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## A SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN YOUTH

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the results of three pieces of empirical research conducted in 1986, 1999 and 2004 respectively, on a representative sample of youth in Croatia and a control sample of those above 30 in the latest research. One aim of the data review is to obtain insights into the basic contours of the sociological profile of contemporary Croatian youth and changes that occurred in the observed period, detecting possible intergenerational differences. The data comparison showed the limited dynamics of the changes in the young population and the relative proximity of the attitudes of the young and the older population in Croatia.*

**Key words:** Croatia, youth, social status, problems, values, political participation, leisure, interests, socialization

## RITRATTO SOCIOLOGICO DELL'ATTUALE GIOVENTÙ CROATA

### SINTESI

*Il contributo presenta i risultati di tre ricerche empiriche condotte negli anni 1986, 1999 e 2004 su un campione rappresentativo dei giovani in Croazia e, nell'ultima, anche su un campione di controllo composto dalla popolazione maggiore di 30 anni. Uno degli scopi dell'analisi dei dati è stato ottenere una conoscenza dei lineamenti del profilo sociologico dell'attuale gioventù croata, nonché dei cambiamenti verificatisi nel periodo esaminato, rilevando le possibili differenze intergenerazionali. Il confronto dei dati ha dimostrato una modesta dinamica di cambiamenti nella popolazione giovanile e una relativa affinità tra gli atteggiamenti dei giovani e quelli della popolazione più adulta in Croazia.*

**Parole chiave:** Croazia, giovani, condizione sociale, problemi, valori, partecipazione politica, tempo libero, interessi, socializzazione

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Scientific research into the young population was conducted in Croatia in the late 1950's, while systematic study began in the 1970's. The focal point of this research is the Institute for Social Research, with more than 40 scientific projects conducted over almost five decades of continued observation of the phenomena of youth. The thematic focuses of these projects are the various issues relevant for the study of youth, which provide sociologically founded insights into the characteristics of Croatian youth.

This paper is based on three pieces of research conducted over the last two decades to obtain a sociological portrait of the young generation in Croatia. These studies are: *The Status, Consciousness and Behaviour of the Croatian Young Generation* (N=1.250), *The Value System and Social Changes Amongst Youth* (N=1.700) and *Youth and European Integration Processes* (N=2.000) and a control group of people older than 30 (N=1.000).<sup>1</sup>

These studies were conducted on a representative sample of young people from the whole of Croatia, where four basic semi-professional groups (high school students, university students, unemployed and employed) were represented proportionally and in three cohorts (ages 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29). All three studies used the same instrument, which enabled longitudinal monitoring of certain issues and phenomena. This discovery of the dynamics of changes in the young population, accompanied by the introduction of the control sample provided the basis for discovering the specificities of the contemporary younger population. For this reason, the following review of the data presented will be dominated by comparative data on youth in different periods, accompanied by a comparison of the young and the older groups in 2004. Before systematization of the data review we shall briefly elaborate the conceptualisation of the research used, that is to explain the specificity of the Croatian social context and the theoretical approach to young people.

### THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF GROWING UP IN CROATIA

The mid 1980's in Croatia was a period of late, well elaborated socialism that differed from other socialistic regimes by systems of self-government and social-owned property. The undisputed leader and political arbiter Josip Broz Tito had been dead for five years and the strength of the ideological dogmas had clearly waned – especially among youth (Santrić, 1989). Also, warnings

were heard regarding the disintegration of the federative community of Yugoslavia (in which Croatia, after Slovenia, was the most economically developed republic) together with an economic crisis. In 1990 Croatia left behind the disintegrating socialist system and the former state and became one of many transition countries.

The first decade in Croatia was more turbulent than in the rest of the post-socialist countries. Alongside the problems which all transition countries faced in a more or less successful manner, Croatia experienced armed conflicts that lasted for several years. A war waged on its own territory unavoidably left long-lasting economic and social consequences. At the same time changes related to the foundation of the new social and political system occurred, especially affecting the political and economic system. The new political system was normatively founded on liberal-democratic values, and the economy on capitalistic postulates. In principle, this means the acceptance of political pluralism, the rule of law, tolerance, respect of human and minority rights, freedom of the press, the inviolability of private property, development of entrepreneurship and a market oriented economy.

At the beginning of the 1990's there was obvious euphoria among Croatian citizens, stimulated by the state's independence, national affirmation and abolition of the totalitarian political system, which altogether eased some of the problems that occurred right from the very beginning of the transition. In other words, despite the proposed normative and institutional-political framework, the real processes in Croatia were not conducted in accordance with the proclaimed principles. This was a reason for establishing of the ethnically homogenous state with predomination of the concept of national integration and renewal of the traditional values. The political monopole of one single party (positioned at the right political spectre), whose style of ruling included elements of authoritarianism and clientelism lasted for a decade. The public media were acted more in the service of the ruling party than in the name of the ordinary citizens, human and minority rights were often violated without corresponding sanctions (Kasapović, 2001; Katunarić, 1995; Lalović, 2000; Zakošek, 2002). The deficient democratisation of Croatian society, accompanied by the involvement of the Croatian Army in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributed to the international political isolation of Croatia. At the same time, in the midst of the war state-owned property began to be transformed, followed by privatisation, and the situation made wide-scale abuse possible. The conversion of property and the restructuring of the economy resulted in the mass destruction of businesses, loss of jobs,

1 The integral results of these studies were presented in four papers: *Fragments of Youth, Youth and Transition in Croatia, Croatian Youth and European Integration* and *Youth: Problem or Resource?*

a fall in living standards over a broad social strata and a pronounced deepening of social differences. These changes also resulted in a fall in the quality of life and the loss of social security which people had known for many generations as they had been brought up under socialism. The end of the war and the experience of life in new circumstances enabled the people's dissatisfaction with the manner and dynamics of social transformation to emerge. This was intensified by the fact that citizens had significant expectations for a rapid improvement on an individual and social level. Instead, Croatia lost its comparative advantages relatively rapidly from the beginning of the transition period and ended up at the bottom in terms of success in the transition countries.

The second decade of transition began with a one-time-basis change of government, and the third peaceful change of government occurred at the end of 2003. This marked Croatia's entrance into a period of democratic consolidation, but there were also political changes, such as the democratisation of society, liberalisation of media space (with an increase in the critical power of the media), with greater protection of human and minority rights. These trends began with the political takeover by the left coalition at the beginning of 2000, but after less than four years the political party that led the country in the first decade of transition, took over leadership again. The reformed ruling party made a couple of important symbolic gestures to build up democratic norms and standards. Still, some trends have been very persistent: the judiciary has not become more efficient, and political actors have not adopted democratic standards of functioning to a sufficient extent. Also, the economic development of Croatia has not improved, propulsive entrepreneurial activity has not been realised, competitiveness has not been raised, the negative consequences of privatisation have not been repaired and state debts and the sale of potentially valuable economic resources have continued. Most citizens are still dissatisfied since their standard of living has not improved and the unemployment rate has not decreased.

The young are one of the population segments most evidently and rapidly affected by these processes and changes. The reasons for this are multiple and partially related to the specificity of the transition from childhood to adulthood, and partially to the specificity of the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic system.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH INTO YOUTH IN CROATIA

A relatively low age is the universal common characteristic of youth, although researchers are not unani-

mous in their definition of the boundaries of youth. When it comes to Croatia, analysis has shown that it is sociologically justified to consider the population from 15 to 30 years as young, or youth, since the oldest cohort (25 to 29 years) is more similar to the population younger than 25 than to the population older than 30 (Ilišin, Mendeš, Potočnik, 2003, 40).<sup>2</sup> However, besides the fact that different age definitions of youth may produce methodological and cognitive difficulties, there is also a problem of youth as a temporary characteristic. H. Bradley (1997) deals with this, saying that age is an important source of personal identity and an unreliable basis for collective (group) identity (since age is inevitably temporary), which makes articulation of common interests, problems and needs difficult. The same author points out the fact that age is "a neglected dimension of inequality" (Bradley, 1997, 148), where we can find a specific type of stratification – the most powerful being in the middle age group. This means that the younger and the older cohorts are in a worse position than the middle cohort (Turner, 1989; Županov, 1996).

A comparison of the entire social status of youth with the status of older people indicates their marginal social position (Ilišin, 1999). More specifically, contemporary young people are marked by a slower uptake of permanent social roles: from professional and family to the public roles. This forced or wilfully chosen prolongation of the status of youth consequently limits the possibilities of expressing the innovative and creative potential of youth, and at the same time becomes a suitable basis for the appearance and persistence of various problems of and with young people.

At the same time, young people may be considered as both a social resource and a social problem (Griffin, 1993; Roche, Tucker, 1997; Schizzerotto, Gasperoni, 2001). A resource approach to youth implies that youth is observed both as a potential source of innovation and as the representatives of a desirable future and bearers of the dominant social values transferred from generation to generation. Thus, the young are a vital social asset and should be provided with the optimal social conditions for development. In this context, the young are regarded as both a future social power and an important present social resource. In other words, the social importance of the young emerges from a potential that must be activated while they are young, without postponement. Besides that, the permanent decrease in the demographic share of youth in developed countries suggests that the young should be (if not now, then certainly in the future) treated as a relatively scarce resource. A problem approach to the youth (i.e. the source of the problems or the group with the problems) means that

<sup>2</sup> Related to this, it should be mentioned that Croatia is one of the group of countries with unfavourable demographic trends which also causes the reduction and ageing of the population. The proportion of young people in the total population decreased from 27.7% in 1953 to 20.6% in 2001.

youth are observed as a population in a sensitive period of development. The young are also susceptible to various forms of deviant behaviour, and are regarded as a population that is not integrated into society in a satisfactory manner and a group that has to be protected by society. This viewpoint is often related to the negative public image of youth and to society's distrust of youth. The consequences are the marginal social status of youth and the paternalistic relationship between society and youth.

However, independently from a theoretical approach, a common aim of all contemporary societies is the adequate social integration of youth, provided that the corresponding conditions exist (Furlong, Guidikova, 2001). In practical terms this means that the development of their existing capacities has to be stimulated, especially in unstable periods marked with rapid changes, since "...as always, aim of youth aim is to create history, the present and the future, and society's duty is to provide youth with adequate foundations for the fulfilment of this duty" (Youniss et al., 2002, 121).

For many reasons, contemporary society recognizes the young as a vulnerable segment of the population, as changes occurring in the contemporary world almost always and everywhere affect young people most. A basic reason for this is the fact that the most young people stand on the dividing line between the protected world of childhood and the competitive world of adults – who expect adequate social integration and that young people will take on a permanent social role. However, this integration – both today and in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – is a complex process in which the young often distance themselves from society, seeing it as insufficiently friendly due to their vulnerability and specific life experiences (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997). The phenomenon, called prolonged youth, (Brown, Larson, Saraswathi, 2002; Cavalli, Galland, 1995; Griffin, 1993; Roche, Tucker, 1997; Ule 1988) is characterised by the increasing length of institutionalised education, uncertain employability (especially in secure and well-paid jobs), difficulty reaching socio-economic independence, prolongation of dependence on the family of origin and insufficient inclusion in the processes of social (political) decision-making. Prolonged youth logically results in slow social integration and persistence of the young's dependence on society, i.e. older people.

At the same time, the contemporary world is changing rapidly, which makes it both a risky place for growing up and an environment in which the way youth is conceived as a transition period to adulthood are in constant change (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Furlong, Cartmel, 1997; Ingelhart, 1997; Kipke, 1999; Mortimer, Larson, 2002; Pais, 2000; Walter, 2006; Wyn, White, 1997). Globalisation has a particularly powerful contribution to the far reaching consequences, as do the rapid development of information-communication technology,

economic changes, increased migration, which includes an increase in the risks and pressure for modernization and reduces and transforms previous forms of social reproduction (Larson, 2002; Ruddick, 2003; Youniss et al., 2002). Modernization processes in the contemporary world contribute to the weakening of traditional relationships and forms of value and the transfer of behavioural patterns. As a result, the young are forced to face up to an increasingly uncertain and difficult search for their identity and individual strategies of social integration (Bradley, 1997; Ingelhart, 1997; Miles, 2000; Ule et al., 2000; Wyn, Dwyer, 1999).

The risks faced by youth are further extended and deepened in transition countries – both in comparison to the young from more developed countries and from earlier generations of youth from socialist societies. Growing up in this unique socio-historical period is marked by a double transition: firstly – young people are undergoing the unique transition period from youth to adulthood, and secondly – this process is taking place in society which is undergoing a transformation itself. Their socialization takes place at a time when the institutions, processes and norms that used to direct transition to the world of adults have either vanished or undergone a profound transformation. Although it is generally believed that the young are the "natural winners of the transition" (Young People in Changing Societies, 2000, 12), as they are more flexible and better equipped to accept the changes brought in by social transformation – analytical insights have shown that youth in transition countries are more exposed to new and greater risks than to new and better perspectives. There is also evidence that poverty has deepened and social differences have widened with the decrease in state and social support for social reproduction and promotion; competition on the labour market is becoming more fierce, with permanently high youth unemployment rates; social insecurity is increasing, with an increase in criminal offences and various forms of deviant behaviour; health care is more and more unattainable; competition and the pressure to obtain as high an education as possible is increasing, with decreasing educational opportunities for the young from socially deprived strata; former social values have been devalued, which has led to a decrease in the importance of intergenerational transmission; the installation and interiorization of new values have slowed and young people are adrift in an individual search for identity, integrity and abilities in choosing their life aspirations (Kovatcheva, 2001; Roberts, 2003; Tomusk, 2000; Ule et al., 2000; Wallace, Kovatcheva, 1998).

Experience and research into the social status and problems of the young in transition countries, according to K. Roberts (2003, 484), call for the reaffirmation of the traditional (conventional) youth paradigm in sociological science that researches the relationship between their

social background, orientation and aims. Transition societies have showed that life chances for the young are not primarily individually created. In other words, individual life choices occur in an existing social structure and they are limited by the availability of the resources needed (Cote, 2002). An insight into the structural restrictions, first of all into the socio-economic and socio-class dimension, is a necessary foundation for an analysis of the cultural dimension of young people's lives – such as values, leisure, consumer behaviour, sub-cultural patterns and life styles (Miles, 1998; Roberts, 2003; Wyn, Dwyer, 1999; Wyn, White, 1997). Shortly, major social changes in all post-socialist societies have clearly shown that the accomplishments of the youth and their future social status are dominantly conditioned by their starting positions, which are, in turn, the consequence of the given socio-economic and socio-structural sets. Contemporary generations of young people are less able than previous ones to make use of various channels of social promotion. The reasons lie in inadequate social support, which is the reason for the increasing importance of family resources, i.e. socio-class modelled possibilities and limitations.

Alongside this we should add that the circumstances in the transition countries, including Croatia, do not stimulate intergenerational integration. Simply, new competitive conditions, and economic and social changes motivate the choice of individual strategies for occupying the best possible social positions. In principle, this destroys inter-group solidarity and the possibilities of articulation of generational interests and needs.

## PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS OF CROATIAN YOUTH

### Young People's Social Status and Problems

Firstly, it should be said that most young respondents in Croatia believe that youth lasts until the age of 29, whereas we can differentiate youth-centred and adult-centred youth. Youth-centred orientation is marked by young people's aspiration to remain in that status for as long as possible, the accentuation of socio-economic independence as the most important criteria for adulthood, accentuation of the advantages of youth because of their flexibility and innovative potential, and the wish to move the upper boundary of youth beyond the age of 30. On the other hand, adult-centered youth do not believe that they differ in any way from older people, they are more prone to accept the paternalistic relationship of society towards young people, and they accept the traditional criteria of the adulthood (i.e. marriage) to a greater extent.

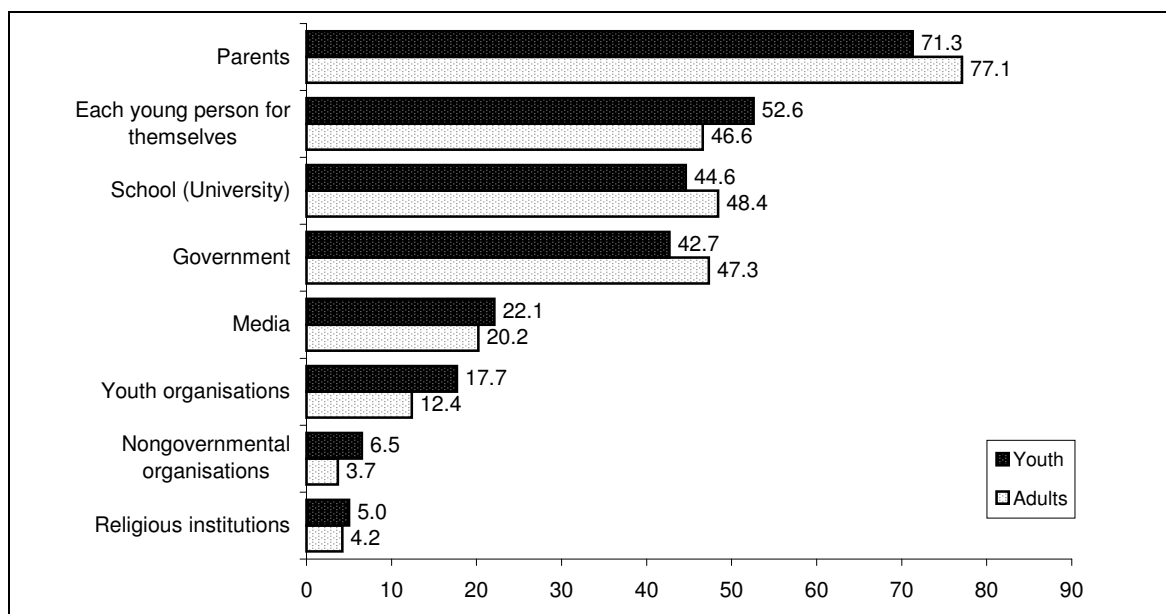
The research data have shown that some tendencies are closely related to the stages of growing up. It was detected that the oldest youth cohort is focused on youth who have finished formal education and succeeded in

gaining employment. Related to this, it was found that the most evident trend of relatively long time spent studying at university and the tendency to be unemployed equally affects all youth older than 20. The results also showed that youth, especially men, are inclined to postpone marriage. This life step is especially related to the provision of private housing, which was managed by only a few respondents (15%). Most of them are not married (85%) and live with their parents (75%), first of all due to their financial inability to leave the parental home (76%) and rent or buy their own housing space. Shortly, the inability to resolve their accommodation problem contributes to a great extent to the postponement of taking on permanent social roles (such as starting a family), and, generally, to the slow socio-economic independence.

Young Croatian people are mostly affected by socio-economic problems, which concretely means that two fifths of them emphasize their low standard of living, the lack of prospects in life and unemployment. It is indicative that unemployment is no longer seen as an isolated and exclusively generational problem (as it was during the socialist period). Here young people see unemployment as a problem with complex causes and long-lasting negative implications for both the young and society as a whole. It is interesting that despite the ever-present "moral panic" only one fifth of the young mentions alcoholism and drug-abuse as major generational problems. Still, these problems exist since the research data show that in the period from 1986 to 2004 the number of those who frequently or occasionally consume alcohol has increased from the already high 75% to 85%, and for "soft" drugs this number has risen from 17% to 35%.

The data obtained indicate that the young have become aware of the exceptionally high social stratification that encompassed Croatian society during its transformation to capitalist society. Evidence for this are the 62% of youth who think that the provision of equal chances for education and employment would contribute to a more efficient solution to the problems of the young. It is evident that most young people have already faced difficulties regarding educational resources and the tough competition on the labour market, which have made them sensitive to the inequality of opportunities. Besides that, 47% of them believe that the young's participation in decision making on all levels would help find a better solutions to generational problems. They are followed by those who regard that more strict punishment of drug dealers (41%) and modernizing secondary and higher education (37%) would help in solving these problems.

Migration to foreign countries is listed as one of the strategies for overcoming the current restrictions on the prospects of young people. From 1986 to 2004 the number of those who do not want to move abroad decreased from 33% to 22%, while the number of those who would leave the country forever doubled (from



**Graph 1: Ranking of the most important factors for solving the problems of youth – the young and older groups – 2004 (%).**

**Graf 1: Razvrstitev najpomembnejših dejavnikov pri reševanju problemov mladih – skupini starejših in mlajših – 2004 (%).**

13% to 26%), and a stable two fifths of them would like to live abroad for a long time.

It is indicative to look at the attitudes of the young towards those considered to be the most important in the resolution of their problems (Graph 1).

The results presented in Graph 1 show that the young mostly believe in individual efforts in solving their problems, while they most frequently rely upon their family and their own efforts. Still, they are aware that the government has to create a legal and social framework to enable individual efforts to have results. They also expect society's help in the area of education since they know that the adequate education or training for a job is a prerequisite for employment and assurance of making a living and social promotion.

Educational accomplishments are obviously important to the young and the statistical data on the educational structure (Graph 2) show that each new generation is more educated than the previous one (where secondary education has expanded to the greatest extent).<sup>3</sup>

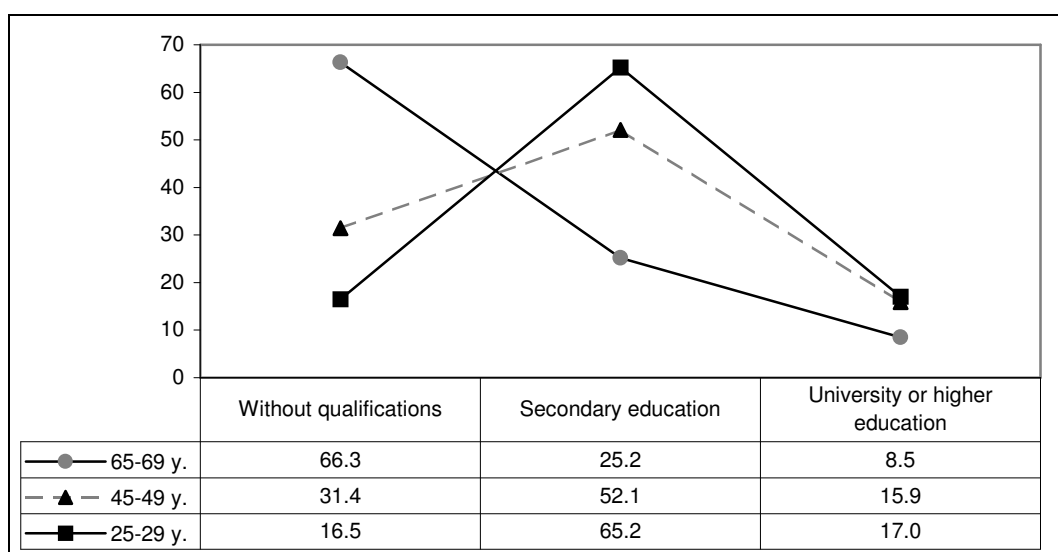
The research data show that youth in Croatia predominantly see education as a means of individual development (58%), and for acquiring the capacities which are prerequisite for the satisfactory resolution of basic existential problems – such as obtaining a desirable job

(45%) and socio-economic independence (43%) – after completing their education. The importance of education as a means of social promotion – obtaining a better material standard (40%) and prestigious social status (27%) – is secondary, while the young regard the socialization role of school as the most important (19%).

Although important changes occurred in the structure of the unemployed in Croatia from the 1980's to the 2000's – first of all with regards to a decrease in the younger cohorts – youth unemployment rates still indicate unemployment as one of the most evident problems of the younger generation. In other words, the youth unemployment rate for almost two decades has encompassed one third of the young active population, who are additionally affected by more frequent employment in poorly paid temporary jobs and by work on the "black market" which was reported by two fifths of youth. The young are chronically dissatisfied with their position in the labour market, and they state that the results of the war (36%), insufficient economic development (29%) and badly managed privatisation (28%) are the actual reasons for their unemployment.

Good general education (55%), communication skills (48%), knowledge of foreign languages (36%) and educational qualifications (35%) are most important for

<sup>3</sup> Another important tendency is an increase in the educational accomplishments of women, which has resulted in the fact that women from the generations after 1965 have on average become more highly educated than the men. In 2001 in a 25–29 cohort 20.4% of women and 13.6% of men had university education (Ilišin, Mendeš, Potočnik, 2003, 64).



**Graph 2: Accomplished educational degrees in terms of age, according to the Croatian Census in 2001.**

**Graf 2: Dosežena stopnja izobrazbe glede na starost po hrvaškem Popisu prebivalstva 2001.**

successful employment. Only one fourth regard IT skills as important, which is consistent with the number of young people who do not use computers (principally since they do not own a computer).

There are not many statistically significant differences between the younger and the older cohorts in the presented data, but, they are very indicative. Thus, we can expect most of the older cohort to be married (90%), to own their housing space (80%), and not to use computers in three fifths of cases. However, the results showed that the older cohort consistently demonstrate a certain level of distrust towards the young, and give greater support to repressive measures in dealing with problems with young people and less support to the foundation of institutions and funds for various youth initiatives than the youth do. In accordance to this, the older are more prone to address the responsibility of solving young people's problems though the parents and less directly with the young, which is an indicator of the persistence of the paternalistic relationship of society with youth.

### Values of the Youth

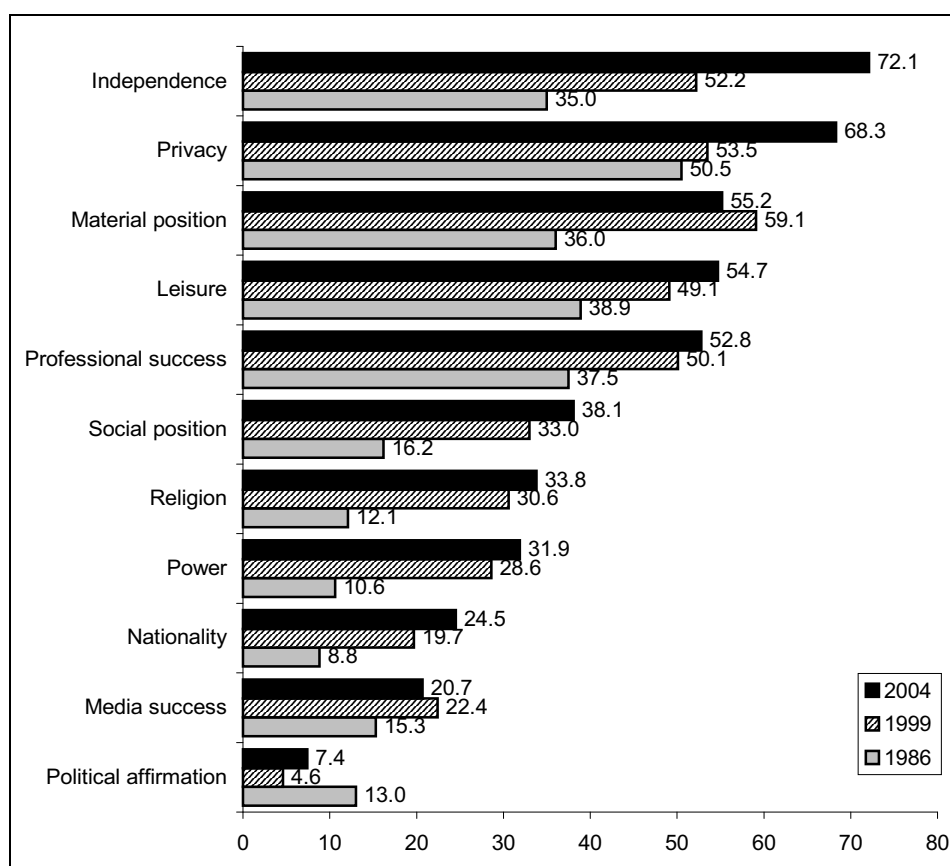
Both changes in hierarchy and the value structure accompanied the social changes in Croatia, with all observed values represented more heavily in the transition period than in the middle of the 1980's (Graph 3).

As we can see from the graph, the young largely accept both individual and family values, characterized by privacy. On the other hand, the aims that marks life in a community i.e. sociability, are ranked lower. This ten-

dency toward withdrawal into the world of individuality characterizes at least the last two decades and there are many reasons for this. We have to emphasize that withdrawal from life in the community in a traditional sense relates to a deficit of goals that could provide minimal programming for the life of the young and their emancipation, i.e. the entrance into the world of adulthood. It is clear that two thirds of the young people polled do not consider high social status as desirable, while politics is almost not at all regarded as a desirable goal, which indicates the constant alienation of the young from the sphere of decision making.

Graph 3 shows that the value of religion among young people increased threefold from 1986 to 2004, and accordance with this youth religiosity also increased – from 30% to 73%, while the number of non-religious decreased from 48% to 11%. Something similar happened with the value of nationality, and with its increase the national affiliation of youth also increased.<sup>4</sup> Research into youth from 2004 showed that the attitudes of moderate national identification increased (53% in 2004 and 26% in 1986), those who mark openness to the world are at the constant level of two fifths, while ethnocentric statements are last in the given hierarchy (although their acceptance doubled during the observed period). The questions regarding the ethnic distance (1999 and 2004) from certain nations showed that the distance increased towards all nations, including Croats, over five years. However the last in this ranking are constantly the nations of the former Yugoslav federation and the Russians, while the middle of the ladder is occupied by some central

4 Croatia is almost not multi-confessional (since almost 90% of citizens identify themselves as Catholics), the reasons for this lie in its national homogeneity. Concretely, the proportion of Croats in the total population increased from 78% (1991) to 92% (2001).



**Graph 3: A comparison of value rankings in 1986, 1999 and 2004 (%).**

**Graf 3: Primerjava lestvice vrednot v 1986, 1999 in 2004 (%).**

European nations (Czechs and Hungarians) with something more than average values. The best rankings belong to Croats, citizens of the European west and south-west and Americans (the same is true for older respondents).

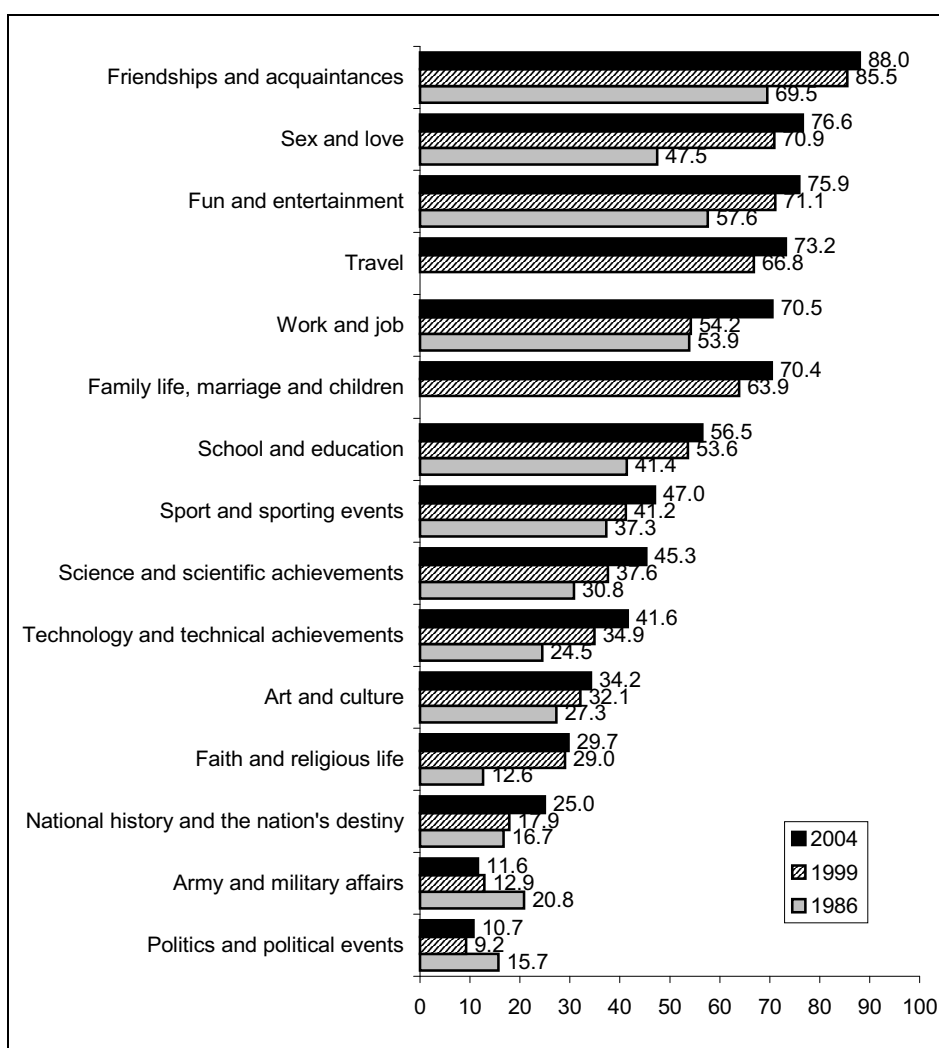
The relative importance of religion and nationality is partially confirmed by the data on the social distances of youth from 1999. It was found that around two fifths of youth regard national and confessional identification as important in marriage, and around one fifth consider them to be important for friendship. Still, in both relationships, moral virtues, intelligence and an understanding of life (91% to 52%) are far more important to youth, while they rank political beliefs and social background as least important.

The data on the estimation of the factors important for social upgrading also indicate the value system of the young, which at the same time reflects the hidden values of Croatian society. In this sense, significant changes happened from 1999 to 2004. Specifically, in the first survey the first five positions were occupied by individual capacities (84%), effort and good job performance (76%), luck (75%), and higher education and honesty (each 68%). Five years later family relationships and acquaintances were in first place (an increase from 66% to 82%),

followed by luck and higher education (81% each), work effort and individual capacities (79–78%). At the same time, political aptitude, activities in political parties and obedience to superiors (approximately 40%) were last, but in 1999 the least important was bribing persons in influential positions (32%) (it rose by 20% after five years), and national identification decreased in 2004 (46%) – becoming a relatively unimportant characteristic.

It is interesting that the older respondents' highest rankings are given to the value of privacy (described as a peaceful family life), which is highly ranked by four fifths of the respondents, while individual identity and material position are both equally accepted by older and younger groups. Leisure activities and professional success are accepted by less than half of the older group, who accept the government, media success and social position one third less than the youth. At the same time, those from the older group accept religion to a greater extent (more than half of the older group), nationality and political confirmation – which are however still in their case at the bottom of the rankings. Thus, it is obvious that traditional values are far more significant for the older group than for the younger. The greater traditionalism of the older groups is also confirmed by their greater religiosity, more ex-





**Graph 4: A comparative outline of the hierarch of major interests in 1986, 1999 and 2004 (%).**

**Graf 4: Primerjalni pregled razvrstitve glavnih interesov v 1986, 1999 in 2004 (%).**

pressed attitudes on the ladder of national affiliations and show greater ethnic distinction. The older express more tolerance than youths higher education, corruptive behaviour, political aptitude and activity, and obedience to superiors for social advancement, while they seldom state lucky circumstances and their own abilities. These differences indicate the influence of life experience, i.e. the fact that the older group had more frequently been affected by the ugly side of acquiring a desirable social status.

#### Political Values and Participation by Youth

All research consistently shows that the youth perceive the phenomena of politics as marginal. Thus, it is

not unexpected that they first of all estimate the influence of the young as satisfactory among friends and family (90%), somehow less (approximately 60%) at work and in the educational environment, and very weak (14%) in the local community and national politics. In accordance with this, three quarters of them believe that the young are not sufficiently represented in Croatian political life, and slightly fewer believe that the political representation of young people in government (especially in parliament) should be enforced by law.<sup>5</sup>

Social, and especially, political, youth activism are at low levels, where there is a noticeable tendency for it to decrease in general (Graph 4).

5 The statistical data on political representation of youth in governmental bodies substantiate these attitudes and although youth in Croatia count for approximately 22% of electorate there are only 6% young people in local government, and only 1.5% in the Sabor - National Parliament (Ilišin, 2006).

The data presented are supplemented by the fact that 85% of the young are ready to vote at the elections, 68% are ready to sign a petition, but only one fifth are ready to take part in the work of political parties or organise a strike, while only 7% would give money to a political party. The young believe that they could be motivated to take an active part in society through various activities – from inclusion in the decision making process (88%) to their inclusion in the work of political parties (60%), but only 15% think that lowering the age for voting (which is currently at 18 at the moment) could have a positive impact. As the social actors who could motivate young people to social activism, the young recognize friends and family in first place (33%), the educational system (20%), television and non-governmental youth organisations, while only 6% of youth think animation by political parties could be efficient.

Despite their weak political participation, young people have firm political attitudes and values that are mostly consistent with the democratic system. For instance, they accept all 11 values of the Croatian Constitution to a great extent (59% to 91%), where even the tendency of this acceptance to increase was noted – with only support to the democratic and multi-party system weakening slightly. The democratic potential of youth is visible from their high understanding of the democratic principles and rules, although they lean towards a harmonized understanding of politics. This is reflected in the increase of acceptance of the statements (in a period 1999–2004) that conflicts among different interest groups cause harm to the state (from 58% to 70%), that the role of the opposition is to support and not to criticize the government (from 35% to 45%), and that citizens do not have the right to strike if it endangers public order (from 32% to 43%).

Young people's trust in political institutions is low: 9% do not trust political parties, around one fifth the government, parliament and the judiciary. On the other hand 54% trust the Church, followed by television, radio and the President of the Republic (Stjepan Mesić) with 45–42%. But, despite this (dis)trust in these institutions, when it comes to the perception of the political actors who could contribute to overcoming Croatia's difficulties, church dignitaries are at the very bottom with only 2%. In this case, most of the young rely upon experts and the intelligentsia (51%), the younger generation (40%), political parties (37%) and entrepreneurs and managers (33%).

The major social problems in transition in Croatia are, according to the young, unemployment (59%), economic problems (49%), corruption (28%) and crime in privatisation (25%). Corruption is principally noticed in the judiciary (55%), the police (49%), and the health system and state governance (each 45%). The war and its consequences (62%), the immorality of the new entrepreneurs, crime and the bad politics of the ruling

party (HDZ) from 1990 to 2000 (each 42%) are seen by youth as the causes of the current economic and social problems in Croatian society. More than 80% of youth observe social inequalities based on wealth, employment and education, while one third accentuates political and national inequalities and one fifth see inequality in the case of religion.

Young people's ranking of political values significantly indicates their perception of political reality. According to their opinion, the most important aim of the Croatian Government should be to reduce unemployment (91%), followed by combating crime and corruption (86%), economic development and growth (81%) and assurance of social justice and security for everyone (76%). Croatia's membership of the EU is a political priority for 42% of youth, and this result reflects the oscillation in Croatian citizens' desire for European integration (which was the most important political goal in 1990).

Regarding the difficulties that Croatia is facing on its way to join a united Europe, the respondents equally address the problems of both Croatia and the EU, with an increasing number (from 1999 to 2004) of the young emphasizing the responsibility of the EU and a decreasing number placing the responsibility on Croatia. It is especially important to say that the young expect significantly more positive than negative consequences from Croatia joining the EU. However, the data show that over those five years there was a slight decrease in optimism and an increase in negative expectations. The most positive expectations were registered on an individual and socio-cultural level, whilst optimism regarding socio-economic development decreased. Moreover, due to Croatia's socio-economic unpreparedness almost two thirds of youth expect negative consequences. Different social groups were seen as potential losers of integration (farmers, pensioners, workers, the unemployed), potential winners of integration (inhabitants of the capital city and some regions, youth and all Croatian citizens) and certain winners of the integration. The following were evaluated as excellently prepared to join the EU: experts, persons who speak foreign languages, the political elite, managers and major companies (60–70%).

Political participation is a field of research marked by significant intergenerational differences. Specifically, youth differ from the older group by their less frequent participation in political affairs; they express a weak interest in politics and less trust in government institutions, and somewhat lower acceptance of the values of the democratic system. On the other hand, the young are, at least on a verbal level, more prone to taking part in various civil activities and a significantly greater number believes that their generation is a generation of social changes. The lack of deeper intergenerational ambivalence indicates that, despite the radical changes that occurred with the break up of the old and the foundation of a new political system, the mechanism of transmis-

sion of political values from the older to the younger generation still functions to a great extent, even given the democratic deficit that persists in the political consciousness of the older generation. Thus, we can suppose that parents are still one of the most important agents in the socialization of young people.

### Youth Leisure and Socialization

Models of leisure are one of the most relevant areas in youth research – both in terms of quantity and their potential socialization function in everyday life. Interests are closely related to leisure time (as a form of terminal value) and to a large extent they correspond with the activities and content of leisure time.

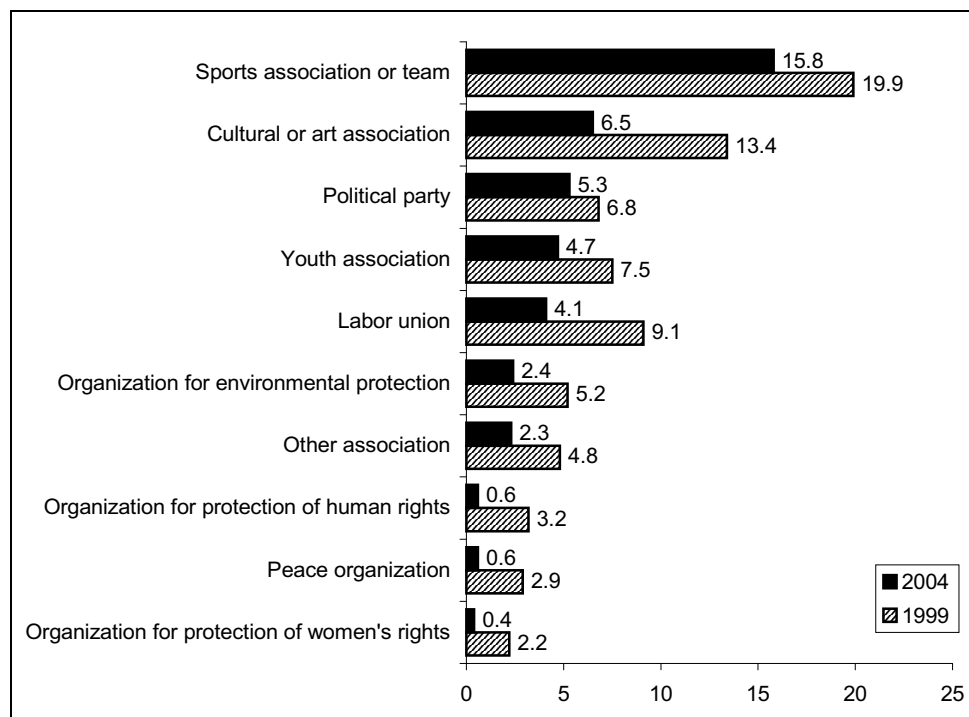
Graph 5 shows changes that have occurred in this segment in terms of interests over almost two decades.

As we can see, youth are always primarily interested in the phenomena and processes that make up the private sphere of life, while interests in the public sphere are weaker. It is interesting to note that interest in all the observed phenomena increased from 1986 to 2004 apart from the army and politics (which, again, shows their distance from the political arena).

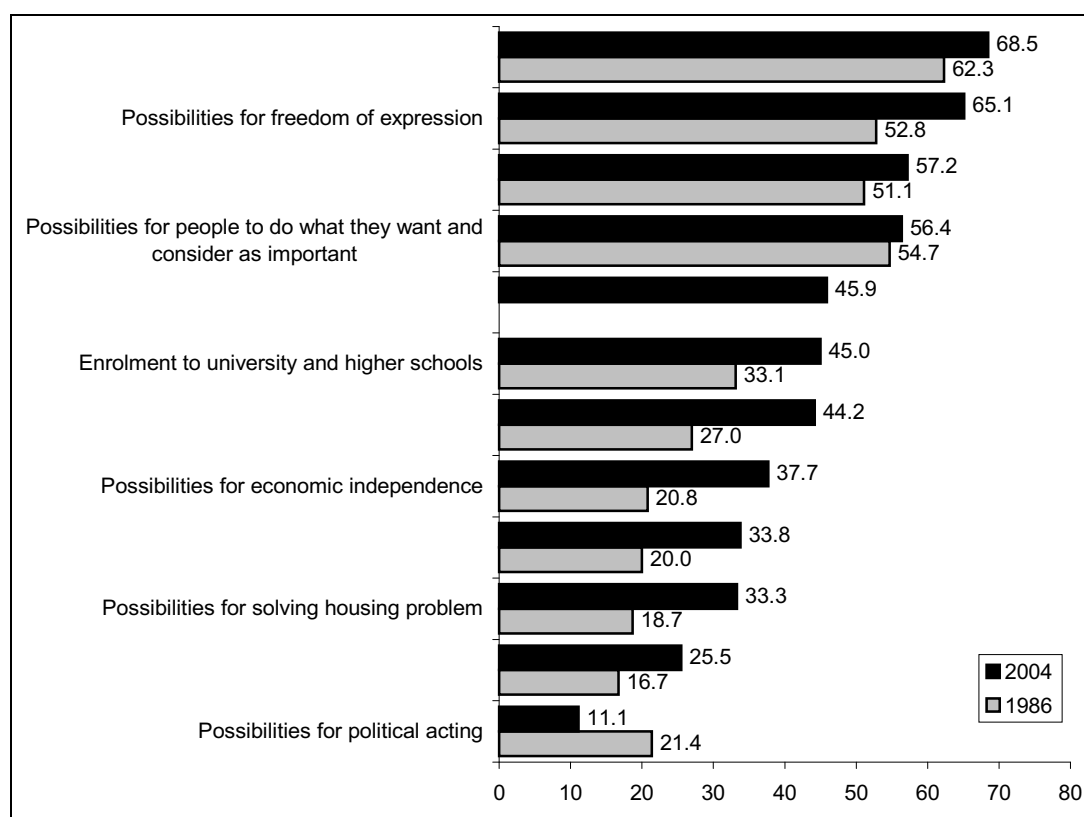
The data on the representation of various topics in communication with their friends and parents also indicate the interests of youth. 78% to 61% of youth frequently talk to their friends about going out and leisure, another friends and acquaintances, music, movies and

books, sex and love, and problems at school or work, while only one fifth discuss politics and society. The content of the communication with parents is completely different: most frequently they talk about the future, financial problems and family relationships (50%), and least frequently about sex and love (7%). These data mostly correspond with the young people's belief that family (90%) and friends (84%), followed by school (69%), books (58%), the religious community (52%) and television (50%) have the strongest impact on their socialization.

According to the research data, youth on average have 3–4 hours of free time during a day. Patterns of leisure have proved to have quite a stable structure, where in each new piece of research the number of those taking part in most of the observed activities is rising. Most youth (83–51%) frequently spend their time with friends, watching TV and videos, listening to the radio and rock music and going out to coffee bars. One third frequently read books, go on trips or have hobbies, and one fifth go to the cinema or do some form of sport. Less than one tenth listens to classical music or goes to the theatre or exhibitions, and only each fiftieth respondent takes part in humanitarian, voluntary or political work. Thus, the young in Croatia are first of all occupied with activities providing fun and entertainment, while the potentially educational content (that contributes to personal development) remains in the background when it comes to the way young people use their free time. At the same



Graph 5: A comparative outline of participation in organizations and associations in 1999 and 2004.  
Graf 5: Primerjalni pregled sodelovanja v organizacijah in združenjih v 1999 in 2004.



**Graph 6: Youth (dis)satisfaction with various social circumstances in 1986 and 2004 (%).**  
**Graf 6: Nezadovoljstvo mladih z različnimi družbenimi okoliščinami v 1986 in 2004 (%).**

time, the stability of life styles and interest orientations indicate the constant and unilateral influence of some civilization and socio-cultural elements of modern society. For these reasons, in each of the past four decades, each new generation has formed new patterns of everyday life that resembles those of the previous generations.

Comparison of the young and the older generation in terms of their leisure activities indicated important generational differences. The youth more frequently take part in almost all the observed activities, similar to the more pronounced inclusion of youth in almost all areas of interest (except family life, politics, religion and their nation). This makes leisure the area in which generational differences are most evident, and this makes it the scene of the significant influence of life cycles and situational circumstances that are significantly different for the young and for the older generation.

#### **The Young Look with Satisfaction to the Future!?**

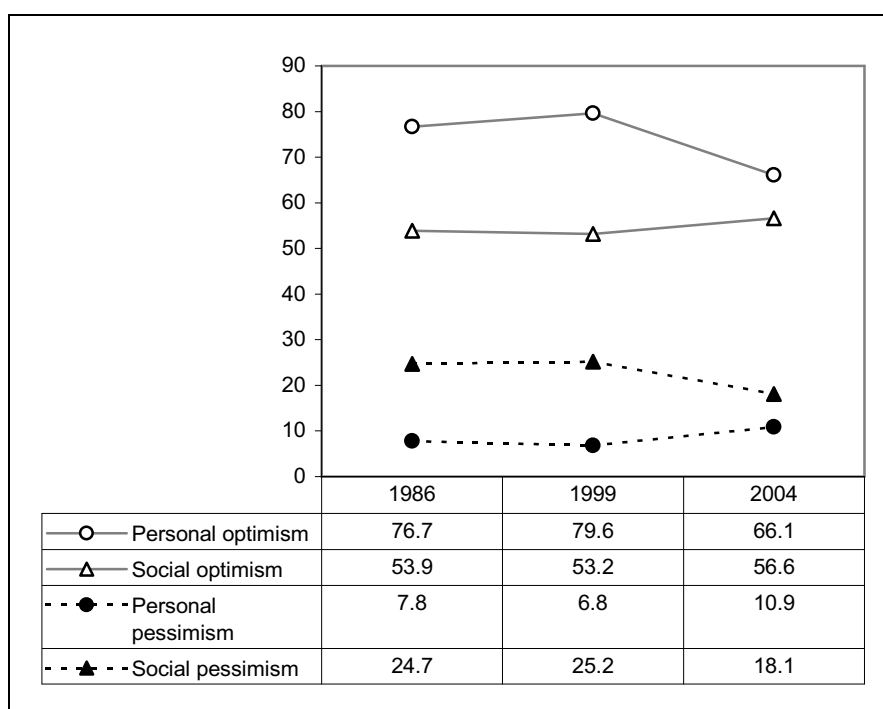
Although the research data point to a series of painful points in the everyday lives of young people, two thirds of them are on average satisfied with their lives, less than one third are apathetic, and only 8% are dis-

satisfied. Even more intriguing is the fact that contemporary youth shows higher satisfaction with various areas of their life than youth at the time of late socialism (Graph 6).

An increase in dissatisfaction was only registered regarding the possibilities of acting in the political arena, which is logically related to the decrease in young people's interest in politics. Here we can raise the question whether the impossibility of adequate political involvement decreases interest in politics or young people's disinterest prevents them recognising optimal ways of political involvement.

The observed increase in young people's satisfaction is not accompanied by an equal increase in optimism, that is the respondents' estimation whether their personal future and the future of society will be better in the future (Graph 7).

The relationship to the future indicates the persistence of the discrepancy between the strong optimism of young people with regards to their personal future and their half-optimism for society's future. Still, more recent results showed that since this discrepancy is decreasing, young people have become more aware of the interconnections between their personal fate and that of society.



**Graph 7: Personal and social optimism / pessimism of youth in 1986, 1999 and 2004 (%).**  
**Graf 7: Osebni in družbeni optimizem / pesimizem mladih v 1986, 1999 in 2004 (%).**

The optimism of young people is related to their greater expectations that positive changes will occur in Croatia in the next decade. In this context they especially expect the strengthening of the multicultural nature of Croatian society (68%), the role of the Croatian Parliament in the political life of the country (65%), political pluralism and the non-governmental sector (each 63%), as well as more rational management of the state budget (62%). On this basis we can say that Croatian youth perceive Croatia in the near future as a modern, open, pluralistic and well-founded democratic society. If this is true, the slight increase of optimism in regard to society they live in is logical.

Although some convergence of personal and social optimism takes place in the new generations, it remains a fact that personal optimism principally relates to life cycles. Thus, it was to be expected the older generation expressed lower levels of satisfaction with their personal lives and a lower level of personal optimism – the young are still more lively and they have more years ahead of them, making numerous changes possible, including those for the better.

#### FINAL REMARKS

Between 1986, 1999 and 2004 there were many radical and long-lasting political and social changes. These changes affected the younger generation to a great extent, although some patterns of consciousness and be-

haviour typical for modern societies remained stable. The results of research into young people given here in detail were therefore aimed at making it possible to outline their social profile, including a dynamic component.

The data presented should be accompanied by information on the trend of differentiation among young people, which was observed in all three pieces of research used here (Ilišin, 2007; Ilišin, Radin, 2002; Ilišin, Radin, 2007; Radin, 1988) – which have not been presented due to a lack of space. From the results it follows that the young are not a homogeneous social group. In other words, a comparison of different sub-groups of youth indicates their heterogeneity in relation to their maturity and readiness to enter the world of adulthood (linked primarily to their socio-professional status and educational accomplishments) and the type of socialization which is conditioned by social background, gender, urbanisation and the development of their region. These socio-structural and socio-cultural characteristics clearly discriminate against youth and to a great extent affect the shaping of their consciousness and patterns of behaviour. In other words, conditions of growing up and accomplished social (lack of) competitiveness are to a great extent related to their preferred life aspirations, how these are accomplished and preparation for adult life – including how they spend their leisure time.

The recorded differences between the young do not only point to their non-homogeneity when it comes to the observed phenomena, but also to deepening of social

differences and their long-lasting repercussions. Unequal availability of resources as education, housing and employment stimulate dissatisfaction amongst young people with the existing social conditions and (im)possibilities and strengthen their awareness of the importance of equality of opportunities for education and employment. It is very clear to them that the unequal availability of social resources during their early youth will create an unequal social status in adulthood. If we observe these tendencies in the light of the increasing importance of family relations for a good start in the lives of young people, and their lack of social integration and generational public involvement, we can conclude that the prospects in life for most Croatian youth are very uncertain.

The individualism of young people is evident on all levels – from life strategies and orientation to interpersonal relations. When it comes to the accomplishment of life aspirations the young principally rely on themselves and family relationships, i.e. to accomplish educational, professional, housing, family and other needs they expect help more from their parents than from the social community. This causes the process of young people's passivity to spread from the socio-political area to almost all areas of their everyday life.

The existing individualisation in life orientation is not only a result of disadvantaged social conditions, but also by processes of modernization which affect a major portion of contemporary Croatian youth. In this, Croatian young people are more similar to youth in other transition countries, but also to those from more developed European societies. However, as a form of re-traditionalisation also took place in Croatia, its effect is manifested through the clear and strong traditionalistic orientation of a significant segment of contemporary Croatian youth. As a result, we can say that young Croats are polarized into those with a modern or traditional orientation, and this is also valid for the older population. However, the young differ from the older generation principally by the fact that they are more deeply affected by the process of modernization.

Young people's political culture in many aspects testifies to the fact that they are approaching desirable democratic standards – especially in terms of acceptance of basic liberal-democratic values and readiness in principle for social engagement – but, their social power and social capital remain on rather low levels. Here, the young are aware of their social and political marginalisation and they recognize a whole spectre of measures that could help them gain a certain level of power and become active citizens. This is desirable in a democratic society but in Croatia the young still use the channels of social and political promotion to a lesser extent than what is available to them.

The research data showed that, in contrast to the Croatian political elite, both young and older citizens do not consider Croatia joining the EU to be the most important political goal. People's political priorities of the citizens are very different and their support for the project of European integration is decreasing. Thus, it is realistic to expect this trend will be continued if some problematic processes in the EU persist, as well as the problems between the EU and Croatia, and the adverse economic and social processes in Croatia. The pro-European orientation of young people could be endangered due to prolonged waiting, because this orientation is also based on their expectation that their generation will be one of the certain winners when Croatia joins the EU.

A comparison of the results of the research showed that intergenerational differences do not indicate a generational gap but they are still indicative. Young people's social status is more unfavourable and their inclusion in social and political processes is weaker than those of the older generation. But, the young proved to be more liberal, tolerant and flexible, showing more trust in the potential of their own generation. However, the integral research data show that the young are very similar to the older generation, apart from in terms of social status (including their participation in political life) and some specific "reservations of the young" such as leisure and sub-cultural patterns of behaviour. As a result of this, we can say that despite the distorted media/public picture of youth as a maladjusted and problematic social group, the process of socialization is flowing without major social disturbances. Having in mind the requirements of the new age and their social environment, the question arises whether the young are actually too similar to the older generation if we want them to bring the desired changes to the life of society and routine behavioural patterns.

Although the research used here encompassed a very wide spectre of problems, their results do not allow for simple statements about a recognisable and specific generation of Croatian youth. On the contrary, the existing differences, situated in a real social context, lead to the hypothesis that the fragmentation of youth and society's neglect of their interests will persist to such an extent that the developmental crisis of the entire Croatian society will continue. This situation consequently does not lead to the recognition, articulation and promotion of universal generational interests, and leads even less to the construction of one generation or a generational unit within the youth of Croatia today, which could appear on the cultural, social or political scene as relevant social factors. However, as we can learn from historical experience, surprises are always possible.

## SOCIOLOŠKI PORTRET DANAŠNJE HRVAŠKE MLADINE

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## POVZETEK

V članku so prikazani rezultati treh empiričnih raziskav, ki so bile opravljene na reprezentativnih vzorcih mladih na Hrvaškem leta 1986, 1999 in 2004, in na kontrolnem vzorcu starejših pri zadnjem vprašalniku. Cilj pregleda raziskovalnih rezultatov je uvid v osnovne poteze družbenega profila sodobne hrvaške mladine in v razlike, ki so nastale v opazovanem času, ter detektiranje eventualnih medgeneracijskih razlik. Raziskovalni rezultati so pokazali, da mladi na Hrvaškem niso homogena družbena skupina in da se med seboj razlikujejo glede na oblikovano stopnjo zrelosti in pripravljenosti za vstop v svet dela in odraslih in da so notranje razslojeni skladno s hrvaško družbo. Diferenciacija med mladimi je pokazala na poglobljanje socialnih socialnih razlik in na neenak dostop do nujnih resursov (kot so izobraževanje, zaposlitev in stanovanje), kar povzroča nezadovoljstvo in povečuje njihovo zavest o pomembnosti enakih možnosti v izobraževanju in zaposlovanju. V tem kontekstu še zlasti izstopa pomembnost družinskih virov za boljši življenjski začetek mladih in za njihovo optimalno družbeno reintegracijo. V skladu s tem zaupajo mladi na Hrvaškem v uresničitev svojih življenjskih ambicij predvsem vase in v družino, znatno manj pa v pomoč družbene skupnosti.

Politična kultura hrvaške mladine je blizu zaželenim demokratičnim standardom – še posebej s stališča sprejemanja liberalno-demokratičnih vrednot in načelne pripravljenosti na nekatere oblike družbenega angažmaja – vendar sta njena moč in socialni kapital na nizki stopnji. Čeprav se mladi zavedajo svoje družbene in politične marginaliziranosti, hkrati zelo malo uporabljajo kanale socialne in politične promocije, ki so jim na voljo. Sprejem Hrvaške v EU nimajo za najvažnejši politični cilj, čeprav so močno proevropsko orientirani in pričakujejo, da bo prav mlada generacija eden od zanesljivih podpornikov pridruženja Hrvaške Evropski uniji.

Primerjanje rezultatov mladih in starejših je pokazala, da na Hrvaškem ne moremo govoriti o medgeneracijskem razkolu, čeprav obstajajo indikativne medgeneracijske razlike. Družbeni status in politična participacija mladih sta na nižji stopnji, njihove oblike preživljanja prostega časa pa so raznovrstnejše in so se pokazale liberalnejše, tolerantnejše, modernejše in fleksibilnejše v primerjavi s starejšimi. Relativno velika podobnost mladih in starejših v večini raziskanih dimenzij sugerira sklep, da se socializacija novih generacij v tranzicijski Hrvaški odvija brez večjih družbenih pretresov. Čeprav so uporabljena raziskovanja zaobjela širok diapazon problemov, dobljeni rezultati ne dopuščajo trditve o enopomensko prepoznavni in specifični generaciji hrvaške mladine. Nasprotno, obstoječe razlike, umeščene v realni družbeni kontekst, ki je označen s popolno odstranitvijo mladih z javnega prizorišča, prej navajajo na hipotezo, da se bo fragmentiranje mladih in družbeno zapostavljanje njihovih problemov nadaljevalo v meri, v kakršni se bo nadaljevala tudi razvojna kriza hrvaške družbe.

**Ključne besede:** Hrvaška, mladina, družbeni položaj, problemi, vrednote, politično udejstvovanje, prosti čas, interesi, socializacija

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