Similar or different? Social position and identity of youth in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to confront the theory of cultural capital and social capital social reality in cross-border regions of three countries: Polish, Hungary and Ukraine, with particular emphasis on the role played by youth in these societies. This confrontation will include both theoretical reflection on the nature, focusing on the problem of the application of the theory of cultural and social capital to describe societies of Central and Eastern Europe, and also the results of empirical studies carried out among the students of secondary school in Poland, Hungary and Ukraine. The specific objective of the article is to analyse the concept of cultural capital and social capital as a factor of identity and social position and political youth Poland, Hungary and Ukraine, for example, the youngest generation.

Keywords: *social capital, cultural capital, youth, social position, identity*

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Introduction

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe suffered in the period after the Second World War many changes of geopolitical, economic, commercial and social nature. As Norman Davis writes, "the enormity of victims of the Second World War did not bring safety: the continent quickly disintegrated into rival political and military blocs, whose energy had been wasted for nearly fifty years" (Davies, 2003: 1125).

That situation lasted until December 1991, when the final breakup of the Soviet Union into independent countries finished the bipolar division of Europe and created a new space for the functioning of independent states of Central and Eastern Europe. The new economic, commercial and political order did not remain without influence on changes in the social field. The existing social hierarchies have thoroughly changed. In contrast to the relatively stable stratification systems in Western societies, the logic of the stratification system and the rules governing it in contemporary Eastern Europe were subjected to frequent qualitative change. People, who in 1990 were sixty or more years old, had lived in four fundamentally different systems: the pre-communist system, Stalinism, post-Stalinist state socialism, and since 1989 (in Russia since December 1991) - in post-communism. These four different social structures were characterized by different spatial structures (Szelényi, Treiman and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995: 13). The results of the research presented in this paper try to answer the main research question, i.e. if the cultural capital and social capital are factors of identity and social position formation of young people living in the border area of three Central and Eastern European countries: Poland, Hungary and Ukraine. It should be emphasized that the study included the Polish-German, Polish-Czech, Polish-Ukrainian, Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Hungarian borderlands. The operationalization of research issues came down to the question whether the cultural capital and social capital, as factors of identity and social position of the youngest generation, make the high school students of Polish, Hungarian and Ukrainian borderlands similar to each other. In the theoretical layer, the aim of this paper is systematic confrontation of Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and the theory of social capital with the social reality of border areas in five Central and Eastern European countries. This confrontation includes both theoretical reflection, focusing on the problem of the use of Bourdieu's theory and the theory of social capital formulated by other authors, in order to describe the societies of Central and Eastern European countries, and also the results of empirical research carried out among high school students living in Polish, Hungarian and Ukrainian border areas.

Social position in societies of Central and Eastern Europe after the communism period

Social status is a concept of a high degree of generality, defining the space occupied by the individual in the social structure. Depending on how we define the social structure, the understanding of social position will change (Gorlach and Wasilewski, 2000: 164). An interesting description of this concept was presented by Piotr Sztompka, who characterized social positions in four interrelated dimensions: 1) in the normative dimension ("how should it be"), in which the social structure is referred to as institutionalized duties. From the point of view of an individual, this dimension is defined by the social role; 2) in the dimension of awareness - the ideal one, in which the social identity is defined as a set of beliefs, judgments, ideas, and habits of thought relating to "how it is". From the perspective of the individual, that set can be described as "positional

mentality" - a set of assessments that is typical for the given social position, in particular concerning the position of the individual's own group in relation to other communities; 3) in the interactive dimension, in which the social identity is determined by the main directions and channels of activities, as well as by partners of interactions. From the point of view of an individual, this dimension is characterized by typical contacts with others - "interactive options"; 4) in the dimension relating to interests, in which the social identity is defined as access to desired goods, and in consequence, as the range of life chances. In the personal perspective, differentiated access to goods (including prestige, wealth, power, etc.) is usually referred to as the social status (Gorlach and Wasilewski, 2000: 164). Sztompka writes that sociological explanation of what an individual is doing, what he thinks, what he strives for, requires always taking into account the position occupied by him/her in the society, its location within the social structure, and thus evoking in the explanations four structural position correlates: role, mentality, option, and status. Due to the interrelation of four dimensions of the structure, any dimensional explanations must be regarded as invalid (Sztompka, 1989: 58). The term "social position" always refers to the characteristics of the position of an individual (group) in the social structure, it always takes into account several dimensions (although it can assign a crucial importance to one of them), and the position taken in the structure is always characterized by the connections existing between various positions (Gorlach and Wasilewski, 2000: 167).

The pre-communist social hierarchy in the period before World War II was shaped by the cultural and economic capital, although the semi-feudal heritage of pre-communist Eastern Europe, with its principles of social class hierarchy gave some special color to the dynamics of social inequalities. After 1948, a qualitatively new social stratification system was created and fully crystallized by the end of the fifties. In this new structural space, the former economic capital has lost its importance and became a burden. The representatives of the former moneyed class have become "class enemies": if they wanted to remain on the surface of the new social order, they had to compensate for features burdening them by acquisition of the new, currently recognized capital. The decisive determinant of the position in the structure of Stalin's society was political capital. In this classical model of state socialism, only those who joined the Communist Party had a chance of promotion to the top of social hierarchy. Only those, whose political loyalty to their superiors could not be challenged, and whose commitment to the Marxist-Leninist worldview left no room for any doubts, could achieve success. Possession of cultural capital, however, was not an obstacle. Education - college school diploma and - if there wasn't any - graduation from a party school or a Marxism-Leninism "university" was helpful, but not necessary. Since the mid-sixties, the Stalinist system of stratification has changed. The newly acquired economic capital began increasingly impact social inequalities. The political capital continued to play a major role in the processes of social advancement, but more attention than before was paid to the cultural capital and professional competence. (Szelényi, Treiman and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995: 14–15). The fall of communism in Poland, which was induced by the partially free elections in June 1989, has meant that from the early spring of that year, the process of rapid economic and political disintegration of the entire structure of state socialism began. For the social structure, the most important was the change consisting in devaluation and de-institutionalization of political capital. Within a short period of time, until 1991, the former political capital, defined as the membership in the Communist Party, not only ceased to be of value, but actually it became a burden. One can risk a thesis that the structure of the post-communist society in this period was a mirror image of the structure in the developed

Western countries. So far, the possession of economic capital had played a secondary role, and the cultural capital has become the decisive factor in achieving position in the post-communist social space, in the struggle for privileges, especially for political power. This unprecedented increase in the value of cultural capital was clearly evident when we look at the composition of the political class, which came to power in the first years after 1989. The power in post-communist societies was fully controlled by intellectuals and professionals. Presidents, prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, mayors, and almost all leading persons in the governing parties and opposition were intellectuals or professionals. In capitalist countries, professionals play an important role in politics, but they are usually lawyers or economists. Humanist intelligentsia rarely gets to the top of political ladder. In post-communist societies, however, taking up the key positions in the structures of power by the humanist intelligentsia is not an exception but rather the rule. The leading post-communist politicians are playwrights, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers. (Szelényi, Treiman and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995: 19).

Social position of youth in Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 21st century

The results of the analyses presented in this study are derived from the survey conducted in the period from March to June 2015 in three countries - Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine. It must be emphasized that despite the fact that the research was carried out on the territory of three countries, it covered the borderlands of five countries. The research sample consisted of high school students in Słubice, Zielona Góra, Racibórz, Krosno, Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Hrubieszów (Poland), Debrecen (Hungary), as well as Drohobych and Uzhgorod (Ukraine). The research was conducted using the audit questionnaire technique in some randomly selected schools. The total sample size included 2900 persons.

The first of the analyzed components defining the social position was to identify the major life goals and plans of the young people. For the analysis, the central tendency statistics, i.e. the arithmetic mean was used. The respondents referred to each of the variables on a five-point scale, constructed in the following way: 1 = I care very much, I care = 2, 3 = Difficult to say, 4 = I do not care, 5 = I do not care at all. The lower the value of the arithmetic mean, the greater importance was attributed by the respondent to the given variable describing plans and life goals. For the Polish youth, the most important life goals concentrate on the following issues: a happy family life, finding a good job, having friends, development of abilities and interests, as well as gaining respect of other people. Ukrainian youth has similar plans and life goals as their Polish peers: a happy family life, development of abilities and interests, having friends, graduation from college or university, and finding a good job. Young Hungarians turned their attention to other life goals. Like their peers from Poland and Ukraine, they pointed out a happy family life and having friends. But in contrast to young Poles and Ukrainians, the Hungarians indicated such values as: life just for pleasure and fun, development of skills and interests, as well as a quiet life away from any troubles. One should pay attention to one interesting point. The young people from Ukraine want to implement all plans and life goals listed in the survey. The range of the value of the arithmetic mean statistic between the most and least desirable variable amounted only to 0.54 (the lowest average value was 2.11, and the highest one was 2.65). In the case of respondents from Poland and Hungary, that range was much larger.

Table 1. Plans and life goals of respondents – mean values

	Poland	Ukraine	Hungary	Total
happy family life	1,37	2,11	1,17	1,72
having friends	1,59	2,16	1,52	1,87
development of abilities and interests	1,70	2,14	1,46	1,89
finding a good job	1,44	2,20	1,81	1,89
gaining respect of other people	1,72	2,24	1,72	1,99
independence from others	1,85	2,22	1,69	2,02
graduation from college or university	2,04	2,17	1,60	2,04
quiet life away from any troubles	1,92	2,38	1,48	2,09
acquisition of assets	1,86	2,46	1,83	2,16
helping other people	2,07	2,30	1,86	2,16
achieving a high position	2,17	2,37	2,16	2,27
living just for pleasure and fun	2,64	2,39	1,45	2,34
eternal salvation - life according to the principles of faith	2,35	2,58	3,12	2,58
starting an own business	3,05	2,41	2,54	2,64
participation in power	3,17	2,65	2,72	2,84

Source: own research (N=2867)

An indicator of social status was also the question what factors primarily determined the probability of finding a ,,good" job after finishing school. For the analysis, the central tendency statistics - the arithmetic mean was used again. The respondents referred to each of the variables on a five-point scale constructed as follows: 1 = Very high, High = 2, 3 = Small, 4 = Very small. The lower the value of the arithmetic mean, the greater is the importance of the variable describing the factors contributing to finding a "good" job.

For the young people from Poland, on finding a "good" job decided the following factors: foreign language skills, high professional qualifications, connections and favoritism, solid, diligent work and occupation - kind of work. Youth from Ukraine turned their attention to the same factors as their Polish peers: high professional qualifications, solid, diligent work, foreign language skills and occupation - kind of work.

What distinguished both national youth groups was the reference to education. Young people from Hungary were very similar in their opinions to the Poles, pointing out the following factors useful in finding a "good" job after completion of education: foreign language skills, high professional qualifications, connections and favoritism, solid and diligent work. One factor that was not indicated by the young people from Poland and Ukraine was grace, personal charm. Respondents from both Hungary and Ukraine indicated education, as a factor helpful in finding a "good" job.

Table 2. Factors facilitating finding a "good" job after completion of education – mean values

	Poland	Ukraine	Hungary	Total
foreign language skills	1,51	1,63	1,32	1,55
high professional qualifications	1,64	1,52	1,56	1,57
solid and diligent work	1,81	1,58	1,66	1,67
education	1,86	1,73	1,66	1,76
occupation, kind of work	1,83	1,78	1,88	1,81
connections and favoritism	1,64	2,14	1,59	1,89
initiative and entrepreneurship	2,08	1,82	1,91	1,92
prestige and reputation of college or university the respondent graduated from	2,26	2,21	1,97	2,19
cuteness, cunning	2,87	2,06	1,87	2,31
grace, personal charm	2,58	2,46	1,62	2,38
place of residence, e.g. a big city, village	2,36	2,45	2,31	2,40
luck, coincidence	2,69	2,30	2,09	2,40
parents' wealth	2,61	2,39	2,52	2,48
social background	3,08	2,59	2,20	2,70
political opinions	3,31	2,95	2,64	3,03

Source: own research (N=2849)

The cultural capital has become one of the most common notions in social sciences in recent years. Theories dealing with cultural capital have proved particularly useful in the case of attempts to explain the transformation taking place within the social structure of post-communist societies. That transformation can be recognized at the level of changes in attitudes and behaviors in the life of representatives of different social categories. One can also strive to capture their effects at the level of general mechanisms and directions of mobility in the verti-cal sphere – of social classes or mobility taking place in horizontal direction between various segments of social structure (Bartoszek, 2003: 7). The particular usefulness of Pierre Bour-dieu's cultural capital theory, as well as the very concept of cultural capital for analysis of changes in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 was emphasized by Ivan Szelényi. He wrote that the unprecedented increase in the value of cultural capital is clearly visible when we look at the composition of political class that came to power in recent years. The power in post-communist societies is fully controlled by intellectuals and professionals. Presidents, prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, mayors, and almost all the lead-ing persons in the governing parties and opposition are intellectuals or professionals. In

capital-ist countries, the professionals play an important role in politics, but they are usually lawyers or economists. Humanistic intelligentsia rarely gets to the top of the political ladder. In post-communist societies, however, taking up key positions in the structures of power by the hu-manist intelligentsia is not an exception but rather the rule. The leading post-communist politi-cians are playwrights, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers (Szelényi, Treiman and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995: 17).

In the scientific literature, the concept of cultural capital is used primarily in reference to Pierre Bourdieu's social structure reproduction theory developed in cooperation with Jean-Claude Passeron. According to P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, the cultural capital of an indi-vidual is most strongly conditioned by education and occupation of his/her father and it im-pacts the level of his/her educational attainments (Bourdieu et al., 1990: 130–31). The cultural capital of students from the upper classes gives them a distinct advantage over students from the lower classes in going through the social selection, starting from the earlier levels of educa-tion; it favors them in obtaining better places in the better fields of study and in achieving better results (Bourdieu et al., 1990: 152–53). In conclusion, it can be stated that the concept of cultural capital explicated in such a manner allows for deepening of perceptions concerning the role of parents' social status in achieving higher positions by their children (Bartoszek, 2003).

As the key measure of cultural capital acquired at family home, two factors were taken into account in this study: parents' education and the number of books in the respondents' home bookcases. Based on the answers to these three questions, synthetic indicator, which included father's education (weight 33.3%), mother's education (weight 33.3%) and the number of books at family home, was developed.

Table 3. Indicator of the family cultural capital and the country of origin (in percent)

Level of indicator	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
Low	35,1	20,9	31,3
Middle	32,1	47,5	31,0
High	32,8	31,6	37,6

Source: own research (N = 2846)

The youth living in Ukraine features the highest level of family cultural capital. The Hungarian youth is characterized by a slightly lower level, and the Polish youth features the lowest level of family cultural capital. It should also be noted that generally mothers featured a higher level of education than fathers. An interesting dependence, which is also worth noting, was the fact that the educational level of parents is determined by the size of home library.

Based on the collected research results concerning the level of the family cultural capital indicator, it can be concluded that in the case of high school students, the inherited cultural capital can constitute a factor determining access to higher education. That can be evidenced by the analysis of answers to the question concerning the educational and professional future, and the field of study preferred by the respondents.

Young people with a higher level of cultural capital more often declared taking up university studies, and often pointed out the fields of study enjoying a high social prestige, such as medicine or law.

Social identity of youth in Middle and Eastern Europe

The concept of identity referred to in the title of this paper is also to be discussed. The identity can be of crucial importance in the process of perceiving themselves in the society, in the perception of others, and finally, the way of perception of the society (Wojakowski, 2007: 70), especially in the case of borderland, i.e. the area covered by the research. The borderland can be defined as an area, in which the social and cultural contacts between two or more nations or cultural ethnic groups take place as well as the consequences of those contacts in the form of formation of the new man and his culture (Sadowski, 1992).

From the scientific point of view, the issue regarding differences and similarities occurring among the representatives of youth in the borderlands of Central and Eastern European countries is therefore interesting. The notion of identity usually refers in sociology to the realm of self-definition of social actors – both individual and collective ones. It can be therefore defined as the collection of perceptions, judgments and beliefs of that actor about him/herself (Bokszański, 2002: 252).

The term identity is often used interchangeably with the terms identification and awareness. It should be emphasized that classical sociological theories of identity basing on the model of identity health, interactive model of identity or ideological identity model are based on the assumption of individual identity. Recently, however, in the social sciences there can be observed a tendency to generalize the concept of identity and in consequence to extend its scope, also onto the community. In this case, we talk about various forms of collective identity: ethnic groups, social movements or nations (Bokszański, 2002: 252). In summary, it can be assumed that the identity is an established, and thus a relatively stable form of awareness. On the other hand, identification means the identity of individuals. If the individual defines her/himself, we talk about his/her self-identification or auto-identification. So it is about a kind of self-consciousness, i.e. the awareness of their own "I", perception of his/her personality, attitudes and behaviors. The individual or personal identity overlaps the social identity, i.e. the collective identity, social awareness or identity (Lewandowska, 2003). Social identity is a supraindividual set of self-definitions which are irreducible to the self-definition of an individual person. It is based on the internalized and experienced tradition, on the present and on the definition of the future which is common to the entire group; it is so close to the concepts of collective awareness, collective representations and imaginations (Banaszczyk, 1989). Due to the nature of the research and to the treatment of representatives of various borderlands as subjects of research analysis, I will focus my attention on social identity.

The first of the researched components of social identity was the sense of connection with the family, the nation, the place of respondent's residence, with the region and Europe. Each dimension was analyzed from the perspective of each of the countries distinguished in the study. One of the analyzed dimensions was the sense of connection with respondent's own nation. The strongest connection with their own people was declared by youth from Ukraine and Poland. The respondents in these two countries were characterized by a strong and very strong sense of connection with their own nation (the feeling of being a Pole – an Ukrainian) and the lowest percentage of declaration of the total lack of connection with the nation (4.4% and 8.4%). The weakest level of the sense

of connection with their own nation featured young people living in Hungary. Every fifth respondent did not feel any connection with their own nation. The detailed data summary is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The sense of connection with the own nation and the country of origin (in percent)

How strong is the connection you feel with YOUR NATION	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
very strong	20,5	19,1	4,2
strong	42,1	47,3	26,3
weak	29,0	29,2	49,4
I don't feel any connection	8,4	4,4	20,1

Source: own research (N = 2832)

The second of the analyzed dimensions was the sense of connection with the family. The level of respondents' declarations was similar in each country. A slightly stronger sense of connection with the family featured youth from Ukraine and Poland.

Table 2 . The sense of connection with the family and the country of origin (in percent)

How strong is the connection you feel with YOUR FAMILY	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
very strong	68,9	72,6	64,3
strong	24,8	22,2	29,7
weak	5,2	4,7	6,0
I don't feel any connection	1,1	0,5	0,0

Source: own research (N = 2832)

The strongest connection with their own place of residence declared again the young people living in Ukraine and in Poland. In the case of young people from Hungary, the sense of attachment to their place of living was at a noticeably lower level.

Table 3. The sense of connection with the place of residence and the country of origin (in percent)

How strong is the connection you feel with PLACE YOU LIVE IN	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
very strong	16,3	15,2	7,8
strong	44,9	48,4	37,7
weak	30,7	34,2	43,4
I don't feel any connection	8,1	2,1	11,1

Source: own research (N = 2832)

The analysis of the level of declared identification with the region demonstrated that it is relatively poorly perceived by the youth of the three researched countries, regardless of their geographic location. It can be associated with the already signaled in the literature problem of poor identification of respondents with mezzo level of social structures. This is confirmed among others by the research conducted by Bohdan Jałowiecki and Grzegorz Gorzelak who came to the conclusion that the level of identification, regionalism and attachment to the region is very weak in the post-socialist countries (Gorzelak and Jałowiecki, 1993). As can be also seen in the following research results, we feel a much stronger identification with the micro level (family, place of residence) and macro level (nation) than with the region that can be considered as the mezzo level of social structure.

Table 4. The sense of connection with the region and the country of origin (in percent)

How strong is the connection you feel with *YOUR REGION*	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
very strong	5,1	7,8	4,2
strong	25,3	39,3	16,9
weak	49,1	43,2	53,9
I don't feel any connection	20,5	9,7	25,0

Source: own research (N = 2832)

Like in the case of the sense of connection with the region, the youth from three countries of Central and Eastern Europe was characterized by a relatively weak sense of connection with Europe.

Table 5. The sense of connection with Europe and the country of origin (in percent)

How strong is the connection you feel with *EUROPE*	Country		
	Poland	**Ukraine**	**Hungary**
very strong	8,7	10,2	8,3
strong	27,2	30,1	21,9
weak	41,4	41,5	36,9
I don't feel any connection at all	22,6	18,2	32,9

Source: own research (N = 2832)

Summary

The research demonstrated differences in the level of analysis of identity and social position of young people - high school students living in the borderland of three countries of Central and Eastern Europe - Poland, Hungary and Ukraine. The aim of the

research was to assess the level of identification with social structures at the following levels: macro - nation, Europe, mezzo – region, and micro - the family and the place of respondents' residence. The research has shown that the strongest connection with their own nation declares youth from Poland and Ukraine. The weakest level of declared connection with their own nation featured young people living in Hungary. The analysis of the level of declared identification with the region demonstrated that it is relatively weakly identified by young people, regardless of their geographic location. The strongest connection with their place of residence felt the young people living in Poland and Ukraine. The analysis of the sense of connection with the family showed that the level of respondents' declarations was similar in each country. For the Polish youth, the most important life plans concentrate on the following issues: happy family life, finding a good job, having friends, development of abilities and interests, as well as gaining other people's respect. The youth from Ukraine has similar plans and life goals as their Polish male and female peers. Young Hungarians paid their attention to other life plans. Like their peers from Poland and Ukraine, they pointed out a happy family life and having friends. But in contrast to young Poles and Ukrainians, the Hungarians indicate such values as: life just for pleasure and fun, development of skills and interests, as well as a quiet life away from any troubles. The indicator of social position used for the analysis was the variable showing what factor primarily determined the probability of finding a „good" job after finishing school. Young people from the three countries of Central and Eastern Europe were rather consistent in their opinions that factors that determine finding a "good" job are foreign language skills, high professional qualifications, connections and favoritism, solid and diligent work, and occupation - kind of work.

The analysis of cultural capital resources of youth from Central and Eastern Europe made it possible to capture several interesting issues. In order to find out the specificity of young people living in different parts of the three countries, the type of borderland was selected as the unit of analysis (the types of distinguished borderlands are described in the introduction to this paper). The highest level of the family cultural capital features young people living in the Polish - German, Hungarian - Ukrainian - Slovakian and Ukrainian - Polish borderlands, and the lowest one features the Polish - Czech and Polish – Slovakian borderlands. The most educated were parents of students from the Polish - German and Ukrainian – Polish borderlands. The research concerning the cultural capital resources allowed for drawing the following conclusion: in the case of high school students, the inherited cultural capital can constitute a factor determining the access to higher education. That can be evidenced by the analysis of answers to the question concerning the educational and professional future, and the field of study preferred by the respondents. Young people with a higher level of cultural capital more often declared taking up university studies, and often pointed out fields of study enjoying high social prestige, such as medicine or law.

The conducted research represents just a fragment of very interesting scientific issue, i.e. the study of the youngest generation entering the world of adult social, civic and professional life. The analysis of social position of the young elites, their identity and cultural capital resources can be of crucial importance in the future. Since in the near future these young people will constitute the foundations of intellectual elite in the borderlands of Central and Eastern European countries.

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