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## FRAGMENTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVENIA: THE END OF UTOPIAS IN THE ERA OF TRANSITIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*In the article we are analyzing changes and transformations of the relationship between youth and society that have occurred during the transitional period in the recent two decades in Slovenia. Our thesis is that the position of youth has changed from being a symbolic representative of a societal change in times of socialism to an ordinary age group in contemporary times, which has no particular or significant societal importance or even, that youth has been reduced to a marginal group. We are asserting that young people, who used to be a privileged societal group in the socialistic period, are now the "weakest link" of the transitional period in Slovenia. We will verify this thesis on the basis of a comparison of data obtained by the following researches: "The Situation, Consciousness and Behaviour of the Young Generation in Yugoslavia" carried out in 1986 (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986) and researches of youth in Slovenia carried out in the past two decades (Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996; Ule et al., 2000; Miheljak, 2002; Ule et al., 2008).*

**Key words:** youth, Slovenia, Eastern Europe, transition, societal/political change, value and life orientations

## FRAMMENTI SUI GIOVANI IN SLOVENIA: FINE DELLE UTOPIE AI TEMPI DELLA TRANSIZIONE

### SINTESI

*Nell'articolo si analizzano i cambiamenti e le trasformazioni nel rapporto tra società e mondo giovanile avvenuti negli ultimi due decenni di transizione in Slovenia. Siamo convinti che la posizione dei giovani è mutata. Nella società socialista i giovani personificavano simbolicamente i cambiamenti nella società, mentre oggi sono ridotti a mera rappresentanza di una fascia d'età senza particolare o chiaro ruolo sociale, se non addirittura considerati gruppo marginale. Nell'articolo si afferma che i giovani, all'epoca del socialismo gruppo sociale privilegiato, sono oggi l' "anello più debole" del processo di transizione in atto in Slovenia. L'esattezza di questa tesi viene verificata con la comparazione di dati raccolti nel corso delle seguenti ricerche: "Posizione, coscienza e modelli comportamentali della giovane generazione in Jugoslavia" realizzata nel 1986 (Aleksic, Vrcan, 1986) e delle ricerche sui giovani in Slovenia realizzate negli ultimi due decenni (Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule e altri, 1996; Ule e altri, 2000; Miheljak, 2002; Ule e altri, 2008).*

**Parole chiave:** giovani, Slovenia, Europa Orientale, transizione, cambiamenti politico/sociali, valori, indirizzi nella vita

## INTRODUCTION

In this article we analyze the changes and transformations of the relationship between youth and society that have occurred during the transitional period in the past two decades in Slovenia. We assert that young people, who used to be a privileged societal group during the socialist period, are now the "weakest link" of the transitional period in Slovenia. We will verify this theory on the basis of a comparison of data obtained by research done on the representative samples of young people in Slovenia in the last two decades (Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996; Ule et al., 2000; Miheljak, 2002; Ule et al., 2008) with the study entitled "The Situation, Consciousness and Behaviour of the Young Generation in Yugoslavia" (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986). From these we derive a theory that postsocialist transition has rendered empty the fundamental ideological concept through which youth was linked to the idea of modernization, i.e. the concept of progress. The hypothetical inherent link between youth and progress has been replaced by another, equally hypothetical inherent link, between youth and the individualization of life.

During the past fifty years youth studies have proven themselves to be a good indicator of the relevance of new societal trends. It is not only the case that the social, cultural and political processes of attaining independence of youth in the twentieth century is a direct consequence of political modernization, but it is also its mirror. While science offers theoretical proof of the changes in the social order, it has definitively been youth who have provided empirical proof of these changes in the past decades (Parsons, 1963; Mannheim, 1952; Coleman, 1961; Musgrove, 1964). Creators of social elites, public opinion or mass culture, have all carefully observed the undertakings of youth in the search for the legitimization of their ideas or to try to make young people enthusiastic about these ideas. They have searched for signs of future changes among youths and have regarded them as initiators and originators of these changes (Habermas, 1994; Keniston, 1971, 1972).

Youth movements in the second half of the twentieth century were founded on ideological progress, regardless of how strong their criticism of the very ideology was. We can witness this in the strong relation of socio-critical consciousness and utopian societal projects that were the products and outcomes of these movements. The ideal of growth and progress was one of the underlying conceptual links in the ideological structures of modernization, especially in the period of industrial modernization and significant revolutionary twists in the twentieth century. Therefore, ideas of youth were associated with ideas of progress in such a manner that the following equation seemed obvious: to be young means to strive for progress. This symbolic role of youth has

been exhausted in the past two decades. At the very least, in Slovenia we can assert that young people who once were the privileged societal group in the socialist period are now the "weakest link" of the transition.

## TIMES OF SOCIALIST YOUTH

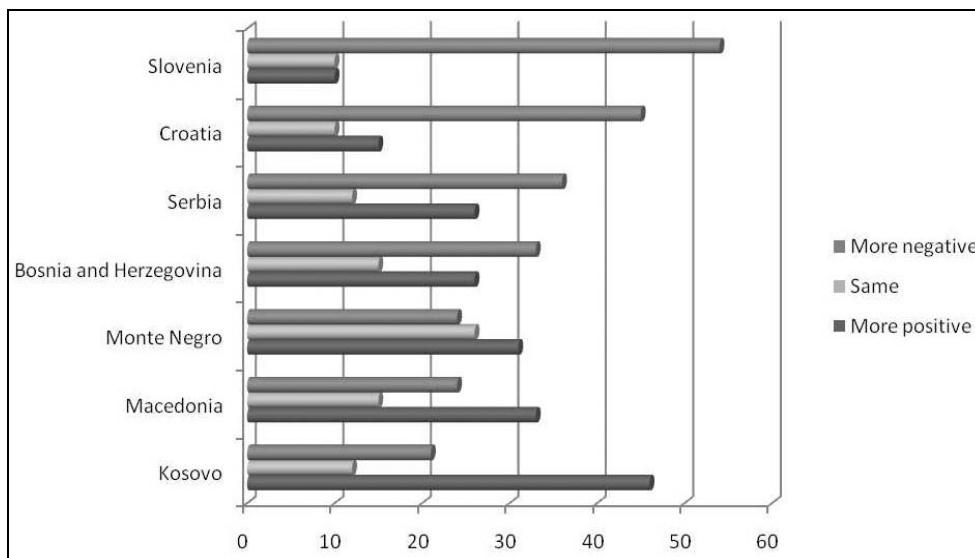
The story of youth in Slovenia was part of the common frame of Yugoslavia until the nineties. Yugoslavia was writing a story, which was meant to be socialist but nevertheless different from other real-socialist stories (Ule, Renner, 1998). This diversity can be seen in a relative openness to the world and in a greater autonomy of the individual within the system. The role of youth in post-war Yugoslav society was clearly integrative. Young people were motivated to identify with the system by the argument that it is precisely through their intensive cooperation in the rebuilding of the socialist society that they would create a better future for themselves. Since Yugoslav society was very rapidly developing economically and young people were participating in this swift advancement (regarding the possibilities of education, employment, and an improved material standard), the great majority of youths identified themselves with the social system, its values and aims (Ule, 1988). The political public was fascinated by young people who were compared with the negative image and perception of the young in the West. This is why the image of the young people in this period was clearly and undoubtedly positive.

This process was under a particular pressure from ideological and political structures that had taken control of all spheres of work and the behaviour of youths. In their speeches, politicians emphasized the importance of learning, studying and collective work. The positive effects of sports, military education and discipline in general were honoured, as opposed to the bourgeois influence, which was thought to promote a lack of ideas, aimlessness, and political passivity. A typically patronizing style of speech and writing about youth fit perfectly into the ideological treatment of young people and into a goal of a social and ideological homogenization of the youth. In this "environment of perfection" there were few incidences of deviance among young people.

However, from the sixties onward, the speeches of politicians as well as texts and comments in media began to appear that warned against the various "non-socialist", "bourgeois" habits of some young people. Students were particularly suspicious as they had always been the most resistant to the seduction of the authorities and of ideologies. This is why political speeches often deal with university students separately from the other parts of the younger generations, especially from the exemplary working class youth. The authorities reacted with warnings to the general public that students were becoming alienated from society and from the Communist party, that they were beginning to accept

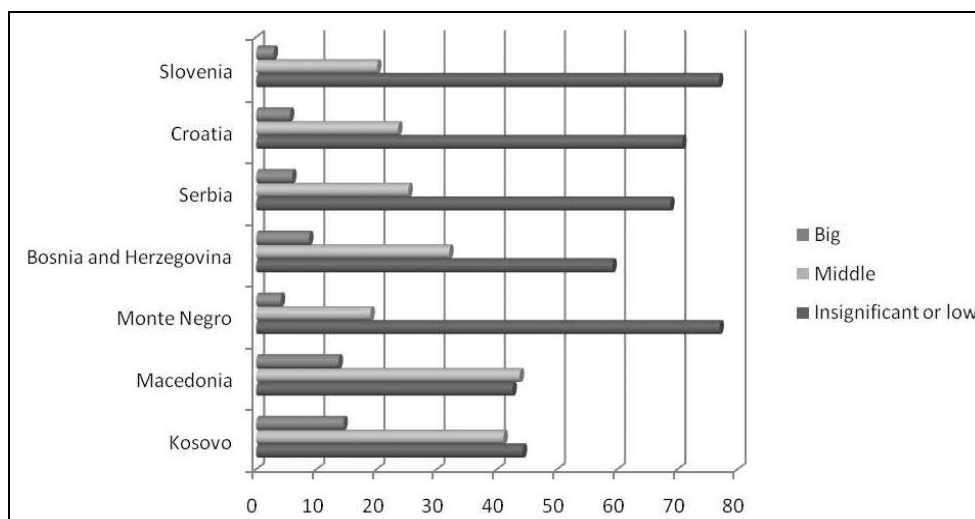
negative influences from the West, and that criminal immorality was surfacing among them. For the first time, young people became a source of worry in Yugoslavia. Conflict between youths (university students) and society had intensified by the end of the sixties, and culminated in the student movements. These movements appeared at approximately the same time as in other parts of the world and were the first mass expression of the crisis of Yugoslav socialist society. Students demanded greater

liberalization of the system, freedom of speech and of the media and a greater decentralization of economic and political power. Student movements had mainly taken place in bigger urban centres such as Beograd, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. For the first time these movements had warned about the differences between the ideological image of youth and their real lives, about the differences between urban centers and rural areas, and especially about the differences between republics in Yugoslavia.



**Graph 1: Attitude of youth towards Communist Party with regard to republican citizenship (in %) (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986, 198).**

**Graf 1: Odnos mladih do Komunistične partije glede na republiško državljanstvo (v %) (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986, 198).**



**Graph 2: Perception of influence of youth on societal changes with regard to republican citizenship (in %) (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986, 208).**

**Graf 2: Zaznavanje vpliva mladih na družbene spremembe glede na republiško državljanstvo (v %)(Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986, 208).**

How very different young people were within the territory of the former Yugoslavia was aptly demonstrated in an extensive survey on the youth carried out in 1986<sup>1</sup> with a sample of 6849 young people (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986). The results of the survey revealed significant differences among Yugoslav youth that did not originate in social differences, as we had expected, but which were linked primarily to the republic affiliation of the respondents. The more advantageous the economic situation in a republic (GDP per capita, employment rate, education rate) was, the more critical young people were towards the system and its institutions.

We can discern a clear parallel: the stronger the political ideological pressure in a republic was, the more young people identified themselves with the system.

Research showed not only differences in positions towards the system, but also differences in value and cultural orientations across Yugoslav republics and provinces. A factor analysis of value orientations on the scales of individualism, collectivism and traditionalism demonstrated that in Slovenia and Croatia the prevailing values were those of individualism, while in Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina the prevailing values were those of collectivism and traditionalism (Aleksić, Vrcan, 1986, 72). For example, traditionalism can be presented by the following statement: "In every moment I am prepared to defend the honour of my family, even with force". The percentage of youth who agreed with this statement according to citizenship was: 67% in Montenegro, 61% in Serbia, 40% in Croatia and 30% in Slovenia. Even more obvious were differences in the next statement: "A woman has to be a virgin when she marries, since it has been like this for centuries and also because this guarantees that she will dedicate all her love to her husband". The percentage of youth that agreed with this statement was: 74% in Kosovo, 35% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 33% in Serbia and 19% in Slovenia. However, there were no statistically significant differences with regards to social affinity, gender or other demographic characteristics.

Results of the Yugoslav survey of youth sounded an alarm and pointed out that many differences and contradictions existed within the social and political system of Yugoslavia. While we had young people in less developed areas of Yugoslavia and out of major urban centres who still trusted the traditional patterns of development rather blindly on the one side, in Slovenia and in developed urban centres of Yugoslavia, we found an already developing model of reflexive modernization that is based on civil society and new social movements

(Ule, 1987; Vrcan, 1988; Pavlović, 1988; Kreft, 1988). This study drew attention to how these differences were generated in the young generation in how they had actually indicated the later collapse of the system. Without question, in Slovenia it was youth who were the instigators of societal changes and also a most distinctive representative of these changes. Perhaps this role was even more significant for the break with the communist one-party system than the actual political power of young people.

### TRANSFORMATION OF YOUTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVENIA IN TIMES OF TRANSITION

In Slovenia, after the political twist in the nineties, which was considerably less dramatic than compared to other republics in Yugoslavia, a new social-economic system was quickly established which was characterized by a neoliberal economy and a weakened welfare state. We now have two ideological perspectives that are simultaneously in conflict and complement each other in an effort to ideologically homogenize the public sphere during the transition period: the perspective of neoliberalism and the perspective of neoconservatism. Both are founded on the domination of capital and political power and on the exclusion of all more socially vulnerable groups such as workers, women, youth, migrants. This system does not require particular symbolic representation for its own legitimacy nor social movements that would represent the political will of the people. And above all, there is no such need which would require these ideologies to express themselves through young people. Instead, ideologies have now acquired other representatives, such as: capital, profit, national homogenization, religion, and family.

When attempting to describe the younger generation during times of transition, researchers now find themselves in a predicament. The younger generation again appears to be undefined socially, culturally and in terms of lifestyle; youth subcultures seem to replay old tunes or else opt for regression. This position has been indirectly reinforced by every-day lay discourse regarding young people that tends to generalize their particular problems. It seems that all that generational and cultural modernization has left behind is consumer emancipation and an autonomous position of individuals on the uncounted markets of consumer styles, fashion, images and the shaping of the body. Young people in Slovenia are now confronted with a competitive educational system, a demanding and restrictive labour market as well

1 In 1986 we carried out an all Yugoslav youth survey named "*The Situation, Consciousness and Behaviour of the Young Generation in Yugoslavia*" (N = 6840 quest.). The idea originated from the top of the Yugoslav youth organisation. The research team was constituted from the researchers from the whole Yugoslavia; the head of research team was Professor Srdjan Vrcan from University of Zagreb, Croatia. The study was also supported by some leading (more liberal) politicians in the Yugoslav political leadership. Without their support, this study would have not been possible.

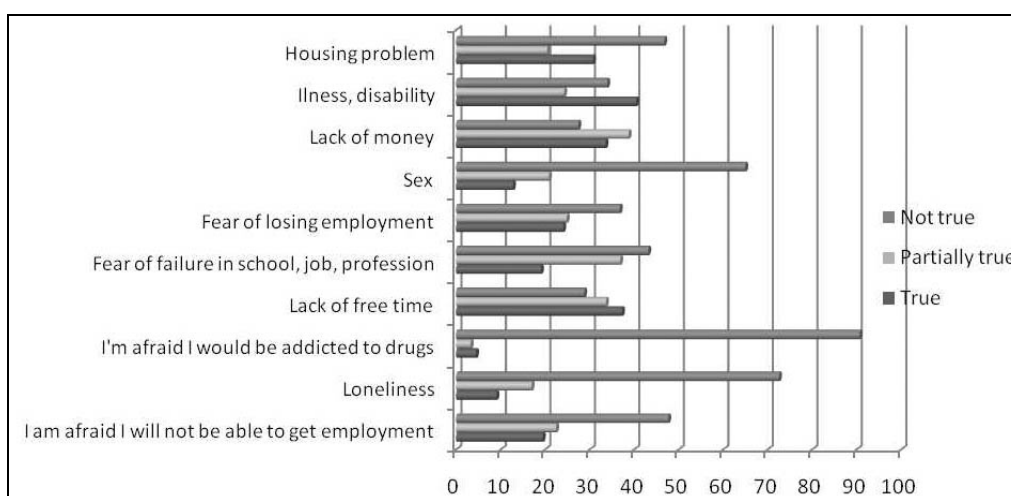
as a prolonged period of dependence on their parents. The risky transition to adulthood compels them to search for flexible strategies that are able to lead them to their (uncertain) goals through the maze of the education system, work, entertainment, family, and peer relations (Ule et al., 2000; Ule, 2008).

### Problems of youth in the post-transition times

Youth studies in Slovenia from the nineties on have shown that the scope and weight of the problems young people are facing is increasing, as are the risks associated with attempts to solve these problems.<sup>2</sup> If young people who participated in the study done in 1986 were still exposing problems related to civil rights and liberties, such as "moral crises and lack of ideals" (16% of respondents thought this was very important), "insufficient societal concern for youth" (14% of respondents strongly agree), "lack of freedom of speech and thought" (11% of respondents strongly agree); young people in the earliest studies in the nineties started to expose predominately social-economical problems. For example, for 72% of respondents in the study of middle-school youth in 1993, the biggest problem they face is fear of unemployment (Ule, Miheljak, 1995).

A 2008 study on the social-economic situation of students in Slovenia<sup>3</sup> also showed similar trends, since 69,4% respondents stated they expect to face problems when entering the job market. Another fact is also indicative; gender comparison shows that female students expect significantly more problems than male students. One third more female students expect to experience problems connected with employment because they are educated for a profession for which there is no (or not enough) demand. Also, almost twice as many female students think, that it will be more difficult to find employment due to the crisis. Moreover, half more female students believe it will be more difficult to find employment because they have no proper acquaintances. On the other hand, almost twice as many male students believe they will easily find employment since their profession is in demand; also, more male students believe they have proper connections and acquaintances.

Likewise, female students are more worried than male students in all situations under the question: "What are your worries for the future?" And again, they are most concerned with being unemployed (Ule, Tivadar, Rajšp, Kurdiša, 2008). All these results indicate how the economic situation of young people in the post-transition period is worsening and how subtle pressures on them are increasing.

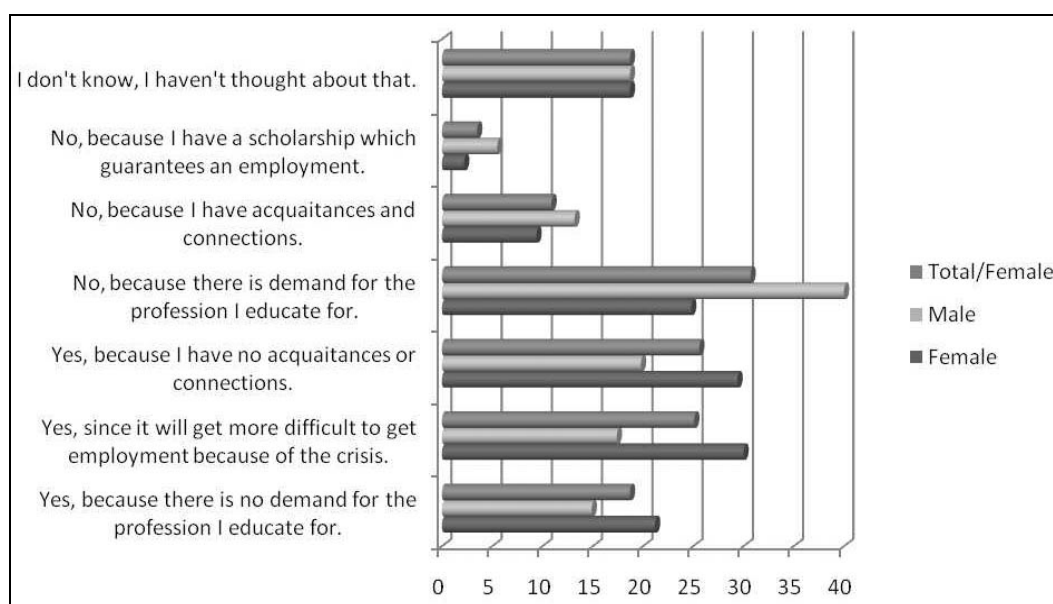


**Graph 3: Main problems of youth (Ule, Kuhar, 2002).**

**Graf 3: Glavni problemi mladih (Ule, Kuhar, 2002).**

<sup>2</sup> Studies on youth have been systematically carried out by the Centre for Social Psychology at the Faculty of Social Sciences since 1993. The first major empirical research study on young people in Slovenia was conducted in 1993. The survey which included secondary school students (the sample included 2354 pupils) (Ule, Miheljak, 1995) followed with the next empirical research program conducted in 1995, which included 1829 students from universities in Slovenia (Ule et al., 1996). In 1998 we conducted a study on the population of fifteen-year-olds (the sample included 1687 elementary school pupils) (Ule et al, 2000). In 2000 we surveyed a sample of 1800 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 (Miheljak, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Research "Socialno-ekonomski položaj študentov" (Social-economical status of students) was carried out by Centre for Social Psychology in 2008 on the sample of 3006 students from all four Universities in Slovenia.



**Graph 4: Do you estimate that you will have problems with employment in your profession (with regard to gender, in %)? (Ule, Tivadar, Rajšp, Kurdiija, 2008)**

**Graf 4: Ali ocenjujete, da boste imeli težave z zaposlovanjem v svojem poklicu (glede na spol, v %)? (Ule, Tivadar, Rajšp, Kurdiija, 2008)**

The register of problems in the last twenty years has considerably changed (Ilišin, Radin, 2007; Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006; Kovatcheva, 2001; Roberts, 2003). The fundamental controversies that young people in Slovenia have to resolve is the contrast between an increasing range of options for the individual managing and planning of their lives on the one hand, and the lesser degree of predictability and control of life-courses on the other. Social and economic status continue to determine life courses, but their influence is less visible and less direct because collective traditions have been weakening and individualistic strategies are becoming dominant (Mihelj, 2002; Ule, 2008; France, 2007; Clark, 2008). On the other hand, the individual is compelled to take steps to avoid shouldering the burden of consequences.

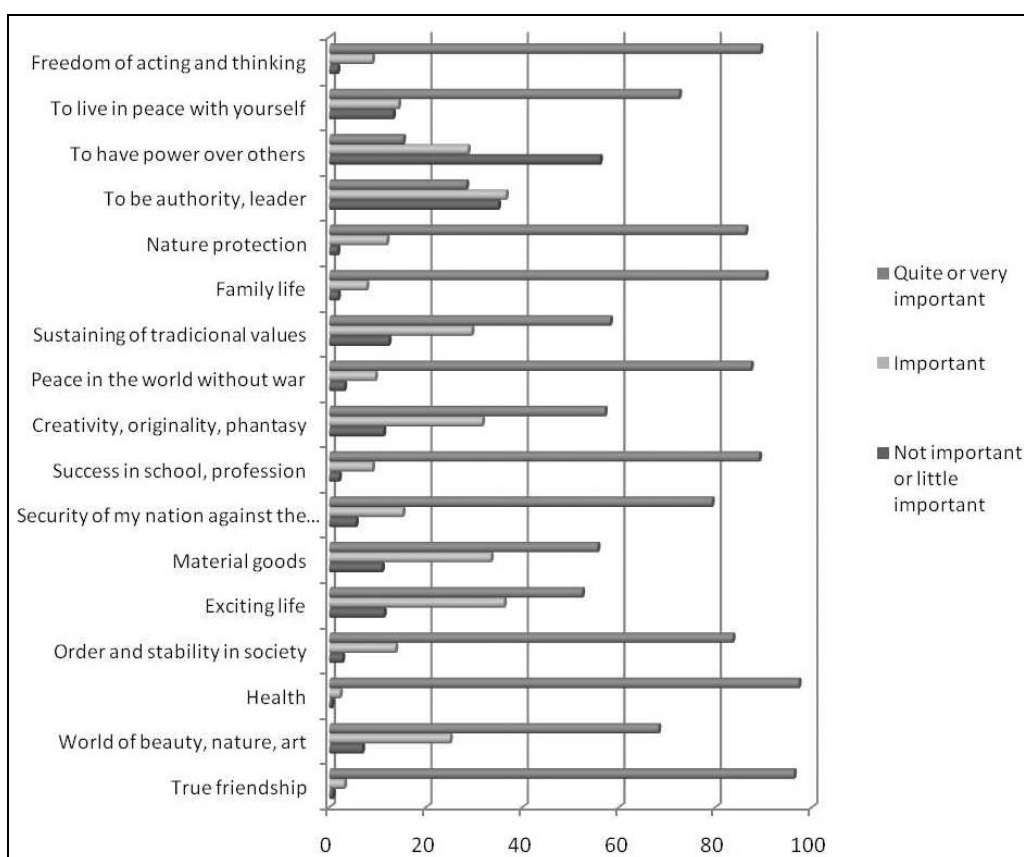
These difficulties additionally increase the social and psychological vulnerability of young people. They also escalate difficulties and accumulate unresolved problems that tend to feed one another. As a rule, the structural characteristics of social vulnerability (for example a disadvantaged starting position) become intertwined with cultural and interactive aspects (Du Bois-Raymond, Chisholm, 2006; Chisholm, 1995). Due to the mostly structural sources of problems and difficulties encountered by youth, young people often experience these difficulties as an irresolvable vicious circle and sometimes try to resolve them by means of various unreflective shortcuts (e.g. consumerism, addictions and escapism into the pop-culture youth lifestyles). These

shortcuts seem to drive problems out of their minds, while in fact they are only deepening them.

#### Transformations of life and value orientations of youth

Changes in social status and positions provoke different reactions among young people; among these adaptations we can also clearly observe changes of life and value orientations. The results of various youth studies done in Slovenia after 1990 show that for young people, the shaping of everyday life and value systems has been a part of their daily search for a balance amid their personal wishes and expectations on the one hand, and social demands and options on the other (Ule, Renar, 1998). However, the balance between expectations and demand and individuals' competences or capacities for action is conditional and exposed to a great many risks. For many, the conventional signs of success (e.g. income, career, status) fall short of their hunger for a "fulfilling life" and an increasing need to "find their own way" and to freely shape their personality.

Overview of the value orientations is indicating that the most important values for young people in Slovenia are expressive values; such as true friendship, family life, world peace, freedom to act and think, environmental protection, the world of beauty and art. Less important are material-career values; material goods, money, power, and influence. It is very interesting that values which we typically assign to youth are also less



**Graph 5: How important are for you the following things? (Miheljak, 2002)**

**Graf 5: Kako pomembne so za vas naslednje stvari? (Miheljak, 2002)**

important, for example an exciting life, creativity, originality and imagination.

Findings of the studies on youth in Slovenia have indicated the following four patterns of value changes:

- *change of values related to work*; accepting and appropriating career, competitive, individualized patterns of relation towards employment and work;

- *change of family values*; focus moving to privacy and intimacy of private life, prolonging of the time spent living with the family of origin, postponing parenthood, differentiation of family formations;

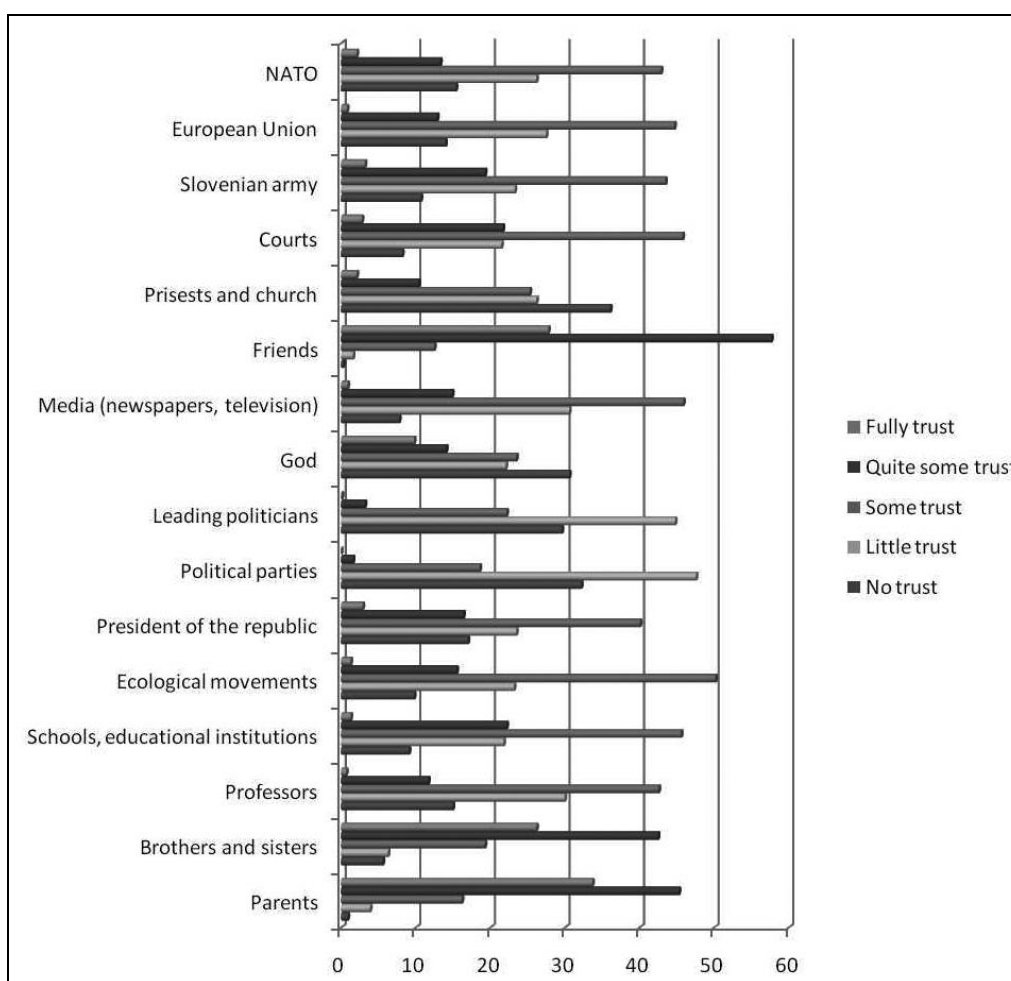
- *individualization of choices and life courses*, self-representation, forming and nursing one's image, body shape;

- *quick appropriating of consumer values*, mediated through mass media, the rapid formation of youth consumer culture.

Some researchers have denoted a change in value orientations of Eastern European youth as a westernization of life and value orientations of youth (Watts, 1994; Chisholm, 1995). This is supposed to be only the introduction to the westernization of everyday life of all age groups and generations. Youth are believed to be the

quickest to appropriate consumer values and to master information culture. With regards to the fact that western values were already available to youth from Slovenia and also other areas of ex-Yugoslavia prior to the transition, it would be inappropriate to understand and these changes as "westernization".

Young people incessantly face new contradictions; due to these, attaining independence and personal growth are becoming more difficult than ever. It is true that young people are liberating themselves of traditional ties and dependencies, but they are becoming more and more dependent on the pressures of other social institutions upon which they have very little or no influence. These institutions are mostly the labour market, the education system, systems of social care in protection, systems of social security and health (Beck, 1997; France, 2007). Older generations can still acquire power for adjusting to the new societal trends from "socialization reserves" of the past, and combine traditional and new patterns of individualization. Young people on the other hand, will have to spend their entire lives in these new conditions of modern society.



**Graph 6: In what manner do you trust the following (in %)? (Miheljak, 2002)**  
**Graf 6: Do kake mere zaupate naslednjim stvarim (v %)? (Miheljak, 2002)**

This is evident also from the responses of young people to the question who and to what extent do they trust. Trust in institutions has been measured in all studies carried out on youth in the nineties in Slovenia. All of them disclosed the same thing: young people display low levels of trust in the political institutions and subjects and show a distinct tendency towards turning to privacy and private life.

The analysis of the fundamental dimensions of life and value orientations in the years after 1990 indicates some important changes. The most conspicuous of these changes is the shifting of young people's attention to everyday life and privacy, and their return to the family. This occurrence could be called the domestication of youth, and it has a twofold significance: one is the return of young people from the public sphere to the private, and the other is the obstruction of the critical and alternative tendencies of young people under the auspices of the "home."

The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed the "break-through" of new, socially highly significant value and life orientations and a value shift among young people in Slovenia. The values of youth cultures and subcultures (for example, sexual liberation, individual freedom of speech, thought, action, life-style) became a part of the public consciousness. Even though this took on the form of a conflict between adults and post-adolescent youth, what was happening then had more to do with the breaking of the last taboos and limitations that represented obstacles for all generations in their departure from the old values of traditional industrialism. In the 1980s a further shift occurred within the value system, namely a shift from the global value systems produced by different ideologies to particular, seemingly fragmentary and concrete values among which the higher sensibility of interpersonal relationships and the quality of everyday life prevailed.



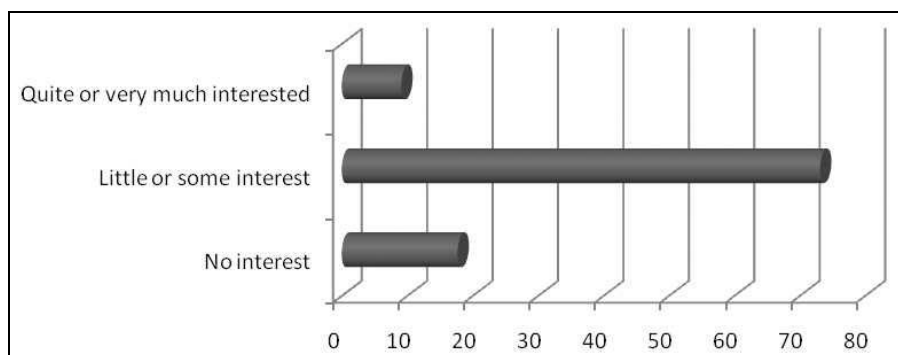
In last two decades we have also observed an increase in the significance of "socially desirable/conformist" values (health, order and stability, family life). Research results therefore show that when working on their life projects, young people are not particularly innovative. On the contrary, they are defensive and, rather than opting for experiments or innovation, they tend to settle for the simulation of various stereotypes of normality, despite the fact that their starting positions differ (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 1994). We have also observed that young people desire to present themselves as entirely ordinary, and normal. This rhetoric of normality enables them to constitute an apparently clear position; however, it does not enable youth to discursively articulate their own position. We are talking more about a kind of simulation of normality. This simulation is a sort of armour for young people. In contemporary times, when what is considered normal and ordinary has been completely turned on its head and there is nothing firm and binding, we see another question raised. This is a question of a norm of normality, about which structures and which discourses are dictating this norm (Beck, Giddens, Lasch, 1994). A well known "diagnosis" of a post modern condition, according to which there are increasing life possibilities and individual freedoms, and young people are their own architects or "identity managers", is therefore valid only under those frames of possibilities that are set by social and political structures.

### Political profile of young people

To the new circumstances of contemporary society most young people respond with increased effort and a continued search for opportunities and investigation of risks; and not with protests or by showing a rejection of existing society. The extensive resistance of young people to the intrusions of society into their individual lives is manifested in their negative or passive attitude towards politics.

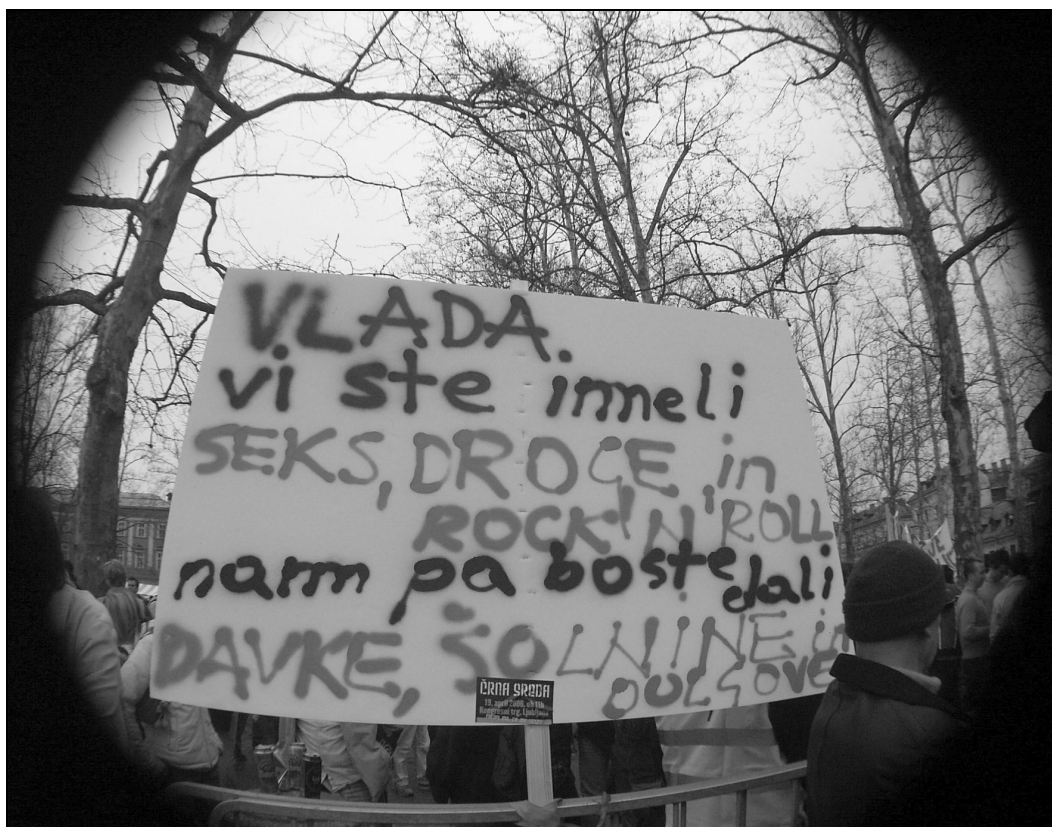
Research on young people's positions towards politics has not shown any significant differences between the sexes; while on the other hand, studies that have included the whole population constantly indicate a higher interest for politics in males. In the study "SJM 2000" in Slovenia, which coincided with the study done by Mladina 2000, 59,2% of females responded they have little or no interest in politics, while only 44% of males responded accordingly. 10% of the male population has a very high interest in politics, while only 3% of female population in the study done by SJM 2000 and only 1,2% of youth in the study done by Mladina 2000 (Miheljak, 2002) indicate a very high interest in politics. We could say that young people have a similar attitude towards politics as women in the general population. Therefore both, youth and women, are significantly more excluded from definitions of political roles and positions. In addition, the public of Slovene political sphere is during this time of transition even more in the hands of the adult male population than was the case during socialist times. We witness similar phenomena in other comparable Eastern European countries (Gille, Krüger, 2000; Sauer, 1995). With this in mind we cannot interpret the lower political interest of youth and women as a particular deficit of young people or women, but we have to perceive it as a deficit of a general political culture and politics in the post-transitional period.

Already by the eighties, studies on Yugoslav youth indicated a sceptical attitude towards the general public and this was especially true for Slovenia. At that time, a sceptical attitude was accompanied by a readiness to engage in informal, alternative forms of political action, civil initiatives, etc. Contrary to this attitude, in the transition period, young people have turned away from any kind of politics as a collective activity. They have simply been trying to stay "out of it." It is interesting that a paper written on German youth, entitled "Jugend 2006" also finds that youth minorities of the radical left and right still exist, but are marked more than with ideology, with ex-



**Graph 7: How would you evaluate your interest in politics? (Miheljak, 2002)**

**Graf 7: Kako bi ovrednotili svoje zanimanje za politiko? (Miheljak, 2002)**



**Fig. 1: Student protests against tuition fees (photo: Bogomir Mihevc).**  
**Sl. 1: Študentski protesti proti šolninam (foto: Bogomir Mihevc).**

pression of positive or negative emotions, prejudices and with the tendency of young people to belong to "powerful" groups which know how to withstand institutions of state (Hurrelman, Matthias, 2006). Thomas Gensicke remarks: "Otherwise youth is interested in politics mostly only as much as can be reached by a click-on-computer" (2006, 139). It is in this manner, Gensicke believes, we have to understand the sympathies expressed by a considerable portion of youths with the antiglobalization movements. Namely, taking part in these movements is an exceptional opportunity for connecting with young people around the world with the help of the internet.

Young people are diverting themselves from traditional political activity. Political parties only rarely attract new members. Contemporary civil-societal initiatives and movements are facing similar problems. Some researchers explain this trend by pointing out the effects of the particular media and internet culture in which young people are growing up (France, 2007; Mizen, 2004). This, however, is hardly a sufficient explanation for such a change. And yet, young people show an interest in at least some topics, such as social justice, environmental care, and the problems of marginalized groups. At the same time, politicians are dependent and

count on the votes of older generations, and this leads to an even deeper rupture between young people and formal politics. Nonetheless, this kind of attitude in young people is in itself very politically significant; young people are resisting the nonsense and obligations which adults often exhaust themselves with without any critical evaluation of their commitments.

#### **DECONSTRUCTION OF YOUTH IN THE POST-TRANSITION PERIOD**

Processes in the last two decades have seemingly ultimately diverted young people from the "grand themes" that formed the foundations of the social movements in the eighties, such as human rights, social justice, gender equality, the autonomy of civil society as opposed to the state; although it is also true that these topics generally disappeared from the public discourse. Neoconservatism and neoliberalism are destroying institutions that are based on solidarity and not on a clear and strict logic of profit; and hence they are destroying the "support network" of youth cultures and social movements as well. It seems that the young generations in Slovenia in the last two decades have forfeited utopian ideals – or perhaps

we should say that they are not willing to look for them anymore. This also means that social criticism and protests no longer take the form of generational or age-determined social movements, but of a dispersed, fragmented socio-political scene in which young people play the roles of extras rather than being active subjects who know how to clearly formulate their demands and wishes. Young people as a social group did not melt away in a trans-generational, trans-ideological and plural society of many differences as initially appeared to be the case. Instead, they transformed themselves into an age group without its own distinctive features. Consequently, the majority of society takes notice of young people only when it feels threatened by them or when it recognizes them as potential consumers.

The theory concerning the deconstruction/disappearance of youth as an intermediate or transitional stage was first introduced towards the eighties. The change of youth was brought about by the structural reorganization of socialization, which eliminated the need for a unique intermediate stage between childhood and adulthood (Walther, 2006). Viewed from the perspective of the eighties, the deconstruction of youth appeared as a process of young people's liberation from social infantilization, and as an emancipation process of youth as opposed to the adult world. And for this reason the theory about the deconstruction of youth sounded very optimistic, which is why many theoreticians and researchers on youth developed it (Trotha, 1982; Zinnecker, 1987). The same was true for Slovenia, where we discovered that the inferior status of youth as a generational group was being aborted and that young people were becoming initiators and subjects of new social movements that were no longer segmented by age (Ule, 1988, 126).

Today, the same theory about the deconstruction of youth no longer sounds so optimistic. It displays itself as acceptance of the prolonging of the social childhood of youth, as placing young people into particular "ghettos", where they are pushed into prolonged education with no clear and definite strategies and perspectives for the future (Coté, 2007). In Slovenia we are dealing with an ever "thinner" segment of young people who are literally from birth accompanied by a mix of worries for the future and every kind of investment from their parents. Differences among young people are increasing; class, gender, ethical differences. Particular ways in which the redistribution of property has occurred in the past two decades has also considerably increased differences in the starting positions of young people who are becoming ever more dependent on family capital, support and familial social networks.

However, not solely demographic trends that are responsible for the reduced share and value of young people in comparison to other population groups (Blossfeld et al., 2005). Another important factor in the social exclusion of youth is the narrowing of the "space for

youth," which has become limited to the spheres of privacy and leisure time. The private world of young people along with the help and support of their parents offers them shelter and a place of withdrawal from the pressures of the increasingly complicated and unclear everyday world of adults. However, it was precisely young people, who have most obviously and faster than any other societal group replaced their interest in social justice, gender equality, autonomy of civil society, human rights, democratic public opinion to conspicuously private conceptions of the social world that is characterized by social anomy and the loss of collective/historical memory. This tendency is in accordance with similar changes in youths in late-modern societies, with individualization of youth, increased emphasis of everyday pragmatism and disinterest in any of the ideological "big stories".

## CONCLUSION

The position of young people in Slovenia has completely changed in the past two decades. The postsocialist transition has rendered empty the fundamental ideological concept through which youth was linked with the idea of modernization, i.e. the concept of progress. The hypothetical inherent link between youth and progress has been replaced with another, equally hypothetical inherent link, between youth and the individualization of life, which initiates young people into the new privacy of the globalized consumer society. Today, due to this change in inherent links, the deconstruction of youth displays itself as a particular historic trap, which ultimately returns young people back to the place where their social historical emancipation originated, namely, to the world of privacy, family, parents. The breakdown of the link between modernization, emancipation and social progress at this stage of post-transitional development, points to the intrinsic limitations of a modernization process that is propelled by neoliberalism.

The passage from socialism to neoliberalism has revived social differences, such as class, gender, and ethnic differences. For a minority of young people these changes have opened such possibilities for a success, career, and material standards that were simply unimaginable before. In this way a limited number of young people from privileged class have access to promising educational degrees, successful careers, and good employment. But on the other hand, more and more young people are facing increasingly uncertain and unpredictable working conditions with short-term employment, a prolonged economic dependency on their families of origin, practical institutionalizing of lower incomes. Prolonged economic dependence has also another price: young people have to face various conflicts with their parents, which are originating precisely and only because of these prolonged cohabitations. And in these cohabitations,



**Fig. 2: Student protests against tuition fees (photo: Bogomir Mihevc).**  
**Sl. 2: Študentski protesti proti šolninam (foto: Bogomir Mihevc).**

parents are prevailing since they have more economic and political power. If we also take into consideration that after they finish their education, young people rarely find employment suitable to their qualifications and that they are usually sentenced to earning the lowest wages in the beginning, then we can also see that the price of youth in Slovenia has become exceedingly high. The low price of work done by young people is rewarding employers, not the young. Employers definitively profit since they have access to a low-paid workforce with the most up-to-date education. In this way, young people are marginalized in the labour market, excluded from the essential flow of adult society and consequently deprived of the origins of power.

This is the framework in which the social and political reconstruction of youth has taken place. The autonomy of young people has been considerably reduced after the process of narrowing of the welfare state has transferred the majority of costs for social reproduction of youth from the state back to the family. Without economic or political representatives, young people have few rights, privileges and accordingly, a lower social status. They perceive the social world as being unclear and unpredictable. New information technology and media offer ele-

ments of multiculturalism and global internationalism; they incessantly inform young people of new cultures and lifestyles. All this results in a widening of young people's world and liberates them of traditional conservative cultural ties and patterns, but on the other hand this same world is particularizing and individualizing their common problems and offers only substitutes and not solutions to real life dilemmas and problems. Youth itself is defined exactly by the ability to rise above psychophysical process of growing up and in that way becomes socially, culturally, and politically significant social group. If there is no future for those members of society who are still growing up, or if roads to those futures are closed or inaccessible, then we can no longer speak about "youth" in the true sense of the word. It is interesting that policy makers are not disturbed by the lack of young people in public life. What is more, today's adult society is, due to its developmental irresponsibility, literally and with no hesitations, parasiting on the future. The irresponsibility of contemporary society for the future goes directly hand in hand with society's indifference towards young people and regardless of the cult of youth that is otherwise reigning in the contemporary mass culture.

## FRAGMENTI O MLADIH V SLOVENIJI: KONEC UTOPIJ V TRANZICIJSKEM ČASU

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## POVZETEK

Medtem ko znanost ponuja teoretične dokaze, so mladi priskrbeli empiričen dokaz družbenih sprememb, ki so potekale v zadnjih desetletjih. Na tem mestu uporabljamo koncept mladih, zasnovan kot skonstruiran pojav v družbi, torej kot družbeno-zgodovinska skupina s skupno zgodovinsko izkušnjo in ne kot starostna skupina.

V času socializma je bil ideal rasti in napredka ena od temeljnih konceptualnih povezav, posebej znotraj ideoloških struktur med mladimi. Na tak način so ideologije napredka in radikalnih družbenih sprememb predstavljale ključni dejavnik družbene konstrukcije mladih v socializmu; homogenizirale so mlade v virtualnem utelešenju družbene prihodnosti. Tovrstno umeščanje mladih je bilo še posebej značilno za socialistične sisteme Vzhodne Evrope po drugi svetovni vojni.

V prispevku analiziramo, kako se je položaj mladih v Sloveniji spremenil v zadnjih dveh desetletjih. Naša teza je, da je post-socialistična tranzicija izpraznila temeljni ideološki koncept, preko katerega so bili mladi povezani z idejo modernizacije, tj. s konceptom napredka. Novi sistem za lastno legitimacijo ne potrebuje posebne simbolne reprezentacije ali družbenih gibanj, ki bi predstavljala politično voljo ljudi. Predvsem pa ne obstaja potreba, ki bi zahtevala izražanje ideologij preko mladih. Ideologije so dobile kvečjemu druge predstavnike, kot so: kapital, dobiček, homogenizacija naroda, religija in družina.

Torej je hipotetični inherentni vezni člen med mladimi in napredkom nadomestil drug, prav tako hipotetični, inherentni vezni člen med mladimi in individualizacijo življenja. Ta vezni člen uvaja mlade v novo zasebnost globalizirane potrošniške družbe. Avtonomija mladih se je znatno zmanjšala skozi proces krčenja socialne države, ki je večji del stroškov družbene reprodukcije mladih prenesel z države nazaj na družino. Mladi so na trgu dela marginalizirani, izključeni iz ključnih tokov družbe odraslih in posledično prikrajšani za vire moči. Brez predstavnikov v gospodarstvu in politiki imajo mladi le malo pravic in prednosti, ter v skladu s tem tudi nižji družbeni položaj. Mladi nimajo več ključnega glasu in niso pomembni predstavniki družbe, ampak zgolj navadna starostna skupina brez posebne ali jasno določene vloge v družbi.

**Ključne besede:** mladi, Slovenija, Vzhodna Evropa, tranzicija, družbene/politične spremembe, vrednote in življenjske usmeritve

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