sofia, Beijing, or Hanoi. According to our data, an average teenager spends about 20 hours weekly at a computer (*State of the Mobile Web, Youth and ICT*). The dynamic expansion of digital technologies has not only changed young people's lives, but they themselves have become different and represent a different social quality as a collective.

One basic question is the extent to which the internet extends the area of freedom (liberty and the opportunity to choose) for youth in countries that once considerably limited this freedom (some still do[14]). The answer is as surprising as it is simple. The internet—even when controlled—very much expands youth's area of freedom, and youth is under less and less control. Nevertheless, the internet's socialization functions are disputable and are increasingly being discussed (Jugend 2015; Federowicz, Ratajski 2015). On the one hand, the internet provides broad opportunities and satisfies youth's important life needs—for social contacts, creativity, and self-experimentation—and it also, by becoming a forum for speaking about important social matters, teaches civic involvement. Simultaneously, as the most open social agora, the internet has become a large dumping ground of meanings. The variety and uncountability of offerings raises the question of whether this still constitutes a choice and what is its quality. How is the internet used by the young? Can it be an alternative to the shortcomings of formal education and the public sphere? The possible result of an excessive expansion of images to replace words brings little comfort. According to psychologists, without words there can be no abstract thinking. Watching is unreflective; it accustoms a person to being guided mainly by feelings and reflexes rather than reflection. There have already been many studies showing that new media not only changes habits it also changes the brain, causing users to think and feel differently, to observe the world differently, and to learn and function differently in the world (Carr 2013: 141 ff.).

These observations concern internet users in general and not especially those that live in post-communist countries, but the latter are also affected. At the same time, the scale of problems and challenges which countries have to solve probably requires citizens to have less uniform thoughts, to think more profoundly, and to be able to read reality accurately. So far, youth does not fully realize the potential of new media or to what degree such media can be a trap and mirage. Young people simply use media in the manner that seems easy, interesting, or amusing. They do it without guides or mentors, with the consent of their parents but without their participation. In the internet, they engage in "socialization under their own supervision" (Tenbruck 1962) in its sheer form—even where the internet is controlled. Nevertheless, the internet has not essentially eroded the socialization sphere in the countries of interest to us; it fits into the landscape of other agendas, which does not simplify youth's task of seeking its own moral code.

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[14] In China, the internet is available only through Chinese operator baidu.com; in Vietnam since 2003 the law forbids people from placing anything other than personal information on social media websites (such as Facebook or Twitter). In Russia, attention is paid to the content of various websites.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the social and cultural space in which the socialization of the young generation in post-communist countries occurs is rather specific. Not only does it reveal the effects of globalization—the clash between global trends, ideas, and values and local determinants—but also the individual trajectories (which are unique each country) of the departure from communism, observed in the broader historical perspective. This coexistence of different axio-normative systems as well as the not quite clearly defined relations between different elements of the newly created social system makes adaptation processes directionless and gives rise to problems. The problems affect both institutions and individuals. In the case of the young generation it means entering adolescence in both a dynamically changing and dimorphic social environment, and basic agendas have their share in this phenomenon. They no longer create a uniform educational front but work on behalf of their own (sometimes very different) interests and goals.

Officially, governments care about providing young people with the best possible start in life and see them as important capital for overcoming the civilizational gap between the post-communist and more developed countries. However, the actions governments take to achieve this end are not always compatible with their supposed goal. As a result, educational reforms, which indiscriminately imitate patterns promoted by international organizations (UNO, OECD, WB), are introduced ineffectively. Except for China and Vietnam, where the implementation of Western solutions is very limited, the interested parties (experts, teachers, and youths) in other countries are disappointed with the changes. Education is poorly related to the labor market; it fails to explain the modern world to the young. Such a notion as "individual development" has disappeared from discussions as well as educational and developmental curricula (what really matters is personal success). While the world is becoming increasingly globalized and requires more universal patterns of identity, governments and politicians focus on strengthening ties with national traditions. Even though this is somewhat understandable in the case of post-communist countries, it generates a dangerous space for nationalisms to be reborn. In such activities, governments are supported by religion and the churches, which seek to influence the young—not necessarily to meet their spiritual needs but rather to induce conservative attitudes in them. It is Poland, Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria that are the examples here. As for the media and popular culture, their top task is to promote consumerism, which is neither challenged nor criticized and which has become the unquestionable philosophy of the young. The belief that such a state of affairs is normal, and the difficult conditions in which many youth happen to live, make parents provide all possible support for their offspring. Therefore, the existence of the majority of families in post-communist countries focuses on children's needs and on securing their future. Due to low levels of development and insufficient resources the result may be "short cut" solutions and failures to achieve life goals.

Although the general trends presented here differ in connection with local conditions, they illustrate that the socialization sphere in all the post-communist countries is very complex and in many ways culturally immature. It is not a friendly space for the young generation, which is entering adolescence under the pressure of different cultural messages and influences and facing numerous risks of a kind that in more developed countries is absorbed

either by the better economic situation or more mature institutional solutions. The example of Germany is doubly significant here: firstly, because of continuing differences between the Eastern and Western lands (in spite of the passage of time and the scale of investment the former lands still struggle with their communist legacy); and secondly because of the distance between the eastern German lands and other post-communist countries. These differences are noticeable not only in the attitudes and life aspirations of youth but also in the adoption of private, occupational, or civic roles in adulthood. However, this question exceeds the bounds of this article.

Acknowledgement

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