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LIFESTYLE OR SURVIVAL STRATEGY: CROATIAN YOUTH IN THE LATE 1990s

ABSTRACT

The starting point of the research elaborated upon in this paper was the hypothesis that individualized youth lifestyles identical to those in the postindustrially modernized societies were not found in the youth population in Croatia, but that there existed ample potential for their appearance. To analyze Croatian youth lifestyles, the authors have constructed a hypothetical theoretical typology consisting of eight lifestyle types resulting from empirical and theoretical research of youth lifestyles in various European countries over the past two decades. By means of their empirical verification, we have tried to identify points of contact between Croatian youth and youth in the postindustrially modernized societies. Research results indicate that the orientation of Croatian youth population towards the family, hedonism and peer groups mirrors that of their Western counterparts. However, Croatian late 1990s youth population was exposed to economic hardship and difficult living conditions, as well as to a more dynamic process of destruction of values in their socio-cultural environment. To integrate into the postindustrial paradigm, they would be required to 'make up for deficiencies in traditional modernization and simultaneously surpass industrial modernity' (Ule et al., 1996). The process of reassessment of cultural and political identities of Croatian youth, initiated in the second half of the 1970s and extending to the beginning of the 1990s, came to a stop by the outbreak of war at the beginning of the 1990s. Youth lifestyles and behavior patterns were pacified by and integrated into the dominant authoritarian war paradigm. The deteriorating purchasing power of the majority of Croatian population was also a contributing factor in this process. As a result, 'the change of the type of youth' (Ule, 1989), indicating the abandonment of traditional and adoption of postmaterialist values, did not take place in Croatia. In spite of the consensual acceptance of multi-party democracy on the part of the political elites, the dominant paradigm of collectivist national homogenization and extremely restricted purchasing power of the majority of population combined to form an insurmountable obstacle to the appearance of truly individualized lifestyles. Unlike in societies with a dominant consumerist paradigm, youth lifestyles have not yet become a field of individual investment and individual consumer choice. Economic hardship and lack of employment prospects securing a relatively stable independent existence have contributed to a general pragmatic reliance of Croatian youth on family resources. However, this is not comparable to the phenomenon of 'extended family' found in the postindustrially modernized countries. In other words, young people in Croatia do not live in families in which they have won a space of their individual liberty, but in traditional families with an extended protective role of parents. Our research results indicate that the majority of young people live in the homes of their parents, their parents are their only source of income, and their worldview is dominated by a conciliatory conformism. Their orientation towards the present and towards short-term solutions is not an expression of a hedonistic 'from-day-to-day' lifestyle, but a consequence of the fact that the horizon of planning became narrower due to economic hardship.

The initial hypothesis elaborated upon in this paper was that the lifestyles of the youth population of Croatia did not resemble the individualized lifestyles typical of the post-industrial modernized societies, but that there existed a great potential for their appearance. The lifestyles of young people in Croatia in the late 1990s have corresponded to the classical youth lifestyles characteristic of the 'first' modernity (Beck, 1986); that is, they have been only partly affected by the process of cultural modernization (Ule, 2000) characteristic of the 'risk societies' or the societies of the 'second', 'reflexive modernization' (Beck, 1986, 1994). Young people in Croatia resemble their peers in the societies of post-industrial modernization by their looks, behavior and their leisure time. They also face numerous global risks on a daily basis. However, the nature of these risks is different from those in the post-industrial societies. The appearance of the truly individualized lifestyles typical of the societies of 'reflexive modernization' was therefore not to be expected in Croatia.

In post-industrial societies, in which the majority of population earns more than is needed to obtain the basic necessities, individualized lifestyles conceived of as a conscious way of choosing one's way of life have become an increasingly significant means of social differentiation. In these societies, the traditional social-economic factors are becoming increasingly irrelevant, and choices of one's lifestyle ever more personal. This has led to the gradual disappearance of the traditional social forms securing the unity of objective life opportunities and subjective ways of life. Present-day post-industrial societies are not only marked by the discontinuity in their development from the 'first', industrial, to the 'second', 'reflexive modernization' (Beck, 1986, 1994), but also by an even more pronounced individualization.

What is meant by 'individualization' is a process in which individuals free themselves from predetermined, fixed relations: an ever-smaller part of one's biography is determined from the outside, and an ever-larger part is the result of one's personal decisions. With the decline of importance of traditional forms of socialization, the outward methods of coercion become less important. However, at the same time, the elements of self-coercion gain in importance. What is individualized are not only chances, but risks as well. New forms of social control are being created, characterized by the fact that private life begins to be increasingly dependent on the market, cycles of consumption and the elements of standardization.

The pressure on the individual 'to form one's own biography is gradually growing' (Beck, 1986: 216). Individuals in

the 'risk societies' are forced to constantly make decisions regarding their education, workplace, place of residence and way of life. If they lack knowledge and capability to reach such decisions, they must take the risk of their indecisiveness.

LIFESTYLES AND THE RISKS OF CROATIAN SOCIETY

The period of political and economic transition in Croatia did not bring about only new possibilities. Numerous new risks appeared on the horizon of everyday life as well. During the 1990s, there appeared trends in Croatian society aiming at establishing forms of political participation characteristic of the contemporary post-industrial societies. However, the society as a whole still exhibited characteristics typical of authoritarian societies. These were notable in terms of the distribution of social power in the political system, and by other phenomena testifying that Croatia in this period was not a fully developed civil society. The post-industrially modernized societies are generally characterized by labor market individualization, the disappearance of traditional certainties, the postindustrial modes of production, and the processes of change becoming central to the functioning of the society. Characteristic of this type of society are conflicts regarding the model of cognition, type of investment, ethical principles, and the process of transformation of cultural values (Touraine, 1987: 51). In contrast with this, conflicts central to the Croatian society in the 1990s were the traditional 'conflicts regarding the state' (Touraine, 1987: 51).¹ The risks appearing in Croatian society in this period were obviously not identical to the risks of postindustrial societies.

The conflict regarding the state and the breakout of war in the early 1990s brought to a halt the process of transformation of the cultural and political identity of young people, which started in the second half of the 1970s and lasted until the end of the 1980s. The alternative youth culture and new lifestyles that began to appear in that period were pacified and integrated into a dominant authoritarian paradigm. This terminated the process of 'the change of the type of youth' (Ule, 1989), whose continuation would have been conducive to the abandonment of traditional values and adoption of the postmaterialist ones.

For a brief period of time, alternative youth cultures came close to the dominant culture. For example, at the beginning of the war in Croatia, different youth styles were expressed in the Croatian army gear, not only in terms of the items of clothes young soldiers wore, but also by means of their general appearance and behavior. These visible outward signs of stylistic diversity were prompted by the lack of official military uniforms, and by the music

and video products accepted by the media because of their patriotic content. However, with the authoritarian paradigm becoming increasingly dominant in the social distribution of power and in the overall functioning of the political system, the gap between the traditional culture and alternative youth cultures grew wider in the period following the very beginning of the war.

After the fall of the Berlin wall, Croatia, together with the majority of transition countries, witnessed 'the renaissance of the disintegrative capitalism' (Beck, 1994: 479). Unemployment figures grew, the national health service and other social benefits were significantly reduced, and there was a decrease in the purchasing power of the majority of the population.² The risks that individuals were taking in Croatian society in this period resulted from a historical change related to the distribution of power, authority and privileges in the context of a traditional 'conflict regarding the state'. These risks were obviously not identical to the risks of post-industrial societies, caused by the conflicts 'regarding structure' (Touraine, 1987).

Structurally speaking, the risks of Croatian society are unrelated to the risks typical of the postindustrially modernized societies of the same period. However, in the second half of the 1990s, the necessity to become a part of the global economic, political, and social processes once again opened the door to postmodern influences. Due to their familiarity with the new media technologies and various communication skills, the youth population of Croatia exhibited the most significant potential to integrate into these processes. Because of the media influences and the availability of Western-style consumer goods, young people in Croatia have already adopted some of the behavior patterns similar to those of their peers in the postindustrially modernized societies.

Therefore, the starting point of our research was the assumption that in Croatia there were no truly individualized lifestyles, i.e. that there were no particular combinations of life-orientation and types of behavior typical of the developed postindustrial societies. However, it was obvious that there existed the elements of similarity between the appearance of young people in Croatia and the general appearance of their counterparts in the postindustrially modernized countries, as well as between their leisure time activities. We were of the opinion that by means of an analysis of youth lifestyles light could be thrown on the ambivalence that existed between the outward patterns of behavior of young people in Croatia in the late 1990s (resembling in many ways those of their counterparts in the developed postindustrial societies)

and the latent processes of the disintegration of youth,³ characteristic of the post-fall-of the-Berlin-wall national homogenization processes (Beck, 1994, Ule, 1996).³

In the case of Croatia, this ambivalence is at least in part due to the fact that two or three decades before the multiparty democracy was established, there existed behavior patterns emulating Western models. The process of national homogenization, on the other hand, was carried out in relation to an atypical socialist system whose institutional structure did not fully correspond to neither the institutions in other socialist systems nor the ones in multiparty democracies (Tomić-Koludrović, 1993).

YOUTH LIFESTYLES IN CROATIA

On the basis of the findings of several European research projects concerning youth lifestyles in the postindustrially modernized countries, the authors of this article have constructed a hypothetical model of lifestyles that was to serve as a starting point for an empirical research of the youth lifestyles in Croatia. A model containing eight different lifestyles was deduced from the empirical and theoretical analyses of youth lifestyles in different European countries over the last two decades (Lenz, 1988; Bietau, 1989; Helsper, 1989; Gaiser, 1994; Reimer, 1995). It included numerous particular conditions and demands that young people face every day in relation to their family, peers, school, the business world, and their general life orientation (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 1997: 152-153).

In a brief outline, the lifestyles constructed for our hypothetical model were the following:

1. Family oriented young people like to stay at home and get on well with their parents because they comply with their demands and expectations. Their aim is to find a job that would provide security. They are significantly different from the so-called conspicuous youth subcultures and therefore emphasize their normality. The time of youth is 'the time of exemption' and they try to make the most of it.
2. Male oriented young people emphasize masculinity and excitement. They tend to form 'cliques', i.e. exclusive groups of closely associated people meeting on a daily basis. Girls are treated as 'a pendant'. Parents put up with and accept their behavior after confrontation. The ambition of the members of this group is to graduate from school as soon as possible in order to make money and have a secure job. These are their guidelines when choosing a profession. They do not conceive of the period of youth as a preparation for adulthood but as the peak of their biographies. They tend to view the life of grown-ups in traditional categories. Young women belonging to this lifestyle see the family as an impor-

116 tant part of their lives, and young men see themselves as family providers.

3. Conventionally oriented young people give importance to education, university studies, profession and continuing education. They aim at a secure job in a line of work that has a future, with a safe income and good opportunities for promotion. Youth is seen in a traditional way, as preparation for adulthood. The lives of persons in this group follow well-trodden paths. Educational accomplishment and a professional position with good chances for the future are in the foreground.

4. Hedonistically oriented young people aim at the joy of life, at being exceptional and prosperous. Their ambition is to be surrounded with luxury and stand out from the crowd. One's looks are thought of as being very important. The members of this group see themselves as communicative persons who are where the action is. They aim at jobs that can offer pleasure. Their gathering places are commercial establishments, in particular bars and discos. They see the world as adults do and get along with their parents well because of mutual respect.

5. Subjectively oriented young people search for opportunities to express their uniqueness and creativity. They find like-minded people they can talk to in peer groups. Parents are perceived as the archetype of adulthood, materialism and conformity. The members of this group do not accept the rigid work ethic and social conventions. They emphasize subjectively meaningful work. They are critical of the existing educational methods, but are interested in continuing education as it offers more space for individualization than the world of work. Finally, the members of this group tend to develop alternative ways of behavior.

6. Reasonably sceptical orientation is characterized by the 'yes-but' dilemma, a mixture of skepticism, insecurity and fear that things may not go according to plan. Education, university studies and future occupation are of particular importance. However, there also exist fears of putting down roots too soon and too fast. The members of this group would like to keep their options open for fear that in the range of options not always the best one is chosen. They are oriented towards the present because they feel that it is now that experience must be acquired. Relations with peers, satisfying housing conditions and being a part of the urban scene all hold an important place. The criterion according to which choices are made are current needs.

7. Dependently oriented young people are open to suggestion and other people's solutions. They usually fulfill their duties and avoid competition, as they prepare themselves to play the role of polite, inconspicuous

employees. The goals of the members of this group are not set very highly: they accept their destiny, avoid pressures related to efficiency and opt for mediocrity. This is not a sign of their being content with the present life or of the optimistic planning of the future, but is an attempt at overcoming the 'eternally mean reality'. The members of this group can appear childish. In this group, the decision-making responsibilities are passed on to the parents. Emphasis is put on the goals the members of the group did not achieve and the chances they did not take, so they give out the impression of being grumpy old men and women.

8. Refusingly oriented young people wish to detach themselves from their surroundings. There is no planning of one's future; expectations are reduced to a successful management of everyday affairs. During their education and in their professional life, the members of this group do only what is absolutely necessary. The detachment from the surroundings is characterized by life in sub cultural milieus. The members of the group feel as isolated losers and blame themselves for this. The reasons for such a self-perception are usually failure at school or difficulties encountered when entering professional life. Education, university studies or professional activity are defined as something external to one's life. There is no stability in everyday life; there is plenty of waiting for something to happen.

Proceeding from this hypothetical model, we elaborated an interpretation plan that relied on the use of different methodological procedures (questionnaires, observation, control-transcripts, interviews, etc). Although the empirical findings did not fully conform to the premises of our hypothetical typology, the results of our research have confirmed that among the young people in Croatia there exist certain styles and orientations similar to youth lifestyles in the postindustrially modernized societies.

What follows is a general empirical picture of the six Croatian youth lifestyles identified in our research, mostly on the basis of variables of identity and leisure time activities.

1. Hedonistic-intellectual lifestyle. In this lifestyle, subjective-hedonistic identity orientation prevails. This style is characterized by an identity based on self-confidence. The members of this group always know what they like and what they do not like; what is right for them and what is not. They do only what they really believe in, take great care of their appearance, as well as of leading a healthy life and eating a healthy diet. In this style, a conventional subjective-hedonistic leisure time orientation prevails. The way the members of the group spend their leisure time suggests their orientation towards

elite culture: they visit museums, galleries, and art shows; read books and magazines to keep up with recent developments (for the sake of continuing education); read demanding books. The members of this group are theater-goers and enjoy classical music concerts. They take walks and go on excursions. They also enjoy going shopping.

2. The lifestyle of fashionable (snappy) dominance is a lifestyle in which conventional-hedonistic identity orientation prevails. This style groups together a number of characteristics that suggest an identity based on dominance. The members of this group always have a ready answer, adapt well to impossible situations, willingly take leadership when working together with others, make decisions very fast, are generally successful in life and take pleasure in convincing others into what they believe. A masculine-hedonistic leisure time orientation prevails. The members of the group are interested in sports: they read automobile and motorcycle magazines, attend sport matches, and are active in sports themselves (most typically jogging, fitness, sauna ...). They frequent restaurants serving foreign food.

3. Superficially sociable lifestyle. This is a lifestyle in which hedonistic orientation prevails in both the group member's identity and his or her leisure time activities. The distinguishing mark of the identity associated with this lifestyle is sociability. The members of this group have many friends and acquaintances, are good at making friends, and are frequently invited into other people's company. Their leisure time is spent very actively: they go to cafés and discos, visit friends and acquaintances, make a lot of phone calls to friends, talk to friends and neighbors, enjoy going shopping and browsing in shopping malls.

4. Traditional family lifestyle. This is a lifestyle in which the identity orientation of dependency prevails. This style is characterized by an identity based on reticence. The members of this group prefer being quiet and listening to what the others have to say; they do not like to talk in a group of people; they will not speak their mind unless they are forced to do so. Leisure time activities are conventional and family oriented. They are aimed primarily at 'having a good time' and include listening to pop and folk music and other social activities in the family context. The members of the group are interested in handicrafts and similar activities. They are typically family-oriented, generally caring persons, always ready to help older people and children.

5. Socially conscious lifestyle. This is a lifestyle in which subjective identity orientation prevails. In this case, such an orientation frequently forms leadership qualities. The members of this group generally possess qualities other people are often envious of; they are always

one step ahead of everybody else and believe they can **117** significantly influence other people's lives. They are very socially sensitive. Leisure time activities of this group's members are family and communication oriented: they talk to friends and neighbors, take care of others, feel they must give their best at whatever they are doing.

6. The lifestyle of leisured fashionableness (snappiness). This is a lifestyle in which hedonistic-subjective identity orientation prevails. This style is characterized by an identity based on exclusivity. The members of this group always want to be noticed and to be the best at everything. They buy exclusive brands and pay special attention to health food and healthy lifestyle in general. A dependent-rejective orientation prevails in the leisure time activities of this group. They wander aimlessly around town, spend most of their time in their own room/bed, state that they do not really care what kind of activity they engage in.

The results of our research indicate that becoming economically independent is the central problem of the youth population in Croatia. Young people in postindustrially modernized societies face the risks of unemployment and the pressures of the need to constantly upgrade knowledge and skills necessary to retain employment. However, these risks are different from the economic hardship faced by the majority of population in transition countries. While young people in the societies of the 'second', 'reflexive modernization' successfully cope with the individualized labor market and the search for the new forms of sociability (Beck, 1997), the youth population of Croatia is confronted with the simultaneous advent of the two modernizing processes, and consequently with the risks typical of both the 'industrial' and 'reflexive' modernizations.

CONCLUSIONS

Economic hardship and lack of employment prospects securing a relatively stable independent existence have contributed to a general pragmatic reliance of Croatian youth on family resources. However, this is not comparable to the phenomenon of 'extended family' found in the postindustrially modernized countries. In other words, young people in Croatia do not live in families in which they have won a space of their individual liberty, but in traditional families with an extended protective role of parents. Our research results indicate that the majority of young people live in the homes of their parents, their parents are their only source of income, and their worldview is dominated by a conciliatory conformism.

In such a context, it is extremely difficult to establish a stable independent existence. Unlike in societies with a

118 dominant consumerist paradigm, youth lifestyles in Croatia have not yet become a field of individual investment and individual consumer choice.

The dominant paradigm of collectivist national homogenization and extremely restricted purchasing power of the majority of population combined to form an insurmountable obstacle to the appearance of truly individualized lifestyles.

In spite of numerous similarities between youth lifestyles found in the postindustrially modernized countries and in Croatia (especially in the aspect of leisure time activities), young people in a transition country context were preoccupied with devising survival strategies in a context of economic hardship rather than with investing into an individualized personal lifestyle.

However, the very fact that it was possible to conduct an empirical research of youth lifestyles in Croatia based on a model constructed with the experiences of the postindustrially modernized societies in mind, indicates that there is ample potential for their appearance. This claim is supported particularly by the research findings concerning the worldview of the polled participants. These research results, as well as the results of other researcher which indicate 'a particularly affirmative attitude towards the European democracy' (Domović, Godler, 1996: 943), suggest a significant potential of the Croatian youth for individualization and for taking a part in the processes of global postindustrial modernization.

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NOTES

- ¹ Touraine (1987) claims that in societies in which the traditional conflict regarding the state prevails, the identity and the duration of changes cannot be based on the social actors and relationships which are themselves being transformed in the process of historical change. According to Touraine, the state and the nation are the only actors that

can preserve their identity during the process of change in such societies.

² According to the data of the Croatian Employment Office for July 2000, as many as 160,000 of the 346,958 unemployed people in Croatia were aged between 20 and 34.

³ The concept of lifestyle can be used to analyze not only the forms of expression of young people in everyday life, but also to analyze their basic orientation in life as it determines their identities for a longer period of time. In other words, in order to establish a lifestyle of their own, young people have to make a connection between their personal, psychosociological development and the economic one, and develop strategies suitable to their specific circumstances. Since they indicate and transmit the elements of both personal and social identity, lifestyles make it possible to realize personal interests in relation to one's social position, work and living conditions, family background, socialization patterns and a general experience of the social world.