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**CROATIAN YOUTH AT THE BEGINNING
OF 2000: SIGNS OF NEW POLITICIZATION**

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with youth in Dalmatia (Croatia) at the end of the 1990s, or more specifically with the level of politicization of youth. The authors started their research with the premise that Croatian youth has been marginalized in the past decade, both in social life and in official discourse favoring the 'great' national themes (such as population politics, abortion, etc.). They interpret so-called 'apolitical behavior' of young people as a phenomenon which is a consequence of and a typical reaction to their marginal position. Throughout the 1990s, Croatian society was characterized by domination of one - nationalist and conservative - party in the newly introduced multi-party political system, and exposed to attempts of state control by various forms of non-party associations and initiatives. In public discourse, youth was frequently presented as the source of social problems and related to issues such as drug abuse, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, social indifference, escape from reality and violence. The dominant patriarchal and socially conservative politics were nourished both by postsocialist transition and by war and postwar realities. Unlike at least some of their counterparts in the postindustrially modernized societies, young people in Croatia perceived politics as something completely abstract. This paper is a discussion of results obtained by the empirical research on the students at Split University carried out in December of 1999, as well as other similar research carried out earlier in the 1990s. The most recent research results indicate the appearance of a new political consciousness of young people, i.e. their increased politicization. However, this new politicization is not an attempt to reexamine the values of the dominant culture, but rather an attempt to call into question the rituals of the dominant politics/its political rituals. The authors interpret this as - at least partly - an expression of dissatisfaction with the political resources that are available to young people. Young people in Croatia seem to demand a change of behavior of the political elites and new rules of political participation. In keeping with general tendencies toward subjectivization and individualization in postindustrially modernized countries, Croatian youth at the end of the 1990s connected personal interest with collective action, which was initiated by various nongovernmental organizations funded from abroad. An alternative scene with elements of civil society came into being. However, 1999 research results indicate that Split students (mostly Dalmatian youths) do not genuinely support NGO methods of political action and behavior. Young people became a relevant political subject primarily by virtue of their mass participation in the January 2000 political elections. Their votes became important and they are likely to be increasingly attracted by traditional political subjects in the future. To what degree this is going to change the stereotype of 'apolitical youth', and what form this new politicization is going to take, remains to be seen.

60 INTRODUCTION

Young people are most often present in public discourse as a source of social problems. Drugs, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, apolitical attitude and escape from reality and violence are some of the problematic issues usually associated with the young. One may have the impression that reports about young people will be written only in cases when they will be scandalized. The reasons for this situation do not lay with the young, but, according to the Slovenian theoretician Močnik, should be sought within the mechanisms of the reproduction of the existing relations 'within the authority hierarchy, the disciplined mechanisms for continuing authority and submission, as well as within the role of the school system' (Močnik, 1989: 5).

Numerous researches confirm that the young introduce new ways of living and warn that the processes of the change of identity connected to a category, in sociology broadly called 'youth', indicatively anticipate social changes. Therefore, it is possible that, under the influence of media and youth culture, the transformations of the subjective youth structures take place even before the changes in economy and politics.

Critical approaches of the young that indicate the disproportion of the already changed subjective structures and identity and as yet unaffected economic and political sphere are particularly noticeable during social and economic crisis. Then each critical approach of the young, which often contains deeper and more radical response to social crisis compared to the one of adults, is more striking. Along with the radical responses to social crisis, youth has also become connected to the concept of subculture. 'Initially introduced to describe and explain the violation of the law and other deviated behaviour of young people' (Chaney, 1996: 129), the concept of subculture and the derived terms sub-politics and counterculture (Tomc, 1989: 9) have been applied to all forms of activities that young people do to express their disagreement and confrontation with the adults. At the same time, while sub-politics and counterculture are closely linked to various forms of resistance to the leading political culture, the idea of subculture is linked to confrontation through various forms of living.

From the perspective of an industrialized society, in accordance with functional division of roles, young people were inferior to the world of adults and their culture was mostly accepted as marginal and subordinate. Thus the concept of subculture of the young was applied in the situations when it was necessary to distinguish the differences

between the values and norms of the young as an identified generation group and the common practice of the conventional majority. However, with the introduction of the postindustrial paradigm in the developed societies in the eighties, collective behaviour became less important, and the ideological encircling of the young into special groups became inefficient. Therefore, together with the process of postindustrial modernization, 'the necessity for social infertility of whole generations also disappears in modern societies.' (Ule, 2000: 18).

The change of the 'youth type' (Ule, 2000) in postindustrial societies, which followed the transformation of industrial into postindustrial paradigm, also gave warning that the hypothesis about the young as an exclusive, homogenous group which is distinctive from 'the older, became intolerably simplifying' (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 1997: 152).

The traditional model of the young, which considered them as the ghetto of pre-adult age, has now been replaced by the pluralism and individualization of their way of life. This refers to the changes which are connected to the process of the 'cultural modernization' (Ule, 2000: 18) and which are specific for the developed industrialized societies, and refers to everybody, not only to the young.

In our research, the term youth refers to the students at the University of Split who were our interviewees in December 1999. It does not refer to a social group which expresses homogenous characteristics in all aspects of living, but to the persons who are above adolescent age, but being still students, do not have the characteristics of adult age. Therefore, they are not considered as a definite and homogenous social group, but a group of people who, during the late nineties, at the time of parliamentary elections and the demands for the changes in Croatian society, expressed certain common characteristics.

THE DOMINATION BY THE PATRIARCHAL POLITICS IN THE NINETIES

While young people in post-industrialized societies, being the holders of political, cultural, economic and development potential, represent key factors of postindustrial modernization of the societies, Croatian youth, during the nineties, due to their inferior social position excluded from the decision-making and socio-economically dependent, were distant from any sort of power and authority. After parliamentary democracy and the independence of the Republic of Croatia had been constituted in the early nineties, because of long-lasting war conflicts, some pre-modern socio-political associations were pre-

served, which prevented the real legitimacy of the institutions, the establishing of a law-respecting society, autonomous public opinion and civilian society. Such circumstances prevented the youth from organizing themselves as social and political factors.

By reason of the war, post-war and transition circumstances, young people were not able to acquire either significant political group experience, which they could express freely, or the interests, which they could defend in confrontation with others. Young people in Croatia broke through their generational ghetto only twice during the nineties: participating in the war at the very beginning of it and participating at a large scale in the elections at the end of the nineties.

Social marginalization of the young and their apolitical attitude as the reaction to it

The war and the post-war transition period in Croatia have impeded and slowed down the processes that could bring Croatian youth closer to their counterparts in post-industrialized societies.

Specifically, social processes of modernization during the mid-nineties in Croatia were obstructed because of the war, and slowed down afterwards. This caused the intensification of the feeling of loss of traditional security (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 966). The war 'added to establishing of some 'pre-modern' socio-political institutions, which prevented the establishment of a law-respecting society, autonomous public opinion and civilian society. On the other hand, economic privatization jeopardized the employment and social security to which all those socialized in the socialist 'safe existence' were accustomed' (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 970). At the time we tried to assume how the young in Croatia experienced the failure of the basic identification models of the youth, especially in their socialistic symbolic images, where paternalism towards the youth was the fundamental relationship. On the other hand, each attempt to get out of the frame, unless it was connected to direct engagement in war, was inevitably connected to resistance to the 'adult world' and the attempts of the new 'ghetto inclosing' of the young (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 970).

However, the results of our research (done during 1994) led us to the conclusion that young people in Croatia did not let themselves into the general demoralizing shadow; on the contrary, the majority still felt like human beings, and were not alienated, lost, insecure or completely disappointed. They claimed that their participation in the

war did have certain consequences for them, but the majority (59.66 %) were affected by the 'general regress in all aspects of life and work in the society', thus ranking it as the most serious war consequence that strongly affected the life of young people in Croatia (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 970).

Unemployment, low birth rate and other regressive social phenomena were not of their immediate concern, but they worried more about the low standard of living and poverty. The war changed their comprehension, views and values, so the majority (78.07 %) considered themselves as a young war generation (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 971). Hence, the war in Croatia, on one hand, slowed down the processes towards higher standards of living, while, on the other hand, with its relationship towards the young in an immediate war danger, proved that the social category of youth and its inclosing in the ghetto is determined by certain other interests, and not exclusively by the characteristics of the age. That factor contributed to their leaving the ghetto of the age (which later proved to be only a temporary attempt).

A similar opinion was confirmed by the empiric researches we had done in the period from mid-nineties to late nineties (Leburic, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996; Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 1997; Leburic et al., 1999), where the complex hypothesis about the paternalism of the adults was confirmed by the empiric argumentation. That is, the young claimed that the relationship between them and the adults was full of conflict, misunderstanding and clashing of ideas. A significant part of the young considered their world as being at opposite poles to the adult world, and their interests, aims, wishes and ways of life were opposite although they believed that they were dependent on each other. Actually, during the mid-nineties we assumed that the majority of young people in our researches were individuals who found it difficult to live with adults. They believed that Croatian youth and their ideas, opinion, behavior, clothes etc, were constantly underestimated. All this complies with the assertion that the youth were socially marginalized.

It was possible to conclude that the observed 'changes in the self-reception of Croatian youth showed elements of postmodernization that could contribute not only to achieving the results of the industrialized modern age, but also to exceed them; empiric results confirm that the young in Croatia consider the failure of the basic identification models of homogenous youth with paternalism as the fundamental relationship, but also that the changes were not the consequence of postmodernization of Croatian society, but of the war during which the young

62 won a certain form of equality' (Leburić, Tomić-Koludrović, 1996: 973).

At the same time, because of the war and postwar reality, politically relevant topics in Croatian society were limited to 'big issues' (Lyotard, 1984) and conflicts. 'Small issues', i.e. everything that interests young people in the postindustrial societies, such as the problems of environment, the quality of life and individualization were marginalized. Instead of the political debate on 'the power of definition over the social space' (Hitzler, 1994: 41) that characterizes the postindustrial societies, where the participants seem diffused in the politically inhomogeneous groups of the civilian society, in Croatia the political debate in the nineties was based on the development of the state. While the social conflicts in the postindustrial societies were transferred from the traditional economic and industrial fields to the cultural one, and were engaged in personal identities, everyday life, motivations and needs (Melucci, 1987: 113), in Croatia those social conflicts were in the context of the 'old' traditional and patriarchal understanding of politics.

Politics based on ideology as the main factor of mobilization of the participants is characterized by the collective instead of the individual approach (Touraine, 1987: 69). In those circumstances the emphasis was selectively transferred to the issues that encouraged homogenization, while the themes that might be of interest to young people were excluded from the political discourse. The mixture of marginalization and manipulation that affected the Croatian youth in the nineties was intended to discipline, i.e. to subordinate the young to the dominant patriarchal political discourse.

The everyday life of the youth was excluded from the politics, which caused apathy and the apolitical attitude of the young. Politics was presented as something abstract, so they felt excluded. Thus they restricted their own social potential to the area of privacy that caused their apolitical attitude (Leburić, Relja, 1999). Just like the youth in the developed postindustrial countries that do not wish to participate in the politics, the Croatian youth also had a similar strategy. They did not express their attachment to any political party (21.3 %), and almost one third of them did not want to declare whether they were interested in political events in the country (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburić, 1997: 160-161).

Refusing to participate in such patriarchal politics, Croatian youth chose an apolitical attitude. The attitude concealed the critique of dominant politics and the resistance to political manipulations. The young were not inter-

ested in such politics: they isolated themselves in the sphere of their privacy and thus remained politically unrealized personalities. A few of them accepted the adults' ideas about political involvement and, by joining youth organizations of various political parties, participated in the dominant patriarchal politics. Our research from 1999 confirmed that only 4 % of youth population sacrificed the qualities of their youth and behaved according to the adults' regulations. In our earlier researches only a small portion of young people expressed their attachment to about fifteen political parties that were active in Croatia at the time (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburić, 1997: 160).

However, our researches between 1993 and 1996 showed certain distinctions in the opinion of the youth population, in relation to current social events, so the conclusion is that 'significant social transformations that occurred in Croatia during the late nineties led to the increase of political involvement of a segment of the youth population. They are the social group that most consistently creates its future by being active in the present' (Leburić et al., 1999: 217).

By leaving out the youth from politics, a new political awareness of the young was created, which doubted the domination of the politics over people. The stereotype of an apolitical attitude and the political apathy of the young in Croatia during the nineties confirmed that it was a stereotype that was created by the traditional, patriarchal politics, that is, it was the narrow conception of politics and the political attitude offered by traditional politics.

In accordance with the general trends towards the subjectivization and individualization, the young related their individual interests to a collective action initiated by non-governmental organizations, forming an alternative scene with elements of a civilian society. It was different from the alternative scene in western European countries, because it was started by NGOs, which were financed from abroad. Hence, it meant transferring to Croatia elements of postindustrial societies where similar initiatives are part of politics of common issues. It refers to an 'artificial' phenomenon of introducing politics into activities that 'are led by all performers who (...) are pushed into the arena of public life' (Hitzler, 1994: 41).

The data in our latest research (1999) indicate that authentic support of the young towards NGO activities has not yet developed completely. Only 23.2 % of those interviewed expressed their wish to get engaged in NGO activities, although they consider (83.2 %) the work to be moral, worthwhile and useful, and recognize the value of similar social activities. However, a considerable percent-

age of those interviewed (41.2 %) wanted to engage in various charity activities.

It has to be stated that the research was performed (December 1999) at the time of an uncertain political situation and expectations of political or other changes that were latently significant for the choice of political orientation and public atmosphere in Croatia at the end of 1999.² It was not only the end of the millennium, but also the period that symbolically imposed different rules of political actions or the period in which new, different and unusual political 'powers' started their activities, for instance, the activities of NGOs and their evident political engagement with the young, among them and for them. Hence, the young realized that the old political paradigm was not effective in Croatian society. Consequently, young people acquired a new political consciousness and different engagement. Towards the end of the nineties a sensitive scene around NGOs was created in Croatia, which initiated the creation of an independent political public.

NEW POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CROATIA IN THE NINETIES

Successful politics also includes political participation of the young and their political initiatives. However, political integration of young people is possible only as a dialogue more oriented towards strong ethical principles, and less towards political dogmas. Only such politics can allow young people to establish, through their political activities, their specific interests and sensitivity, and it also enables the creation of new ethics of individual and social responsibility.

In our research (December 1999) the interviewed students became distinctive as a group of young people that could be described as promising.³

The data about their family background showed that their fathers were workers (27 %), retired (16.6 %) or specialists (10 %), while their mothers were housewives (29.4 %), clerks (25 %) or workers (19.2 %). Almost half of the parents had completed secondary education, while one third had obtained a high school or a university diploma. Fathers appeared to have more education than mothers. The respondents depended on the pocket money received from their parents, because few of them earned money for living (13 %). Close connection to home and parents, and their dependence, is also reflected in their dwelling. According to the answers of the interviewed students concerning the lifestyle of their parents, the students could belong to the middle class, because they stated that their parents do not live any better or worse than others in Croatia (84 %). However, half of them (50.4 %) said that they started uni-

versity studies to have better life in future, i.e. to have better employment opportunities. However, there is a significant group of the respondents (40.8 %) who declared that they study to develop their individuality.

General characteristics of the students' profiles lead to the conclusion that the young wish and are able to be (but they are not) socially engaged to their utmost. The interviewed group of youth clearly recognizes the general social situation, they are able to take a diagnostic view of the existing social relationship and to distinguish crucial social problems and processes. Most importantly, such opinion is proved by their own distinctive and worthwhile oriented attitudes.

In addition to other research questions, we also asked young people about their participation in the January 2001 general elections, so this is one of the few researches in which the so-called respondent abstention was not observed. In all interviewing situations, which required their personal opinion, or the exact attitude of the student, which was the evaluation of the manifestation of a social issue, precise and consistent answers were received.

Political awareness of the young and their evaluation of current political events in Croatia have revealed a different and more complex explanation of their possible participation in the January 2001 elections. Namely, 75 % of the interviewed students at the University of Split clearly stated that they would vote at the January elections, while 19.4 % were undecided about whom they would vote for, but not whether they would vote at all. Analyzing the entire research data, it is possible to conclude that the interviewed students were not passive or a marginalized social group that would not want or would not be able to be more active or more effective in the creation of the future social development. What clearly distinguishes itself is the effort made by the young to consider critically all the events in the society, not only in the field of culture or their free time and entertainment, but also in politics that determines the future of the Croatian people, as well as in the economy and other aspects of daily living of Croatian citizens.⁴

Additionally, two thirds of the interviewed students stated clearly which party they would vote for, so the SDP-HSLS coalition held the solid first place, because 33.6 % of the respondents stated that they would vote for their candidates. The other opposition coalition ASH-HNS-HSS-LS had the second position with 11.8 %, and HDZ, the ruling party of the time, with 11.6 % had the third position. There were 'votes' for yet another coalition: HSP-HKDU (5.8 %), and HČSP (1 %), while others had even lower percentages.

64 The fundamental reasons or explanations which the young gave about their votes were referring to party programs (30.2 %), confidence in the party as a social power which will be able to carry out the election promises (16 %), the fact that the party gathered the most competent politicians (12.4 %) or the fact that the particular politicians and their party could guarantee the achievement of a higher level of democracy in Croatian society (11.4 %).

Accordingly, it was clear that the students at Split and Zadar University, at the time when the research was done, had already chosen the opposition parties. Besides, their list of preferred politicians confirm the hypothesis: their favourite politician at the time was Ivica Račan (14 %), followed by Mate Granič (12.8 %), the sociologist Vesna Pusić (6.8 %), Vlado Gotovac (6.2 %), Stipe Mesić (4.8 %) and Dražen Budiša (4.4 %).

We can say that, with their intentions and the probable considerable participation at the elections,⁵ the young have become a political entity and proved that the stereotype about their apolitical attitude was the result of the traditional and patriarchal politics, from which they were excluded during the last decade. Their significant participation at the elections meant a certain 'judo' movement into the dominant patriarchal Croatian politics. Simultaneously, that movement put in danger the practice of the old, traditional politics.

However, the participation of the young at the elections should not immediately be explained as the manifestation of their confirmed political involvement. It rather refers to the relationship of the young towards the parties that participated at the elections and their opinion that their voting could be successful.

CONCLUSION: ABOUT THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE YOUNG

The growth of individualism and insecurity results also in the growth of risk-taking, for instance, going abroad for work. 68.2 % of the interviewed young people considered getting a job abroad.⁶

Young people of the new generation consent to the cost of greater freedom of living their individuality with the aim of giving meaning to their life. Their socio-demographic characteristics demonstrate the tendency towards the so-called middle categories. They even place themselves into average categories, while, for example, evaluating their own or their family's way of life. The tendency to average can also be noticed in their opinion about the purpose and the aims of their university study. That was the only part of the questionnaire in which the

aspects of individualization of the students was more evident. This means that the majority of the students stated that their primary aims of the study were: to develop their own personality (40.8 %), to ensure a better life in future (38.8 %) and to get a job more easily (11.6 %). At the same time, there are few answers mentioning university studies as a social value (4.6 %), imposed obligation (1.6 %), necessary evil (1.2 %) and fulfilling their duty (1 %).

We also have to state that, according to their social and professional characteristics, the parents of the interviewed students could not be treated as members of marginalized social classes. Most of them are employed, have a regular income and a higher level of education, developed professional interests, etc.

According to our research, young people in Dalmatia are very critical towards all the events in society, but still have prejudices and are pragmatic in search of a more pleasant daily life. Thus they do not consider themselves the only threatened social group in Croatia, but that all social groups are in the same situation (36.6 %), unemployed (31.6 %) and retired people (11 %) as well. Only 16.6 % consider the young as threatened.

On the basis of most accepted assertions on the identity scale, it is possible to conclude that we have dealt with an average or typical young person, inclined to contemplation, who feels particularly well when they do something for themselves, who does not bother others with their problems, and does not vacillate. They are determined and confident and often invited out. To finish, the identity representation of an average student is of a self-confident member of the young generation, aware of their integrity. They are not an isolated lonely person and know what they want, but do not aim for elitism, because they do not want to act as a leader.

The lack of wish for the life of the elite or a 'high life' can be supported by the data about the least popular leisure activities, which were: participating in a citizens' initiative, movement and association, visiting restaurants, listening to folk music, doing handicraft etc. The list also includes activities that sum up our typical student as an archetype of teenagers in postindustrial countries, because they do not have a computer, do not do aerobics and fitness, or go jogging. Instead, they prefer and more often perform more unpretentious activities, such as: talking on the phone, listening to music, going for a walk, frequenting bars, window-shopping and shopping, reading (while studying), going to church, cinema and discotheques ...

If we placed the treatise into a realistic, current social context, by the end of 2000 we could expect about 50,000 unemployed people in Split-Dalmatian county, one third of them with secondary education. The situation in Zagreb, Osijek and Lika counties is less alarming. Taking into consideration the intended liquidation of companies,⁷ deficit and other numerous problems, it is difficult to consider the prospects of the young. The Croatian government has launched several measures (for instance, lower tax on profit if it is invested in new jobs), but that would probably not be sufficient, because it is necessary to carry out the measures, and respect the law, which means to realize the functioning of the law-respecting society at all social levels.

Lastly, the rehabilitation of political consciousness of the young could mean a new starting point for the change of stereotype of young people who should be a significant social power. The young are not a social group without their principles. Those who claim that young people are not politically involved, just express another social stereotype. Croatian youth had already shown their activities and capabilities before the elections. It seems that, at the end of the millennium, the activities of the third segment in Croatia could be significantly expanded. That could be one of the relevant areas for including the young into politics where they would have the opportunity for direct participation in democratic processes. Namely, the development of NGOs has been initiated by real social problems. Participating in the processes, at present, a few young people have already debunked the myth about their apolitical attitude, or as some say: the myth about political incapability and immaturity of the young.

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NOTES

¹ This empirical project was ordered by a nongovernmental organization from Split, and the interviewees were the students of Split University. The choice of the research respondents' sample was stratified, proportional, representative and random (Arber, 1993: 87-89; Blalock, 1960: 399-404; Guala, 1996: 248-251). It included (N) respondents and was distributed to two sub-samples: Split (n=300) and Zadar (n=200). The applied research method (De Vaus, 1990; Dunsmuir & Williams, 1996; Guala, 1996; Henerson and others, 1987; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; May, 1993; Maynz and others, 1978; Pawson, 1996) was a structured interview combined with the questionnaire method with 60 questions.

² The research was done from 15 to 25 December 1999, and data processing and analysis was completed by 10 January 2000. We used Windows program SPSS (Babbie & Halley, 1995; Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1987; Foster, 1998; Norusis, 1988; Procter, 1993). Several research aims were set: a. to analyse wishes, perceptions, views, and opinion of the young; b. to identify current topics which occupy the attention of young people, as well as current political, economic and similar problems, as the young observe them; c. to estimate the future of the young, in view of parliamentary elections in Croatia in January 2000; d. to analyse various cultural and value aspects of the lifestyle of the young in Dalmatia.

³ The majority were 18 to 23 years of age (87 %), mainly female (65.8 %), almost all of Croatian nationality; exceptionally good pupils in secondary school (91.4 %), mostly full time students (88 %), the majority of whom were best students back in school.

⁴ There are very few students who stated that they were not interested in elections as socio-political factor (3 %) or who stated that they will not be able to vote (2.6 %).

⁵ At the time of the elections 22 % of the electorate in Croatia were under 30 years of age.

⁶ 39 % were considering the idea of emigration, but did not have an opportunity, 27.2 % were waiting for a suitable opportunity, while 25 % had already decided and arranged to leave the country soon. Thus we can see that only about one third (31.6 %) of the respondents never intended to emigrate.

⁷ If the expected series of company liquidations do happen in Croatia, the structure of the unemployed will be different, with a larger percentage of women and elderly people. Unfortunately, the government has not prepared any suitable programmes, so the social dimension will detrimentally illustrate the social inability to cope with the crucial problems of today.