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Value Orientations and Perception of Social Change in Postcommunist Romania

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Introduction

For more than four decades, people of Central and Eastern Europe were subject to close supervision, suppression of initiative and of freedom of choice, paternalism, sanctioning of disobedience, and rewards unrelated to effort and performance (Schwartz & Bardi 1997). The collapse of communism came as a psychological shock. The extent of it, however, was difficult to evaluate due to its scale and a lack of comparative indices. Within a relatively short period of time, new laws, new institutions, and a new economic system started to be implemented, creating an environment hard to control. Compared to younger, post-transition generations who were increasingly exposed to a transformed society, with a substantial use of modern technologies nurturing a rapid spread of Western values (Sobotka, Zeman & Kantorova, 2003), older, pre-transition generations are more anchored in the past, and may be more resistant to the rapid social, economic and political changes. In the current chapter, using our own empirical findings and those reported in the literature, we are first seeking to find out whether and how the communist system affected the basic values of its citizens and, second, we are looking to provide some clarification about the values and experiences of individuals living through profound socioeconomic transition, such as the shift from communism to democracy. Our focus is on Romania, which, similar to other East European countries, has gone through dramatic transformation after the breakdown of communism in December of 1989.

When confronted with novel situations, the individual becomes aware of his/her beliefs and values and can react in two different ways: (a) displaying a *defense reaction* by avoiding the changes in order to maintain his/her identity or (b) displaying an *adaptation reaction* by changing the goals and the strategies needed to reach the goals (Trommsdorff 1999). Several works argue that adaption to life circumstances is important for value formation (e.g., Rokeach

1973), and this adaptation implies adjusting effectively to the existing opportunities and constraints. While communist regimes in Eastern Europe provided for the basic needs of its citizens (housing, employment, etc.), very few choices in terms of work, education, and leisure were available. These limited choices may have led to the adoption of certain value priorities (Schwarz & Bardi 1997). The demands and opportunities of the new system raise questions with regard to how individuals (of different ages and gender) were affected socially and psychologically.

The current chapter starts with a short historical introduction followed by a description of socio-demographic changes in Romania. Next, different theories and empirical findings regarding stability and change of value priorities across time and generations (pre- and post-transition) are presented. The chapter also integrates work on perception of social change from a generational and gender perspective.

Brief historical overview

Following hundreds of years of foreign influence, the Kingdom of Romania emerged after the union of principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859. At the end of World War I, Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia united with the Kingdom of Romania. By the end of the World War II, Romania fell under Soviet influence and a communist regime was established. This regime has slowly dragged the country into an economic, social, and moral deadlock. After the Communist regime was overthrown in December 1989, Romania began to transition towards democracy and a capitalist market economy. After years of economic problems and extensive reforms, the country joined the European Union in January 2007. Romania has the seventh largest population of the European Union with 21.9 million people, approximately 48% of its population residing in rural areas (Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2007).

Socio-economic and demographic changes within the Romanian context

During communism, people were provided security for full employment, affordable housing, health care, and family benefits and child care, even though at a low standard of living. In return for stability and security, autonomy was constrained and alternatives including travel, education, and access to information were very limited. While the new system provides more autonomy, it provides less security. General enthusiasm was dampened drastically after the first decade of democracy, and it can be explained by the extreme difficulties brought by the transition period. Similar to other former communist countries, unemployment in Romania became a crude reality after 1989. Unemployment rate grew from 3% in 1991 to 11.8% in 1999, and then declined continuously reaching 3.98% in 2008 (National Agency for Employment 2011). However, the outbreak of the financial crisis in early 2009 set an abrupt end to the decline in unemployment rates and reversed the trend, reaching 7.3% in July 2011, still roughly 2.5 percent below the EU 27 average (Eurostat 2010).

The decades of communism affected both the public and the private spheres. Starting with 1966, a strict ban on abortion combined with the nationalistic propaganda promoting the increase of the population resulted in the birth of thousands of unwanted children who were later left in orphanages (Pasti 2003). During early 1990s, family planning became widely available. Fertility rate has dramatically and continuously decreased in the last decade, from 2.2 in 1989 to 1.2 in 2001 and 1.32 in 2009, much below the minimum level necessary to ensure a demographic renewal of the generations (Eurostat 2010). However, the fall of the fertility rate is explained by the decline in the living standard (expressed in the form of widespread abortions) rather than proper family planning policy (Youth Policy in Romania 2000).

During communism, women constituted about 46% of the total adult labor force (United Nations Statistics Division 1995). Despite this “special” status, they were overrepresented in low-status jobs and their wages were kept at a lower level compared to men. At the same time, there was not a parallel change in the gendered division of domestic responsibilities, with women being responsible to maintain the home while working full time. With regard to more recent relations between genders, a survey conducted by Gender Barometer (2000) found that the majority of both men and women (71%) agrees that both partners are responsible for taking care of the children. Interestingly, more specific questions revealed a different picture: (1) 69% of the respondents reported that it is women who take care of the children on a daily basis, 23% answered that both parents do this task, and only 3% answered that fathers take over this task; (2) 64% answered that only women look after children’s homework and leisure time while only 8% answered that men do this; (3) mostly women bring children to school and to the doctor (68% and 66% respectively). Other studies show that with regard to domestic chores, other than childcare, Romanians support gender equality (B. Voicu, M. Voicu & Strapkova 2007), but disagree with the presence of women in leading positions (M. Voicu 2004). These findings show inconsistencies between responses to general versus specific questions, emphasizing the existence of both modern and traditional patterns with regard to gender roles.

The deterioration of living conditions affects people’s perception of opportunities and demands in the new society. A survey conducted in 1999 by CURS (Center for Urban and Regional Sociology) showed that 61% of Romanians considered that their life was better before 1990, 11% answered that it is the same, and only 24% reported that life is better after 1990. Data from the European Values Survey (1999 wave) showed that only 44% of the respondents

declared themselves as being satisfied with their lives, putting Romania on the list of the most pessimistic countries participating in the study (Voicu, 2001).

Values stability or values change?

Several researchers attempted to clarify the question whether the communist ideology and indoctrination in Central and Eastern Europe was successful and to what extent (Danis, Liu & Vacek 2011; Schwartz & Bardi 1997; Schwartz, Bardi & Bianchi 2000). Many argue that it was only superficial, but that an adaptation to the environment created by the system, including the gradual adoption of certain values, was inevitable (e.g., Schwartz & Bardi 1997). With regard to individuals' value priorities after the breakdown of communism, the questions arise whether, how profoundly and how quickly individuals will adopt values that are more in synch with the current demands and opportunities typical of a free market economy. Will new values replace the old ones or will they co-exist? The rate at which individuals' values change is, at least in part, dependent upon age and life stage (e.g., Schwartz & Bardi 1997). The rapid changeover from communism to democracy, from centralized economy to free markets is expected to have produced a generational gap expressed, among others, by different value preferences. Some theories argue that people's attitudes are resistant to change after early adulthood (e.g., Inglehart & Welzel 2005) when personality traits are well established. While older people may be more resistant to societal change, young people's values are less anchored in the past, and may adapt more quickly to change (Schwarz & Bardi 1997). While some of these questions can be answered empirically, others need further research.

Materialism and post-materialism in Romania

Inglehart (1997/2008) argues that an increase in economic prosperity leads to a better fulfillment of basic needs, which, in turn, leads to less materialist values from generation to

generation and a stronger focus on autonomy and self-expression in life. In times of prosperity, new generations emphasize less economic and physical security than earlier generations; instead, they give higher priority to nonmaterial goals, the so-called post-materialistic goals. The similarity in the preference of post-materialistic and individualistic values is expected to stimulate an overall change (a “silent revolution”) towards post-modern values (e.g., less authority, less religious orientation, and declining closeness of parent-child relationships). The results of the EVS (the 1999-2001 and the 2005-2007 waves) show that the percentage of Romanians who can be characterized as "post-materialist" remained practically unchanged over a period of a decade and a half ranging between 5-8%; the “materialists" represent 45-47% while those with "mixed orientation" 47-48% (B. Voicu, 2007). Additionally, over 70% of the sample believes that the Church provides adequate answers to family problems and moral issues, thus being the European country (in the EVS survey) with the highest levels of confidence in religion (Voicu 2001; M. Voicu 2007). Moreover, 85% believe that a smaller, but secure salary is better than a larger, otherwise uncertain one (B. Voicu 2001).

At the same time, two thirds of the participants in the EVS reported that they can plan their life as they wish, this percentage being comparable with those in Western countries, and is among the highest in ex-communist countries (B. Voicu 2001). This belief in one’s ability to control their own fate seems paradoxical, given the other responses reported earlier, especially those about the authority of religion. In contrast to this, results based on data collected more recently from representative samples (late 2009) showed an increased preference for external locus of control among the 20-year olds, suggesting a detachment from responsibility and attributing success to factors such as luck (Gavreliuc 2012).

Waves of the EVS/WVS (1993, 1999, 2005) indicate a continuity in the importance attributed to family (over 85% of respondents declare the family as "important" or "very important"), followed by work, religion, friends, leisure (all above 70) (Popescu 2007). Only religion showed significant increase in the importance it is given (Popescu 2007), a pattern that is different from the general trend in Europe where a gradual withdrawal of the church from public life is noted. With regard to child rearing goals, Romania appears rather unique among EU countries with its focus on hard work (71% in 1992, 82% in 1999, and 83% in 2005) and religious faith (43% in 1993, 59% in 1999 and 63% in 2005) rather than creativity and independence (B. Voicu 2007). Putting these trends together (materialism, reliance on religious authority and aversion towards risk), Romanian postcommunist society seems rather a *traditional society* than a modern one.

Conservatism and hierarchy or autonomy and mastery?

Schwartz and his colleagues (e.g., Schwartz & Bilsky 1987; Schwartz & Sagiv 1995) have presented and validated a theory of universals in the content and structure of value systems. Values are desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Schwartz 1992). Using the technique of smallest space analysis, this theory distinguishes seven types of values (56 single values) according to the motivations that underlie them: conservatism, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy, hierarchy, egalitarianism, harmony and mastery (Schwartz 2005). The theory also argues that certain value types have similar behavioral implications and are therefore compatible with one another while others are in conflict with one another (Schwarz 1992). These compatibilities and conflicts have been validated across samples from more than 20 countries; there are, however, some deviations from these patterns as demonstrated empirically with samples from several Eastern European countries (Schwartz &

Bardi 1997). In several former communist countries (Romania was not included) the three universalism values (world at peace, social justice, and equality) and the two security values (social order and national security), which are normally incompatible, were in close proximity in the structural analyses implying that the five values share a common meaning (Schwartz & Bardi 1997). The interpretation here is that communism affected not only the priorities that individuals gave to (sociopolitical) values but also the meaning of these values (Schwartz & Bardi 1997). Additionally, the strong priority given to conservatism and hierarchy in these former communist countries supports the hypothesis of adaptation to life in a communist social system (Schwartz & Bardi 1997).

Using Schwartz Values Survey, Gavreliuc (2011) examined representative samples of three age groups (N = 1841), conventionally called "generations": "Generation 50" (individuals who were on average 50 years old in 2002-2003 when the data was collected, socialized overwhelmingly during communism), "Generation 35" (secondarily socialized during communism) and "Generation 20" (not integrated in the communist system, and began their social insertion into a society that was profoundly changed). The "generation 35", the "decretei", represents a distinct social stratum which has internalized a dramatic social destiny: they are the cohorts that exploded demographically in 1966 when Ceausescu passed the 770/1966 decree that banned abortion; they also are the generation that contributed decisively to the removal of the communist regime in December 1989, deriving this also from the higher number of victims at the "revolution" (***, 2011).

In contrast to hypotheses of value change as a response to dramatic transformation (XX), results showed more similarities than differences in values priorities across the three generations studies here. "Generation 35" showed the most pronounced conservatism, hierarchy,

Table 1
Portraits of intergenerational values

Supraordinate Values	G50	G35	G20
Conservatism	4.06 -----**	4.68 *-----	4.21
Hierarchy	2.12 -----*	2.97	2.29
Harmony	4.19	4.17	4.08
Egalitarianism	4.62 -----*	4.23	4.46
Intellectual autonomy	4.78 -----**	4.12	4.43
Affective autonomy	3.56	3.21 *-----	3.81
Mastery	3.96	3.77	3.82

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05

egalitarianism, and especially low intellectual and emotional autonomy compared to the other two cohorts (see Table 1). This value profile suggests striking instability, ambivalence and vulnerability pointing to an internalization of generational insecurity typical for the “decretei” (Gavreliuc 2011). Such vulnerability was reported in other similar studies regarding the "legacy of trauma" (Kellermann 2001). However, between generations 50 and 20, there is no statistically significant difference in terms of value orientations, and this speaks more in support of intergenerational value transfers, despite the radical societal transformation.

Overall, the evidence presented so far speaks more in favor of stability of values rather than value change across time and cohorts in Romania. To follow Inglehart’s theory, in order for values to change (both in terms of priorities and of meaning), significant changes in the actual life conditions are necessary. One interpretation is that not enough improvements were experienced in the Romanian context in terms of general living standard.

There is, however, some evidence coming from cross-national studies that suggests that Romanian youth are oriented more toward individualistic values. For instance, using Schwartz Values Survey, Frost and Frost (2000) compared 217 Romanian college students with 201 American students and found that Americans scored higher than Romanians in *conformity* and *tradition*. Furthermore, a highly significant difference was found for *universalism*, with Romanian students giving more importance to aspects like wisdom, a world of beauty, unity with nature, a world at peace, social justice, and environmental protection (Frost & Frost, 2000).. Friedlmeier and Trommsdorff (2011) found some support for similarities between American and Romanian adolescents in the importance given to individualistic and collectivistic values.

Another study that included Romania showed that Eastern European adolescents (and Americans), compared to Western Europeans; stressed the importance of becoming rich, famous, and professional, and the importance of taking care of their parents, having children and being useful for their country (Nurmi, Liiceanu & Liberska 1999). This high interest in having money and fame may be a consequence of the current rapid social changes toward free-market and capitalist economy, which might provide models of people who earned much money in a short time ('nouveaux riches'), and, in turn, create unrealistic expectations in youths. Furthermore, the importance of taking care of the parents and being useful to their country mentioned by adolescents from Eastern Europe could be an expression of the rather traditional types of values existing in these countries and the poor economic situation as compared to Western countries and the incapacity of the welfare system to provide real support for families (Nurmi, Liiceanu & Liberska 1999).

These findings focusing adolescents and college students suggest a blend of traditional and modern, individualistic values thus implying that younger generations who are still forming their values may adapt more quickly and easier to the transition.

Perception of social change: generational and gender differences

Since 1989, a decline in social welfare services in former socialist countries combined with increased competition for employment placed greater burden on women, who are expected to balance work and family obligations (Macek 1998). Effects of social change on human development are also expected to vary by age (Brandstaedter & Greve 1994; Heckhausen & Schulz 1995). Because youth/adolescents are not yet committed to a certain career path that could be disrupted by abrupt social changes (e.g., Elder, Shanahan & Clipp 1994), they are expected to be more likely to seize the new opportunities available and have a more positive perception of the ongoing changes taking place in the society compared to older generations (Friedlmeier 2006). For instance, older generations may lack (at least temporarily) the social and personal resources to adapt to the new environment, thus evaluating the changes in the new society more negatively.

Friedlmeier (2006) examined parents' and adolescents' perceptions of the changes taking place in the society (e.g., predictability of tomorrow, income inequality, trust in people) after the fall of communism in Romania. Based on the assumptions outlined above, two hypotheses were tested: (1) compared to boys and men, it was expected that girls and women would be more likely to perceive the changes as negative; (2) compared to the older generation (the parents) adolescents would feel more positive about the social changes. One hundred families from a medium size city in the Eastern region of Romania participated. The instrument of Perception of Social Change was developed by Noack et al. (1997). In the current study, participants were

asked to rate whether different aspects of life deteriorated, remained unchanged or improved in comparison to the time before the breakdown of the communism in 1989 (or during the last five years for adolescents since they were too young to remember the times before 1989). Only two scales were used here: Social Life (e.g., “People help each other”; “Many people get active in the interest of others”) and Uncertainty (e.g., “Everything is so uncertain that anything could happen”; “Things change so fast that is difficult to find an orientation”). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (“much less today”) to 5 (“much more today”). High scores for *Uncertainty* indicate higher level of perceived negative change whereas high scores for *Social Life* indicate higher level of perceived positive change.

As expected, results showed that parents perceived stronger uncertainty and less concern for social life in the society compared to adolescents (see Table 2). The overall high scores for uncertainty across all groups indicate that aspects like unpredictability and insecurity of the future, crime and aggressiveness, and financial discrepancy among people are perceived to have increased in the society during post-communist years. Additionally, mothers and daughters showed perceived greater uncertainty than fathers and sons, but no gender effect was found for social life. Men emphasize personal initiative and independence more than women, which might better prepare them to cope with competition and novel situations in a market-type economy (Friedlmeier 2006). Moreover, the role division between men and women in Romania is rather conservative (Pasti 2003). Therefore, it is possible that the chances women have on the new job market such as to start a new business are smaller and not in agreement with their husbands’ traditional expectations. That women perceived more aggressiveness and crimes in the society may be also because that they spent more time watching TV than men (especially Romanian channels) where crimes and robberies are shown as a daily routine (Pasti 2003).

Table 2
Intergenerational and Gender Comparison of Perceived Social Changes

	Parents		Adolescents		F-value (df = 3, 296)	R ² (%)	F-value for single effects
	Father (n = 100) M (SD)	Mother (n = 100) M (SD)	Son (n = 48) M (SD)	Daughter (n = 52) M (SD)			
Uncertainty	4.41 (0.58)	4.66 (0.35)	3.70 (0.68)	3.98 (0.46)	46.39 ^{***}	32.00	A: 121.66 ^{***} B: 17.80 ^{***} C: 0.06
Social Life	2.55 (0.79)	2.53 (0.80)	2.91 (0.85)	2.72 (0.78)	2.97 [*]	3.00	A: 7.68 ^{**} B: 1.20 C: 0.68

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$. Notes: Answers were rated on a 5-point scale, from 1 (much less today) to 5 (much more today).

The perception of social change may play a powerful role in the process of adaptation to a changing society as well as individuals' well-being. Further results of the current study showed that parents and daughters who perceived positive changes in social relationships reported greater satisfaction in different life domains (Friedlmeier 2006). Piquart, Silbereisen and Juang (2004) found that those adolescents in the former East Germany who perceived higher levels of negative effects of German unification (e.g., the financial situation, options of spending their leisure time, and life in general) also reported poorer satisfaction with their present life (e.g., school, the chance of getting a job) and optimism regarding their future. Overall, these findings point out that adolescents have a more positive outlook of the recent social changes compared to the parents generation, and that female participants perceived more uncertainty in the society than male participants.

Final discussion and future research directions

The breakdown of the communist system in Eastern and Central Europe was the most significant historical events of the last decades, having enormous economic, social, moral, and psychological consequences. This chapter has provided an overview of the impact of socio-political and economic changes on individuals belonging to different generations in Romania. Overall, interesting results were found in terms of mainly stability but also some change of the value system. Several studies presented in this chapter showed that Romania remains essentially a traditional society (illustrated in terms of religious authority, risk avoidance, focus on discipline, conservatism). The instability following the economic recession from 2009 puts additional obstacles to the transition to modern (or post-modern) value orientations. We learned from this chapter that younger people (Generation 20) structure their values and attitudes similar to their “parents” (Generation 50), even if children in Romania sometimes condemn their parents for complicity under communist times. Such narrative appears frequently in the interviews done with youth, despite the persistence of transgenerational fatalistic attitudes (Gavreliuc 2011). Evidence from some cross-national studies and other small-scale studies conducted with Romanian samples suggest, however, a more positive outlook both in terms of values and perception of recent changes among adolescents and college students.

In times of social change or modernization, values of both types (individualistic and collectivistic) may coexist. Sigel (1999) assumed that where changes occur, there are mixed feelings associated with a blending of collectivistic and individualistic goals and values. The important question here is: what blend is an optimal blend in terms of encouraging and maintaining a democratic system in former communist countries? As it has been shown in several studies mentioned in this chapter, the values that are given most priority are conservatism

and hierarchy, the expectation that the government should take more responsibility. At the same time, values that are needed in a free market system (i.e., autonomy and mastery values, taking risks) are not very much endorsed. Some values may change over a period of years while others may take generations to change (Danis, Liu & Vacek 2011). Future studies, especially longitudinal, should clarify the reciprocal relationship between changing values in a changing environment.

This chapter sheds some light to important questions, raises others, and suggests future research of how values and behaviors change in response to institutional upheaval. More research is needed to investigate the impact of abrupt social change like the breakdown of the communist system on individual development as well as factors that contribute to the development of successful strategies necessary to cope with socio-economic challenges and insecurities.

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