

Chapter 8

Transition from Education to Employment: Comparative Assessment of Youth Guarantee Policies in Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Latvia

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8.1 Introduction

Eastern Europe is not a uniform historical, economic and cultural space even though it is often understood as such, chiefly by virtue of the shared experience of former socialism. The changes in the position of youth during the transition are certainly one of the key commonalities of post-transitional Eastern Europe. In the post-war decades, the ideal of growth and progress was, namely, one of the fundamental underlying conceptual notions in Eastern European countries, particularly in the ideological structures of youth. In this way, ideologies of progress and radical social change were a crucial factor in the social construction of youth; they were homogenising youth in a virtual embodiment of a societal future.

After the political twist in the 1990s, Eastern European countries quickly established a new socio-economic system characterised by a neoliberal economy. This system does not require any particular symbolic representation for its own legitimacy nor social movements representing the political will of the people. And, above all, there is no such need for these ideologies to express themselves through young people. Instead, ideologies have now acquired other representatives, such as capital, profit, national homogenisation, religion and family. Therefore, the hypothetical inherent link between youth and progress has been replaced by another, equally hypothetical inherent link, this time between youth and the individualisation of life (Ule 2012). It is this link that is initiating young people into the new privacy of the globalised consumer society.

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Our thesis is that the position of youth has changed from being a symbolic representative of societal change in post-war Europe, and especially in the socialist countries, to an ordinary age group in contemporary times, which holds no particular or significant societal importance or has even been reduced to a marginal group. We assume the biggest reasons for this are young people's weakened position in modern neoliberal societies and the new conditions of growing up, fostering youth's disengagement from the public space and favouring one's private space. Young people are no longer a critical voice or an important representative of society but an ordinary age group devoid of any particular or clear social role. Neoliberal policy supports the individual's autonomous participation in labour, knowledge and capital markets, without the institutions of the welfare state, which leads to the individualisation of responsibility for social and economic success or failure.

Social inequalities have a major impact on young people's personal aspirations as they are socially constrained and not just drawn upon personal characteristics and preferences (Baillergeau and Duyvendak 2016, 155). The processes of individualising responsibilities tend to ignore and neglect knowledge on how inequalities are (re)produced in order to transfer the responsibility from structural causes to individuals. This is especially important for analysis of the process of the transition from education to employment because inequalities affect the life course and create disadvantages that are difficult to overcome in later life periods. We will discuss this further in the empirical part of the chapter.

8.2 Transitions to Adulthood in a Neoliberal Context

The whole of Europe has been facing truly radical changes in the life trajectories of individuals, particularly in the transitions from youth to adulthood. Youth transitions to adulthood are neither linear nor emergent. On the contrary, they are contingent and linked to complex interactions between individual decisions, opportunity structures and social pathways with more or less institutionalised guidelines and regulations. In this perspective, youth is not a self-contained phase but a component of the life course which is impossible to clearly distinguish from adolescence and adulthood, except in terms of legal definitions of the age of maturity.

The concept of transitions neither implies psychosocial or developmental assumptions or normative expectations regarding the correct timing and sequencing of becoming adult, it rather gains relevance in the life course framework which rests on the following five assumptions: each life phase affects the entire life course: life-span development, individuals actively construct their biography, the life course is embedded in historical events, social circumstances and events influence transitions, social relationships and networks contribute to the shaping of biographies. (Heinz et al. 2009, 4)

Core transitions to adulthood concern the matching of education and employment which is the backbone for implementing one's aspirations and for coordinating participation in the spheres of family life, consumption and citizenship.

Youth has been extended, and the patterns of transitions to adulthood have become more plural and no longer predictable. Increasing numbers of young people

are pursuing the kinds of life patterns that can be described as ‘choice biographies’ (Du Bois Reymond 1998). But, the so-called reflexive modernity also brings along ‘manufactured uncertainty’: individualisation is not a free choice but a compulsion to construct one’s own biography in the conditions of a welfare state, with the help of one’s own resources of all types. The fundamental controversy young people must nowadays resolve is the contrast between the growing ranges of options for individual managing and planning of life on one hand and the reduced predictability of and control over life courses on the other. Social and economic statuses continue to determine life courses, but their influence is less visible and less direct because collective traditions have been weakening and individualistic strategies are becoming dominant. The individual alone is compelled to take the necessary steps to avoid shouldering the burden of the consequences of the individualisation.

New information technologies and media offer elements of multiculturalism and global internationalism; they constantly inform young people of new cultures and lifestyles. All this results in a widening of young people’s world and liberates them from traditional cultural ties and patterns. But, on the other hand, this same world is particularising and individualising their common problems and only offers substitutes and not solutions to real-life dilemmas and problems. While global digital networking is producing a new form of generational and cultural homogenisation of youth, the diversity and inequality of life situations and chances, which are all too visible, are producing great differences and gaps in the young generation, and that is precisely what is generating particular tensions and explosive forces.

The autonomy of young people has been considerably reduced since the process of the narrowing of the welfare state that has transferred the majority of the costs of the social reproduction of youth from the state back to the family. Young people are marginalised in the labour market, excluded from the essential flows of adult society and, consequently, deprived of the origins of power. This is the framework in which the social and political reconstruction of youth in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in Europe has taken place. An important factor in the social exclusion of youth is the narrowing of the ‘space for youth’, which has come to be limited to the spheres of privacy and leisure time. The private world of young people along with the help and support of their parents offers them shelter and a place to withdraw from the pressures of the increasingly complicated and unclear everyday world of adults.

These difficulties are especially acute in the ‘transition countries’ and exacerbate young people’s social and psychological vulnerability. They also escalate difficulties and accumulate unresolved problems that tend to feed one another. Youth studies right across Europe indicate that the structural characteristics of social vulnerability (e.g. a disadvantaged starting position) as a rule become intertwined with cultural and interactive aspects (Helve and Evans 2013; Walther et al. 2016). Due to the mostly structural sources of problems and difficulties during youth, young people often experience them as an irresolvable vicious circle and sometimes try to resolve them by adopting various unreflective shortcuts (e.g. consumerism, addictions and escapism into pop youth lifestyles). These shortcuts at best only temporarily drive the problems out of the mind, while in reality they make them even worse.

As a result, attaining independence and personal growth are becoming more difficult than ever. It is true that young people are liberating themselves of traditional ties

and dependencies, but they are becoming ever more dependent on the pressures of other social institutions upon which they have no or very little influence. These institutions are mostly the labour market, education system, systems of social care and protection, systems of social security, etc. (Beck 1997). The prolongation of youth cannot solely be attributed to the prolongation of education or to the 'egoistic choice of free lifestyles'; in fact, due to structural reasons, many young people are unable to achieve the 'adulthood indicators' such as a regular job or independent housing. For example, young people have become a precarious workforce everywhere in Europe.

8.3 The Transition from Education to Employment: Challenges and Risks

The OECD's long-term interest in this particular transition has shown that the optimism built on efforts like building a youth-intensive sector and creating targeted labour market programmes, that in the 1970s succeeded to include the majority of young people in employment, was not justified by the developments of the following decades. Many young people faced difficulties being integrated into the labour market, and in the 1990s youth unemployment was still a big problem. It was also recognised that countries vary in the number of obstacles youth face in accessing the labour market and in the size and composition of at-risk groups (Bowers et al. 1999, 7). Results of the OECD research also show that the problem is successfully challenged if a coherent educational, labour market and social policy are created to help young people overcome obstacles on their way to employment. There is a need to approach specific groups with particular problems and not to build generalised policies that fit a limited number of young people and, finally, to provide conditions that will ensure good careers and good employment for young people (ibid.). Labour markets are not static, they change, and what was a problem in one period might disappear soon after. In a report from 2008, the OECD points to the high employment rate in the first decade of the new millennium but warns a significant part of the employment growth comprised precarious and/or low-paid jobs. Activation/obligation strategies increased labour market participation and made efforts to include under-represented groups, but labour demand for those groups is limited (OECD 2008, 12).

Young people are not a unanimous group. While some face labour market discrimination (like minority groups, women, disabled, etc.), others are well in advance due to skills and knowledge they acquired in education and elsewhere and because of the social capital they hold. Employment opportunities for early school leavers are much lower than for their better educated counterparts. Overall, young people are much better educated than older cohorts, and unemployment in the 15–24 age group was lower in the first years of the new millennium due to longer enrolment in education and the rise of precarious jobs (ibid., 28). Prolonging education, as mentioned, is also a personal strategy young people use to avoid the competitive and precarious labour market. The consequences of their rational behaviour in terms of prolonging living with their families are that families bear the financial burden and care for their children much longer than in the past.

In 2011, the ILO published a report on the impact of the economic crisis on young people's employment. The organisation calls for effective school-to-work measures because during the crisis the employment of young people was falling drastically, with disproportionate affects for women and disadvantaged groups.

The main point is that young people who are caught by the crisis are more vulnerable to its effects than are adults and that these effects are likely to be more long-lasting. This is not just because young people will have more time to suffer the consequences of their current unemployment, but also because they are at a formative stage in their lives; they are more educated and trained than are older people, but also their patterns of behaviour are likely to be more affected by their experiences at an early stage in their working careers. (O'Higgins 2010, 1)

The author continues that the loss of work experience in one's early career also affects the loss of human capital, which can translate into a lower income over the entire life cycle (Elwood 1982 in O'Higgins 2010, 1). It was also found that young people, especially first-time jobseekers, are struggling more to enter the labour market after the crisis than other age groups. Youth are also more affected by the crisis 'because youth unemployment tends to be super-cyclical and it fluctuates stronger than adult unemployment' (Bejaković et al. 2015).

8.4 (Un)Employment and Educational Trends in Three Selected Countries

In our case, all three countries – Slovenia, Czech Republic and Latvia – were affected by the crisis, and youth unemployment has risen disproportionately compared to other age groups. There are several reasons for selecting these three countries. Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia that was not occupied by the Soviet Union, and it developed its own political system which differed from other countries of the 'Eastern Bloc'. Even inside the Soviet Bloc, there were differences between countries (Ferge 1992). The Czech Republic was occupied by the Soviet Union, and Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union, what influenced differences in the development of their political systems before and after the break with socialism or communism. Slovenia developed a particular kind of welfare system that differed from both the Czech Republic and from Latvia. As Ferge claims (*ibid.*), there were also commonalities among socialist countries in the full-employment policies and in the dominance of the economy over social policy that was a consequence of the belief that a just social system would by itself do away with social problems. The aim of comparing these three countries is to explore the commonalities and differences in responding to the particular problem of youth unemployment. Successful strategies are important for all European countries that are facing a high level of youth unemployment.

In Table 8.1, we compare data across several years of the economic crisis. We selected 2010 since that was the year when the effects of the crisis clearly showed, and in 2013, some countries had already started to recover. The year 2015 is a time of economic growth, while the results of the targeted Youth Guarantee (YG) measures should already show some results.

Table 8.1 Data on (un)employment of young people in the 15–24 age group in the three selected countries, 2010, 2013 and 2015, in %

	Czech Republic			Latvia		Slovenia			
	2010	2013	2015	2010	2013	2015	2010	2013	2015
NEET population	8.8	9.1	7.5	17.8	13.0	10.5	7.1	9.2	9.5
Unemployment ratio ^a	7.7	6.0	4.1	14.4	9.1	6.7	5.9	7.3	5.8
Unemployment rate ^b	18.3	19.0	12.6	36.2	23.2	16.3	14.7	21.6	16.3
Long-term unemployment ^c	5.8	6.2	3.8	12.0	6.8	4.4	4.9	8.5	5.8
Youth employment rate	25.2	25.6	28.4	25.4	30.2	34.5	34.1	26.5	29.6

Source: Eurostat

^aUnemployment ratio: Youth unemployment includes all youth (i.e. people between the ages of 15 and 24, inclusive) who are unemployed. The youth unemployment ratio is the share of unemployed young people compared to the total population of that age group (not only the active but also the inactive such as students)

^bYouth unemployment rate (the youth unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed persons aged 15 to 24 by the total active population of the same age group. The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey)

^cTwelve months or longer

Data on NEET and the unemployment rate show that Latvia was affected the most but was also quite capable of reducing unemployment and the effects of the crisis. The NEET population fell from 17.8% in 2010 to 10.5% in 2015. Even though Slovenia experienced a deep and long economic crisis, it has positive economic growth in three consecutive years, but the NEET population is still rising. Latvia also succeeded in improving the unemployment ratio and reducing the unemployment rate. In fact, the percentage in 2015 is equal to that in Slovenia, although the Latvian figure in 2010 was almost three times higher than the Slovenian one. The Czech Republic also had a higher unemployment rate in 2010 than Slovenia, but in 2015 reduced it to 12.6% compared to the Slovenian figure of 16.3%. Latvia is also doing the best in cutting long-term unemployment, and again Slovenia is less successful, although the share has also dropped in this country. The employment rate in 2015 is higher than it was in previous years, and Latvia proved to be the most successful by having increased the level of employment since 2010 by almost 10 percentage points.

Employment rate data by educational attainment in the 15–24 age group are only somewhat comparable because in some countries tertiary education (levels 5–8) finishes at age 25 or 26 (e.g. in Slovenia). With the Bologna reform of education, the second cycle can even prolong this period, and therefore in Table 8.2 we include data on the 30–34 age group where the percentage refers to the total population in that age group. In Latvia and Slovenia, more than half the women in this age group graduated or finished the postgraduate level. The figure in the Czech Republic is much lower, even though women there are doing slightly better than men; more than 90% of young people in the Czech Republic and Slovenia completed upper secondary education, again more women than men. Latvia is slightly lagging behind but is very successful in reducing the NEET population. We can predict that it will converge to the same level as the two other countries in the next few years.

Table 8.2 Employment by educational attainment, age and sex, 2015

Level		Czech Republic			Latvia			Slovenia		
		0–2	3–4	5–8	0–2	3–4	5–8	0–2	3–4	5–8
Employment rate, age 15–24 ^a	Total	7.9	83.6	8.5	17.8	62.1	20.0	16.2	74.7	9.1
	Fem.	6.2	79.2	14.6	10.3	59.7	29.8	13.3	75.6	11.0
Tertiary ed., age 30–34 ^b	Total			30.1			41.3			43.4
	Fem.			35.9			56.5			56.4
Upper secondary ed., age 20–24 ^c	Total		90.4			86.1			90.9	
	Fem.		90.6			91.6			93.7	
On temporary contract, age 15–24	Total	11.8	76.6	11.6	31.9	52.9	n.d. ^d	12.4	76.8	10.8
	Fem.	9.2	74.2	16.6	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	11.3	76.9	11.7
Part-time job, age 15–25 ^e	Total	15.8	65.2	19.0	22.0	60.2	n.d.	14.1	77.6	8.3
	Fem.	12.1	71.3	16.6	n.d.	67.3	n.d.	13.0	79.1	7.9

Source: Eurostat

^aThe youth unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed persons aged 15 to 24 by the total active population of the same age group

^bThe indicator is defined as the percentage of the population aged 30–34 which has successfully completed tertiary studies (e.g. university, higher technical institution, etc.)

^cThe indicator is defined as the percentage of people aged 20–24 who have successfully completed at least upper secondary education

^dNo data

^eLow reliability of data on temporary employment and part-time jobs

Data on precarious employment forms show that the start of the career path is unstable, and most young people receive temporary or part-time contracts, as also observed by the ILO. O'Higgins (2010, 18) points to the fact that impermanent contracts are more attractive to employers as there are almost no costs upon terminating them. While in many countries the number of temporary contracts dropped during the economic crisis, in the Czech Republic and in Slovenia, it increased. In Slovenia, temporary contracts were fairly widespread even before the crisis. In fact, the country's share of young people with such contracts was the highest among the EU countries in 2007. Of all contracts young women received, 78% were temporary (65% for males), while in the Czech Republic, less than 20% of young people worked on temporary contracts and slightly over 10% of young males in Latvia (*ibid.*, 20).

8.5 Youth Guarantee Plans to Assist the Transition from Education to Employment

For the comparative analysis of youth guarantee plans we are using reports submitted to the European Commission, that is European youth report 2015 (2016), The National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, Latvia (2014), Implementation Plan for Czech Youth Guarantee Programme (2014), and Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, Slovenia (2016). Slovenia, Latvia and the Czech Republic are

three former socialist countries that have experienced a change in the labour market participation of young people. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show that the countries developed in different directions, reflecting differences in political developments after the break with socialism and in the particular arrangements concerning the economy and the issue of regulations. Data show that Latvia improved its youth employment by a great extent, while Slovenia was much less successful. The Czech Republic is a very stable country seeing limited effects of the economic crisis. We are particularly interested in how these three states assist young people to enter the labour market soon after they exit education.

The transition from education to employment is a major step towards independence, autonomy and adulthood. In order to successfully navigate the path to the labour market, young people need support on both the structural and personal levels. On the structural level, policies and measures should be created to ensure an encouraging environment to minimise risks significant for the transition from education to employment. On the personal level, services should be created in order to support young people's efforts to obtain employment that can provide them with enough resources to plan their own future and provide not just for them but also for their (future) family. As mentioned, that is the most important transition period that affects the whole life cycle of a person. The knowledge they learn and skills they acquire in the education process can be forever lost if they cannot apply them in practical situations as soon as possible.

The age limit to be eligible for Youth Guarantee (YG) is under 25. That might be an obstacle to effective inclusion in the labour market since young people are deciding to prolong education and enrol in the second cycle of education (master level) and finish their education at age 26. It is also important to shorten the period from the first employment to less than 4 months after being registered as unemployed, as is the aim of YG (Dhéret and Morosi 2015). The question is: how successful are these three countries in achieving this goal? In order to respond to the questions in focus, we assessed their Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. Latvia submitted its plan for the period 2014–2018, the Czech Republic updated its plan in 2014 and Slovenia submitted its plan for the period 2016–2020.

Latvia identified the biggest obstacles in youth labour participation in a close relationship with the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Science and later on in intensive discussions with different stakeholders on the macro (ministries, agencies, etc.), mezzo (NGOs, social services, municipalities, etc.) and micro levels (youth centres). The main obstacles to a successful transition from school to work are the following:

- The provision of education that matches labour market needs
- The timely provision of qualitative measures, which help in gaining the first work experience
- The individual approach to young people's needs and the provision of targeted and sequenced measures and profiling
- Strengthening the cooperation with employers in order to provide timely first work experience

To overcome these obstacles, they created a set of measures:

- Profiling and job-search assistance and career counselling.
- Non-formal training programmes (language, IT, project management, etc.).
- First work experience (work for up to 12 months in newly created workplaces – wage subsidies for employers).
- First work experience for youth in NGOs. This is not formal employment, with a young person receiving EUR 90 for transport and similar costs for up to 6 months or until a newly created workplace becomes available.
- Supporting young people to commence self-employment.

The Czech Republic did not disperse responsibility for the implementation across different sectors and different agencies but did discuss the plan with stakeholders and include a broad number of organisations in promoting the Youth Guarantee. The greatest obstacles are as follows:

- Inconsistencies between the young people's skills and those needed in the labour market
- Lack of professional practice
- Lack of a possibility to acquire competencies for entering the labour market

The measures to tackle these inconsistencies include:

- Development of competencies required for long-term employability
- Addressing labour market disparities from the perspective of the educational process and predicting future labour market needs and adapting the content of education accordingly
- Introduction of an innovative way of individual further education through internships in companies
- The internship project for young jobseekers
- Professional experience for young people aged up to 30 (registered at the Labour Office for at least 4 months, whose previous work experience does not exceed 2 years since having completed education)
- Support for the creation of new jobs (community service + socially beneficial jobs), including young people

Slovenia is targeting youth aged 15–29 due to the high level of enrolment in tertiary education. The introduction to the measures in the Implementation Plan is short, without identifying any obstacles. The Employment Office is the chief provider of measures that were discussed by a working group of stakeholders. We learn that Youth Guarantee will focus on:

- Those who really need help to enter the labour market and have less opportunity and a longer period of unemployment.
- The measures are intended for young people registered as unemployed with the Employment Office and meeting the conditions prescribed for the target group. After 4 months of unemployment and/or after the completion of different forms of training, the person will be offered a more intensive service.

Measures include:

- Strengthening counselling to young jobseekers at the Employment Office (Youth Counsellors)
- Promotion of young people's international mobility via the EURES network
- Incentives for the employment of young people
- Support for youth entrepreneurship (provision of training to unemployed young people for business start-ups, assistance in drafting an entrepreneurial plan, provision of services to potential entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs at the start of their business career)
- Incentives for young enterprises
- Promotion of business cooperation and employment of young people in youth cooperatives etc.
- Projects for young people (implementation of various projects related to developing new employment opportunities and the self-employment of young people as a response to social challenges)

The similarities among the Implementation Plans partly reflect the instructions and forms provided to member states to fill in, which also predetermines the content and the measures. All three plans emphasise the common assumption that unemployment is a result of disparities between education and labour market demands. While Latvia and Slovenia stress the mismatch between educational programmes and the labour market, the Czech Republic emphasises the lack of skills and lack of practical learning in educational programmes. Even though we agree that education has to be responsive to the labour market's demands, we also note that labour markets change, as also confirmed during the recent crisis. For example, the construction industry was under great pressure, and the loss of jobs in construction was among the highest in some countries (e.g. Slovenia). Vocational training and education in building and construction did not serve the market's needs at all, despite the high demand a few years earlier. The Czech Republic plans early career counselling in elementary school, even though pupils are a decade or more away from entering the labour market. Such early profiling could also pose a major obstacle regarding the need to adapt to the fast changing and flexible labour market. Data also show that the biggest share of unemployed youth is actually those without education and drop-outs (Bejaković et al. 2015, 4).

The second common feature is the role of employment offices in career counselling, profiling, providing information on jobs available and to some extent also in controlling the 'activation' of jobseekers. These are obviously standard services provided by employment offices in all countries. Escudero and López Mourelo (2015, 6) point out the need for effective and responsive employment services because they are vital for implementing YG, which was copied from Scandinavian states with a particular tradition in job-search assistance that is expected to raise job search effectiveness. 'The success of these programmes will depend on whether public employment services are properly staffed (in terms of both numbers and competencies) to offer customized support to different groups: and on whether they are well resourced to effectively manage the range of services offered under youth guarantee programmes' (Escudero and López Mourelo 2015, 8). If this is not the case and it is merely activa-

tion control that is effectively performed, young people face more restrictions than support on their path to employment. Employment services also differ in their offers of training or workshops that should contribute to improving the skills needed to fit with job requirements. Offering useful training requires a very good overview of labour market expectations and a high level of responsiveness to such expectations.

The third feature is the financial incentives to employers or for self-employment, but here the countries differ. The Czech Republic does not include any measures on incentives, Latvia and Slovenia include a programme on youth entrepreneurship, and Slovenia provides a more standard set of incentives like wage coverage and hiring incentives. Incentives and wage subsidies are not new in employment policies and are not an invention of YG, and the discussion on the effectiveness of subsidies is ongoing (e.g. Kluve and Schmidt 2002).

There are also differences among the countries that can challenge the YG scheme itself. As we emphasised previously, it is important to include young people in paid labour as soon as possible after they finish education. The knowledge and skills they learn should be applied to concrete practical situations as soon as possible, otherwise they might be lost. It is also important to acquire experiences and understanding of how skills and knowledge are working in those situations, how they can be used, etc. YG rightly predicts that the period must not be longer than 4 months, which also implies that first-time employment must be supported and supervised by older and skilled workers who will mentor young people on their way to becoming able to take full responsibility for their performance. Not all states are aware of the importance of reducing long-term unemployment. In our sample, Latvia is strongly focusing on timely provision that will be offered as soon as possible within the first 4 months of being registered. The Czech Republic will introduce internship, which has proved to be an effective measure. Slovenia is an exception here. The sole eligibility condition for inclusion in YG is to have been registered with the employment office for at least 4 months. There is even a plan to reduce internship and intensify support after a year of unemployment, like inclusion in public works and offering an incentive to employers.

The crucial difference among the three states is how fast they are capable of including young people in the labour market after they complete their education. The assessment shows that Latvia is aware of the problem, has created measures to tackle it and in the last few years has succeeded in cutting youth unemployment by almost half. Slovenia is much less successful. Even though its problem was not so drastic, it is in a worse position than Latvia was in 2015.

8.6 Discussion

The data show significant differences in the processes of youth's transition to adulthood in Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia in the period from 2010 to 2015, at a time when these countries were also affected by the consequences of the last Great Recession. The gathered data show the largest positive shift regarding youth employment in Latvia, which had the highest youth unemployment rate and managed to

halve it in the examined period. The Czech Republic has managed to somewhat reduce its unemployment level. In Slovenia, however, which had the lowest youth unemployment rate, unemployment has even increased. We assume these differences are the outcome of differences in the structural reform process in these three countries and the variations in their responses to the economic crisis of 2008–2010.

After independence in 1991, Latvia was forced to adopt radical and wide-ranging economic and social reforms, so it could cope with the large-scale collapse of its economy after the secession from the former USSR; nevertheless, Latvia always took care of the modernisation of its industry, education, science and technology. Since 1991, Slovenia and the Czech Republic had relied on their relatively developed economies, which were (in some areas) also comparable with developed economies in the EU in their good education system and entrepreneurial tradition. Slovenia, which began the transition as the most developed post-socialist country, then stalled in its development. It seems that, after joining the EU, Slovenia waived the independent management of politics and left the decision-making to the instructions of influential EU institutions. This deadlock can primarily be seen in its less competitive systems of education, science and technology that make it increasingly difficult especially for educated young people to find a way to secure employment suiting their education and qualifications. It is therefore not surprising that Latvia and the Czech Republic are today doing better than Slovenia regarding young people's transitions from education to work.

Further, there are also different circumstances regarding the institutional monitoring of young people's transition from education to work in the examined countries. In Latvia, for instance, there is a close relationship between the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Science for monitoring the youth employment problem. This cooperation is then also transferred to the lower levels of institutional functioning, which is why in Latvia there is the most systematic guidance and monitoring of YG's implementation among the three countries. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia, there is no such institutional cooperation. In the Czech Republic, they rely on a wide network of various organisations to implement YG, while in Slovenia they chiefly rely on the work and influence of the respective employment offices in local environments that have their own lists of measures to help young people find employment.

In all three countries, young people without an adequate education or drop-outs are the most vulnerable, and it seems that with schemes such as the Young Guarantee Implementation Plan, we can offer them only little or no help at all. Young people who for various reasons are unemployed for a longer time and dependent on precarious jobs are at risk of long-term social exclusion. This applies to all young people in the EU, not only those in the post-socialist countries.

8.7 Conclusions

Processes over the last three decades have seemingly ultimately diverted young people away from the 'grand themes' that formed the foundations of the social movements in Europe in the 1980s, such as human rights, social justice, gender equality

and autonomy of civil society as opposed to the state, although it is also true that these topics have disappeared from public discourse in general. The fundamental controversies young people of today must resolve are the contrast between the growing ranges of options for individual managing and planning of life on one hand and the reduced predictability of and control over life courses on the other hand.

Young people are incessantly facing new contradictions, making the attaining of independence and personal growth more difficult than ever. It is true that young people are liberating themselves from traditional ties and dependencies, but they are becoming ever more dependent on the pressures of other social institutions upon which they have no or very little influence. These institutions are mostly the labour market, the education system, the systems of social care in protection and the systems of social security and health.

The last economic crisis had hit young people particularly hard. It has expanded the gap between those with more and those with fewer opportunities. Accordingly, a limited number of young people from the privileged class have access to promising educational degrees, successful careers and good employment. Yet, on the other hand, more and more young people are facing increasingly uncertain and unpredictable working conditions with short-term jobs, coupled with prolonged economic dependency on their families of origin, thereby practically institutionalising their lower incomes.

It is difficult to convince ourselves that new and attractive opportunities for young people will emerge through a period of economic restructuring following the recession. The evidence points to a future in which job insecurity will become a defining feature of the life of young people in the 'new economy'. Youth itself is defined exactly by the ability to rise above the psychological and physical process of growing up, and in that way it becomes a socially, culturally and politically significant social group. If there is no future for these members of society, or if the roads to those futures are closed off, then we can no longer speak about 'youth' in the true sense of the word.

Our analysis points to the crucial importance of the state and its policies in young people's transitions from youth to adulthood, particularly with regard to the transition from education to employment. The state's role cannot only be to serve the economy, that is, to establish the conditions (involving a precarious labour market and reduced labour rights) which enable a profit to be made. It depends on state policies when and how young people acquire employment. The market is indifferent to these transitions, it does not distinguish between generations, and it does not run social policy. All of this needs to be run by the state. The state has to ensure special protection of vulnerable social groups such as the young, women and the elderly. The labour market in itself is unfriendly and exploits young people. The market is only interested in obtaining the best qualified and the cheapest labour force.

Therefore, young people's transitions from education to employment are not regulated by the market. This is where the state plays the key role: its measures of active policies should enable young people to make the transition as soon as possible and without breaks to be able to immediately use their acquired knowledge. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing both the knowledge and the young generation.

The state has to have an independent, targeted social policy that enables young people's sustainable and stable entrance to employment. This was also corroborated by our study in the three Eastern European countries. What our research shows is that countries where targeted efforts are made to address the problem of the transition from education to employment, namely, using measures that enable fast employment, have the largest drop in the share of unemployed young people. In our research, Latvia is an example of such good practice.

Some other countries are resolving the labour market problem by prolonging education. In our analysis, this is the case of Slovenia. In Slovenia, the unemployment of young people tends to be solved with longer education that, however, only postpones the problem of employment. The prolongation of education has been offered to young people by the Slovenian state as a solution without any further strategies to address the time of their transition to employment. It has even allowed the youth labour market to become precarious and has abolished apprenticeships that served as a soft measure for young people to become familiar with prospective employers. As a result, youth employment in Slovenia fell drastically during the economic crisis. Conversely, Latvia has ensured that safe employment is provided immediately after education has been completed, which is why the level of young people's unemployment in Latvia has been steadily decreasing.

Therefore, the primary finding of our analysis is that state and institutional measures designed to help young people should be directed more towards protecting transitions instead of defending statuses. It seems that state assistance needs even to extend beyond national borders. State systems of social assistance should become Europeanised, meaning that innovation should reach beyond state traditions and limitations.

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