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GROWING UP SLOVENIA IN THE NINETIES

ABSTRACT

It is difficult to determine the nature of young people in the 1990s in Slovenia, since this population seems to be socially, culturally and stylistically unformed. The 1960s and the 1970s were years of rapid ascent and qualitative growth for youth movements in Slovenia, along side a higher level of youth emancipation and self-confidence. The 1980s were years of expansion and the breaking up of youth subcultures into the various alternative scenes. The 1990s, in contrast, have been marked by the regression of youth movements, the increased social anomie of youth, and the destruction of alternative youth cultures. The redirection of dealing with society to dealing with oneself is characteristic of the young in Slovenia in the 1990s. Young people deal mostly with themselves now and try to achieve as painless and risk free a path to the future as possible. The problems which they encounter, they do not displace onto society, but deal with them alone.

Key words: Youth, young people, transition, identity, social inclusion/exclusion, subculture

Introduction

Conceptually, youth has been defined in the sociological literature as a stage of socialisation and transition to adulthood. At present, however, youth is being re-evaluated as a central and strategic phase inside the life course. This conceptual shift is required by the growing individualisation of the process of growing up, i. e. what sociologists call “diversification” of pathways into adulthood. Individuals determine their adult position through a process of “negotiation” instead of simply following paths pre-defined by their social origin, gender or other basic structural constraints that traditionally

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determined a person's life course. This does not mean, however, that origin no longer matters: the individual's capacity to negotiate successfully her/his transition is still strongly dependent on the cultural capital and the support provided by one's family, as well as by opportunities and constraints related to gender and region.

In the 1990s young people in Slovenia grow up in a society which is in the middle of a process of multiple transitions. Changes in political and economic systems also cause significant social changes, e. g. unemployment. Slovenia was not totally unprepared for the process of transition, the people had known for a decade that major social changes were going on and that they would have to be fully realised. This was a society which for at least 20 years had spoken about the necessity of social "change", and about the "crisis in society". Slovenia had been open to the world, especially to the West, more so than the other Yugoslav republics. There was a strong and steady exchange of information and material goods between Slovenia and Western countries. As a result, young people had significant contact with their peers in the West and the experience of youth movements and cultures quickly spread among the young in Slovenia. In these movements and cultures, young people saw a model for their affirmation and emancipation from ideological, cultural and political tutors.

In the period of substantial changes of Slovene society in the 1990s, young people met with particular difficulties. One of the larger problems was the eventual unemployment of the young and changes in the way employment was realized. The generation of their parents did not face unemployment or an uncertain life perspective, while young people now face both as quite a real possibility. Therefore, there is a question as to how these young people will face the loss of illusions about a smooth transition into adulthood, into economic independence and the danger of not fulfilling their parents' expectations.

Young people's problems

It is normal to expect that in a period of transition young people have to deal with more problems with the society, than vice versa. It can also be argued that such problems are more intense concerning the conditions of the transition to adulthood, than around typical youth activities. In the transition to adulthood problems are related to economic, material, and residential emancipation.

The structure of young people's problems significantly changed in the 1990s. In the 1950s and 1960s what was significant was that young people started to form their own life and cultural styles and to develop the main forms of the self-consciousness that resulted in feelings that they were a socially specific and important generation group. It was a time of sharpened generational conflict, and the most important problem of young people was the limitation of personal autonomy by the family and adult society.

Table 1
“What are the biggest problems for young people in Slovenia?”, 1985, 1993
and 1995

	1985	1993	1995
unemployment	41,8	72,1	66,8
alcohol, drugs	11,9	68,6	60,6
lack of money	18,8	47,0	38,0
loneliness	7,2	31,0	22,3
problems at school	8,6	35,5	17,8
achievement pressure	-	15,3	16,9
lack of ideals	15,4	12,3	13,8
Boredom/we do not know what to do	5,4	29,2	12,1
conflicts with adults	6,5	18,5	11,5
	N = 538	N = 2354	N = 1829

Sources: Ule, 1988; Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996.

In the 1970s and 1980s the youth in Slovenia started to critically address social problems, such as ecological and peace problems, with claims for basic democracy. In the 1990's the importance of such problems in relation to the personal emancipation of youth and to political influence, is significantly decreasing.

Young people in Slovenia are sensitive to problems which jeopardise their social emancipation (unemployment, a lack of money) and personal integrity (alcohol, drugs). There has been a significant increase in these problems in the 1990s compared to the 1980s (see Table1). This is undoubtedly due to a rise in economic uncertainty, especially concerning unemployment during this important transitional period in Slovenia. The feelings of danger regarding drugs and alcohol is more an expression of an increase in personal uncertainty and the vulnerability of the young in new situation, than an actual threat.

It can be argued that young people in Slovenia in the 1990s do not represent a problem to society, nor do they cause problems for society. Rather, they live caught in a net of problems, defined by the limitations of the labour market and the limited employment opportunities of new generations.

Table 2

“Do any of the below mentioned situations threaten you or do you expect that they will threaten you in the future and to what extent?”, 1993 and 1995

	Youth '95*		Youth '93*	
	It threatens me very much %	No threat %	It threatens me very much %	No threat %
Inability to find a job.	32,7	16,3	52,0	11,4
Being without a flat.	27,3	31,5	35,7	29,1
Experiencing a war.	19,6	19,3	45,2	10,2
Getting AIDS.	14,4	31,9	39,3	20,1
Being poor.	12,6	30,6	28,1	22,8
Being sexually abused.	10,2	43,1	26,8	34,8
Being harassed by foreigners.	9,9	41,1	21,7	29,2
	N = 1829	N = 235		

* Only the end categories are shown.

Sources: Ule, 1998, Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996.

According to survey results, the 1990's have seen an improvement regarding consumption (clothing, entertainment, food). (Table 3) However, the conditions regarding employment and housing - the vital sphere which enable young people to enter adulthood - are getting worse. Slovenia is a predominantly middle-class society, with parents having significantly high aspirations concerning their children. The younger generation in Slovenia is mostly well-educated, which causes them to experience professional and life development problems even more tragically.

Table 3

“What do you think about the present situation as compared to previous years?”, 1993 and 1995 (in %)

	Youth '95* It is better than before	It is worse than before	Youth '93* It is better than before	It is worse than before
The food supply.	61,6	5,7	44,7	11,3
Clothing.	67,8	4,8	65,8	6,8
Solving accommodation problems.	4,5	66,2	13,0	52,5
Schooling.	31,7	19,0	30,9	24,3
Employment.	4,8	75,8	3,7	83,4
Health care.	21,8	39,6	37,6	23,7
Fun.	54,9	6,1	62,1	10,4
Traveling.	54,5	15,4	45,1	23,1
	N = 1829	N = 2354		

* Only the end categories are shown.

Sources: Ule, 1998.

Table 4

“Would you like to go abroad for a long period of time or forever?”, 1993 and 1995

	1993	1995
I would not like to go abroad for a long period or forever	9,3	16,7
I would like to go abroad for a long period of time	45,5	57,0
I would like to go abroad forever if the conditions suited me	31,1	19,8
I would like to go abroad forever in spite of any possible problems	4,7	1,1
I have not thoughts about this	9,4	5,4
	N = 2354	N = 1829

Sources: Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al. 1996.

The survey conducted in 1993 showed a surprisingly high percentage of young people who were prepared to leave the country for a long period or even forever (Table 4). It would seem that this is a kind of ‘daydream migration’, a reaction to the great changes at home, which caused fears and doubts regarding the future. The share of those prepared to leave the country forever was significantly smaller in the survey carried out in 1995 than in the previous surveys, which indicates that the situation is stabilising.

Social inclusion/exclusion of the young

Social inclusion means for a person to have different social networks available, individuals with whom one can keep company, exchange his/her own experiences and thoughts, whom he/she can turn to for advice and help, who help shape his/her own interests, work, friendship and intimate relationships. Some people are important to an individual because they feel safe and can share things with their social world. The quality of these relationships significantly co-defines a person’s self-image and his/her place in a social world.

Historically, it is possible to portray the sociological reflection of social inclusion/exclusion of youth through an overview of metaphors which reflect the typical analysing and understanding of young person’s interactions with his or her social milieu and typical sequences of events between adolescence and adulthood.

The dominant metaphor for the 1960s was that of filling society’s niches, reflecting the dominant functionalist and developmental perspective of the time. In this period “growth task” models predominated: the fulfilment of normative tasks was seen as guaranteeing successful integration into adult roles and working life.

As unemployment increased, transitions became much more complex; post-compulsory education became more common and patterns of social reproduction became more complex. The increasing protraction of the transition from school to work was accompanied by emergence of bridges, routes and pathways to work as dominant metaphors.

During the 1980s the metaphor of trajectory came to the fore, reflecting structuralist influences: the use of the term trajectory implying that labour market destinations were largely determined by social forces and transitions were largely outside the control of individual social actors.

Reflecting the emergence of reflexive and post-structuralist perspectives, in the 1990s, metaphors of navigation started to emerge. Youngsters came to be seen as “navigating perilous waters” and negotiating their way through a sea of uncertainty. Within this model, successful transitions came to be seen as dependent on individual skill and capacity as well as external risks and ability to judge them. In these circumstances young people needed to learn to live with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action. (Giddens, 1991, Evans and Furlong, 1997).

In Slovenia modernisation and various processes of adaptation to liberal capitalism, as well as to “European social and political standards” affects the lives of all young people and demands more and more from them but does not affect each young person in the same way. Although many young will find their ways through life, there is a possibility that these developments promote two contrasting groups: the winners and the losers. Winners have social and personal opportunities by which they can benefit from changes going on in Slovenia in the 1990s. Through their creativity, flexibility and supporting networks they manage to make use successfully of the chances offered to them. Young people who do not manage to adapt to the new demands of society are prone to become losers. They often but not exclusively originate from the lower social strata. The dynamics of modern society enlarge the risk of larger groups of youngsters emerging who are equally liable to become winners or losers. Winners and losers have their fate only partly in their own hands, but winners know how to handle it to their benefit. Modernisation makes prediction of future developments in youth more difficult. Modernisation impacts upon young people through family, education, employment and leisure. Furthermore, it seems that social inequality appears to perpetuate itself especially in these spheres of life.

The structure of the everyday life world of youth

The secondary school and student population express an explicitly differentiated attitude to living spheres: caring and orientation to privacy on the one hand and rejection and dislike of the (political) public on the other. However, this polarised picture does not totally fit the reality. The privacy which is so strongly appreciated by young people is not necessarily a closed privacy. Moreover, the public which is refused by young people is only one of public dimensions: young people refuse only political commitments, politics as domination.

In particular, the student population in Slovenia is very individualised but not egoistically directed to itself and its own interests. To a certain extent quite the opposite could be claimed. Students express a high level of sensibility for social themes from the immediate neighborhood. They are ready to engage themselves as soon as they find expression in activities where the effects are immediate and visible. The above mentioned tendency can be described as the orientation to the short and middle range lives.

Let us look closely at the structure of the everyday life world of youth in Slovenia in the 1990s. Who are the important others in this world?

Table 5**“To what extent do you trust the following?”, 1993 and 1995 (in %)**

	Youth '95*		Youth '93*	
	Completely	Not at all	Completely	Not at all
Parents.	45,8	1,1	49,5	1,6
Brothers and sisters.	38,6	3,7	32,0	6,2
Teachers (professors).	2,2	10,0	2,8	32,7
School friends.	8,4	1,9	7,3	4,5
Friends.	41,2	0,5	29,7	1,9
Priests and the Church.	5,3	37,9	7,5	37,1
Political parties.	0,2	51,2	1,0	61,0
TV.	1,0	13,4	2,8	18,7
God.	19,9	38,5	17,2	35,7
	N = 1829	N = 2354		

* Only the end categories are shown.

Sources: Ule, 1998.

The survey results show the clearly structured every day world of the young. The central place is occupied by the closest family members (parents, brothers, sisters) and the most intimate friends. (See Table 5 and 6)

One of the effects of the cultural revolution of the 60s which “captured” the student population in particular, happened at the level of private life. The achievement of personal autonomy of young people was strongly linked to their leaving home. This was particularly true for young women. However, nowadays, the situation seems to be reversed. More and more young people, and especially more and more students, live their prolonged youth with parents. The period of a new form of half-family life was marked as the LAT phase (living apart together). There are many reasons which contribute to the LAT phase: for instance, difficulties in achieving economic independence, unemployment, housing problems, extension of schooling, etc. Subjective reasons such as the comfort and cheapness of living at home, understanding with parents, emotional and material security with the simultaneous preservation of a high level of autonomy and freedom, also have to be mentioned. However, data for Slovenia show the domination of external reasons and therefore the LAT phase seems more to be a constraint than a choice. (See Table 7)

Table 6
“How important are the following people in your life at the moment?”, youth 1993
(in %)

	very important	not important
father	68,8	4,0
mother	79,1	1,0
brother, sister	59,5	4,3
adult relatives	14,4	7,0
best friend	73,7	1,7
school mates	17,7	2,8
teachers	28,3	7,7
	N = 2354	

* Only the end categories are shown.

Source: Ule, Miheljak, 1995.

Table 7
Where will you probably live and where would you prefer to live aged
between 25 and 30? (in %)

	I will most probably	I would like to
- alone in my own flat	10,1	17,1
- alone in my parents' flat	19,4	2,0
- with my partner in my parents' flat	11,7	2,5
- with my partner in his/her parents' flat	7,8	0,5
- with my partner in our own household	32,5	69,1
- elsewhere	3,8	4,7
- I do not know, I do not want to tell	14,6	4,2

Source: Ule, Renner (eds.), *Youth in Slovenia*, 1998, p. 69

How did it happen that after several decades of conflict between generations and the discovery of peer networks, young people have suddenly turned back to their parents? In the period between the 1950s and the 1970s, surveys on youth called attention to the destruction of what had been a stable youth world, based subordination to parents and various other authorities. The family was replaced by some other forms of socialisation in the youth world, first school, and then more and more peer groups. To sum up, the trend was directed away from established groups and towards the youth's own groups, towards the youth worlds.

From the 1980's onward youth surveys have shown an increase in the importance of personal paths into adulthood, paths which are not essentially attached to youth or any other groups. This trend includes a revival of interest in the family, understood as a community of partners, based on the principle of the equal rights of individuals of different generations, and not as a hierarchically arranged community with age and sex as the basis for the division of labour and roles.

This new discovery of trust among one's closest family members means primarily that the family is the most flexible institution of the everyday world; it has been able to adapt to the postmodern trend towards individualisation and the subjectivisation of the life world and life course. As such it contributes to the development of personal potentials and needs. This also could mean that the family today is functioning as a sort of anti-environment, as a sort of therapeutic community which mitigates stress and conflicts from other environments, as a sort of asylum from the outside world. This might imply that the outside world has become one-dimensional, pretentious and dangerous for young people as well or at least that the outside world is being daily represented as such by "caring parents and concerned mass media".

With the change of youth from a transitional to an educational moratorium, school is becoming the main institution for advancement, and the school environment is becoming increasingly prestigious, competitive, and stressful. The family is the place which protects, advises, and helps, but at the same time it limits, determines aims and tasks, and controls youth less and less. The latter has become a function of the school, which occupies young people more and more. At the same time schooling has been prolonged, since educational qualifications are becoming increasingly important for the social advancement of young people and for successfully competing in the labour market.

What about youth scenes and subcultures in the 1990s?

What is the level of identification and socialising of young people with the typical youth groups in Slovenia? What do the youth scenes in Slovenia mean to the young? They offer innovations in the sphere of forming life styles and life self-placement: the creative and critical productivity of such groups, which at the same time do not assure any 'stable', 'solid' exit from the youth moratorium. Instead of continuity and stability (of identity), they offer the contingency, relativisation, and relatedness of all identity formations.

In spite of sometimes strong collective experiences, youth scenes offer basically individual solutions. No interpretation of the meanings offered by youth scenes are complete, as no rules for behaving are ensured. Although youth scenes include individuals to whom involvement in such groups entail a life-long commitment, the majority of young people perceive them to be part of a transitional period. Those who follow one such scene, often follow other scenes as well.

Table 8

“Some groups of people are known for doing something special or having particular lifestyle. Some of these groups are mentioned here. What is your attitude to them?”, 1993 and 1995 (in %)

	Youth '95*		Youth '93*	
	I am one I think of them	I sympathise with them	I think I am one of them	I sympathise with them
Rockers	10,0	42,5	20,9	41,5
Sports fans	11,0	38,2	20,4	40,9
Church groups	20,2	31,9	19,7	33,2
Disco fans	10,0	33,7	18,8	27,6
Video games and pinball fans	12,9	24,4	14,9	31,2
Ecology supporters	18,7	52,1	14,7	50,1
Jogging fans	**	**	12,4	43,3
Peacemics	9,7	51,7	12,2	48,9
Computer fans, hackers	13,6	35,7	11,7	42,0
Spiritual groups	10,1	29,6	10,5	35,9
Homosexual movement supporters	**	**	9,4	6,1
Vegetarians	**	**	9,3	48,5
Women's/feminist movement supporters	**	**	8,9	30,4
Skinheads	15,2	9,9	7,4	19,1
	N = 1829	N = 2354		

* Only the first two categories are shown.

** This was not asked in Youth '95 survey.

Sources: Ule, Miheljak, 1995; Ule et al., 1996.

From the responses we can infer that sympathy with certain groups is much higher than an actual participation. Young people sympathise to a large extent with (post)modern social movements (ecological and peace movements, New age groups) as well as typical youth subcultures (disco or video game enthusiasts etc.). Subcultural activities in Slovenia show that youth subcultures and scenes do not tend towards social criticism and resistance. They have become a more sophisticated means for young people themselves, to their self-development, and self-realisation (Internet, video production, spiritual movements etc.). Young people in Slovenia sympathise the least with violent subcultures, such as the skinheads. (Table 8)

Relationships in youth scenes are intimate and intense, but they are not lasting. That is why even successful scenes quickly pass out of fashion and are replaced by newer, more currently appropriate scenes. The only stability is the stability of continual change. Although youth cultures are of great importance for many young people, they do not ensure any continuity in the individual's development. They are personally productive only for those young people who are strong enough to constructively find an exit from the threats of unemployment, low level of education etc. Those young people who only 'join' a certain youth culture to spend their spare time within it, might be trapped in the pluralism of life styles advertised by particular youth cultures.

How do young people spend their spare time?

How do young people express their youthful feelings and pressures, how and with whom do they think about life? Some answers are provided by the results of the Youth 1993 survey. (Table 9)

Young people talk mostly about personal problems, read about them, or learn from the life experiences of adults. To a lesser degree they write about them. Interestingly, young girls are more actively involved in such activities; they talk more, read more and learn more from others' experiences. They also correspond and write about personal feelings more.

Growing up in Slovenia in the 1990s is a more open (fictitious) space of meeting, entertainment, and information (the internet culture, and new media), but at the same time it provides young people less opportunity to reflect on their own growing up and individualisation, as had been more possible in the 1970s and the 1980s. New forms of entertainment offered by information technology (e.g.. video games, the internet) have turned young people from a more public to a more private world, to their rooms and computer environments. Therefore the typical environments of young people have been reduced to the family and parental environments, which make young people more similar to their parents (adult-oriented youth), but at the same time it makes them depend on their parents, it infantilises them. As a consequence, young people possess to a lesser degree those life strategies and experiences distinctive of youth in the 1970s and the 1980s, which are characteristic of moving beyond youth. The role of the alternative scene and libertarian aspirations is decreasing.

Table 9

“We can talk about ourselves and our life with each other in different ways. How often do you do the following activities?”, 1993 (in %)

	Youth '93*	
	Very often	Never
I talk with my friends about life problems.	40,5	3,2
I learn about others people's life stories through films or books.	25,3	5,3
Adults tell me their own life experiences.	19,4	5,1
I read horoscopes to get encouragement.	27,7	12,9
I read intimate letters in newspapers and magazines to learn something from them.	11,5	25,3
I keep a diary.	10,3	55,4
I write to my friends about my personal problems.	7,8	39,5
I write short notes and poems about my personal feelings.	7,0	48,6
	N = 2354	

* Only the end categories are shown.

Source: Ule, Miheljak, 1995.

Two strong factors prevent young people in Slovenia in the 1990s from developing and overcoming the social infantilisation of youth and from developing less private forms of individualisation. First, a prolonged economic and social dependence on the family of orientation, the pressures of unemployment, and the extended process of education. Alternative forms of employment and the part-time employment of young people do not represent a solution to dependence on parents, since these forms are accessible to a minority of young people and are time-limited.

The second factor is a decrease in the importance of autonomous youth scenes and engaged subcultures which can offer young people the development of a specific generational and subcultural identity and self-confidence. Young people are therefore, now more than in the last few decades, left on their own and to their own 'personal projects', when they face far-reaching life decisions. At the same time, dependence on the products of the commercial culture is increasing. One of the consequences of this is the political passivity of the youth. Actually, the situation is very similar to that detected by researchers on youth in the 1950s and 1960s.

Because of the amorphism and social unresponsiveness of the young generation, one gets the impression that young people today are moving away from the ideals of post-adolescence and back towards a traditional transitory youth. We can trace a tendency toward the 'domestication of youth'. The main medium of activity of youth and the primary life environment has again become the private sphere, even a close family environment. There is also no trace of significant generational conflicts.

This shift toward the domestication of youth in Slovenia was clearly detected in the "Youth '93" survey. Instead of a combination of 'social pessimism and readiness for social engagement', characteristic of the youth in Slovenia in the middle of the 1980s, in the 1990s we can trace a combination of 'social optimism and unreadiness for social engagements' (Ule, Miheljak, 1995). On the contrary, we expected that the modernisation of the young detected in the surveys in the 1980s in Slovenia (Ule, 1988), would develop further and prevent any possible social and historical regression.

The current unformed and inexpressive character of the younger generation can be explained as the belated negative effect of the abolishment and overcoming of youth or as Eisenstadt (1993) puts it, the "social deconstruction of the youth". These negative effects are not something new, but are always present. Certain youth elites maintained a balance with their influence and example between aspirations for social anomie, passivism and on the other hand, social radicalism and critique. This balance was very sensitive, and was disrupted immediately after the disappearance of the social and historical reasons for the creation of such elites. As a consequence, revolutionary networks of youth cultures and social movements have been destroyed under the pressure of social conformism and the neoconservative ideals of success as well.

The classification of young people into various social and generational subgroups, cultures, and life styles, makes collective activity by youth and the homogenisation of larger groups along the lines of common experiences, ideas, values or symbolic apparatus simply impossible. Youth cultures and peer groups are no longer reference points in the process of growing up. They have been replaced by others social relations, which are as a rule insensible to age and generational differences.

One might question whether the processes of the social deconstruction of youth, as well as the individualisation and subjectification of youth, have not at long last affected young people, and made them more non-autonomous than ever before and aggravated collective forms of social protest and the collective expression of their feelings and life orientations. Current social anomie is not only a sign of the decay of the immune system of the young generation in the face of repeated attempts at generational homogenisation and disciplining. On the contrary, it might evidence a displacement of social critique and protest energies from generational to other forms of social groups. This also shows the great brittleness and vulnerability of youth cultures. This also means that social criticism and protest will no longer be defined by generation or age, as was the case in the last 30 years, but will be a dispersed, particularised socio-political scene, into which anyone can enter - young people and adults. It is expected that young people will play a part as the "crowd", and not as active agents, who would be able to clearly express their demands. We can expect this to become a universal process, removing all national

and social boundaries, since it is found in Slovenia as well as in Germany, Portugal and Sweden (Chisholm, Büchner, Krüger, 1995).

Youth is no longer considered a period for reflexive and critical learning, but on the contrary, a continuation of the social infantilisation of youth. Young people no longer think of their 'youth' as a social frame for thinking and acting, but rather act as individuals with their own educational, vocational, economic and other interests.

The social deconstruction of youth has otherwise abolished those viewpoints of social infantilisation, which were bound to traditional transitory moratorium (e.g. the social gettoization of youth in the framework of their peer groups and cultures), but it has not abolished all opportunities for the infantilisation of the young. Individualisation forces individuals to more than ever refer to themselves, to 'pump' from themselves. It is only a question of whether they are able to do it.

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