

Harmony Project as a Starting Point

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The present issue of Romanian Sociology Revue is dedicated to the connection between the social troubles specific to the transition from communism to the market economy and democracy on the one hand and the specific anxieties of young people who are looking for a road and a place in the adult life. The idea of publishing such a number appeared at the end of an international research project coordinated by *Nicolaus Copernicus* University in Torun, Poland called *Youth in Transition Countries: Innovative Potential, New Context, New Problems, and New Challenges* (and shortly, *Harmony* project). The project gathered selected ex-communist European and Asian countries, which differ in historical background, cultural tradition, and advancement of systemic transformation. The analyses were based on national and international data and focused on describing youth's life situation, education, entry into adulthood, and civil and political attitudes, in the socio-economic context and in the local political context where the processes take place.

Youth in the post-communist context means – as professor Szafraniec, project coordinator says – that “absorbing new ways of thinking and new models, being free of the burden of the past, it could become a significant actor on the stage of systematic change”. Looking at school careers, processes of entering labour market and adulthood, some articles of the issue could say if young generation enjoy of opportunities or only represent a generation overloaded, lost, not understanding the reasons of their own fail-

ures, most often striking back with distrust in politicians and the paths they have taken.

The ambition of the project coordinator, professor Krystyna Szafraniec, was to bring together countries with a common past and to propose a reflection on the young generation and implicitly on the present and the future. Even if only three of the project participants (including the project coordinator) responded personally to the magazine's invitation, it is the merit of this group of researchers to gather for almost three years (2014-2016) existing materials in their own countries on the evolution of young people in the period following the fall of communist regimes and to analyze them from a comparative perspective.

Post-communism theoretical background

Post-communism is by the opinion of the political scientist Emanuel Copilaș a valid theoretical tool in apprehending even this new stage of Romania's development. His study tries to differentiate several major directions of analysis regarding Romanian post-communism. The typology he proposes tries to identify the main dimensions of this complex social phenomena: ideological, political, economical, social and cultural. Of great interest for sociologists can be the social component, characterized by the author from an anti-neoliberal perspective – through poor situation, eviction and incrimination (of the working class); the author

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discusses the decrease in the social prestige of the working class, the loss of rights acquired in communism by poor strata, the formation of a small urban bourgeoisie in conflict with the old working class. On the same ideological line was built the volume “The Great Post-Communist Robbery” reviewed by Dan Neuman. The conclusion of the reviewer is that this volume reveals a picture of Romania as we knew it: a divided society, in which social classes are consolidated through networks of interests out of the law or abusing it, and the shortcomings, underdevelopment and political dependence on Occident have become something ordinary and accepted, consolidating a semi-colonial status for the Romanian state.

The other articles in this issue of the journal are based on sociological research and analysis, and without necessarily being based on a common theoretical and ideological perspective, they draw on a common reality – the evolution of the young generation during a prolonged transition marked by progress and of numerous problems and road accidents.

Youth social behaviour in post-communist societies

After following youth situation in education, transition from school to employment and family life, Kristyna Szafranec – coordinator of Harmony project – describes youth as “non-standard” – which means excessively prolonged in adulthood, more complex (asking use of some hybrid concepts like *kidults* or *adultescents*), more difficult to bear, systematically bereft and politically riskier. For the author, youth in post-communist society seem to carry a real struggle with adulthood because “searching for a job, starting a family ... are crashing with the realities of political transformation”. Post-

communist societies offer to youth a “difficult environment – more riskier than in the Western developed countries”.

Jaroslav Domalewski from Poland finds out that young people from communist societies are all susceptible to the pressure of consumerism and they are feeling tensions resulting from a clash of the global patterns of the “appropriate” life offers and ability to claim them. Emigration could be a solution for many of young people but it has become the element of youngster’s life strategies in some ex-communist countries more than in others. This situation is explained by differences related to work perspectives and living standards.

Investigating ICT use and lifestyles of youth in Romania, Valér Veres is starting by pointing out some gap of Romanian society. If we look to the top of ex-communist countries taking into consideration indicators like youth employment, enrolment in tertiary education, educational attainment, social vulnerability, daily computer use, IT skills we always find Romania situated among the last. But Romanian youth situation is not one of homogeneity. In order to better understand the situation, the author created four consumer groups by means of factor analysis representing ICT related cultural lifestyles. These groups are the following: ‘*screenagers*’ who consume culture through computers and the internet, being informed from these sources, communicating with their help, ‘clubbing and sport’ lifestyle, ‘high culture’ and ‘home literature readers’. We have also analysed the socio-demographic background of ICT frequent users: high educational level and a residence in a big city predict frequent ICT users for diverse purposes. *Screenager* lifestyle is strongly associated with the upper and upper-middle class status, but also other lifestyles are present among middle class youngsters in Romania, while the youth from lower class and deprived are under represented in all lifestyle groups.

Reform and public policies addressing youth problems

Post-communist reform of educational system has been driven by global pressures and many times limited by budgetary constraints. Although the reforms responded to some unsatisfied needs during the communist period, the result – with some exceptions – is not an increase in the interest and trust of young people in school and education, and these could explain why some gap is still registered in participation to education in many ex-communist countries, in comparison with Western European partners (see my own contribution as one of the participants in *Harmony* project).

But youth unemployment and lack of social inclusion is representing a problem

not only for ex-communist countries but even for most part of European countries. Implementation of some European Program (*Youth Guarantee*) in Bulgaria is analysed by L. Spasova. Even if the Program is on its first years of life, some conclusion could be driven: keeping young persons in the education system and raising qualifications of graduates could bring more intensive inclusion for long-term unemployed youngsters, youth with disabilities or youth of Roma origin.

Putting together in this issue a number of both theoretical and applicative contributions, both Romanian and other countries, offer the satisfaction of an up-to-date picture of sociological research that evaluates the experience of the journey and seeks new perspectives. For this achievement, all contributors deserve our thanks.