STUDENT YOUTH IN SLOVENIA – IN SEARCH OF A FUTURE

Studentska omladina u Sloveniji – u potrazi za budućnošću

ABSTRACT In the article, we are presenting the research results about social position of the student youth, which were obtained in 2008 on the sample of 3008 students, and we are comparing them with selected data from a similar research, carried out in 1995 on a sample of 1829 students in Slovenia. We are analysing results in light of contemporary conditions of uncertainty and risks, which are being significantly deepened and intensified by the current economic recession. We are reflecting on the increasing competitiveness and marketization of tertiary education, which is in contradiction not only with the enlightenment concept of knowledge production and dissemination, but also with the demands and absorptive capacity of the labour market. Therefore, we are asking ourselves whether students today are still an avant-garde of social progress and if so, whether new students’ movements, similarly to those from 60s and 70s of the preceding century, are announcing a social change based on a new emerging ethics of duties towards oneself.

KEY WORDS youth, students’ protests and movements, tertiary education, life and value orientations, future, parents’ support

APSTRAKT U članku se predstavljaju rezultati istraživanja o društvenom položaju studentske omladine sprovedenog na uzorku od 3008 studenata 2008. godine, koji se porede sa podacima sličnog istraživanja sprovedenog 1995. na uzorku od 1829 studenata u Sloveniji. Rezultate analiziramo u svetlu savremenih uslova neizvesnosti i rizika, koji su značajno produbljeni sadašnjom ekonomskom recesijom. Ukazujemo na rastuću kompetitivnost i marketizaciju visokog obrazovanja, koji je kontradiktorno ne samo u odnosu na koncept proizvodnje i širenja znanja, već takođe i u odnosu na zahteve tržišta rada i mogućnosti apsorbovanja diplomiranih. U skladu sa tim, pitamo se da li su studenti danas još uvek avangarda društvenog napretka i ako jesu, da li novi studentski pokreti, slično onima iz 60ih i 70ih godina prošlog veka, najavljaju društvenu promenu zasnovanu na novonastaloj etici dužnosti osobe prema sebi samoj.

KLJUČNE REČI omladina, studentski protesti i pokreti, terciarno obrazovanje, životne i vrednosne orijentacije, budućnost, roditeljska podrška

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Introduction

In the recent years we have witnessed a number of students’ and youth protests, demonstrations, movements, in many European countries, for example in Italy, Austria, Germany, France, Spain, Croatia, Finland, Great Britain, Greece. In Slovenia too, where students were demonstrating against intent of the government to introduce tuition fees and the law on “small labour”, which would reduce the extent of “students’ work”. Furthermore, very recently, in November 2011, a new students’ movement “We are the University” has emerged within the framework of “We are 99” movement. Within this movement, according to the model of students’ movements from the end of 60s and the beginning of 70s, students have occupied the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana and thereupon broadened to other faculties, especially sociological. This movement is orientated against marketization of studies\(^3\), against current study and employment policy at the University, and against precariousness of university employees, especially younger ones. Students demand free and universally accessible studies and a possibility of academic and research work for all who are appropriately qualified (http://mismouniverza.blogspot.com/).

Could we, in any way, see some similarities between today's student protests and those from the 60s and the 70s of the preceding century? The essence of the protests back then was a disproportion between relatively high level of students’ social innovations, initiatives and libertarian experience on the one hand, and a relative confinement of institutions and media to these initiatives and experience on the other. Researchers have explained multiplicity and universality of these movements as an unconscious reaction of the youth to the social changes that were on the horizon. Precisely these students’ movements were about to announce the beginnings of a post-industrial society, information society, “knowledge society”, where knowledge, innovations, information, communication have become crucial strategic developmental indicators instead of mass industrial production and consumption (Keniston, 1971; Inglehart, 1977; Braungart, Braungart, 1989; Ule et al., 1996). Following this historical reasoning, we could ask ourselves, are the current students’ protests and movements also announcing a change? Perhaps the end of neoliberal ideology, of domination of capital and market mechanisms in science? The fact is that central conflicts in the contemporary society are precisely the conflicts in producing knowledge, education, and communication. And students are certainly the most important participants in this process.

In this article we will attempt to provide an answer to this question with a closer look at the circumstances and conditions of the current social position of student youth in Slovenia. We will analyse data obtained by the research in 2008 on the sample of 3008 students from four universities and compare them with selected

\(^3\) Marketization here refers to implementation of market principles in the institutions of higher education.
data of a very similar research carried out in 1995 on the sample of 1829 students. We will focus on the results regarding perception, participation and life orientations of students, and the respective changes that have occurred in a time span of 13 years. Here we have to highlight that the research in 2008 was carried out just before the current economic crisis, thereby its negative consequences were not felt yet, especially by the students. Therefore, we have to assume that at least some results on the economic situation, employment possibilities and the like, would have been to some extent different if the research had been carried out a few months later. Furthermore, we have to be aware that the data from 1995 were obtained only 4 years after Slovenia gained independence with a change of political and economic regime. At that time, Slovenia was still a “transitional country” and therefore struggling with the process of economic transformation. Likewise, we have to bear in mind that the social structures of students’ populations in 2008 and 1995 are to some extent different, since according to the SORS, the number of tertiary education graduates in 1991 when 6,043 students graduated, to 2009 when 18,103 students graduated, represents a 200% increase (SORs, 2011a: 15), whereby not only the number, but also the social structure of the student population has changed.

**Perspectives of contemporary student youth**

Students are a societal group that has gained a lot from contemporary Keynesian welfare state; better and more equal forms of education, social and health security, special legal protection, and a range of institutions, which are “professionally” dealing with the problems of youth (Mizen, 2004). This model of dealing with young people has run relatively smoothly during “golden times” of the economic boom and almost full employment. However, the circumstances have changed with the outbreak of economic crisis in recent years, when neoliberal and politicians’ promises about incessant development and progress proved to be mistaken; and this mistake is experienced most strongly precisely by young people, who are waiting on the threshold of economic and social adulthood (Côté, 2007). Opportunities for employment of young people, subsequent income levels and welfare of individuals in general have been subjected more to the market demands and limited to their financial confines than to their expectations and hopes. Age has become a basis for more and more profound attempts to restrain the behaviour of the young within the framework of law.

A switch from Keynesianism to neoliberalism has revived long lasting social differences among youth, which have been in the background for some time, for example class, gender, ethnic and racial differences. Contemporary status and profile of student youth is based on two major societal changes, which substantially affect the position of young people:
• **Prolonging of education** and **prolonging of youth** with it. The consequences of this process are longer economic and social dependence on the family of origin and society.

• **Social changes, new risks, uncertainties**, which are described in terms of individualization and globalization. These changes affect labour market and transition of young people to employment; they change life-courses and life-opportunities, especially when it comes to young people.

Neoliberal economic logic of globalisation forces societies to shift burden of its reproduction to the shoulders of individuals. All “intermediate structures” between the individual and society are being transformed to the market or capital structures, which are fighting for their share and influence on the market of services. These trends have a great influence on that population, which is still in the process of forming and shaping its position in the society; thus, the student youth are certainly one of the most exposed and affected groups. These changes affect deeply life orientations of the student youth and correspond precisely to changes in the global society (France, 2007). Today, more and more young people continue their education on tertiary level. Therefore, “student life” has lost its former connotation of particularity and privilege (Ule, 2008). Due to prolonged educational process in the third decade of life\(^4\), economic and psycho-social dependence upon family of origin and the status of indirect citizenship are also being prolonged.

As statistical data show (see Figure 1), enrolment in tertiary education has increased considerably in the last 10 years and is still increasing, especially the share of women – in the academic year 2007/08 their share was more than 60%. But what is particularly worrying is the fact that women still continue to educate themselves in the fields of social sciences, education, social work, where there are almost no jobs currently available.

Today, it is more or less clear that the essential reason for the increasing share of young people, who continue their education after secondary school, is not the consequence of strategic decisions or the generosity of state politics. It is becoming increasingly evident that it is more a consequence of a lack of opportunities for reasonable employment and a belief that educational capital could mean a better position on the labour market. Yet, the latter has proven not to be the case, since the share of highly educated unemployed is rapidly growing\(^5\).

Therefore, it is true that the general level of education among youth has increased; yet again, the young from the middle and high classes benefited the most

\(^4\) In the academic year 2009/2010 31% of students were aged 26 or more; among which 14% were aged 30 or more (SORS, 2011b).

\(^5\) In December 2011, 13% of registered unemployed persons had high education (VI, VII and VIII level of education in the Slovenian education system), while in December 2005 their share was 8%. Moreover, in December 2011, the share of young registered unemployed persons (aged 30 or less) was 24% (Zavod RS za zaposlovanje, 2012).
from the increasing demand for more qualified labour force, as they often receive higher grades during primary and secondary education and enrol to more prestigious schools. It is especially characteristic for the middle and high classes of society to consider the education of children as a good “investment decision” (Carr Stelman, Powell, 1991; Voigt, 2007).

Figure 1 Share of young people (19-23 years) included in tertiary education by their gender and the academic year, Slovenia, 1997-2008

Source: SORS, 2009: 47.

Transition problems, life and value orientations of student youth in Slovenia

The common denominator of young people across Europe is the increasing uncertainty of transition to adulthood. Many studies across Europe and in Slovenia show increasing extent and severity of the problems, as well as risks brought about by the attempts to solve them (Blossfeld et al, 2005; Du Bois-Reymond, Chisholm, 2006; Hurrelmann, Mathias, 2006; Ilišin, Radin, 2007). The register of causes of these problems is also changing. Causes are becoming more difficult to determine as they hide in a disperse network of local and global circumstances, on which the individual has little or no impact, yet, s/he has to act, otherwise s/he ends up with all the weight of consequences on his/her shoulders.

Strategies of systemic inclusion have lost their legitimacy. Loss of security, which was inextricably bound to institutional paths of transition means that the risk of false strategies can also appear when a young person takes well established institutional paths; for example, s/he finishes education, yet education and training do not correspond to the demands and needs of the labour market (Clark, 2008; Ule et all, 2000). There is only a small step from the uncertainty about how to reach social inclusion, to the question of what social inclusion actually is. Nevertheless, in
the contemporary postmodern society, young adults can perceive themselves as included in many other ways, not only within the boundaries of commonly understood inclusion.

Perception of risks and worries about the future

Figure 2 “What are your main concerns and worries about the future?” 2008

As the data on the worries about the future show (see Figure 2), young people are indeed burdened with these questions. Namely, what concerns students the most regarding the future are in fact social problems – increasing social differences, fear of unemployment, as well as ecological concerns. This is quite an important finding, since previous youth researches showed strong orientation towards personal problems. Yet, both of these major concerns can quickly turn into personal problems, which points out to the general feeling of personal vulnerability. Research also showed that female students, and students whose parents have lower education, are more concerned about the future. It is important to note that whether or not students have a sense that they could succeed, depends above all upon circumstances in a wider society. Also, without a general trust in social progress, wishes for personal progress are only abstract and without grounds.

Hence, the position of young people has thoroughly changed in the last two decades. For a minority of the young, originating mostly from high and middle classes, these changes have provided opportunities for a success, career, material standard, life-style, which could not be even imagined before. Yet, for a majority of
the young, prolonged dependence upon parents increases costs and undermines the system in which higher education should be equally accessible to all. More and more young people are facing precarious employments for a definite period, prolonged dependence on the family of origin, considerable increases in educational and working demands, institutionalization of lower incomes and substantial increase in the costs for ensuring at least some degree of independence. Despite the importance of family, the pressures of unemployment, insecurities and withdrawal of state supports have reduced chances for young people to get independent and to shape their biographies autonomously. That is why the young are justifiably dissatisfied with their position in the society and with societal balancing of central transition to adulthood (see Figure 3).

### Figure 3 What causes dissatisfaction of students? 1995, 2008

![Chart showing data on student dissatisfaction]

Source: Ule et al, 2008; Ule et al, 1996

Data from 2008 show that students are dissatisfied the most with those social conditions and possibilities which are the most essential for their transition to economic and social independence: housing problems, employment opportunities (where women are considerably more dissatisfied: 73% women and 60% of men), possibilities of creating family life. Also, the lower the education of parents, the higher the dissatisfaction with employment opportunities. On the other hand, students are content with possibilities of entertainment and possibilities of expressing themselves freely.

If we compare data from both years, we can see that major dissatisfactions have lowered to some extent, yet, we have to be careful in interpretation because of
the specifics of both samples described in the introduction. Therefore, we could argue that percentage of the dissatisfied with employment opportunities, housing problems and perspectives for the future could be considerably higher at this moment. The significant increase in dissatisfaction with possibilities of creating a family is the most striking, which has increased by as much as 27.8%. This is also a strong signal of a changed relationship between state and individuals, since more and more burden (financial burden as well as decision-making) is transferred from the level of state to individuals, which makes the task of future (and family) planning much more demanding and subjected to careful economic calculations more than ever before.

Problems with transition to employment and how to handle it

Increasingly narrower scope of work and employment opportunities has in recent decades affected youth around the world. This does not mean that young people have lost touch with the world of labour, but that a new system of flexible underemployment has become established, which is being formed on the border of the official system of full employment. For young people this means switching between periods of unemployment, extra-curricular jobs during studies, part-time employment, etc. However, these alternative forms of employment are not protecting youth from socio-economic dependence upon adults, since these forms of work are only accessible to some, and are generally limited in time. Loss of life-long employment, together with development of individualised labour market, affects most of the new generations, which are yet to enter the world of work. Everywhere in the Western world employment has become uncertain; unemployment is the extreme form of this uncertainty.

Results reveal that there is considerable anxiety regarding future employment, as more than half of respondents expect problems. Further analysis of the sample shows that students whose parents have lower education, are more concerned about their employment, since they lack connections and acquaintances, and also because of the crisis. Yet, the most interesting is the comparison between genders: female students expect significantly more problems in finding employment; for example, more female students by one third think that there is no demand for their profession. Statistical data about unemployed young graduates confirm that their worries are justified; in the period from 1998-2003 there was 70% of women among young unemployed graduates (Verša in Spruk, 2004: 10) while in 2008 their share was already approximately 80%. Reasons for such a big discrepancy between genders are at least these: more women are studying and graduating – among graduates of tertiary programs there are two thirds of women; women graduate in academic fields for which there is no demand (for example, social sciences and humanities); covert discrimination of women, as they have equal rights in education, but not equal employment opportunities.
Figure 4 “Do you think you will have problems with employment in your profession?” 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know, I haven’t thought about it</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, crisis means difficulties for everyone to find employment</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, there is no demand for my profession</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because I don’t have connections and acquaintances</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, there is a high demand for my profession</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I have connections and acquaintances</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, because I have a scholarship, which guarantees my employment</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ule et al, 2008

What are students willing to do to improve their employment opportunities? The comparison below between two years shows relatively stable attitudes (see Figure 5). We can see that students are mostly very willing to educate further, to change their place of residence or even to work outside their profession, but are not willing to engage politically (only a fifth would do that in 2008, but this is still 9% more than in 1995), and are especially not ready to renounce having family and children. But the comparison between genders show that men are more willing to engage politically and renounce having children, while women are more ready to educate further and to change field of studies. Interestingly, we can observe that over the years, students are becoming less willing to move outside of Slovenia and prefer to move within the country.

Figure 5 “If you would improve your employment opportunities, would you be willing to…” 1995 and 2008

Source: Ule et al, 2008; Ule et al, 1996
Furthermore, the most desirable employment for students in 2008 is in the state administration – more than 30% of students would prefer this kind of employment, and the percentage is even higher for women and students whose parents have lower education. Again, it seems that in light of growing uncertainties, security of employment comes first, especially for socially more vulnerable groups of students.

Life and value orientations of students

In the short period of one generation, radical changes in life experiences of young people have occurred. The prolonged dependence upon the parents, which is by no means only financial in nature, is occurring throughout Europe, yet this process seems especially distinctive in Slovenia. Contemporary societies demand early mental and behavioural adjustment in contradictory conditions: prolonged education and economic dependence are in sharp contrast with the demands for early choices and for taking over responsibilities for these choices, in line with the ideology of self as a project and of being a “master of yourself” (Živoder, 2011). Challenges coming from the “outside world” are contradictory in a similar way: information technologies and media offer elements of multi-culturalism and global internationalism, and at the same time inform youth about new cultures and life-styles, which is on the one hand expanding their horizons and modernizing them (liberating them from traditional ties), but on the other can easily cause new distress and insecurities (Helve, Bynner, 2007).

Nevertheless, empirical studies of changes in value orientations of the youth reveal that changes which are occurring are less dramatic than is believed by many critics of changes, which warn us about “crisis of values” or even point to the disintegration of system of values. Yet, the studies demonstrate that persistent, systematic and far-reaching changes in tendencies of young people have taken place in recent decades (Beck, 1997). These changes represent an irrepresible process of cultural modernization of student youth in particular. Main features of this process are:

- An increasing deviation or shift from paid work and employment as a central value of an individual towards a quality of life as a principal value, which also includes, besides work, leisure time, consumption and entertainment;
- Changes in gender roles, pluralism of family forms;
- Individualisation of life-courses, shaping of individual biographies and careers;
- Emphasizing “post-material” values, which include valuing highly personal experience, identities, body practices, interpersonal relationships, privacy.

Our research on student youth in the mid-1990s showed that the most important values of students were those related to personal-private life, relationships, autonomy and self-realization, followed by social values such as peace
in the world and protection of nature; while the least important were those related to
major ideological topics such as traditional values and social influence and power.
At that time, expressive values were more important than information-production
values, which reflected the transitional period of economy back then and a lack of
informational network (Ule et al., 1996).

Compared with 1995, we can see that the structure of values shows relatively
stable pattern, but also a gradual and steady shift towards increasingly personal
values related to the overall quality of everyday life (see Figure 6). The most
important values of students in Slovenia nowadays are those concerning
relationships, family and freedom to act. The second are values of self-realisation
and ecological values. The third are so called material-hedonistic values. The least
popular are traditional and authoritarian values of power and influence.

These data confirm general trends of values in Europe and in Slovenia: we
can observe persistent and comprehensive changes in value orientations of student
youth. Namely, young people are gradually distancing themselves from a complex
of values characteristic of the modern period: work – employment – career –
earnings towards a more personal complex of values: interpersonal relationships –
personal development – creativity – education – quality of everyday life. This
certainly does not mean that “work” has lost its value or meaning, but it rather
suggests that the concept of work itself has changed: it no longer means only
traditional employment and workplace, but also a personal desire and strive of an
individual for self-fulfilment through work, for creativity and productivity (ideology
of “master of yourself”). Furthermore, comparison between genders also shows
significant and interesting differences – for female students more important values
are relationships, self-realization and ecological concerns, while for male students
material-hedonistic values and traditional and authoritarian values are more
important than for female students.

Value system of individualisation contains origins of a new ethics, which is
based on “duties towards oneself”. This seems to be in a complete opposition to the
traditional ethics, which was based on duties towards others and towards society as a
whole. Therefore, new values of the young can give impression of egoism and
narcissism. Yet, there is also something new in this process, which surpasses this
impression. It is a process of self-clarification, which also includes searching for
new social bonds in family, friendly relations, at work and in public. New
contradictions are emerging, which make personal growth and independence more
difficult than before. Young people are certainly liberating themselves from
traditional ties and dependence, yet they are also becoming increasingly dependent
upon pressures of other social institutions, on which they have only little or no
influence. These are above all the labour market, educational system, system of
social care and social security, and health system (Beck, 1997). The older
generations can still draw the strength for adapting to the new forms of socialization
from “socialization reserves” of the past and combine traditional and new aspects of individualization. The young, however, will have to spend all their lives in the conditions of a new modernization of society.

**Figure 6 Values of students, 2008**

![Graph showing values of students, 2008](image)

Source: Ule et al., 2008

Thus, this shift of core value orientations from “material – career” towards “post-material – personal” signifies the shift in the very nature or character of values. While the classic industrial values were presented above all as a set of clear and explicit norms, behaviour rules, life-goals, we are now dealing with rather fluid and flexible structure of values and personal orientations, which are difficult to be defined conceptually and empirically. It is particularly significant that today’s young people no longer construct their values according to the “big stories” (Chisholm et al., 1995), where a concept of a “big story” signifies big ideological systems, which encompass the whole value world of people. Erosion of the big stories relates to the decline of their power on individuals and the community.

**Participation and influence on social change**

How do students estimate their own influence over social changes? In 2008 50% of students estimated that their influence was very little or little, and only 11% believed it was strong or very strong (see Figure 7). If we take into account that students are a part of intellectual elite with the most recent knowledge, these beliefs are highly problematic and somewhat tragic for the society. Yet, this percentage is considerably smaller than in 1995, when more than 70% of students thought they had little or very little influence on social changes. Therefore, we can observe gradual and consistent change in students’ perception of how social changes happen,
and to what extent is every individual able and responsible to intervene and shape their social world. This is also in line with the new individualization of society, in which social and economic burdens are transferred to the shoulders of an individual, who is responsible for his/her own life; these individual biographies are increasingly subjected not only to local, but also to global social and economic circumstances. Whether subjective and individual shaping of personal worlds could also bring benefits and “improve” wider social conditions for all, or could only lead to fiercer struggle between individuals for better individual positions, depends also on how much interest and will there is for broader collective issues.

However, research results show that the interest in politics among student youth is insignificant. In 2008 73% of students had no, or only some interest in politics, while only 6,4% were very interested. This proves again that the new individualised ethics of everyday life has, in the previous two decades, slowly replaced old collective notions of duties and loyalties. Political parties gain new members only with great difficulties, the same goes for some modern civil society movements. Nevertheless, young people show interest in some specific topics, such as social justice, environmental concerns, problems of disadvantaged, marginal groups, which confirms our thesis about the gradual development of a new ethics, in which the student youth is indeed its first voice. However, we have to emphasize here that political parties currently rely mostly on the votes of older generations, which only deepens the distance between politics and youth. From the viewpoint of the young generation, we could say that traditional politics avoids them and ignores their experience and standpoints.

Figure 7 “How do you estimate your personal influence over social changes that will happen in your future?” 1995 and 2008

Source: Ule et al, 2008; Ule et al, 1996
Whom do young people trust?

For young people, the centre of gravity is by definition limited to the family and private sphere and not to the public sphere and workplace (see Figure 8); the development of the culture and leisure industry relies on this fact. It is not just a question of the ideology of personal, but also a real process and a realistic possibility of shaping one’s life situation (Ule, Rener, 1998). This process began in the second half of the 20th century, with the transformation of patriarchal family models into permissive models of family life.

Today, the family serves as a place of refuge and shelter from the stresses of the wider world, which are surely not minor in highly competitive societies. Long-term upbringing becomes possible since there is no longer a need for authoritarian control and the constant monitoring and maintenance of generational rules. This is the result of transforming the family into a leisure time and a consumer unit in a society of services. Parents thus increasingly devote themselves to the specific personality, emotional and cognitive traits of their children, and less and less to attempts to adjust the child to the characteristics of the local environment (Ule, Kuhar, 2003). Parents are becoming confidants and counsellors to their children when the latter have psychological or financial difficulties, as well as their strong advocates in the public sphere and institutions.

Here we have in mind the organized lobbying in which parents as a group apply pressure from outside to the cultural and educational institutions, in order to improve opportunities for their children. Whereas youth in the 1970s and 1980s rejected this conceptual world as a space of control and coercion, today they seems to accept it with open arms. The difference is that parents have achieved a kind of contractual relationship in which children fulfil their desires for social advancement without resisting much. Parents must protect and support their offspring long past the period of psychosocial maturity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 8 “How much do you trust the following?” 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not at all</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools, educational institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media (newspapers, TV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests and church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts of law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ule et al, 2008
Research on youth in Slovenia shows a low level of generalized trust and trust in the fundamental institutions of modern societies and states. The immediate environment of life, in particular the family, is the only world which is truly important to young people and which they trust. The personal sphere is increasingly becoming a place of self-realization and not a place of duties and obligations. For this reason, trust in the personal has also a socio-political significance for young people. But this is a phenomenon with ambiguous effects. The accessibility or absence of a family support network reproduces social inequality and creates a gap between those who are well equipped, and those who are not. For this reason, one of the most important factors in social differentiation of today’s young people is precisely the existence of family support.

One of the main reasons for the absence of generalized trust among student youth in Slovenia, as well as in other Eastern European countries, is definitely the set of negative perceptions of the processes of modernization and transition (Roberts, 2003). Some call this the negative experience of transition. The experience of transition, both personally and socially, causes a strong increase in the amount of uncertainty on the one hand, and the quantity of experience on the other. It is the perception of new types of risk in the face of which the individual does not feel sufficiently protected (Ilišin, Radin, 2007; Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006; Ule, 2010). If the thesis regarding the transition effects holds, then the expectation arises that the part of this phenomenon of a low level of trust is transitional in nature, but it is not clear just how long this transition or period of adjustment will last. Trust or a lack of it is a fairly stable trait of individuals, and any change is usually associated with the collective dynamics of the degree of trust, for example a consequence of an increase or decrease in general social welfare.

Conclusions

Students are entering the future, which seems worse than the past and present lives of their parents. The crisis of employment affects young educated people the most. In times of the economic boom, young graduates with employments for a definite period, low starting incomes, some or no syndicate rights, represented a cheap reservoir of qualified labour force for capital owners, whose profits grew immensely. But, with the economic crisis, the position of young educated people has considerably changed (Ule et al., 2011). They are more and more educated but at the same time their unemployment rates are higher than ever. So today’s young people, who are looking for their first employment, are the most vulnerable group in the society and are marginalised on the labour market, excluded from the main currents of the society, and hence also excluded from the sources of power. Without economic and political representatives, they also have only a few rights and privileges and thus a lower social status. Growing up in late modernity is indeed a complex social process, which reveals fundamental social contradictions.
This difficult position is worsened by the “massivization of tertiary education” and by the “Bologna process”, which proved to be a tool for making university studies the market goods and which is subjecting universities to the “logic of capital” (Lerougetel, 2003). This is transforming tertiary education to a sort of “assembly line”, where there is no time and place where students could think about what they are actually doing and what they will do with the acquired knowledge.

European and Slovenian youth research data show that staying in education is the basic strategy of young people, with which they are prolonging social and economic dependence on their parents and other institutions (Du Bois-Reymond, Chisholm, 2006; Walther, 2006). Due to the changed role of peers and increased competitiveness for limited resources (desired schools, employment) the importance of generational solidarity is decreasing. Young people rely heavily on their parents’ support and the alliance with parents is prolonging from secondary to tertiary education. Students are not in conflict with the classic authorities (parents, institutions), but are focusing their attention on biographical solutions to structural, societal problems. They are increasingly more concerned with their individual life-courses, achievements and their position in the society.

German youth researches also ascertain that contemporary students are in a way very realistic and pragmatic, in the sense that they are engaged in public life only when their engagement is connected with very practical personal benefits and emotional profits (Hurrelmann, Mathias, 2006). When the assessment is positive, they are highly motivated; but they also quickly become demotivated in projects in which they see no personal opportunities or pleasures. And projects which require high reflexivity, responsible planning, critical awareness, care for others are usually the second kind of projects – for example educational projects, civil society movements, political engagement, etc.

If we compare current data about the youth with data from the second half of the preceding century, we could talk about considerable narrowing of motivational perspectives. Instead of a presumably inherent ideological relation youth-progress, which served as a slogan for emancipatory and revolutionary movements of modernity, today we have a new, also presumably inherent relation youth-individualisation of life, which works as a slogan for the new privatism of a globalised consumer society. And this shift is not innocent, since it is one of the keystones to historical deviation of the developed societies from the emancipatory ideals of enlightenment and thus carries the dangers of slipping into societal (political) anaemia.

The changed life circumstances of today’s youth are thus hyper-complex, hard to perceive and unmanageable for young people. The growing uncertainty of transition to adulthood is a common denominator of the youth across Europe (Walther, 2006). State and public support systems do not always operate in accordance with the needs and concerns of all young people. Strategies of systemic
inclusion have lost their legitimacy. The same factors can affect the course of life in a restrictive or a liberating way. Besides the standard factors such as social and national origin and gender, the importance of nonstandard factors, such as sociocultural capital, communicative skills, and emotional stability is growing.

If today’s young people as a heterogeneous social group have anything in common, it is this impeded or prohibited access to full citizenship. In conditions in which social exclusion of the youth is systemic and not random, and the educational system is an imperative for young people at least in their twenties, while at the same time it controls, selects, and rejects, when responsibility for their biography must be borne increasingly early in their childhood, and children must already be mature enough for important decisions, this hindered access or exclusion of young people from citizenship rights implies arrogance and cynicism, and it is destructive for citizenship identity and the sense of belonging.

Therefore, considering these unfavourable circumstances, today’s students’ movements are a “natural” response or even a desperate cry for help. But, can they make a change? Is their struggle a first sign of future changes or just a symptom, a reflection of contemporary conditions? Do the young have enough will, strength and motivation to firmly defy “the unbeatable” and merciless power of capital? Are they paving the way for a new ethics and possibly a redistribution of power in the society? It remains to be answered in the future.

References


