
Youth in the Processes of Transition and Modernisation in the Slovak Republic

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Abstract. The first post-communist generation of youth in Slovakia set out on its path by making decisions on professional orientation at the age when encounter and experience are perceived as an important and controversial dimension of one's own *personality*. The second phase, consisting of decision-making on social breakthrough into labour market, has been shifted into *another civilisation time-space* through the transformation of real socialism into real capitalism. Unemployment as a social threat and as a life experience is an element of youth individualisation which is demonstrated through the acceptance of flexible solutions, including the readiness to change place of residence and professional qualifications. A comparison of surveys in 1993 and 1995 indicates that the initial shock of unemployment has been overcome.

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Introduction

It appears that the political, economic and social changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe present a new opportunity to verify K. Mannheim's thesis on the inevitable link of generations with the dynamics of social reproduction and change. What determines our approach to youth issues as issues of generations must be the unusual, historically unique dynamics and extent of the social change [Machonin 1996].

In international research projects of sociologists in post-communist countries, the feature of the transformation and processes of individualisation of the first post-communist generation of youth [Roberts, Jung 1995: 11] represent, in author's opinion, an important signal on the future of the new Europe.

The transition of the political and economic system of Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland is only a part of the birth of a 'new Europe', which opens up new perspectives for a broad process of economic, political, social and cultural integration. "Nobody can predict the direction of these changes. One is, however, certain: they will deeply influence human lives, above all of those that are children and young people to date." [Chisholm 1995: 1]. The emerging European youth policy sensitively articulates fears that the present and future generations of children and youth in a new Europe will be more subject to segregation and marginalisation and their life perspectives will be determined by structural inequalities from their early ages.

1. Individualisation of Youth and Modernisation Theory

Not all Slovak sociologists in the field of youth issues link transformation processes in the sphere of political (pluralism tendencies) and economic (market tendencies) life with

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such a typical element of modernisation as information technology. J. Suchý, in the introduction to his text 'The Situation of Youth in the Transformation of Slovakia' delivered in a lecture as early as autumn 1992, complained that information technology had entered the life of Slovak society in a rather inconspicuous way and somehow too much in the shadow of democratisation and privatisation. [Suchý 1992: 8]

In a society of the classic type, the transformation process, along with its attributes of democratisation and market economy or, of late, processes of European and trans-Atlantic integration, with modernisation strategies such as information technology, rationalisation, mobilisation and secularisation [Martin 1996], brings not only the inevitable social risk and social problems of growing youth unemployment but, simultaneously, opens up an unprecedented chance for development in utilising the unleashed creativity of individual personality as an inexhaustible source of social prosperity.

An inspiring work in developing the issues of the relationship of social context and individualisation of the first post-communist generation of youth is the theory of Ulrich Beck, the author of the monograph *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Society of Risk. On the Way to Some Other Modernity) [Beck 1986]. This highlights contradictions between the production of economic resources (wealth) and the production of social risk in developed Western industrialised countries.

A new image of youth began to appear in the 1980s as interpreted by youth sociologists in Germany (T. Ziehe and J. Zinnecker) which was based on Beck's thesis of individualisation. The social situation in all rich Western industrialised countries, especially in Germany, appeared as a situation of a relatively high material living standard and far-reaching security. As a consequence of all this, according to Beck, a historic discontinuity arose through which people were uprooted "...from traditional class conditions and family care and their dependency on the labour market with all the risks, chances and controversies of true individual destiny increased" [Beck 1986].

A decade later, I. Richter in his brief theses [Richter 1995: 64] was able to outline this concept of youth:

Family – marriages concluded at a later age, an increase in young people living by themselves, the transformation of marriage into partnership.

Education – the diversification of educational career and a prolongation of the phase of education, a democratisation of the pedagogical approach.

Job – new bonds of education, unemployment, life-long education, accent on individual self-realisation in one's job.

Culture – a peer group life of youth of a religious, sporting, and political nature is influenced by multidimensional relations mediated through the mass media and network systems, which simultaneously bring about drawing closer and separation.

Politics – individualisation in this sphere is demonstrated above all through lower participation in creating political will.

Everyday Existence – in fashion, sexuality and communication, forms of behaviour often described as hedonistic that are presented through the mass media.

Discussion over the issue of whether such an image holds even at present, of whether it is scientifically correct to apply in this case Mannheim's terminology (1928) of a 'generation form' and to speak about the generation of the 1980s as an environmentalist genera-

tion [Richter 1995], has continued up to this day. K. Roberts queried an interpretation of the concept of individualisation as a destructurement of the situation of young people, in which prolonged transition into the world of labour and adulthood creates a 'moratorium' during which young people may escape from the old determinants of their life chances, such as gender, social class origins and the achievements of secondary education. "In practice, however, the old social predictors remain in sound world-wide working order. Young peoples' situation and future prospects continue to be governed by their family origins, school records, gender and places of residence." [Roberts 1995]

L. Siuralla has recently responded to a popular topic of verifying post-modern changes with a question: are traditional background variables losing their explanatory power? [Siuralla 1996: 63] Empirical verification of modernisation theory under the conditions of Finland indicated that the process of breaking loose from traditions and from collective guidance is a slow one: "...the social-class background, regional background and separate male and female cultures seem to have maintained their strong position as guiding forces in the socialisation process and in mediating traditions. Similarly, educational, consumption and leisure choices are still largely made in accordance with these background factors." [Lähteenmaa, Siuralla 1992: 128]. It is, however, beyond any dispute that some changes in the way of life with contemporary youth in Finland can be well explained by modernisation theory. Individualisation processes do not hold generally, but according to Finnish experts they can be related above all with metropolitan regions, consequently with regions where there is some accumulation of modernisation changes creating a wider selection of life chances to choose from.

The fact that the disintegration of family, neighbourhoods and religious communities should increase young people's sense of personal responsibility for their own conditions of living and for shaping their own future constitutes an important factor of the times, be it designated as modern or post-modern. O. Stafseng believes that a programme of getting free from conventions and traditions as well as from any mechanical form of collectivism, that is, a programme of the modern individual through which young people themselves determine their own life, has its older sources. Those who named it as being post-modern (T. Ziehe) created, in his opinion, only a vague theory by which the attempt to disguise that citizenship as a legislative and political basis for a modern individuality in terms of personality was originally only defined for men and persons that belonged to 'well-to-do' classes of society. [Stafseng 1995]

In spite of these doubts, it is necessary to admit that a tendency to individualisation in modern Western societies and also in transforming European societies is a consequence of the partial subversion of traditional class distinctions based on an ascriptive status and a traditional lifestyle. Individual performance has a growing importance in the diversification and individualisation of lifestyles in transition, where the conditions have arisen for such a shift through modernisation (industrialisation, urbanisation, information technology, secularisation). This development reflects the rise of new chances and freedom of choice, but also of new forms of threats and compulsion.

The fact that patterns of youth transitions from childhood into adulthood are more pluralist-like and the life experience of young people confirms a shift from traditional normative expectations is the main hypothesis of youth research in Europe at present. This change occurs in major building blocks of youth transitions such as school education and occupational training, separation from the family of origin, friendship and partner-

ship, entry into the labour market, leisure, consumer activities, and civil and political participation [Chisholm, Hurrelman 1995: 133].

Over the course of the century, the significance of education and vocational training has grown to the detriment of employment, and thus also the process of integration of a larger part of youth into the youth subculture and partner patterns has accelerated. And as the process of physical maturity accelerates likewise, in the opposite direction, a larger space has been created for youngsters to remain young for a longer time when compared to the previous period.

An important fact for understanding individualisation is that in some areas young people acquire a high standard of autonomy, and a possibility to choose from alternatives or the individual shaping of everyday existence (fashion, music, leisure activities, the culture of speech, political articulation). All this, however, takes place in an unstable social context in which the social position of an 'adolescent' or of a 'young adult' is temporary and uncertain, especially because the certainty of materialising life plans in the future does not exist. Young people, therefore, can gain autonomy and can take over responsibility in areas where it is typical of adults (for example, in consumption or in partnership) but they have not yet acquired the status of adults for good.

Above all, the discontinuity (sequencing, making steps) and inconsistency of the process of transition from adolescence into adulthood represent a fundamental risk factor. All young people, irrespective of their social origin, are in a way thrown "into structural contradictions" of their adolescence phase of life. It remains also a fact that they gain the possibility to optimise their life chances. However, it is important that "...where personal competence and social resources are available and sufficient, young people can and do find productive ways of negotiating youth transitions successfully, thereby establishing healthy adult personality and development. Where competence and resources are insufficient, the results may be a transiting into poor well-being." [Chisholm, Hurrelman 1995: 152]

The causes and effects of youth individualisation have also become a cardinal issue of the current youth research in countries that are transforming their political and economic system. In Slovakia people are interested in what marked changes are taking place in the social structure of youth, which specific groups of youth are influenced by this development, and in what way.

2. Sociological Contexts of Youth Individualisation in the Slovak Republic

The age-group of 20 to 24 year-olds that was studied in the empirical sociological research (by the Sociological Institutes of the Academies of Science in Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland in 1995) is characterised by several differences in the socialisation context.

From a demographic viewpoint, especially in the case of Slovakia, it is a generation group whose potential has recorded no historical parallel as yet. L. Pisca claimed that the census in 1970 exactly indicated the social consequences of the decrease in the birth-rate in the period after 1953 in the Czech Lands and after 1957 in Slovakia [Pisca 1980a: 23].

The system of social precautions in 1970 brought about a change in the birth-rate for a whole decade ahead, whereby there was a decrease in families with one child, in favour of families with two or even three children, along with increased qualification and

employment of women. In 1980, the negative effects of the renewed population vitality were also registered [Pisca 1980b: 524].

Difficulties accompanied especially the first five years of children born in the period 1971 to 1975 throughout their life cycle, because the material infrastructure which should have met their basic needs of life was introduced with a minimum three to five years delay. They were born into families that were entitled far later, namely as families with two or three children, to obtain a better placement on the social urgency lists for state-owned or co-operative flats, they experienced the stress of their working parents for want of vacancies in crèches and in kindergartens, they tried going to school in afternoon shifts, especially in the housing estates of large towns, they receptively responded to the endless efforts of the whole family clan (that is, the social network) in seeking patronage to be able to enter a secondary school or a university.

From a sociological viewpoint, a generally extended feeling of social security in the sphere of basic needs, especially as far as the possibility to get an education and a job, which followed from an interaction of mutually intertwined systems of paternalism, state care and support and protection by parents, was typical of the young generation that lived their childhood and adolescence before 1989. This system revealed itself in the extreme dependency of young people on the state and family, especially in their attempts to get a flat of their own, to establish a family or even to gain a higher social status. W. Adamski [1987: 37] reminds us that, as a result of the dominating ideology of equal chances, the aspirations of youth in the socialist countries depended a great deal less on the structural background than in the countries of Western Europe. In the socialist countries the influence of the state in production relationships, in systems of social increase and in professional careers created a social socialisation context for the solution of contradictions between the aspirations of youth and the possibilities of their materialisation, and thus determined the course of socialisation processes.

A great number of young people even in the planned market of education in Slovakia created unique competition and a deepening of the contradiction between increasing subjective aspirations and the objective possibilities to satisfy them. Restricted chances to be admitted to grammar schools, and especially to secondary technical or commercial schools with general certificate of education, pressure to attend preparatories for worker professions at secondary apprentice training centres, a restricted number of vacancies for freshmen in the most attractive branches of study at universities or technological institutes – all represented a barrier for youth individualisation. This generation with atypical tension between aspirations and their satisfaction in the sphere of education therefore represented not only a detonator, through their wider families, but also formed a strong background of social resistance against totalitarian political power in the period before 1989.

The first post-communist generation of youth in Slovakia started on this way by making the decision on its professional orientation (1985-1990) at the age when encounter and experience are perceived, according to A. Melluci [1996: 3], as an important and controversial dimension of one's own *personality*. Its second phase consisting in decision making on social breakthrough into the labour market has been shifted into *another civilisation time-space* through the transformation of real socialism into real capitalism.

We have not yet managed to realise the core and manifold chances challenging young people as a result of the break with the vision of 'socialist modernity'. C. Wallace

denominates it not too flatteringly as an antiquity of 'modern' society based on intense industrialisation typical of the end of nineteenth century and collectivisation, which produced huge enterprises and concentrations of employees in huge housing estates. People were divided into large groupings based on 'classes' and 'age', which were rigorously institutionalised, and they supported their collective identity by celebrations with rituals, slogans and gatherings. "*The type of subjectivity which was encouraged was one of the passive individual dependent on external institutions, who led a stable life and was neither geographically nor professionally mobile. Critical thinking was strongly discouraged.*" [Wallace 1997: 4] This is the very reverse of the 'reflexive individualisation' that takes place in late capitalism, as here such external institutions determining, for example, how, where and when to start one's job, when to get married and have children, where and with whom to spend one's leisure time, are mostly absent. All this is replaced by the necessity to make one's own choice among various alternatives and thus to form one's own individualised style of life, to cope critically with self-evaluation and even gradually develop a sceptical approach to one's environment in which old values and certainties lose their influence.

To Wallace's credit (an English sociologist with a deeper knowledge of the situation in the Czech and Slovak Republics acquired during her stay at the Central European University in Prague) she does not deny existing elements of individualisation tendencies and some manoeuvring space for individualisation in this "gigantic apotheosis of modernism and fordism". How could then such sociologically reflected phenomena of "the household working scheme" [Roško 1995], or other known forms of the grey economy extending into the sphere of the lifestyle (gardening, cottage-going) that were widely known but not considered to be self-destructive for the system arise? They (for example, the household working scheme) were tolerated, or even supported (for example, cottage-going) as suitable instruments for the venting of individualisation tendencies. This naturally does not change Wallace's justifiable argument that the very insufficiency of flexibility of the old system and its resistance to 'reflexive individualisation' may be considered as the cause of its collapse. In a comment on the changes of 1989, V. Mináč, a keen observer and commentator on the same reality from within, spoke about the efforts to support a collapse of the state paternalist system by the management and technocratic layer of the party *nomenklatura* that was fed up with obscuring and concealing the source of its wealth and strove to make its élite position apparent. Simultaneously, this opened up a possibility for new individual expansion that stopped being contrary to the ideology of socialism, but became compliant with the ethical code of a meritocratic capitalist society.

It may then be accepted that the first post-communist generation of youth was socialised in two qualitatively different social contexts. It is therefore not only a generation intensely endangered, but simultaneously, of immense, historically unique chances for life careers with unusually manifold possibilities of social and space mobility. At the same time, it represents a generation that must overcome a value hierarchy suitable for a different system of social structure. It often recalls in a Jeremiah way how excellent, without problems or conflicts everything used to be in the recent past, because it was stable and contained no risk once one learnt the ropes and the ways of getting around the rules.

For verifying structurations of adulthood with the post-communist youth generation, data from the survey *Transformation and modernisation 1995*, facilitate the clarifi-

cation of one area in decisive stages of transition, especially *the entry into the labour market*.

3. The Challenge of Market Economy

From the most important results of empirical surveys of value orientation of youth before 1989 comes the acute awareness that especially two values – the development of science and technology, and the exploitation of human ideas and creativity – had their specific place in its structure. *“The opinion is relatively more frequently represented that in these values capitalism is commensurate with socialism, there are even quite a number of people who believe that capitalism ensures even more successfully the materialisation of these values. The comparison of the past ten years makes it possible to state that critical attitudes of youth have deepened in the above area.”* [Macháček 1988: 136-137].

Even in this period, it was already apparent that the image of bringing together advantages of two faces of the coin, that is, the creative application of ideas and invention, and the minimum social risk in life was a typical schizophrenic characteristic of the then socialist generation of youth. Young people entered the transition phase after 1989 with an analogical vision of the ‘human face’ on both sides of the coin, now, however, it was capitalism [Macháček 1995: 39]. This explains the surprising and complex reactions over unemployment as a first visible systemic social consequence of the liberal economic reform, the side of the transformation and modernisation coin which presents Janus’s face of ‘risk and threat’.

This happened in spite of the fact that measures supporting the employment of graduates of universities, technological institutes and all sorts of secondary schools were effected on the basis of decrees of the government of the Slovak Republic and adequately reacted to the ‘shock’ of young people and their parents. There were sometimes not systems measures compatible with market economy.

The Government Decree No. 275/1990 allowed the withdrawal of 2,500 graduates of universities and technological institutes from the labour market and to grant them an additional specific term of studies with a scholarship amounting to 1 400 CSK (Czechoslovak crowns). This made it possible for this group of young people to create not only better conditions for finding a job in the labour market. It helped to give a signal that the political representatives would not allow the revolutionary young generation to be forced from universities by the market economy. From a pragmatic viewpoint, extending the time limit occurred in order that the arising market economy could absorb the first graduates from universities.

The Government Decree No. 428/1990 was also implemented aimed at helping graduates of secondary schools, universities and technological institutes to find jobs through better co-ordination in requalifying (an inter-ministerial board for the requalification and further education of youth and adults was founded) along with measures stimulating employers to engage graduates (the employers were motivated by remission of income tax payments, social insurance contributions, by the possibility to exceed budgeted limits for salaries in governmental organisations, and by granting tariff pay to graduates or a part to employers for a period of six months). According to the relevant analysis of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in the period concerned these supporting measures were exploited by 3,800 graduates from a total of 30,220 graduates. About 34 million CSK was paid out on salaries and compensation of salaries.

In 1991 the government of the Slovak Republic issued Decree No. 361, on the basis of which tariff pay was compensated to employers through labour agencies from the state budget for the active policy of employing graduates for a period of twelve months from the moment young people took up their jobs (3,500 CSK per each university graduate and 2,650 CSK per each secondary school graduate). The total sum amounted 97.8 CSK million, which represented 2.6% of finances allocated to active employment policy.

In my paper on the consequences of the development of the market economy on youth behaviour in the case of unemployment [Macháček 1994], I anticipated that young people would begin to design their professional and employment strategies in a flexible way and that parents and the public would accept this strategy. What I had in mind was the acceptance of unemployment and the drawing of unemployment benefit, as well as exploiting chances of vocational requalification courses, of various forms of language and professional education and their interfacing with part-time jobs as 'normal'. This group was characterised also by the highest preference from among all age-groups to include even the tactical alternative – "to draw on unemployment benefit and hope that the situation will be resolved somehow" in their standard behaviour on the labour market for a period of at least the first six months. The first post-communist young generation simply viewed unemployment as a new attractive element of lifestyle, by which a free citizen may solve his/her situation on the labour market. All the more that their parents still remember the notorious mechanism of planned economy for regulation of the labour force on the 'labour market' and its symbol – 'allocations' to particular enterprises or organisations. It has been confirmed that unemployment is a social experience that is accepted differently according to age in this historically unique time-space of the economic system transformation in the Slovak Republic. Even according to statistical tests, this experience occurs much more frequently with the youngest generation ($CC = -0.24$ in $0000*1$). In the age-group over 44, 13% admitted they were unemployed for at least two months, in the age-group between 30 to 44, it was 25%, in the age-group 25 to 29 it was 35%, and for people between the ages of 18 to 24 it was 44%. Likewise, in Slovakia the loss of one's job was expected least by persons aged over 44 (34.5%). The age-groups under 24 (50%) and from 25 to 29 (62%) expected the loss of their jobs in 1995 to a considerably larger degree.

A comparison of data from empirical research carried out in 1993 and 1995 shows some change in the strategies of solving unemployment. In Slovakia, there was a sharp decrease in reliance upon the state unemployment benefit. From the former 67.5% of those ready to accept unemployment benefit there remained remarkably only 34% of young people in 1995. In the Czech Republic, young people began relying on unemployment benefit more frequently in 1995 (38%) than in 1993 (27%). The results obtained indicated that the readiness to solve unemployment by undertaking private business activities could be expected especially from young people aged between 18 to 24. A similar change between 1993 and 1995 occurred also in the attitude towards business activities (entrepreneurial activities), which are considered to be a modernisation life strategy under the conditions of a market economy. In the Czech Republic, there was a decline in preferences for this strategy of solving unemployment both within the whole population (from 40% to 30%) as well as young people (from 47% to 36%). In Slovakia, an unimportant decrease in the total of the population was registered (33-30%), however, young people aged under 24 strengthened their orientation towards business activities (from 31% to 37%).

Table 1. Strategy of Solving Unemployment in the Slovak Republic (SR) and in the Czech Republic (CR): 1993-1995

Attitudes of various groups		18-24		W	
		SR	CR	SR	CR
		N = 134	N = 316	N = 956	N = 1,206
I shall requalify	1993	72.7	63.4	68.3	58.8
	1995	73.0	69.0	55.0	54.7
I shall seek a temporary job	1993	66.7	48.3	65.2	44.1
	1995	52.6	40.6	49.1	36.7
I shall apply for an unemployment benefit	1993	67.5	27.4	58.3	31.9
	1995	34.0	38.0	28.8	33.8
I shall try starting business activities	1993	30.7	47.5	33.1	40.3
	1995	37.2	36.6	29.6	30.7
I shall live on other income	1993	8.6	5.5	10.2	7.7
	1995	8.9	11.7	9.3	9.7

Table 2. Strategy of Seeking a Job and Locality

Attitudes of various groups		18-24		W	
		SR	CR	SR	CR
		N = 134	N = 316	N = 956	N = 1,206
I would seek a job in my speciality and locality of residence	1993	45.2	43.1	51.7	42.9
	1995	90.0	88.6	88.0	86.1
I would seek a job in my speciality anywhere	1993	71.3	44.6	51.7	50.5
	1995	62.4	46.2	88.0	52.0
I would seek any job in the locality of my residence	1993	50.0	46.3	48.1	37.8
	1995	68.9	37.8	57.2	31.8
I would take any job anywhere	1993	58.8	25.7	48.5	28.1
	1995	44.0	16.6	31.4	15.6

The most remarkable change in comparing data from surveys in 1993 and 1995 is the return to the most rigid variant of seeking a job in the place of residence: *I would seek a job in my speciality and in the locality of my residence*.

It appears that the shock from the unexpected consequences of unemployment has been overcome and was confirmed in the return to a variant preferring all advantages of such a job that stresses a regularly obtained qualification and profession and that reduces to a minimum expenses related with the change of one's residence. There was a variant preferring locality of residence even to the disfavour of qualifications and speciality: 10% of the total population and 18% of young people chose this. High expenses on travelling or no possibility to get accommodation probably eliminate all the advantages of a job in one's speciality outside the parents' residence. This tendency of the *entrenching of Slovak youth in the locality of their residence* is also confirmed by the fall in preference for seeking a job in one's speciality anywhere: from 71% in 1993 to 62% in 1995. The final variant is seeking *any job anywhere*, which lost its attractiveness both in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. Older (31%) but especially younger Slovaks (44%) however realise that competition in the labour market will require acceptance of even this least popular strategy.

The objective of Government Decree No. 666/1993 was to motivate employers to create new jobs – socially purposeful and publicly useful for graduates who were registered with employment offices as unemployed. An employer received a financial subsidy for a period of 12 months if the graduate got a newly created job, or even for 18 months if the job was vacant due to the retirement of an employee. The employer was obliged to employ a graduate in a qualified vacancy and to give him/her a wage not in the amount of the subsidy but in a higher amount, that is, in compliance with his/her job assignment. In 1995, 3,797 million SKK (Slovakian crowns) was spent on active employment policy, of which 2,698 million SKK was used for socially purposeful jobs. According to the data of employment offices, a further 6,935 purposeful jobs were created for graduates and adolescents by way of an irretrievable contribution of 66 million SKK.

There was also created the possibility to obtain a contribution from an employment agency amounting to 200,000 SKK for creating a self-employed job for starting an independent business activity. The contribution was to be used for acquiring the tangible or intangible assets necessary for the activity or for settling a rent for leased premises or land, or for paying back interest or loans. The condition for granting such a contribution was to carry out the agreed independent activity for a period of two years. A whole range of forms to activate young people in engaging (in socially purposeful and publicly useful jobs, the contribution for self-employment, requalification, protected workshops) were included in the new Act on Employment that was passed by the National Council of the Slovak Republic in December 1996.

As a result of improving the quality of instruments of the state employment policy, passive reliance on the care of employment offices and social welfare departments has been decreasing. Especially with the young generation, orientation towards business activities has been gradually increasing. It could therefore be stated that the trend towards a change in life strategies has obtained a modernisation dimension during the recent period and is appropriate to the exacting character of market economy under conditions of integration into the European Union market.

The overall absence of linkage between the economic transformation in the sense of market principles and the housing market is the biggest obstacle to the effectiveness of all other measures of active employment policy. Put concisely, Slovak youth is entrenching in the locality of their residence and their readiness to move for a job has declined. It must therefore be stressed that this trend in life strategies has no necessary modernisation dimension and under the given conditions it can scarcely have any. The change of attitudes of young people to include in their flexible life strategies the alternative of seeking a job outside their residence probably cannot be achieved by relying only on the instruments of state employment policy.

Conclusion

The challenge to transform a planned economy into a market one, and a totalitarian political system into pluralist democracy means for the first post-communist generation of youth a thorough social change that is demonstrated in a different structuration of transition into adulthood in the most important sphere – in entering the labour market.

Contrary to the planned economy under real socialism, where after the education process was over a phase of finding one's place in the labour sector fluently followed, in attaining the status of an adult even in the most important sphere, the transformation-

modernisation process brings uncertainty in materialising life plans. Unemployment and, within its framework, requalification with partial contractual work engagements has put discontinuity into this process and inconsistency, that is to say transition becomes individualised.

The first post-communist generation of youth experienced prolonged school holidays in this process, a phase of several months seeking a job with the help of the state, attempts at studying or short-term employment abroad, periods of business activities and falling through into the social network of state and non-governmental charity organisations. In order to understand the social behaviour of youth in the Slovak Republic, it is necessary to know more thoroughly the rules of the state employment policy. Graduates did not take up their jobs immediately after finishing their studies mainly because until 1996 it was possible for them to draw a state benefit while seeking a job immediately after they were registered. Since 1 January 1997 they have been able to obtain a state benefit while job searching only after 6 months have expired.

Unemployment as a social threat and as a life experience is an element of youth individualisation which is demonstrated through the acceptance of flexible solutions including the readiness for a change in living place and professional qualification. The comparison of surveys in 1993 and 1995 indicates that the initial shock from unemployment has been overcome. It is confirmed by a growing tendency to draw unemployment benefit in the Czech Republic and by an increased preparedness to engage in business activities in Slovakia, as well as in the preference to look for a job in one's line and in the place of one's residence even longer rather than take any job anywhere.

On the whole, it may be stated that transition into adulthood with the first post-communist generation is a specific process that paves the way for better understanding the problems of subsequent generations of youth. Analysis of citizens' behaviour in the labour market as well as the preferences of modernisation strategies intensify the overall impression that all generations are confronted with the transition in 'adulthood'. It appears that even the older and oldest generations have squared up to the 'transition' not badly. Acceptance of social change brought about by transformation is more intensive with younger generations. However, in the case of important dimensions such as privatisation, democratisation and integration into Europe, it would be difficult to find statistical bonds of importance to age groups.

Transformation and modernisation seem to represent a civilisational-cultural process whose breakthrough is reflected in attitudes and opinions of all generations in a relatively similar way. If we return to the beginning of the essay on understanding transformation and modernisation as a certain historical dividing line with a generational dimension, it may be concluded that social changes are of such systems importance that practically all generations have to cope with them jointly. A hypothesis for future research may be inferred from what has been said that the mere shifting of the first post-communist generation of youth along the age stages into adulthood and old age will not bring any principal/substantial change either in civil potential or in the economic prosperity of our society.

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