

Youth and Value Dilemma of Transition Comparative Analysis

Florin Constantin DOMUNCO
"Ștefan cel Mare University", Suceava

Abstract

After experiencing hope and exuberance in December 1989 Romania set out on a new track that of democracy. Ever since Romanians have understood that once Pandora's Box among the freedom choice opened one has to expect the sweet bitter taste too they have chosen to pay the bill of transition towards capitalism stoically. In his synchrony theory, Eugen Lovinescu claimed that small peoples can participate in civilization as long as they make efforts of synchronization with the great centers of innovation and validation [1]. Romania has been making these efforts for sixteen years. The fall of the communist system should mean the fundamental reorganization of the Romanian society. The process implied therefore the end of a way of thinking and the rebirth of some new ones. But the values and institutional changes need time and resources. Thus the social and economical lack produce in Romania *"an incomplete cultural modernity lacking some of its essential functions less productive and subjected to powerful pressures by the nostalgia of traditional as well as postmodern tendencies"* [2]. However Romania is not similar to a western European country, there is one certainty: it does not look like a communist country anymore and its entire value perspective has changed, having a European nuance. This paper is about some young people brought up in an environment of values exterior to the European Union but having real chances of living inside it in the coming years.

Keywords: value, modernity, postmodernity

Literature review

Nowadays youth live in a world mastered by modern and postmodern trends. The ambivalence and similitude, complementarities or the present antagonism between the two values systems bring forth numerous different opinions having manifold side effects on the new identities that are in the transition between adolescence and adulthood. For young Romanians, pressures of a disorder caused by the transition from communism to capitalism are added to this normal process of biological evolution. To understand this value dilemma the conceptual explanation becomes imperative. The elements of the equation are: modernity and post-modernity related and unrelated at the same time to the concept of value.

I understand by **value** *an explicit or implicit conception distinctive for an individual or characteristic to a group as for what is desirable which influences the selection of ways, means and available aims of action* [3].

I consider that *"modern is the man for whom to be modern means a value in itself, completely independent from any content"* [4]. In modernity the exterior criterion (more recently) plays a more important role than the interior one (a better one). A modern value will rank on a higher position in a random hierarchy only if it is more recent, more accepted, more popular, more in fashion. The content problems turn therefore into subsidiary ones, enhancing the placement of material values into the foreground of the modern perspective.

On the other hand, *"post-modernity in broader lines seems to be a notion which has something to do within what we call social changes under the influence of the economic"* [5]. The post-modern world is a prosperous community, highly integrated, with tolerant open mind, where every man can have a decent life as an individual, without being judged according to his belonging to a group. The birth of a new society meant class differences which become more obscure than ever in the past, the family tends to lose their force to bring men together, a general passive attitude, and man turns into a consumer. The post-modern option impose by near a new cultural model assuming involving existentially, politically, morally and philosophically in a world of liberal democracy and civil society together with its series of characteristics: tolerance, human rights, cultural pluralism and civic attitude.

But the postmodernism, *"our unique chance"* means isolation, marginalizing or crises caused by the fact that the individuals "browse" and "try on" all kinds of identities and relationships generating all these show of the *"various masks of a post-modern personality"*.

Thus, if the modernity meant *"a change in the relationship between material uncertainty (decreasing) and the axiological one (increasing, by giving up the all mighty destiny and imposing the individuals' power to influence fate), post-modernity marks a society of welfare but extremely differentiated inhomogeneous as sameness, by giving up normative conceptions and promoting tolerance and the individuality of needs"* [6].

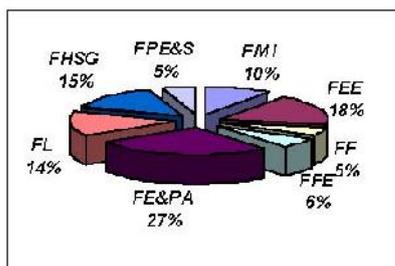
Methodology

The following research is a part of a larger project called "The social identity of youth during the transition period" and is a starting point in establishing the general frame of this research.

The working tool used had as a basis questions that can be found in WVS 1999-2000, a research applied in Romania by the ICCV and in the 2003 Euro barometer having the title *Youth in New Europe* applied in Romania by Gallup Organization. This thing let me to compare the values resulted from the investigation run at a local level on young Romanians with those resulted from the European youth.

The criteria of selection followed the shares represented by the organization of the "Ștefan cel Mare" University (Figure1). This research was carried out on students attending the daily courses.

Figure 1

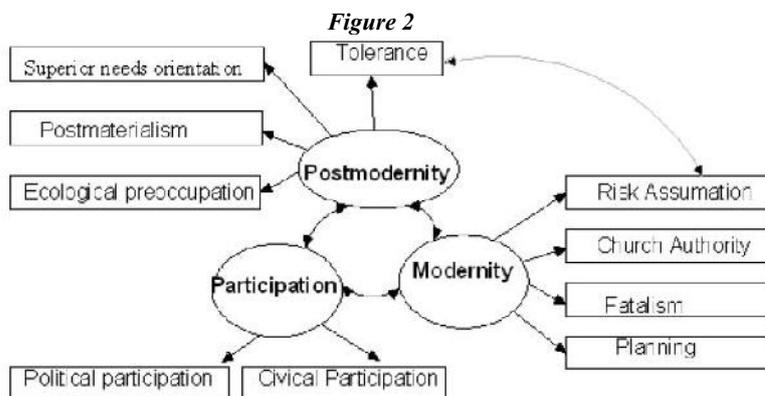


The Legend

FE&P Faculty of Economic
 FL Faculty of Letters
 FH&G Faculty of History and Geography FPE&S Faculty of Physical Education and FM Faculty of Mechanical Engineering FEE Faculty of Electrical Engineering FF Faculty of Forestry The shares presented are those resulted directly on the spot (no approximation have been made). The survey went on during 7th June – 15th June 2005.

Analysis and results

The starting point in analyzing the data is the Romanian sociologist Bogdan Voicu paradigm (Figure 2). The main objective is to identify the values universe of USV students.

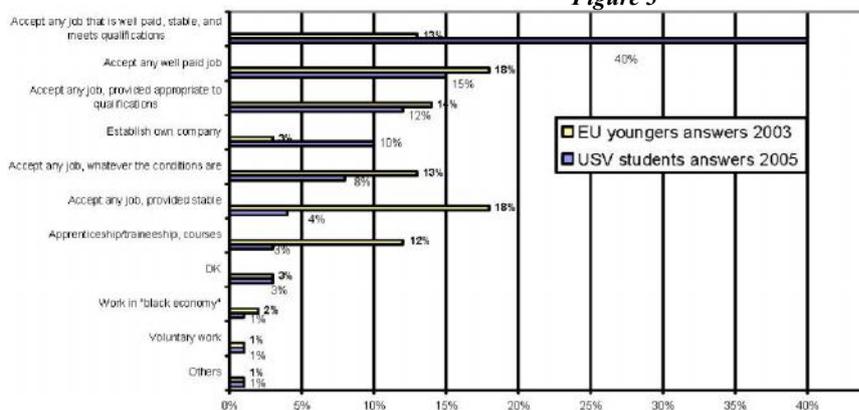


The modernity is revealed through the position towards church authority and risk assumptions items.

Risk assumption

Rather than becoming unemployed, “Stefan cel Mare” University’s students accept any job as long as it is well paid, stable and meets their academic preparation in a percentage of 40% (Figure 3). This percentage together with the image of a society without too much experience in the market economy and the difference of 27% in comparison to the young Europeans bring forth from the very beginning the hypothesis of a very low tolerance of the questioned students to taking the risk.

Figure 3



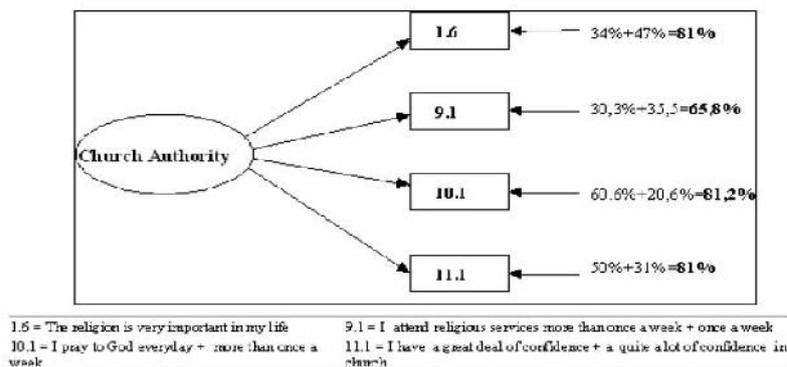
The wish to have a well paid job exactly in the field that you have studied may indicate a positive strategy too that young people use to project their future. The next position with 15% is taken by the option *I accept any well paid job* and 10% of these students speak about their intention *to set up their own firm*. In other words, in 65% of the cases money plays directly or indirectly an important role and material goods, as well this “hunger for money” is understandable when it comes to taking into account that 42% of USV students have an income up to 50 Euros monthly, 28% from 51 to 100 euros and the remaining 32% over 100 euros but no more than 200.

Those only 4% of the option *I accept any job provided it is stable* in contrast with the 16% given to young Romanians in *Youth in New Europe* in 2003 point at the beginning of an increasing tendency of tolerance to risk of young people.

The Church Authority

Romania has always trusted church. The fact is confirmed by the 81% of the young who answered that religion is very important in their lives (Figure 4).

Figure 4



In June 2004 Gallup Romania reported the results of a study called *Being Young in Romania*. To the same question, the credibility of the church among youth was of 70%. These differences in percentages are due to the Suceava specific religiosity. As a matter of fact the name of the institution itself reminds us of a great Romanian ruler Stefan cel Mare sanctified by the Orthodox Church for his services brought for Christianity.

These 81,2% allocated to the affirmation *pray God daily or a few times a week* mean a way of reducing the axiological uncertainty of the youth as a result of economical deficiency. The percentages of 66% allocated to the frequency of young at the religious services indicate a difference of 15% between the demonstrative behavior on the one hand and the inner feelings on the other hand. These mark the starting point of new behavioral mutations.

The presence of **postmodern values** in a poor socio-economic area comes in contradiction with the postmodernity definition itself. With all these, as a consequence of contagious process the existence of some values with postmodern resonance like tolerance, superior needs, ecological or post materialistic preoccupations becomes possible.

Tolerance

As for **tolerance** it is surprising how low its level is in a country dominated by the orthodox religion, which sees this value as one of its coordinates. On the other hand religion might be the explanation for this quite intolerant attitude as biblical concepts punish those who do not follow Christian behavior harshly. That is why not surprisingly if people have the possibility of choosing their neighbors more than 69% 86% respectively would choose as unwanted the alcohol or drug addicts.

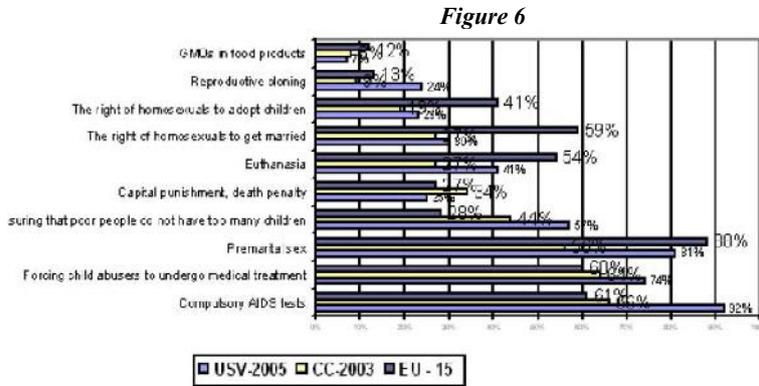
Figure 5



Being considered facts that infringe the religious norms they become the normal result of applying an ethical and social code at a social level. It is interesting that in this hierarchy, homosexuals are overcome with 20% even by persons with psychological disabilities when ten years ago the latter represented the topic of public controversies initiated by the Orthodox Church without considering EU recommendations. Even if time favored these sexual minorities the percentage of 50% refers only to that situation when young people would accept them as neighbors. When their marriage comes into discussion though, their acceptance is of 30% while their adoption of children is an issue too, the percentage decreasing to 23%. An explanation can be given by the family pattern that dominates the Romanian group mind, the nuclear family.

Ethical issues

Some students' points of view towards some disputed ethical problems (Figure 6) revealed once again the same low level of tolerance when we speak, for example about stopping persons with small incomes from having too many children. In spite of all these, I think that those 57% are rather the effect of the spread of begging phenomenon among children and less an attitude which could prove an obstruction of human rights.



But our very religious subjects leave aside all the inhibitions when we speak about sexual relations before marriage. These points of view are similar to those expressed by west European youth.

Still are there common value considerations when talking about ecological preoccupations, post materialistic orientation and those tending to superior? At least theoretically these values are

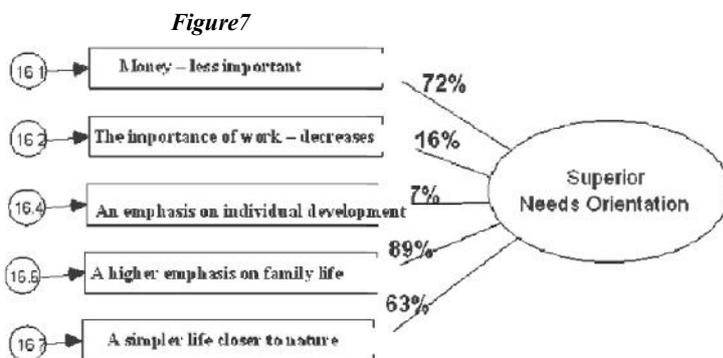
foreseen to come together as these elements that characterize the post modernity seem to exist in any society. Inglehart (1977) tells us though that their manifestation is limited because all of them imply satisfying first some basic need, that is, prosperity, security and a high material insurance. "In this context, the presence in Romania of some individuals consistent from a value perspective is highly due to some contagious effects by coming in contact with west European societies." (B.Voicu, 2001). Moreover this thing can be explained if we take into account the fact that even if these subjects still have

their current home in the countryside, their educational experience meant in many cases a number of at least 8 years of experience in the urban area. Thus, the individuals labeled post materialists are found, according to Inglehart's studies, mainly more frequently in the urban areas, where they have access to education more easily. Those who have the biggest chance to be included in this category are the youngsters who have more possibilities of reaching the western world. As a matter of fact, the region where the university is placed is one of the most affected areas in Romania with massive departures to

work in the western European countries. This thing creates this situation where it is impossible for young people not to come in contact with the other European civilizations directly by means of at least one friend or relative.

Superior needs orientation

The postmodern direction becomes certain (Figure 7) through these 72% given for idea that the decreased importance of the money in day-to-day living is a good thing, 63% who want a life closer to the nature and 87% think of considering their individual development.



The equation is more complicated when we take into consideration those 89% who would like to emphasize to a greater extend the family life fact which contradicts with the values of postindustrial society for which the family does not play such an important role.

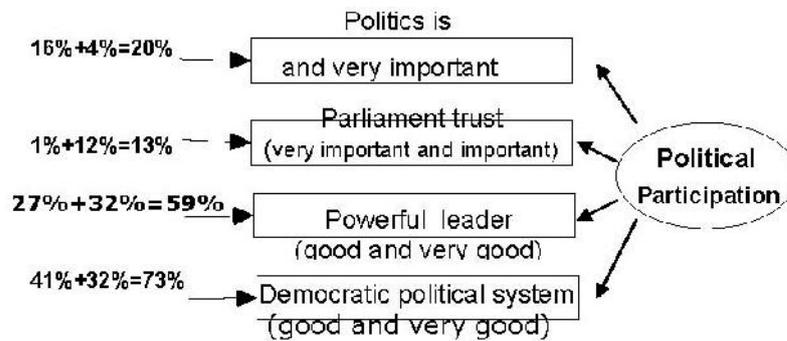
The interest towards politics

The political involvement registers low percentages (Figure 8). The explanation that only 20% of the youth consider

politics important or very important can be explained through the lack of trust that young people show towards the political class. This thing is obvious if we notice that the most important political institution, the Parliament is of 13%. As a rule in politics, uncertainty leads to xenophobia, the need of powerful leaders and respect to authority. In this case the conviction of youth expressed in a percentage of 73% that Romania should have a democratic political system succeeds in calming us down

Still a certain degree of political uncertainty is signaled by the high percentage of 60% that indicated the need of a powerful leader that has nothing to do with the Parliament and the elections. Thus, the current president of Romania has won the elections especially with the help of youth and urban population rendering the exact image resulted from this study.

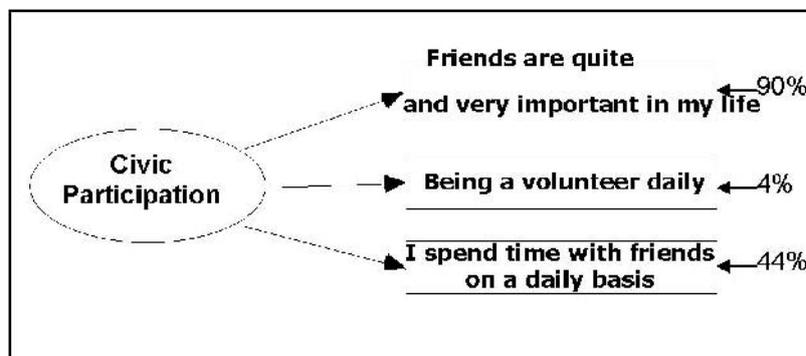
Figure 8



Civic participation

The Romanian young people’s civic attitude has never reached high percentages. In order for this to happen the democratic system has to work very well. After the revolution in December 1989 the political analyst, Silviu Brucan, a person who at some point had some connection with the communist regime, estimated that we will be talking about democracy in Romania only in 25 years’ time. At that time, many considered his statement was the result of his old age. But 16 years after his prediction, things tend to follow his direction. However, the daily volunteer activities of youth represent 4%, this thing meaning in fact 3% under the average met in 2003 in EU. Spending free time with friends comes to 44% and their importance reaches a maximum of 90%.

Figure 9

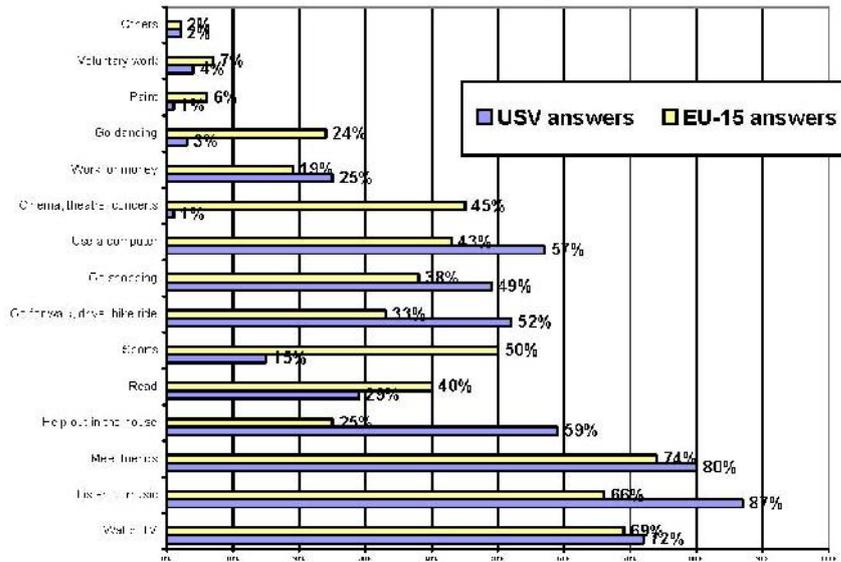


The activities practiced

As for spare time activities (Figure 10) we notice some very close percentages when choosing between watching TV and spending time with friends. The activities that suppose physical effort in an organized pattern are preferred by west European youth at a greater extent. Dancing 24% in contrast with 3% or sport 20% with 15%. Romanian young people prefer walks in fresh air 52% to 32% probably just because, in order to perform this activity one does not need to pay anything. Still, young Romanians spend more time shopping 49% to 38% or helping with the chores 59% to only 25%.

Reading becomes a big problem. If in the case of western young people 40%of the latter read, as far as Romanians are concerned this pastime is met only in 29%. If for the European young people the percentage can be considered satisfactory as it includes both with academic studies and average or basic ones, for the Romanian students this percentage is a reason to worry. Being in a shaping their personality period the latter prove superficial when having in mind the hedonistic style they want to achieve the maximum satisfaction through very little effort. This strategy though, can only be successful for a short period but for long term commitments it may mean incompetence.

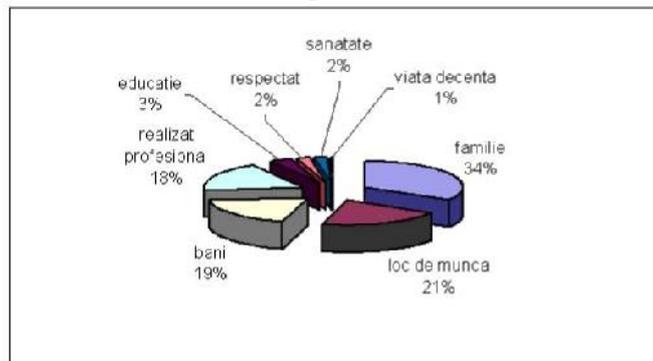
Figure 10



Finally, the study had one requirement that wanted to identify the aspects that Romanian youth consider necessary to be able to say about a person that he/she has succeeded in life. The results confirm that on an axis that has at one end Modernity and at the other Post modernity, young Romanians have the tendency to be closer to the first one.

Family comes first with a percentage of 40% (Figure 11). It is considered to be an obligatory step in the individual's growing up and his/her future material and professional achievements. The job comes next on this hierarchy, being in fact the means by which the individual can assure the security of his family. Only after the money turns not to be a problem anymore, the young Romanian naturally thinks of his professional achievement. We notice that the resulting hierarchy goes from basic needs to self-accomplishment and status ones becoming the illustration of Maslow's needs pyramid.

Figure 11



Conclusion

1. Right now there are modern, postmodern and pre-modern elements in the Romanian value area.
2. The Dispelling of old Romanian cultural patterns myth brought forth an uncertainty among young people forcing them to move towards a random, unsure, ambiguous area.
3. The new system of values has a hybridized character. By assuming it, young people developed some superficial action strategies governed by the hedonistic and Latin principle Carpe Diem!
4. Although there are common values in the value universe of Romanian young people and European ones the comparison is based on differences rather than similarities.
5. The value differences between young Romanians and Europeans can represent a new form of social inequality.

Notes

- Delberghe, M. (2006), "Le Medef salue une jeunesse attirée par l'entreprise, informée et métissée", *Le Monde*, 24.05.
- *** (2005), *Un posibil cadru european al calificărilor în perspectiva învățării pe parcursul întregii vieți*, Comisia Europeană, Bruxelles.
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- *** (2002), *Formarea profesională a adulților*, OG nr 129/31.08.2000, MO nr. 711/30.09.