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## CONTROVERSIAL TRENDS IN EASTERN EUROPE NEW SOCIAL CONSTELLATIONS AND NEW CONCEPTUAL MAPS

*The article proposes the analysis of the debates and the authors' conceptualization on society and societal change in the context of the Eastern European societal transformations. Rethinking of the concepts of social changes, transitions and societal transformation is grounded on reconstruction of the positivist analysis of social changes in terms of German sociological tradition as well as analysis of two types of modern society. Conceptual scheme of structural factors of societal transformation is grounded on inclusion into analytical perspective the influence of the global trends to societal transformation in Eastern European societies. The*

**Keywords:** societal changes, societal transformation, Eastern European societies, global trends.

*Стаття пропонує аналіз дебатів та авторську концептуалізацію суспільства та соціальної зміни у контексті трансформаційних процесів у Східній Європі посткомуністичної доби. Переосмислення концептів соціальної зміни, транзиту та соціальної трансформації ґрунтується на засадах реконструкції позитивістського способу аналізу соціальних змін в межах німецької соціологічної традиції, а також аналізу двох типів модерного суспільства. Концептуальна схема структурних факторів соціальної трансформації ґрунтується на включенні в аналітичну перспективу впливу сучасних глобальних трендів на процеси соціальної трансформації у країнах Східної Європи.*

**Ключові слова:** соціальні зміни, соціальної трансформація, суспільства Східної Європи, глобальні тренди.

The most traditional and simultaneously most topical issue in the social sciences is the issue of the moving forces, processes and effects of societal change. All classics of sociology used to focus on it since sociology historically emerged as a science about society and societal change. The intellectual efforts of generations of sociologists brought about well differentiated conceptual frameworks of structures and actors, functions and contradictions at the level of society. Nevertheless, each new generation of sociologists discovers new fields for conceptual development and empirical research on society and societal change. This should not be surprising since both societies and the knowledge about societies change fast. The changing of the concept of societal change will remain a particularly topical issue in the long run.

The task of the present paper is to draw a preliminary balance of the debates on society and societal change in the context of the Eastern European societal transformations. However, the first step is the bridging of the recent Eastern European intellectual and practical

experience with some relevant episodes in the conceptual developments during the decades preceding 1989.

### 1. Rethinking the Positivist Dispute in German Sociology

Some two decades before the profound changes in Eastern Europe the locus of promising social change was Western Europe. Several days in May 1968 it seemed that the "late capitalism" was probably doomed to become history. This impression turned to be an illusion soon. Capitalist markets and democratic political institutions once more demonstrated their adaptability to rapidly changing historical circumstances. In the leftist intellectual circles the feeling remained that unique opportunities for change of the socio-economic system as a whole were missed. Other intellectuals saw their ideological preferences towards *individualist liberalism* confirmed by the gradual changes which followed the events of May 1968. What was strikingly left out of serious reflection was the relevance of the events for the further elaborations on the concept of societal change. The relevance of the conceptual issues

concerning society and societal change was overshadowed by the overwhelming relevance of the political events and their implications.

Therefore, it might be promising to refresh the memory that the student movements in France and in Germany were intellectually very much influenced by the critical theory of society of the Frankfurt school. Ideas of intellectuals related to this inhomogeneous group were transformed into simplified slogans igniting students on the barricades in Paris and in the street riots in West Berlin. What were the reasons for the attractiveness of these ideas to students? Has the feeling of missed opportunities somewhat to do with the content of the ideas of the Frankfurt school? The best way to answer the questions is the return to the debates which intellectually prepared the students upheavals at the end of the 1960s.

The turn to the nearly forgotten intellectual history immediately leads to the book collection which was attractively and somewhat misleadingly related to an alleged positivist dispute in German sociology. The major opponents in the dispute were Theodor W. Adorno as leading theoretician of the Frankfurt School and Karl R. Popper as the symbolic figure of the intellectual stream which was known in Germany as critical rationalism. The key idea represented by Adorno in the methodological dispute concerned the necessity to always keep the concept of the totality of society in the background of the discussions on the methodological approaches to society and societal change. Briefly summarized in Adorno's words, all data used in sociology "are structured by the interconnectedness of the societal totality"[ Adorno, 1969]. To the contrary, Popper insisted on the precise definition of specific situations for the purposes of methodologically well guided study on human action. The guidance should make it possible to apply the method of objective understanding in order "to sufficiently analyze the *situation* of the acting human individual"[ Popper, 1969].

At the first glance, the controversy between Adorno and Popper referred to well known differences between methodological holism and methodological individualism. The debate was more complicated since the methodological differences between both discussants were ontologically based on rather different views about social reality and societal change. Adorno represented a vision of social reality which was influenced by ideas of Marx but moved away from their materialist and revolutionary core. Adorno believed that capitalist society had to be changed since it was marked by deep cultural contradictions [Adorno, 1966]. However, he did not pay special attention to the structural characteristics of society understood as totality. In particular, Marx' stress on the interplay of economic, political and cultural structures and on the determining role of economic processes in social development was far from his understanding of society and societal change. Consequently, he did not keep to any pre-conception concerning the historical mission of the working class and its organizations. If any particular social group had to be the leading force in the change of capitalist society, it was the group of leftist intellectuals. For the purpose they could only use the means of enlightenment.

The methodological individualism of Popper was inherently connected to a radically different vision of society and social change. He vehemently attacked the idea of society as a totality developed by Platon, Hegel, Marx and many others and particularly the attempts to prepare and implement revolutionary change of whole societies. According to the political liberal Popper all such attempts had ended up or were doomed to end up in ideological and political totalitarianism. It was related to

immense human sufferings in history [Popper, 1966]. As an alternative, Popper used to stress the advantages of the rationally designed and implemented piecemeal evolutionary improvement of particular social situations.

The dispute between Adorno and Popper on society and societal change remained mostly at the level of the social philosophy. Neither Adorno nor Popper did develop specific concepts of societal structures of society or of the moving forces and processes of societal change. Popper regarded this very task as futile. For him, exactly as for Margaret Thatcher later, the relevant entities were the acting individuals while the concept of society was just a misleading construct. Thus, both important theoreticians could be hardly helpful in the efforts to systematically describe and explain the Eastern European societal changes. But their visions of social change could help to identify some paradoxical developments in the study and management of societal development. This mostly concerns the mutation of liberalism in theoretically and practically handling societal development.

## 2. Two Types of Modern Societies

It was the sociologist Talcott Parsons who systematically elaborated on differentiated concepts of societal structures and societal development. He applied these concepts in his study on the modernization of societies and identified two historical types of social modernity. In particular, he elaborated on the achievements and shortcomings of the Soviet type of modernity. In this sense his theory and historical analysis could be helpful if there was a real need to approach the Eastern European societal changes by using scientifically sound conceptual frameworks.

Parsons' research interest on modernization and modernity had a clear focus. It was society defined as "the type of social system characterized by the highest level of self-sufficiency relative to its environments, including other social systems" [Parsons, 1977]. The major innovating and integrating factor in societal systems was assumed to be the value change in the sense of value generalization and the maintenance of value-normative patterns. This is the conceptual key for understanding Parsons' interpretation of the achievements and deficiencies of both parties in the polar confrontation during the Cold War.

As to Eastern Europe, Parsons recognized the achievements of the Soviet Union in the rapid industrialization and in the fast increase of the educational level of the population. But he also identified the crucial problem in this variant of modernization. It did not produce and reproduce the cultural legitimacy of the political leadership: "we suggest, then, that the process of the democratic revolution has not yet reached the equilibrium in the Soviet Union and that further developments *may* well run broadly in the direction of Western types of democratic government, with responsibility to an electorate rather than to a self-appointed party" [Parsons, 1977: p. 127]. The prognostic implications of Parsons' analysis for the further development of Eastern Europe were strong.

Parsons was successful in his analysis and prognostication because he already possessed the best elaborated theoretical concept of society. Its structure followed the pattern of four functions A-G-I-L [Parsons, 1977: p. 11] which had to be performed by all social systems. His theory of modernization was clearly based on this concept of society historically defined as modern nation-state. Consequently, his analysis of modernization was guided by *methodological nationalism*, or, more precisely, by *methodological societalism*. Casting a closer look at his theoretical model and his methodological approach from the vantage point of present-day debates

on globalization and regional development, one may be struck by the narrow scope of Parsons' conceptual framework. He hardly made any mention of the relevance of supranational integration schemes. The very topic of globalization was missing in his theorizing.

There were not these deficiencies of Parsons' theory but ideological controversies which made his ideas out of intellectual vogue. Individualist and subjectivist theorizing took the lead in the mainstream sociological theory and research during the seventies and the eighties of the last century. They were not particularly relevant for theoretically catching up with the emerging profound changes in Eastern Europe. The studies focusing on societal development in the context of the developing world system [Wallerstein, 1974-1989] were practically not seen as theoretically relevant to the processes in the region as well. This situation is a clear verification of the point that social sciences are too much prone to intellectual discontinuities and resist the cumulative conceptual development.

### 3. The Theoretical Emptiness of the Transition Concept

Thus, there was no well elaborated and influential concept of society widely circulating in the social sciences in the end of the 1980s. Instead, there was a conceptual vacuum in the moment when the systematic description and explanation of the imminent profound societal changes was very much needed for the purposes of their rational management. The fashionable concept of social structuration was practically of no use and virtually nobody tried to apply it. There was no time to rethink traditional theoretical debates. Nobody even considered the re-vitalization and application of Parsonian concepts. The dramatic events could not wait, since the autumn of 1989 they followed each other fast, the social time accelerated immensely.

Logically, political slogans immediately occupied the conceptual vacuum. Everywhere in Eastern Europe one could be struck by the catchy slogan "Back to normality" seriously repeated by serious intellectuals. The slogan seemed to be fully transparent. After the aberrations of state socialism, some kind of restoration of normality was needed. But restoration of what was actually needed? With only few exceptions, Eastern European societies had been economically dominated by agriculture before state socialism. Nearly all of them had dictatorial regimes. The level of education was low as a rule. Who actually wanted the return to this 'normality'? Moreover, no restoration was possible since there was a fundamental discontinuity in the economic, political and cultural development of the region. What one could only expect was an all-encompassing *adaptation to qualitatively new domestic and international circumstances*. Not slogans with the sense of "back to" but concepts focused on "forward to" were needed. Thus, the concept of "transition to" was hastily put in circulation to fill in the conceptual vacuum.

The meaning of the concept seemed to be clear enough. The question "Transition to what?" could be immediately answered: Transition to democratic political institutions and to market economy. Already the first discussions about constitutional changes signaled how deceptive the transparency of the transition concept was. Eastern Europeans had to learn fast that there were many versions of democratic political order. It was not the issue of democracy "as such", but the choice between parliamentary or presidential democracy, between proportional or majoritarian electoral systems, between one-chamber or two-chamber parliament which mattered. The aim "transition to a market economy" turned out to be blurred as well. Eastern Europeans learned in due course that there were liberal market arrangements in the world

but also tightly regulated "social market economies". Thus, the nebulous slogan "transition to a market economy" had to be replaced by discussions about institutional arrangements which could presumably be best adapted to the local conditions.

The time was already ripe to focus less on slogans than on the explanation and management of the ongoing social processes. In this intellectual context serious attention was paid to the famous "dilemma of simultaneity". In its extreme versions it stated the very impossibility to rationally manage simultaneous changes in the major action spheres of society – economy, politics and culture. Casting a glance at the accumulated historical experience one should immediately understand that simultaneous changes were practically unavoidable. This experience questions the meaning of the debates on the sequence of political, economic and cultural changes as well. According to influential pundits, the Eastern European governments had to start with economic liberalization followed by the stabilization of the liberalized macro-economic conditions. Then privatization had to come to the top of the agenda of reforms.

As for the privatization itself, the experts of the World Bank were unanimous: Big-Bang privatization had to have absolute priority [Sachs, 1993]. The gradualist strategy of privatization was basically rejected since it could only increase the losses due to reforms and thus deepen and prolong human suffering [Åslund, 2007]. Knowing previous intellectual debates, one could be only struck by this strategic orientation since the experts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were exclusively neo-liberals at that time. They all have forgotten that the classical liberal Karl Popper was definitely against the big-bang of rapid societal change since it was doomed to cause massive human sufferings according to the historical experience. Instead, he stressed the necessity of rationally designed and implemented step-by-step evolutionary improvements of particular social situations. The liberalism of Jeffrey Sachs and his fellow-experts in Eastern Europe did not have anything to do with the rationalist visions of Karl Popper. Paradoxically enough, the neo-liberals preferred radical change of the totality of Eastern European societies exactly the way in which Theodor Adorno and other intellectuals from the Frankfurt school imagined the necessary societal change. It seemed that the only reasonable explanation for the radical change of mind of liberal thinkers was the practical consideration of the neo-liberal experts to prevent the re-establishment of the former economic and political order at any rate.

Nobody had the time or the interest to think about the reasons for this intellectual mutation of liberalism at the beginning of the nineties. New topics like the famous "dilemma of simultaneity" attracted the intellectual debate. Logically enough, the decision-makers did not care about it. They had to opportunistically react to *simultaneous* burning needs for urgent reforms of economic, political and cultural institutions. Nowhere did the economic reforms follow the normative vision of "liberalization – stabilization – privatization". No financial resources were available for stabilization of enterprises before their privatization. The typical answer of leading Russian reformers to the question of why they started privatization immediately after the liberalization of markets was rather simple: Otherwise there would have been hunger throughout the country.

The weaknesses of the intellectual debates concerning the Eastern European transition to democratic political arrangements and market economy were not due to the immaturity of social sciences alone. The complexity of the ongoing changes in itself was immense. If taken in isolation, the introduction of democratic political institutions in Eastern

Europe exhibited nearly identical features with the political change in countries of Southern Europe or in Latin America [Linz and Alfred, 1996]. However, there was also a profound difference since nowhere in the world had the means of production been as largely socialized as in Eastern Europe in the course of the socialist development. Many other specifics of the Eastern European overcoming of state socialist economic and political organization could be identified in terms of conceptual pairs defining rationality [Genov, 1991].

Taking the relationships between *individual and collective rationality*, one could identify the tension between the emerging knowledge based society and the state-socialist centralized definition of tasks and top-down hierarchical control. The very logic of knowledge based economy and society required that individuals should increasingly participate in decision-making and in the control of technological, economic and political processes. The trend towards participatory democracy was greatly facilitated by the rising educational level. Contrary to this trend, Eastern European rulers continued to keep to the centralized system of economy, politics and culture. Thus, the deprivation of large groups of individuals of their right to develop initiative and to take responsibility questioned the collective rationality of state socialism based on the state ownership on the means of production. The state ownership was intended to eliminate negative effects of capitalist competition driven by greed and causing alienation and economic crises. But the excessive state intervention in economic affairs produced its own irrationalities by suppressing the evolutionary achievement of market competition. This de-differentiation of economy and politics was the major reason for the slow pace of technological innovations in Eastern Europe. The deficit of incentives for responsible work and creativity in innovations could not be efficiently compensated by indoctrination, use of violence or by the mere necessity of earning a living. In the long run the disrespect to individual interests brought about mass dissatisfaction with the conditions of work and the standards of living. Thus, the shortcomings of centralized economic organization caused permanent shortages of goods and services. In turn, the shortages reproduced organizational pathologies in the enterprises and in the national economy, as indicated by diminishing returns on new investments [Kornai, 1992].

This and other inherited contradictions of state socialism had to be overcome by radically reshuffling of the institutional frameworks. The state monopoly in economic life and politics had to be demolished. However, there were no elaborated and proven mechanisms for transforming state ownership into private ownership on such a large scale. There was no free domestic capital in the Eastern European countries which could be used for private entrepreneurship. To the contrary, most Eastern European societies were overburdened by international indebtedness. All Eastern European countries had extreme difficulties in adapting to competitive foreign markets. In addition, the political culture was dominated by patterns of authoritarianism. The ideal of the non-zero sum political game could not easily take the lead. Political victory was typically understood as the total defeat of the opponent. Thus, the task was to introduce the modern market exchange in Eastern Europe and to develop political institutions which could regulate it in a democratic way. The democratic institutional reforms implied a temporary dysfunction of state administration. It came about under the conditions of a deep economic and cultural crisis. Unstable situations of this kind tend to nourish political frustration and forces which are inclined to break with the rules of the democratic political game in favor of authoritarianism.

Intensive cultural and political problems were also focused on the relationships between *short-term and long-term rationality*. The background was the striking difference between the slow social time of state socialism and the accelerated social time of the transition. Under state socialism the attention was focused on the grievances and conflicts of everyday life. In a sharp contrast, the official propaganda was future-oriented. At the end of the eighties Eastern Europeans did not want to accept the ideology and politics of permanently postponed gratification any more. They could no longer bear the contradiction between the promised future welfare and the reality of housing shortage, deficits of goods and ecological disasters. Thus, the reservations against the centralized long-term planning were well founded. But the crucial points were neglected that liberal markets are short-sighted and can never perfectly balance themselves. The neglected evolutionary universal of market arrangements was reinstated at the expense of the evolutionary universal of long-term state regulation of economic activity.

The discussions on the moving forces, ends, means and outcomes of the Eastern European transition invigorated intellectual life in the region and worldwide. Some of the discussions had real theoretical meaning and implications for decision-making. But generally the studies in the framework of "transitology" did not develop any clear conceptual core. Their degree of theoretical cohesiveness was low, their capacity to reach systematic descriptions and explanations of the ongoing processes turned out to be rather limited. Their contribution to the development of social science and politics came increasingly under suspicion. Other conceptual frameworks were urgently needed in order to guide research and policy recommendations. The time was ripe for taking stock of the rapid social and intellectual developments.

#### 4. From "Transition" to "Societal Transformation"

The above experience of the early nineties drove the *need to change the conception of change* in Eastern Europe. Failures of national adjustments to the new economic environment strengthened the view that the technological and economic lag dividing Eastern and Western Europe would continue to be substantial much longer than expected. The inevitable conclusion followed that the level of material well-being in both parts of the continent would remain rather different in the foreseeable future. Competitive politics brought about turmoil and disappointment even in the Polish society which was praised for its pioneering achievements in the post-socialist economic restructuring. It was already common sense in Eastern Europe that the commercialization of all action spheres had undermined moral and aesthetic values and norms. Unemployment, impoverishment and crime prevented the self-realization and undermined the future prospects of large social groups in the region. The previous hierarchical system of power relationships was replaced by steep inequalities of income and wealth. The social time decelerated for large segments of the Eastern European societies. This casted doubt on the meritocratic effects of the post-socialist reforms and re-vitalized the culture of survivalism.

Therefore, it turned out that the seemingly clear goals of the *transition* as defined in the early nineties became blurred in the course of the complex and uncertain *transformations* of Eastern European societies thereafter. The need to develop and apply a better defined concept of societal transformation became urgent. The related debates will continue to be topical in the long run like the debates on the concepts and approaches related to the French Revolution of 1789 [Stone, 2002; Kates, 2006]. The Eastern European reforms needed new conceptual

developments and systematic empirical tests of the elaborated concepts.

When searching for explanatory models analysts had to be selective. The time was ripe to exclude narratives like those concerning the stages of *cultural trauma*. This conceptual model only allows for sketchy references to structural dynamics. The same holds true for the temptation to explain the tensions in the economic and political development of Eastern Europe by referring to *civilizational deficiencies* in knowledge and in organizational skills. More promising options offered, for instance, the three-dimensional conceptual framework developed and applied by T. I. Zaslavskaya. It makes meaningful operationalizations and explanatory variations possible [Yadov, 2007].

The major reason for the variety of conceptual models is the diversity in the changes themselves. Each society in Eastern Europe is performing its own *specific* transformation. Nevertheless, comparative analyses of societal changes in the region show that there are identifiable *common features* in their starting points, their course and their preliminary results. These features characterize the historical type of the *post-socialist societal transformation*. It took a variety of specific paths and brought about different results from country to country. How could this large variety of problem situations, changes and their outcomes be conceptualized? The complexity of the task might be partially managed by using *sensitizing concepts* which serve *ad hoc* historical explanations. If the intention is to achieve systematic descriptions and explanations of individual societal transformations and to try to theoretically generalize the cognitive outcomes, then the development and use of sensitizing concepts cannot be a promising strategy. It questions the possibility of developing generalized sociological knowledge with systematic explanatory potential.

Thus, the task could be resolved by developing the explanatory potential around a concept based on stable ontological foundations but allowing constructive freedom. The concept should help to resolve traditional dilemmas of the relationships between individual and collective action, between economic, political and cultural factors of social development, between stability and change in social life. The differentiated concept of *social interaction* might help to achieve this result. The concept combines the structural and action-oriented theoretical approaches in sociological theory building by referring to five subsystems of the societal system, namely the environmental, technological, economic, political

and cultural subsystems of society. This differentiation can be further elaborated concerning typical structural issues which the transformations have to resolve, the ensuing specific tasks and the intended effects of their resolution.

*First*, in the context of the Eastern European reforms the most urgent task was the change of the distribution and use of political power. In fact, in the course of the reforms the political systems in Eastern Europe developed polyarchic structures [See Dahl, 1998] which were qualitatively different from the hierarchical institutional patterns of state socialism. The most important changes were the establishment of a working division of powers and the differentiated party system. In addition, national politics in Eastern European societies had to be adapted to the controversial dynamics of international politics.

*Second*, new patterns of economic organization were introduced. The changes primarily concerned the ownership of productive assets, but unavoidably also the patterns of investment, production, distribution and supply. In the historical context, the key issue of economic restructuring was and remains the adjustment of the national economic systems to the open global markets of goods, services, financial exchange and labor.

*Third*, the change in the value-normative systems of Eastern European societies occurred simultaneously with the change of political and economic institutions. The very core of the new value system came to be the concept of universal human rights together with the concept of sustainability in all its dimensions.

*Fourth*, in this broad context of simultaneous changes, the productive infrastructure was transformed in order to bring about more efficient technological chains and patterns of participation in the international division of labor.

*Fifth*, although the environmental limitations of technological and economic growth had been well known since the beginning of the seventies [Meadows, Donella, Jørgen Randers and Dennis Meadows, 2004], the comprehensive approach to environmental protection only became possible in Eastern Europe in the course of the societal transformations. They opened up access to environmentally friendly technologies, to the market calculations of natural resources and to patterns of democratic control on the impact of technology and economy on the environment.

The so differentiated transformation processes in major action spheres and between action spheres occurred within the impact of regional and global processes: [Genov, 1999].

Figure 1. Structural dimensions of societal transformations in Eastern Europe

Global and regional impacts	Issue		Task		Potential effect	Global and regional impacts
→	Environment-friendly restructuring	→	Ecologization	→	Adjustment to the need for environmental protection	←
	↑					
→	Technological restructuring	→	Informatization	→	Adjustment to the information technologies	←
	↑					
→	Cultural restructuring	→	Universalization	→	Adjustment to the innovations in culture	←
	↑					
→	Economic restructuring	→	Marketization	→	Adjustment to the dynamics of the open markets	←
	↑					
→	Political restructuring	→	Democratization	→	Adjustment to the rationalization of politics	←

The next step of conceptualization concerns the *action dimension* of the Eastern European societal transformations. The major analytical concepts refer to individual and collective *social actors*, their *relations* and the *social processes* in which they are involved. Following this analytical differentiation, the adjustment to more efficient institutional and behavioral patterns requires changes in the major *action characteristics* of society. New types of *actors* are emerging in the course of the transformation. Private entrepreneurs, democratically responsible state officials and associations of civil society are taking the lead as bearers of new forms of social and economic organization and action. The problems in this context are focused in the convergence and divergence of the interests of *individual and collective, national and transnational* actors. New actors create and sustain new social *relations*. These are marked by the shifting focus from the distribution of political power to the economic

reproduction of society and from hierarchical to associational relations. The societal transformations in Eastern Europe engender an immense variety of relations between *coordination* and *conflict* as well as relations between the traditional institutional *hierarchy* and the dynamic institutional *poliarchy*. The emergence of new actors and relations is a **process** which brings about a variety of expectations, desires, decisions, actions and outcomes. *Short-term* goals and their effects characterize some of these processes. Others are bound to exert *long-term* impacts on individuals, groups and societies. Some processes have or will have only *local* relevance by influencing specific groups or communities. Other processes have or will have broader geopolitical and even global relevance. The analytical differentiation of tasks and effects according to the three action dimensions of the societal transformation can be schematically presented together with the impact of the context as follows:

Figure 2. Action dimensions of the societal transformations

Global and regional impacts	Dimension		Tasks		Effects	Global and regional Impacts
→	Actors	→	Initiative and responsibility	→	Competitiveness	←
	↕					
→	Relations	→	Balancing hierarchy and poliarchy	→	Meritocracy	←
	↕					
→	Processes	→	Effective allocation of resources	→	Innovation	←

The multidimensional concept of Eastern European societal transformation is intended to theoretically reproduce the complexity of the ongoing processes in the region together with the concomitant uncertainties and risks. The concept is not rooted in any assumption about linearity or the inevitable success of the transformations. To the contrary, the underlying assumption concerns the possibility of both achievements and failures in the transformation of Eastern European societies. Some social groups, some organizations or territories do adapt to the new conditions successfully, while others do not. Some societal transformations bring about evolutionary achievements while others reach only modest and others rather sobering results or just fail.

Bearing in mind the level of organizational development of Eastern European societies at the beginning of the nineties, one could have assumed that the post-socialist transformations would be implemented in the form of controlled social innovations. The processes in East Germany, in the Czech Republic or in Slovenia tentatively followed this pattern. In most other Eastern European countries influential neo-liberal visions and policies favored spontaneous market forces. Thus, the societal transformation deviated there from the pattern of organized change. Transformations were additionally influenced by the worldwide recession cycle at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. Its negative imprint leaves the much deeper recession twenty years later as well.

**5. Paradigmatic Re-orientation to the Growing Relevance of Global Factors**

The differentiation among the Eastern European countries was due to three major types of factors. *First*, divergences in the post-socialist transformations were caused by the variety of inherited technological, economic, political and cultural structures (*path dependency*). In some cases the differences in inherited structures had centuries-long histories. Another set of factors for convergence and divergence in the post-socialist transformations was related with the *quality of decisions* taken and implemented in the course of the transformations. *Third*, their impacts on the particular societal transformations exerted also various *external factors* like the European integration and the ongoing globalization.

When studying the Eastern European post-socialist transformations, one could hypothesize that as powerful the influence of *path dependency* and *quality of decisions* on the post-socialist transformations might be, the major and crucial factor determining the content, the speed and the effects of the transformation increasingly is the globalization. Only until recently this assumption could be regarded as intriguing or even as path-breaking hypothesis. The global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009 turned out to be the verification of the hypothesis. The year to year negative socio-economic changes affected differently but –with very few deviations – practically all Eastern European societies. This development powerfully made manifest the overwhelming influence on global processes on societal transformations:

Table 1. Growth of real GDP and external debt in Eastern Europe in 2009

Country	GDP growth (y/y, in %) <sup>14</sup>	External debt growth (2008Q4/2009Q4, USD bln) <sup>15</sup>
Albania	0.4	na
Armenia	-7.4	1,830
Belarus	-5.2	6,866
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-5.3	na
Bulgaria	-7.4	3,821
Croatia	-3.9	8,727
Czech Republic	Na	3,461
Estonia	-9.1	-1,773
Georgia	-2.8	na
Hungary	-4.7	6,616
Latvia	-11.7	-348
Lithuania	-19.0	669
Macedonia	-1.5	na
Moldova	-8.3	263
Montenegro	-5.1	Na
Poland	1.6	36,051
Romania	-6.3	16,666
Russian Federation	-4.7	-7,810
Serbia	-3.7	na
Slovakia	-6.9	13,327
Slovenia	-4.4	3,177
Ukraine	-4.4	2,314

Given the large variety of national, regional and global historical circumstances, one should notice both the theoretical strength and the limitations of the concept of societal transformation. It is currently the most sophisticated conceptual model for the study of structure and dynamics of modern societies. The strength of the model consists in its link to the structures and processes of modern nation-states. However, this is also the limitation of the model since *the major moving forces of societal change are increasingly the moving forces of the supranational globalization*. Societies have to adapt to changes which come about due to the global technological division of labor, the fierce competition on the global markets, the global political insecurity and the global convergence and divergence in culture. "Methodological nationalism" is in-built in the concept of societal transformation and could be radically overcome in the constructive way only by opening of this society-centered model towards processes of global relevance.

How can this methodological and theoretical shift be implemented? One may start from the re-orientation of production. The turn from the processing of matter and energy towards collection, processing, and use of information is obvious. It is also obvious that the powerful information processes which triggered this change are concentrated in organizations. They need huge amounts of information for the preparation of organizational decisions, for their implementation and control on the implementation. Briefly summarized, omnipresent formal organizations need larger and larger amounts of information of a better and better quality in order to steadily *upgrade their own organizational rationality*. The process has far reaching consequences in the development and realization of individuals. In the context of the progressing division of labor and development of knowledge-based society individuals receive more and more differentiated and broader social spaces for their autonomous orientation,

decision and action. This is the global trend of *individualization* as defined by two complimentary processes. The first one concerns the social-structural changes of the conditions for individual action. The second refers to the cognitive quality of the preparation and implementation of action by individuals. The strategic orientation of the actions of individual and collective actors worldwide today is towards increasing the efficiency of the means for conquering and dominating the natural and social world. The rising influence and relevance of this pattern of orientation and action might be conditionally called the *spread of instrumental activism*. This process is closely related to another cultural and institutional trend of the *universalization of value-normative systems*. The trend is developing around the concepts and institutionalized practices of human rights and sustainability.

The theoretical re-orientation under scrutiny is guided by the assumption that the transformations of the post-socialist Eastern European societies could be best described and explained as adaptations to these four global trends [Genov, 2007].

#### 6. Controversial Global Trends and Cognitive Tasks

If scrutinized closely, each of the four global trends under discussion reveals a large and growing variety of manifestations. They tend to cause mutual reinforcement or hindrance between the trends. The same holds true for the four global trends themselves. Each of them provokes its own counteracting forces. The global trend of upgrading the rationality of organization brings about and reproduces organizational pathologies as side-effects of the rationalization. Individualization comes about very often at the expense of the common good of society thus undermining social cohesion. The spread of instrumental activism questions various dimensions of social sustainability as a rule. Last but not least, the

<sup>14</sup> EBRD statistics <http://www.ebrd.com/country/sector/econo/stats/growth.pdf> (05.05.2010).

<sup>15</sup> The World Bank Statistics Table C1 – Gross External Debt Position <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/EXTDECQEDS/0,,contentMDK:20721050~menuPK:4704712~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:1805415,00.html> (10.05.2010).

universalization of value-normative systems provokes various forms of value-normative particularisms.

Given this contradictory character of the ongoing globalization it should not be surprising indeed that the societal adaptation to these global processes is full of contradictions in itself. This could be immediately recognized in the rather diverging assessments of Eastern

Europeans concerning the post-socialist transformations of their societies. The numerous positive developments notwithstanding, large segments of the Eastern European population tend to regard the transformation towards market economy as a failure. This might be clearly seen in the assessments about winners and losers after twenty years of economic transformation:

**Table 2. "Would you say that the economic situation for most people in your country today is better, worse, or about the same as it was under communism?" (2009, in %) [Two Decades After the Wall's Fall, 2009]**

Country	Better	Worse	About the same	DK
Poland	47	35	12	6
Czech Republic	45	39	12	3
Russia	33	45	15	7
Slovakia	29	48	18	5
Lithuania	23	48	15	14
Bulgaria	13	62	18	7
Ukraine	12	62	13	12
Hungary	8	72	16	5

The above data are very much sobering. Whatever the specific definition of "economic situation", and "most people" might be, it is obvious, that the memories about everyday economic security and the stability of the social security systems under state socialism still reproduce nostalgic feelings concerning the situation before the changes in 1989. But the major reasons for the dissatisfaction with the current economic situation are certainly related to the present day conditions in the region. We witness an immense increase in the social complexities which individuals, groups, organizations and societies have

to cope with in order to preserve their integrity while adapting to the stream of economic changes. Competition is becoming fierce in all fields. Only the strengthening of moral and institutional regulations together with the retention of enough space for personal autonomy and creativity can prevent competition from getting out of control. Instead, Eastern Europeans have also witnessed two decades of weakening of the moral and institutional regulations. So, it should not be surprising that they are massively critical also to the situation in action spheres outside of economy:

**Table 3. "National problems today beyond the economy in the former Eastern bloc" (2009, answers "yes", in %) [Two Decades After the Wall's Fall (2009) p.76.]**

Country	Corrupt political leaders	Crime	Illegal drugs
Bulgaria	76	76	74
Czech Republic	71	55	51
Hungary	76	69	54
Lithuania	78	76	66
Poland	58	49	49
Russia	52	51	54
Slovakia	52	55	46
Ukraine	70	56	46

The social sciences could offer promising insights into the causes and reasons for the new deficits in transparency and for the pathological developments. These insights are very much needed for the management of the ongoing processes. The explanatory and predictive capacities of the social sciences could increase substantially, provided their theories would be consequently constructed by focusing on the sources, course and consequences of social development. In ontological terms, it always consists of mutual influences of micro-social and large-scale macro-social processes. Therefore, a combination of the research techniques which use the "telescope" of the macro-social and those which use the "microscope" of micro-social analyses is needed.

The implementation of this program for conceptual advancement in the study of socio-economic development presupposes interdisciplinary work, cross-paradigmatic interaction and a cross-fertilization of theoretical and empirical research. This is the only way to develop social sciences which have a clear cognitive value and are able to guide the practical management of social development. A major reference point for the completion of this task consists of developing and applying concepts of social structures and functions. Today it is uncontested that a *range* of well-

differentiated analytical concepts is needed to accumulate and systematically analyze empirical data, to make generalizations, to substantiate explanatory hypotheses and to carry out effective prognostic procedures. In addition, special attention paid to globalization has brought about a series of innovations in the study of social development. Globalization involves a large variety of actors and structures that are subject to change through different paths and logics. Against this background, the traditional teleological understanding of social development as a progressive improvement in social relations and processes gives way to a neutral definition. Nowadays it is pertinent to understand social development either as a substantial improvement in the adaptability of a social system to its environment or as a decline and dissolution of a system's structures and functions. This re-definition of social development raises many questions concerning the linearity and progressive overtones of modernization theories.

Another major issue concerns the concept of society. Recent studies on globalization, regionalization and 'glocalization' have revealed an extraordinary variety of micro- and macro-social causes of social processes as well as of their consequences. As a result, "methodological nationalism" is no more feasible. Trans-national and trans-

cultural comparisons have become extremely important and should increasingly take the lead in the social science systematic descriptions and explanations. Nevertheless, contemporary social reality is still very much structured along the lines of nation states and this fact puts some limitations on the concepts focused on globalization. Constructive balances are needed in each specific effort to explain societal change.

Could sociology successfully cope with the tremendous challenges of this rapid social and intellectual development? The answer should refer to the outcomes of the analysis of convergence and divergence in the controversial contemporary social development. The success and failure of Eastern European adaptations to global trends offer the perfect subject matter for carrying out this test on disciplinary performance. So far, the diverse and profound changes in Eastern Europe have one common denominator. This is the transfer of institutional patterns which have already proved their efficiency in managing industrialized societies. This transfer concerns value-normative orientations and institutional structures which embody major trends in the development of modern societies.

Is this development of Eastern Europe really unique? Undoubtedly, the experience of the regional transformation is as unique as every event in history is. As seen from a broader historical and conceptual perspective, the societal transformations in the region are just a special case of the worldwide change of everyday life and deep social structures. The overall trend of strengthening the individual initiative and responsibility cuts across social systems, functions and processes. Together with the increase of social complexity, social dynamics has put well-established patterns of hierarchic government on trial. The high complexity of processes brought about by numerous influential actors with diverging interests has come to the forefront. Efforts to cope with the growing social complexity by means of polyarchic frameworks involve state institutions and business organizations, political parties and voluntary associations, as well as social movements and groups. Their interplay fosters social change which questions established structures and roles. The crucial tasks now are the improvement of knowledge on social dynamics together with the improvement of the institutional mechanisms of its governance [Bornschiefer, 2008].

All of these processes offer abundant causes, reasons and consequences which might be well described and explained by the concept of risk understood as *the probability of the dysfunctional effects of processes on social systems*. The stress on the risk concept does not imply any understanding of present-day societies as being especially prone to risks, as *risk societies per se*. Under circumstances such as natural calamities (volcano eruptions, floods or epidemics) or in cases of social crises such as wars or riots, societies throughout human history have always been "risk societies". The real point is that modern secularized, individualistic and achievement-oriented societies have developed a specific *culture of risk*. This lays the stress on the scientifically based *perception and assessment* of risk factors as well as on rationalized *risk management*. This culture of risk and its institutional frameworks are dominated by *calculations of risk factors* and by *accountability for risks*. The context of calculations and accountability is the *all-pervading competition* which is taking place under conditions of permanent *uncertainty and change*.

In order to cope with the new situation, advanced democratic societies have developed and are maintaining a tight safety net for the protection of individuals and groups

who fail to cope with the competition. Protection from basic risks like illness, poverty or unemployment is increasingly regarded as a matter of universal human rights. The safety net includes state-supported welfare and private insurance. Both schemes socialize risk and thus strengthen social integration. However, they are also factors which diminish the propensity for risk-taking. Therefore, a special problem in democratic society is the balance (or imbalance) of the propensity for risk-taking and the lack of readiness to take risks. The *practical* problem is how to balance the need for the institutional management of risk with the preservation of enough space for autonomous decision and risk-taking on the part of individuals and groups. Stability and innovation in society depend on the way in which this balance is established and maintained.

As seen from this point of view, national transformations are major risk factors themselves. They always bring about uncertainty and instability. Marketization and democratization confront individuals and groups with the responsibility of making decisions and acting under permanent uncertainty. The paternalistic props of the traditionalist and authoritarian social and economic organization belong to the past. There are good reasons to consider the *globalization of risk* [Beck, 2007], since uncertainty and instability of current national transformations in Eastern Europe are brought about by global trends. Thus, there are important cognitive reasons for the special attention to the relationships between risk and national transformations as well as between risks and global trends.

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