YOUTH: THE TRAP OF INDIVIDUALIZATION IN A GLOBAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses two basic dimensions of life in contemporary times, individualization and globalization, and their influence upon the young. Young people are particularly susceptible to risking social exclusion as the traditional systems of personal and social security are disintegrating, which is particularly characteristic of the so called "societies in transition". The author finds that forced depolitisation of the young causes important effects: during the recent decades, the young have been looking for individual and biographic solutions to structural problems and have thus fallen into the trap of disciplining and privatization. The author critically evaluates the concept of social exclusion: she finds that without ever being analysed in detail the term and its use have entered the politically correct language of European institutions, the professional discourse, particularly that of social studies, and socially-political discourses. The concept of social exclusion, as it is largely used today, does not include any interpretative challenges of the global power structures or the distribution of wealth in society. Thus, the relationships of dominion and the new baronial classes remain invisible.

Key words: youth, individualization, globalization, social vulnerelability, social exclusion

LA GIOVENTÙ: LA TRAPPOLA DELL'INDIVIDUALIZZAZIONE NELL'ERA GLOBALE

SINTESI

L'articolo affronta due dimensioni fondamentali della vita contemporanea, l'individualizzazione e la globalizzazione con le loro influenze sulla popolazione giovanile, particolarmente soggetta al rischio di emarginazione sociale, data la destrutturazione dei sistemi tradizionali di sicurezza individuale e sociale, caratteristica in primo luogo delle "società in transizione". Secondo l'autrice la depoliticizzazione imposta dei giovani provoca delle conseguenze significative: i giovani hanno ricercato negli ultimi decenni soluzioni individuali e biografiche ai problemi strutturali cadendo cosi nella trappola del disciplinamento e della privatizzazione. L'autrice è molto critica nella valutazione che dà dell'emarginazione sociale: negli anni novanta il termine e il suo utilizzo hanno assunto la dimensione di linguaggio politicamente corretto tanto delle istituzioni europee e quanto nelle discussioni di esperti, in primis di carattere sociologico e politico sociale, senza che il concetto stesso sia mai stato oggetto di un'approfondita analisi. Il concetto di emarginazione sociale come oggi utilizzato non contiene sfide interpretative visavis alle strutture di potere globali e alla distribuzione della ricchezza sociale. Le relazioni di padronanza e le nuove classi baronali rimangono cosi invisibili.

Parole chiave: giovani, individualizzazione, globalizzazione, vulnerabilità sociale, emarginazione sociale

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century brought many different changes, among them, quite significantly, the constitution of youth as a social group which played an important part in the development of society. Never before had a young generation such an important role, never before they generated so many changes of universal importance, mustered-up so much self-confidence, or showed such readiness and willingness for change, both at personal and at societal level. At the same time, however, it seems that the explicit function of youth has been drawing to a close towards the end of the twentieth century. Their share in demographic terms has been reducing in the western societies and they have become merged with other generational and social groups. These changes in youth and young people above all indicate a historical change in social reproduction and generational units. Until the 1970s young people were firmly embedded in the "production system" of society. Even though school and leisure undoubtedly left space for a certain degree of independence from the production system, the formal educational process, family socialization and everyday culture were in the service of future employment, of life-projects and tasks and thus rather strictly determined social roles. The spread of specifically youth cultures, a growing autonomy of youth consumption and prolonged schooling, which was no longer necessarily in the service of future employment, loosened and strongly individualized the connection between the everyday world of youth and the world of (economically evaluated) production (Ule, Rener, 2001). The life experiences of young people and their life expectations changed quite significantly over the last two decades. These changes affect relationships with family and friends, partners, experiences of education, labour market, leisure and lifestyles and above all the ability to become independent young adults (Furlong, 1997). Many of these changes are a direct result of the restruc-

turing of the global labour market, of an increased demand for educated yet flexible workers and of social policies which have extended the period of dependency of young people on their parents and families well into their thirties. As a consequence of these changes, young people today have to negotiate a set of risks which were almost unknown to the generation of their parents. As many of these changes have come about within a relatively short period of time especially in the so called "transition societies" of the ex-socialist countries, points of reference which previously helped smooth processes of transition into adulthood have become unclear and obscure. Thus, increased uncertainty of one's future life course can be seen as a source of stress, risk and vulnerability. The period of late modernity, as some social scientists have labeled the times we are living in, operates on the everyday lives of people in two fundamental ways: on the general and global level as globalization, and on the personal level as the intensive individualization of life courses.[1]

A considerable portion of people's lives in the late modern period unfolds despite of a lack of awareness of the way things operate – things upon which everyday life is based (how many ordinary people understand how transportation systems, financial markets, computer networks, telecommunications, international corporations, and the like really work?). There is therefore an abstract confidence in expert systems as an obligatory part of everyday life. However, this carries with it risks and threats which in recent times have become increasingly apparent, revealing the vulnerabilities of expert systems and their systemic inability to be fully controlled: recall, for example, the (unnecessary) panic induced by the Y2K bug, the Mad Cow Disease, the Bird and Swine Flu scares, various ecological risks, and so on. At the threshold of the millenium abrupt changes occured which virtually overnight placed us at the very center of modern turbulent events. Today we face ecological threats posed by nuclear power stations, genetically modified foods, global warming, the hole in the

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1 Globalization and individualization are two manifestations of the same process and cannot be treated in isolation from one another. Globalization is a concept which has paraded freely through our lives over the past decade. Yet the more ubiquitous it is, the less clear appear to be its implications. So let us define it right at the outset: we take globalization to mean the planetary-wide extension of the system of (neo)liberal capitalism, which has been greatly facilitated by the development of transportation and communications technologies. The principal cultural and political tools of this world system are the recruitment of countries into "the civilized world" (i.e. identification with the values and lifestyles of the west) and the aggressive export of the supposedly superior system of western parliamentary democracy.
Individualization is usually defined by social psychology textbooks as the tendency towards an individual lifestyle and personal autonomy in making decisions about one's education, occupation, job, place of residence, way of life, and similar. Individualization is supposedly made possible by the development of pluralistic and decentralized forms of subjective structures, which are presumed to distinguish "new, individualized people" with a hodgepodge of identities from the stable, solid selves of the traditional subject of modern industrial society. My own understanding of individualization is that it is the result of a self-deception to which social scientists over the past few decades have contributed a great deal: in highly stratified modern societies "free choice" (regarding anything at all, let alone regarding critically important life choices) is only temporary, and is thus more of an illusion than a reality. But illusions have politically useful effects: the more people are obsessed with themselves and their own lives, the less likely they are to recognize the structural forces operating on their lives (and pressure to individualization is definitely a structural force!), and hence the less likely to engage in cooperation with and feel solidarity towards others.

ozone layer, the HIV virus, and a multitude of other problems. Until relatively recently these threats seemed quite abstract to most of us, calamities which occurred in distant places and affected strangers, while we ourselves still felt relatively safe. But common computer viruses, which may seem banal and minor but are global in their reach, new forms of viruses which threaten to spread to world-wide epidemics have catapulted this abstract sense of risk directly into our living rooms via our television screens and into our everyday lives. The September 11 attacks on the very core of the modern world system, after which "the world will never be the same," have definitively shifted the ontological security of even the most privileged part of the world into the world of illusions, or at least made it parenthetical. In other words, fundamental global risks are no longer abstract, and risky situations are no longer something that happen to other people ("over there"), from which we can remove ourselves with a simple push of the remote button. They have literally shifted into everyday reality.[2]

YOUTH AS EXPERIENCE OF INSECURITY

Social scientists studying youth in Europe observed a tectonic shift in the values orientation of young people from the 1970s onwards: they explicitly withdrew from big issues, big history and ideology to the smaller stories of the more private and personal sphere of everyday life, friendship, partners, and family. The research on youth done by the Center for Social Psychology in the 1990s revealed the same trends among youth in Slovenia (see Ule et al., 2000; Miheljak, 2002): young people constantly spoke of a turning inward, cultivation of a personal social network, and an attendant rejection of the public sphere, particularly the political. But this polarized image is deceptive: despite this pronounced individualism, young people are not egotistically focused only on themselves and their own interests. In fact, just the opposite is true. Young people have consistently shown a high degree of social sensitivity as well as a willingness to volunteer as an alternative social public life. What they are rejecting is not the public sphere in general, but rather the political sphere as the authoritative domination of power.

At the same time, from the 1970s onward, there was also a tectonic shift at the macrosystemic level; in the opinion of the majority of globalization analysts, fundamental globalization processes began to unfold in two key directions, both of which were supported by the development of information and communication technology: the extension of the global capitalist system in the economic as well as political sense (the world as a

"global village"), and the global spread of its ideological (cultural) mechanisms (the "McDonaldization of the world"). At the macro level the sovereignty of national states (and associations such as the European Union are no exception), which represents one of the last remaining obstacles to multinational corporations and the supraterritorial nature of financial capital, is disintegrating, as a result of which political citizens are transformed into private consumers, while at the micro and individual level the mechanisms and institutions of social security are crumbling, and the feelings of personal risk and a sense of being threatened are increasing. The reaction of (young) people is therefore not so surprising: on the one hand, there is a turning inward to the private, personal sphere, to one's own body as in effect the last place in which it is still possible to act "publicly." On the other, there is an aversion to big issues like politics, economics, and history, which are nontransparent and operate as natural forces to which resistance is futile. Thus nowadays the problem of "ontological security" becomes literally a matter of survival.

Of central importance in all this is the feeling that we can only rely on people and things in our immediate environment. The social period for the acquisition of ontological security is childhood and youth, and the social environment for so doing is the family. Thus the results of our survey investigating what and whom the respondents had the most trust in are not surprising: young people trust completely only those with whom they have intimate relationships (parents, brothers and sisters, friends). All the other social institutions (schools, media, politics, religion) are much more objects of distrust than trust (Miheljak, 2002).

But this is no different than for Slovenians generally. According to studies of the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey in the 1990s, in 1996, 86.9% of respondents trusted their family and close relatives a lot or completely, and in 1999 the number was 92%. The level of trust in family did not vary significantly with age or educational level of the respondents. No other institution has such a high and uniform degree of trust as the family (Kurdija in: Hanžek, Gregorčič, 2001, 56; Rus, Toš, 2005, 371). Taking these data into account one can but wonder where do persistent public discourses about "the deep crisis of the family" originate in Slovenia?

The growing uncertainty of the transition to adulthood, which some authors have called an "ontological vacuum" or "empty future," is today a common denominator among youth all over Europe. This dramatic ontological vacuum, which affects the majority of the younger generation, of course also resonates in social science reflections on modernity. In particular, the

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2   The experience of risk – similar to the experience of globalization – is governed by the TINA (There Is No Alternative) syndrome. Both are presented as like the weather, beyond human influence. TINA was frequently invoked in the 1980s by Britain's Iron Lady, while Slovenians were subjected to it *ad nauseam* throughout the campaign to join NATO and the EU.

question arises of whether or not these changes herald a transition into a new age, whose significance is no less than that of the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, or whether they are simply the continuing consequences and unfolding developments of modernization. Postmodernists like Lyotard (1984) or Baudrillard (1988) believe that we are entering into a new, postmodern era in which an analysis of social structure is losing its meaning. The models of social behavior and individualized life courses are considered to be unpredictable, and grand social theories and classical sociological factors (gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, etc.) are no longer adequate to explain variability in individualized life courses and lifestyles.

Other authors are skeptical regarding postmodern ideas and reject the concept of the postmodern, preferring to speak of late modernity (Giddens, 1991) or "second modernity" (Beck, 2009), or "reflexive modernization" (Lasch, 1992), or "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2008). They say that pluralism and differentiation, the weakening of community, and feelings of uncertainty are characteristic of the kind of modernization that classical sociology deals with. Is there really anything new going on nowadays that the old social science concepts are not able to explain? We tend towards the view that the epistemological confusion is caused not by new elements, but rather by a blurring of the effects of classical sociological factors. In other words, the social and economic status of people still has a fundamental impact on the life courses of individuals, but its operation is less visible, blurred, and less direct, because collective traditions are weakening and the pressures of individual values are growing. As a result, people in the grip of induced isolation and social amnesia see the social world as nontransparent and unpredictable, rife with risk, which must be grappled with as an individual, as if there were no others who lived in the same circumstances and faced the same risks. Typical of young people in the last decades was a search for biographical solutions to structural problems, which made it very easy for them to fall into the trap of discipline and privatization. It is therefore necessary to interpret the "antiglobalization"

demonstrations in Seattle, Goteborg, Prague, and Genoa, whose core was undoubtedly composed of young people, as the first mass forms of resistance in the territory of "the West" against the world system after the revolutionary year of 1968. They are certainly important in a symbolic sense, but even more so in the sense of recognizing "common topics" of action, exchange of information, skills, and solidarity despite the lack of any traditional political "common platform" or shared ideology.[3]

THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

Globalization, which in Slovenia was additionally exacerbated by the changes accompanying economic transition, has an impact on young people through the fundamental institutions to which they are "subjected" in everyday life – through their family and personal environment, school, and free time. Modern capitalism requires young people to be able to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances, but it does not affect each young person in the same way. Although a large number of young people will certainly find their own way to adulthood, it appears as though the contemporary events of globalization will promote two contrasting groups of young people: winners and losers. The winners will have family and the personal resources which will allow them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by neoliberal capitalism. Young people who cannot or do not want to adapt to the demands of globalization because personally or socially they are less prepared for it than their peers will end up in the category of losers. Both winners and losers will hold their fates only partially in their own hands, but the winners know what to do with it and how to direct it so that they will benefit from it. The dynamics of late modernity lie specifically in expanding the circle of risk for young people; young people who are subjected to risk no longer come exclusively from classic underprivileged social environments, the lower classes and social minorities, although it is true that among the "losers" there are still more of these who live in less favored social circumstances. The im-

3   Individuals and groups who struggle for "a different kind of globalization" (which kind? We can turn a brick over in various ways, but it remains a brick) are becoming visible at demonstrations during the meetings of the G8, the World Bank, and the IMF…Let's stop for a moment and ask a naïve question: why do we even need meetings of the G8 and similar institutions? Why don't the eight heads of the economically most powerful countries in the world consult by videoconference or meet secretly at some isolated farm in Vermont? Why do they prefer to put themselves on display and force the city in which they meet to practically declare a state of military emergency? The answer is probably quite simple: they are not there in order to have a meeting, but to display themselves and their power. Their function is purely to make a spectacle of themselves, to be a highly visible advertisement for globalization. They are there so that an entrepreneur from Bavaria can see them as he is making a decision about whether or not to invest in the Russian market. They are there in order to inform the planet of how likable they are and that therefore the investments (and profits) of the small businessman and the huge multinationals are safe. They radiate optimism, confidence in the future, and unity; they provide the lubricants that keep the machinery of globalization running smoothly (Barricco, 2007). Or, as Kralj states: "This is why the antiglobalist counter-spectacles are so important. Regardless of the fact that the "movement of the movements", like the World Social Forum, which embeds various social discontent cannot stop globalization, it can disrupt its advertising message. In this way the antiglobalists hit their target very precisely: they are hitting globalization where it is weakest, that is to say, when it is selling itself" (Kralj, 2008, 74).

portance of classical structural constraints (class, ethnicity, race, gender) has lessened in modern times, or at any rate no longer plays such a dominant role in how life proceeds for individuals, but at the same time the forces behind social inequality are becoming stronger. These operate inside the basic institutions or agencies of global society, which crosscut the standard class structure of society: in the family, the educational system, employment, and free time activities. Young people who belong to different social classes differ among themselves in the amount and type of resources, opportunities and possibilities at their disposal, but the specific unfolding of their life courses to adulthood is more than ever dependent on their placement within and support from the areas previously mentioned. Concepts of the social vulnerability of youth in particular which have been developed to date originate from two theoretical and empirical suppositions: first, that socially vulnerable young people are from the lower classes, while the rest are much more secure, and second, the concept of risk and vulnerability must be tied primarily to young people who operate in the "danger zones." These concepts now appear one-sided and unconvincing (du Bois-Reymond, 1996). We would rather say that "deviant" cultural and life patterns of young people that in the past were confined to the tiny segment of youth subcultures are now becoming an ever more "normal" part of everyday life. The difference between conformity and deviation in behavior is becoming unclear and relativised.

Similarly as elsewhere in Europe, young people in Slovenia are facing new challenges: they are growing up in a state which in the context of the Central and East European countries appears relatively successful and stable and in which an individualized social climate is being intensively developed. This opens up new options and their accompanying risks. Reliance on past sources of security and trust (values, systems of social security) are no longer possible. Young people and their parents are forced into earlier and more informed choices (with respect to education, leisure activities, the early planning of life courses, etc.), which assumes a shift of responsibility for one's own life essentially into the phase of childhood. Modern European and Slovenian society requires the early mental and behavioral adjustment to two simultaneously contradictory conditions for them: an extended period of education and an extended period of economic dependence are in sharp conflict with the demand for making life choices early on and accepting full responsibility for those choices. Likewise, the challenges which come from "the outside world" are also contradictory: information technology and the media offer elements of multiculturalism and global internationalism and inform young people about new cultures and lifestyles, which on the one hand expands their horizons and "modernizes" them (liberating them from the trappings of national tradition), while on the other hand it can easily bring new distress and uncertainty.

In the last decade social science researchers focusing youth developed various concepts of social vulnerability. The British researcher Bob Coles categorized as socially vulnerable those groups of young people who experienced difficulties and challenges during the transition to adulthood: youth with special needs, youth in foster care or institutions, and youth in "alternative" careers who had committed various minor offenses as well as more serious crimes (Coles, 1997, 69). Schuyt's definition of vulnerability is also of interest: youth are considered especially vulnerable if in their interactions with social institutions they are accorded more sanctions and social supervision than they are support and benefits (Schuyt, 1995, 8).

We are convinced that social vulnerability and risk are no longer confined to a delimited, minority portion of the population of young people, but rather are becoming dominant, a majority cultural social milieu of cohorts of modern young people.

The society of late modernity creates risks, and in this respect Slovene society does not differ at all from other developed European societies. It is thus not a new discovery that social risk is unequally distributed. Gender and class ties seem to be of considerable importance in this respect.

In late or "second" modernity as Beck puts it it is possible to say that class ties (at least on the level of subjective feelings of belonging) are being weakened, as a result of which it is impossible to predict lifestyles and political convictions purely on the basis of information about occupation, education, and family background. Beck calls this new era "capitalism without class" (2009). In individualized life courses people are compelled to put themselves at the center of their own life plans and reflexively construct their own biography. Employment and jobs have long ago stopped being the arena for powerful social conflicts; linked foremost to them is the fear of unemployment, which penetrates downwards along the age scale, practically right into childhood. We arrived at these conclusions through our study of primary (14 years old) and high school (17 years old) adolescents who were asked about the biggest problems young people are faced with. According to their answers their biggest concern is fear of illness and disability, followed by fear of failing at school, becoming addicted to drugs and fear of unemployment. Other, seemingly less felt preoccupations, are much more "youth oriented": concerns about self-image, social contacts (fear of loneliness), and emotional problems. Our study of psychosocial problems and the vulnerability of young people showed that the levels of self-destructive feelings, uncertainty, feelings of guilt and a demoralized attitude towards the world and life in general are quite high. Further statistical analysis of the data revealed significant

differences between genders both in reactions and personal feelings. Girls display significantly lower self-confidence, are more uncertain and more depressed: 39% of girls agreed with the statement: "I often feel that life is not worth living" in comparison with 23% of boys. 30% of girls and 16% of boys agreed with the statement: "I often feel that my way of life is a failure". 44% of girls and 22% of boys think that they are "more sensitive than most other people"; 45% of girls and 22% of boys state that they "often feel down" and 68% of girls and 48% of boys "sometimes feel guilty for entirely unimportant reasons".

By contrast, more boys than girls are prepared to act destructively or to fight aggressively in defence of their position. For example, as many as 76% of boys agreed to: "If someone strikes me, I strike back" in comparison with 57% of girls.

These gender differences are rather surprising because they reveal some typical and quite traditional differences which we expected to be disappearing from the life of contemporary young people. These findings could indicate that girls internalize the pressures and frustrations exerted by their environment and more tend to connect them with their self-image, while boys' reactions appear to be more externalized and reveal aggressive tendencies. Girls seem to identify more with various pressures for achievement and their reactions are more acute and sensitive than those of boys. Whereby boys approach problems in a more aggressive manner, girls seem to be more prone to evade them and withdraw (Ule et al. 2000; Ule, Rener, 2001). In our opinion, these findings tend to contradict theoretical assumptions about the weakening of influence of classical sociological constraints such as gender, class, ethnicity… on life course, opportunities and risks of young people in late modernity. In other words, it seems that the classical system of social inequality remains in operation much more than it was optimistically predicted by many social scientists.

British researchers in this sense have coined the syntagma of "structural individualization" (Nagel in Wallace, 1997). In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, the German authors Berger and Sopp (1995) have written that the classical factors of social differentiation and inequality today are introducing or translating into a growing demand for "individual choice," which is most affecting young people.

There is no empirical evidence that the distribution of social wealth and power has changed in any significant way in modern times. On the contrary, there is a consensus among social analysts of western societies that globalization processes are not leading to a higher level of social equality but rather to a specific "fossilization" of the social structure of developed industrial societies. Beck has found that social inequality in Western Europe has shown an astonishing stability (2009). Statistics on social stratification in Slovenia show a similar picture: while the "objective" picture of stratification of Slovene society takes on the classic pyramidal shape, the subjective judgments of people regarding their own situation within the layers is expressed in the shape of an onion. Regardless of their actual position, the majority of people in Slovenia see themselves as located somewhere in the middle (Hafner Fink, 1999). In Marxist terminology we would say that the social classes exist only "in themselves" and not also "for themselves", and that people have lost or rather failed to develop an awareness of their class belonging. Is it therefore possible to speak of an "epistemological self-deception" of late modernity, which is expressed as a growing gap between the empirical social and economic conditions and the subjective perceptions which people are allowed to entertain and dream about? Life opportunities of people remain determined by class to a great extent and are therefore collective, but people perceive them as individual and search for solutions in private and isolated ways. In this way risks are perceived as individual, as personal crises and shortcomings, and not as the effects of processes which are beyond personal control. The loss of employment is regarded as a personal misfortune, lack of success at school as a lack of sufficient effort and competence, rejectionist attitudes of youth as stemming from a lack of upbringing and solid values, and so on. We would not claim that there is no truth in any of these, but we do believe that half the story is sold as the complete one. Individualization of risk means that situations which at one time would have called for collective and political action are now being interpreted as hard luck stories of one or another person, which can only be solved at the individual level through personal effort.

Young people appear to be exceptionally receptive to risk discourse, which undoubtedly influences their life experience, plans and lifestyles. If we take a look at what Slovene fourteen-year-olds fear the most, we can see that they are more fearful than is actually good or necessary. In the 1960s and 1970s young people were already enveloped by a "moral panic" which the adult establishment society cultivated out of fear of the new self-confidence, resolve, and radical demands of the youth of that time. Today we could say that the panic has moved over to the other side – it is no longer the moral panic of adults, but the existential panic of children. In political concepts we cannot imagine a greater failure for young people. How did the adult establishment manage to instill fear among young people to such an extent and at such an early age, such that in just a few years children shift from fearing monsters and wicked witches to fearing AIDS and unemployment?

Perceptions of risk and danger are of course culturally constructed, they are the effects of media exposure, one's own experience and norms and the fears of significant others with whom young people are in daily contact. Enrollment in a prestigious high school is most

likely regarded as a risky act by an outstanding student who has grown up in a lower working class family compared to an equally well qualified peer who comes from a wealthier family; the latter would regard the same act as a smooth and logical step along a planned life course.

The individualization of risk goes hand in hand with the individualization of responsibility and achievement: both represent values which are constantly reinforced by the media, the educational system, the entertainment industry and anxious parents. The combination of pressures towards individual responsibility (which is a mechanism of disciplining) on the one hand and the experience of actual powerlessness and vulnerability on the other generate a strong sense of ubiquitous risk and danger. Uncertainly and doubt penetrate all dimensions of the lives of young people, and their identity becomes fluid and subjected to constant reinterpretation.

In the space of one generation there have been radical changes in the life experiences of young people in Slovenia: the school experience and educational system of today's primary schoolchildren differs significantly compared to that of their parents, and today's labor market would be completely alien to the former generation. Regardless of social background, the huge majority of young people (98% in Slovenia) continue their schooling after ninth grade graduation, and higher education is no longer limited to a small elite. Education has become a consumer good with an internal hierarchy just like any other consumer good: the more accessible it becomes to the majority, the sharper are the internal distinctions, both formal and informal, which also differentiate the educational aspirations of children and their parents. Competition for entrance into prestigious schools is becoming a commonplace consumer rule, except for one important peculiarity: here, "the fakes" are not just as useful as are "the originals".

Along with the extension of the period of schooling, the period of dependence or semi-dependence of young people on their families is also simultaneously lengthening. This extended dependence on parents, which is not just of a material nature, is a process which can be observed all over Europe, although the regional differences are large. In Slovenia this process was already especially pronounced in the 1990s (Rener, 1996) and doesn't seem to change: in 2009 the average age of leaving parents' home is 31,5 years for young men and just a little less for young women. Some authors (Furlong, Cartmel, 1997, 9) are of the opinion that the social and emotional attachments between children and their parents are in fact weakening, despite the extended period of economic dependence, while the influence of peers and the mass media is becoming stronger. Research that we have conducted in Slovenia on various populations of young people, however, does not support this. In fact, it contradicts it. Particularly when we are speaking of the social vulnerability of young people it

can be seen that it is precisely a lack of family support that is a crucial factor in vulnerability and risk. From the point of view of individualization theories, this should not surprise us. If the influences of the classical sociological determinants are less clear and direct and, in the absence of a collective tradition and collective social identity, risk and responsibility are individualized, then without a doubt the significance of families is growing.

But the crucial problem of the "new individualization" of young people is to be found elsewhere, in the aforementioned epistemological deception of late modernity, in which there is a deconstruction of youth into a mass of individuals, each of whom is striving privately to achieve the best possible niche for themselves and each of whom fails to see that collective and political problems are being fragmented, ground into sand of disciplined loneliness.

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The most socially vulnerable portion of the youth population is usually interpreted by the standard analytical instruments of the social sciences using the concept of social exclusion. The concept of social exclusion was introduced into European social political discourse by the European Commission in 1989 based on the French concept (*l'exclusion sociale*) from 1974, which was used to distinguish "a group of people who are not covered by social insurance" (Chisholm, 1997, 106). In the 1990s the concept and its use spread like wildfire into the politically correct speech of European institutions and into specialist literature, particularly in sociology and sociopolitics, but without a precise analysis of the concept itself.

Surveys by Eurobarometer, which make free use of this vague concept, have shown that respondents themselves defined it better than European politicians and academics. Social exclusion was understood not as an "objective" state of affairs (for example, low income, poverty, unemployment, dependence on welfare), but as a feeling of insignificance, superfluity, rejectedness and powerlessness to change one's own situation. These feelings were statistically significant for people who had no source of income, were unemployed, whose family life had fallen apart, and who lacked a social network. On this basis Jill Jones developed the thesis that young people are *per se* a marginalized group, for all practical purposes excluded from citizenship. Young people who are explicitly vulnerable and fall within the "danger zones" represent only the tip of the iceberg (Jones in Chisholm, 1997, 109).

Let us stop for a moment to examine this thesis. The concept of citizenship is a dual concept of rights and obligations, and embodies assumptions regarding individual emancipation as well as social integration, upon

which the social order of modern states is supposedly based. It is well known that right-wing political ideologies, parties, and movements emphasize the significance of the obligations of citizens and that they succeed in stressing the obligations more than the left is able to emphasize the citizens' rights. Researchers of youth in Europe have shown that without the rights of citizenship (political, civil and social), we cannot expect young people to develop feelings of responsibility.

If young people are to gain any sense of the obligations of citizenship in society, they must be treated as citizens and granted rights of citizenship, as Jones and Wallace have explicitly stated (1992, 154).

If young people as a social group - despite their heterogeneity - have anything in common, it is this impeded or forbidden access to all three dimensions of citizenship. Indeed they are barred by law from political citizenship until the age of 18. In other words, what constitutes youth as a social group is precisely their marginal social position. In a situation where the social exclusion of youth is structural and not coincidental, when the educational system is mandatory up to at least the age of 14, and at the same time it monitors, chooses, and excludes, when the means of legal and illegal pacification of youth are offered in schoolyards and in nearby bars, when children and their parents take on responsibility for social inclusion/exclusion in childhood, this means that impeded access to or exclusion from the rights of citizenship represents an arrogant and cynical attitude towards the young population, which is expected to be simultaneously "mature" enough to make critically important life decisions by the age of twelve, and yet is considered too "immature" to have certain rights until well into their 30s. The shift of political citizenship (active and passive voting rights) to earlier years of course would not mean a radical shift in the position of young people, but in a parliamentary democracy it would perhaps contribute to the greater visibility of young people and their problems, and political parties would be compelled to work for their votes.

Let us return for the last time to the concept of one's own speech. Speech and the use of concepts are not neutral acts. We have already stated that the concept of social exclusion, which is widely employed in discussions of social vulnerability of youth, is conceptually questionable. Here we are trying to draw attention to one of its dimensions. The concept is questionable insofar as it is presented as a nonpolitical, neutral expert research tool which is supposedly being used to identify and clarify the social position of vulnerable groups. But as soon as we take away its political ammunition, we sever its ties to its economic and political origins which just produce the processes whose effects are the reality

which the concept is trying to embrace. The concept of social exclusion which today is used by the majority does not contain interpretative challenges to the global structure of power and the distribution of social wealth. The power relations in the new world order thus appear invisible. The imperatives of globalization of world (liberal) capitalism and the structural marginalizations which this inevitably triggers are regarded much like the weather, as something outside the reach of human intervention. The concept of social exclusion carries with it this meaning of inevitability and powerlessness and operates ideologically because it reveals effects but lacks the power and courage to ask about causes. Exclusion from what? Inclusion into what? As if the very core of the concept - society itself – along with its specific organization of power relations, production and distribution of wealth is no longer in question? Thus social science reflections on social exclusion are also ideological, all the more so when they are subjected to the demands of practicality and effectiveness, when they measure exclusion and proposes means for its alleviation. Individual risk and exclusion, just like individual rights and liberties, can only result from collective demands and collective action. Nowadays there is a trend towards the privatization of risk and resources. Moreover, even social utopias are seen as the creation of private dreamers. The art of translating personal difficulties into public affairs and into political power is in danger of being erased or blurred.

It is not my intention to pompously oppose or negate the concept of social exclusion. I would only like to draw attention to the limitations of the concept as it marches victoriously into the dictionaries of the social sciences and into the political institutions of the European Union. My intention is just to remind that it is possible to translate the private to the collective and public spheres, regardless of how difficult this may appear in today's world.

Between the pressures of politically and economically opportune deconstruction of youth into young individuals navigating on their own across the sea to adulthood and their psychosocial demoralization there is a whole series of other possible intermediate attitudes, such as therapeutic consumerism, flexible adaptations to the worsening conditions of life, a constant shifting from one scene to another, occasional "fundamentalism" of various kind, an so on. All individualized attitudes are precarious and therefore risky. Those young people who unreflectively accept them as normal modes of coping with our "liquid times", may survive as individuals and live even well, but are lost as a part of youth as a factor of much needed social change.

MLADI: PAST INDIVIDUALIZACIJE V GLOBALNI DOBI

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POVZETEK

Raziskovalke in raziskovalci mladine v Evropi že od sedemdesetih let naprej ugotavljajo, da se je v osnovnih vrednotnih orientacijah mladih zgodil tektonski premik: mladi so se eksplicitno odmikali od velikih tem, velike zgodovine in ideologij k malim zgodbam zasebniške vsakdanjosti, k prijateljstvu, partnerstvu in k družini

V enakem času, ko so se mladi individualizirali z izrazitim obračanjem vase, se je na makro sistemski ravni prav tako dogajal tektonski premik; začeli so se temeljni globalizacijski procesi v obeh ključnih smereh, ki ju je podpiral predvsem razvoj informacijsko- komunikacijskih tehnologij: raztegovanje svetovnega sistema kapitalizma v ekonomskem in političnem smislu (svet kot "globalna vas") in globalno razširjanje njegovih ideoloških (kulturnih) mehanizmov ("McDonaldizacija sveta"). Individualizacija in globalizacija ponujata nove življenjske možnosti, a tudi številna tveganja. Mladi ljudje so bolj kot druge starostne skupine deležni obojega, vendar je bilo doslej zanje značilno, da so iskali individualne in biografske rešitve za strukturne probleme in tako uspešno padali v past discipliniranja in privatizacije

Čeprav bo gotovo veliko mladih ljudi našlo lastno pot v odraslo življenje, se zdi, da globalizacijska dogajanja sodobnosti promovirajo dve kontrastni skupini mladih: zmagovalce in poražence. Zmagovalci imajo družbene ter osebne vire, s katerimi izkoriščajo priložnosti, ki jih globalno razširjanje neoliberalnega kapitalizma ponuja. Mladi ljudje, ki se ne zmorejo ali nočejo prilagajati globalizacijskim zahtevam, tvegajo vstop v kategorijo poražencev. Oboji, tako zmagovalci kot poraženci, imajo svojo usodo le delno v lastnih rokah. Dinamika visoke moderne je specifična v tem, da izjemno razširja tveganjski krog mladih; mladi ljudje, ki so podvrženi tveganjem, še zdaleč ne prihajajo več samo iz klasičnih deprivilegiranih družbenih okolij, iz nižjih razredov in družbenih manjšin, čeprav je seveda res, da je med "poraženci" veliko več takih, ki živijo v neugodnih socialnih razmerah. Pomen klasičnih strukturnih prisil (razrednih, etničnih, rasnih, spolnih) se v sodobnosti navidez zmanjšuje ali vsaj nima več tako dominantnega vpliva na življenjski potek posameznic in posameznikov. Hkrati se krepijo silnice družbene neenakosti, ki delujejo znotraj temeljnih institucij ali agentur globalne družbe, ki prečijo klasično razredno strukturiranost: v družini, v izobraževalnem sistemu, v zaposlovanju in prostem času. Mladi ljudje, ki pripadajo različnim družbenim razredom, se sicer med seboj razlikujejo v količini in vrstah virov, možnosti in priložnosti, a so konkretni izteki njihovih poti v odraslost bolj kot kdaj koli odvisni od umestitev in podpor na navedenih področjih.

Ključne besede: mladi, individualizacija, globalizacija, družbena ranljivost, socialna izključenost

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