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1 Introduction

This book is about global youth, but with a particular route map. We start in Eastern Europe, and then move into the rest of the world via the west. The actual start-point, of course, is a western (UK) sociologist's understanding of youth in Eastern Europe. Readers are invited to join in considering the condition of contemporary youth (some issues will be familiar if readers are youth researchers) from an unorthodox vantage point. English language books about global youth (or global anything) usually start in the west; the rest of the world is then subjected to explicit or implicit 'othering' – having its character defined from the perspective of another. Here the western gaze is filtered by focusing, initially, on youth in Eastern Europe.

That said, any westerner in Eastern Europe will inevitably look upon local youth through a western gaze. At first glance, especially if one's introduction to Eastern Europe is through universities, the young people will look familiar, and they have become more familiar during the last 20 years, since the end of communism. They are listening to familiar kinds of music, wearing familiar fashions and styling their hair in familiar ways. More and more of them are able to use English language. There have been some startling convergences. Russian girls have become slimmer, and this is not a result of food shortages. In Central Asia the young males and females have become more Eurasian in appearance. In the Caucasus formerly swarthy complexions have become lighter, especially girls' complexions. All this is alongside some striking contrasts. The university students in Eastern Europe look younger than their western counterparts. In fact they have tended to be younger. More of them have commenced university studies at 16 or 17 than has been normal in the west, and fewer have embarked on the old 5-year university diploma programmes at age 20 or above. Over the last 20 years it has become rarer for university entrants to be under 18, but they still look and appear to behave in more juvenile ways than

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western students. This is likely to be because they do not possess, and as younger teens have not possessed, the amounts of money that western youth spend on themselves. It is also relevant that in most East European countries university students still do not have the self-governing student unions that are an established part of western campus life. Nor do most young people in Eastern Europe gain any experience in genuine voluntary associations – sports and arts clubs, youth clubs etc. Yet in other respects Eastern Europe's young people grow up quickly. In many of the countries the most common ages of marriage throughout the 1990s and since have been 22–24, and parenthood has followed quickly. Mean ages of marriage and parenthood have risen, and those who do not marry in their early 20s are now more likely than in the past to delay until they are into their 30s, but early-20s remains a common age in much of Eastern Europe. Maybe there will be more east-west convergence during the 21st century, but who will change? Biologically, early 20s is more appropriate for becoming a parent for the first time than late 30s. It is probably peculiar western behaviour that needs to be 'othered' and given a specific socio-cultural explanation.

Eastern Europe is still much poorer than the west. All the countries of Eastern Europe are poorer than all the countries of Western Europe with one exception – Slovenia, a small country with a population of less than 2 million adjacent to Italy and Austria. Slovenia was the first region to break away from Yugoslavia, starting the process that sparked the Balkan wars of the 1990s. This has been another stark difference between the experiences of western and East European youth during the last 20 years. Western youth who have gained military experience have done so as volunteer soldiers, sailors and air force personnel. Some have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, or have been part of peacekeeping missions in various parts of the world. Some young military personnel from NATO's new members in Eastern Europe have been part of these operations, not necessarily as volunteers. Young males are still eligible to be conscripted into military service throughout Eastern Europe (and usually try to avoid this). Many young males have fought in real wars in the Balkans and in the North and South Caucasus. During the 1990s many young males in Eastern Europe were in serious harm's way. Some were seriously wounded. Young women were widowed and their children became fatherless.

However, the most obvious east-west difference is that the East European countries remain relatively poor. Workers earn far less than in Western Europe. Young people have less to spend than their western counterparts, and they are *not* catching up. The global market economy

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will develop hotspots in Eastern Europe – mainly capital cities and places close to the borders of western countries. The chances are that most of Eastern Europe will be systematically under-developed by the global market economy, the fate of the third world. Since the early 1990s many East Europeans have feared that their world region could become another Latin America – a source of raw materials (like oil and gas) and cheap manufactured products for first world consumers.

However, it is not only or even mainly their lower living standards, lower disposable incomes, that separate youth in Eastern Europe and the west. The housing regimes are responsible for possibly greater differences. In Eastern Europe the rapid privatisation of the residential stock to occupiers in the 1990s is perpetuating young people's dependence on family resources to make life stage transitions into their own dwellings. Waiting to inherit an elder's property is a pre-modern practice that was consolidated under communism and is surviving under post-communism. It remains normal throughout Eastern Europe for the younger generation's transitions to head of household status to be delayed until after marriage and parenthood. This makes a huge difference. Young people in most western countries experience a period of life prior to marriage when they are free from daily parental surveillance and the accompanying control. Among other things, the East European way tends to perpetuate traditional gender divisions. Young males do not learn to care for themselves while young females share the housework with mothers and sisters. It also makes a difference that the standard residences built under communism were squalid 2 and 3 room apartments – the housing stock that the people will live in for years to come.

An aim of this book is definitely not to portray East European youth as thoroughly backward, perpetually trying to catch up with the west, though this is how many of the differences will appear to the western gaze. East Europeans are not in awe of all aspects of western ways – the amounts of money that young people spend on clothing, alcohol and drugs, and their willingness to leave elders to care for themselves. Also, there are senses in which East European youth have become hyper-modern world leaders – the latest examples of late-development effects in which the last countries to arrive leap to the head of the international procession (see Dore, 1973, 1976). The ex-communist countries have become part of the global market economy, and have established multi-party political systems, in late-20th and early-21st century conditions, most institutional baggage having been discarded. There are three important ways in which East European youth have become more advanced than their western counterparts. First, in many East European countries, rates of participation in higher educa-

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tion have rocketed. Old universities have expanded and new universities, including many private universities, have been created. All universities have sought to increase their budgets by admitting more fee-paying students. Alternatives for young people in Eastern Europe – jobs and vocational courses – have been dwindling. In this context, in some countries, progression from school to university has become the normal way forward. Second, on leaving full-time education many young people in Eastern Europe (generally far more than in the west) are experiencing prolonged periods of under-employment (this is defined properly below). Under-employment is now a global phenomenon in youth labour markets. In the west it is typically seen as a sign that young people need to catch up with the demands of the new knowledge economy. In Eastern Europe it is typically construed as a sign that the countries' transitions into properly functioning market economies are still incomplete. Not so: under-employment is the 21st century global normality for youth in the labour market. Third, East European youth have become leaders in their disengagement from public affairs prefering to seek private, personal solutions to their problems, whatever these problems might be.

Young people in Eastern Europe are also different – not lagging or more advanced than western youth but simply different – in experiencing their coming of age in distinctive cultural contexts. An important part of these contexts is that their countries were once communist. Today's young people have no personal experience of life under communism, but everywhere this is part of the collective memory which shapes how the present is experienced. Looking back historically, the populations in Eastern Europe are aware of what young people have lost since communism ended. The west needs to be reminded of this, especially since there is no longer a working alternative to the global, capitalist market economy. A plain fact is that communism was more generous and protective towards its young people than any western society. Nearly all young people in Eastern Europe have concluded that, even so, they prefer the present. They are progressives rather than reactionaries, but with a particular historical awareness. Western youth also have a specific historical awareness; this comes from growing up in countries with histories of being (or at least regarding themselves as) world leaders. This makes a difference to how the present is experienced, and to young people's future hopes and expectations.

There are many reasons why westerners, and not only social scientists, should be interested, maybe concerned, about trends in Eastern Europe, especially among the region's young people. Not the least of these reasons is that the west is going to be, and in fact is already

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being, affected. While labour costs remain substantially lower, businesses will be tempted to direct new investment (and jobs) towards the EU's new member states. At the same time, young people from Eastern Europe will travel and compete for jobs in the west. Up to now young East Europeans with decent educational qualifications have been employed in the west doing seasonal jobs in agriculture, as low-grade hotel staff and suchlike. No one should imagine that this will continue. Students at West Europe's universities will be aware that thousands of students from Eastern Europe are now spending a semester at western institutions assisted by the EU ERASMUS programme. Their German, French or English language often reaches the standard of local students. They will be returning with degrees to compete for graduate jobs. They will be able to offer more than one language. They will have a wider knowledge of European markets and cultures than stay-at-home locals. If you are based in the west, make no mistake: what is happening in Eastern Europe, and how the region's young people are responding, is going to affect you.

Eastern Europe and the west

In this book Eastern Europe means the entire pre-1989 communist bloc. Europe in this book is not just the European Union (EU) countries – 15 up to 2004, then 25, and 27 in 2007, with the Balkan states of the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Ukraine, Georgia and Albania somewhere in the queue for future membership. Europe, for this book's purposes, does not end at the Ural Mountains, partway across Russia, the geographical boundary that is sometimes used. Present-day Europe cannot be defined in terms of a particular religion – Christianity – and the associated culture. Nor can Europe be defined as sharing a common history – the history of Europe looks very different, and the key dates and events are different, depending on the particular country or group of countries.

The whole of Soviet space was Europeanised, lightly under the Czarist Empire, then much more thoroughly by communism which modernised agriculture everywhere on collective and state farms (except in Poland). Communism expanded the towns and cities, built factories and created modern industries, and introduced modern systems of public administration, health and education services. For this book's purposes there is simply no point in trying to work within a boundary between countries that are more or less likely, and those that look unlikely, to join the EU at some point in the future, or even according to their traditional, that is, pre-communist characteristics.

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The East European countries (as defined here) shared a common experience of communism, and they have all experienced a similar post-communist transition. As explained below, there are differences among the ex-communist countries, but they share much in common simply by now being in a post-communist historical era.

'The west' in this book comprises western Europe and North America. Of course, there are differences among western countries including a great deal of American exceptionalism, and there are important differences in the character of the youth life stage between northern and southern pre-2004 EU member states. However, when set in a global context, the western countries are seen to share much in common. As noted above, standards of living were and still are much higher throughout the west than in any part of Eastern Europe except Slovenia. Capitalism and market economies, and multi-party political systems, have longer histories throughout the west than in Eastern Europe. Also, although there have been important changes in the economies, labour markets, education and much else in the western world since the mid-20th century – sufficient to inspire widespread talk and writing about 'youth's new social condition' – none of the countries has experienced as abrupt or as thorough a change as was experienced throughout Eastern Europe when communism ended.

Communism and post-communism

There were variants of communism. People in every East-Central and South-East European country, and in every former Soviet republic, will tell visitors what was distinctive about their experience of communism: most farms remaining privately-owned in Poland; the thwarted revolutions in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968; the experiment with workers' self-management in Yugoslavia; or the industrialisation of parts of Central Asia during the Great Patriotic War (known as the Second World War in the west) when entire factories were transported lock, stock and barrel from the western parts of the Soviet Union that were at risk of, then subjected to, German occupation. Equally important, countries differ in how long they were communist – from 1917 in the case of Russia but only since 1945 in the case of the Baltic states and all the non-Soviet countries. They also differ in whether they had pre-communist histories of industrialism and multi-party democracy (histories which some have been able to recover and restart since 1989). However, over-arching all the variations, the entire communist bloc experienced the basic features of communism, namely:

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- State ownership of virtually all economic assets.
- Central economic planning.
- Government by communist parties to which no organised opposition was permitted.

These were the system-defining features of communism which ended, vanished, immediately and abruptly, in 1989 in East-Central and South-East Europe, and in 1991 when the Soviet Union was dissolved.

Young people's treatment under communism was very distinctive. Their situations were 'constructed' in a standard way throughout the communist bloc. Modern youth was 'constructed' in all the countries that modernised during the 19th and 20th centuries (see Wallace and Kovacheva, 1998). 'Constructed' here means that special institutions were created for young people, together with special rules and roles that defined their proper places – in schools, training schemes, youth movements, and so on. Under communism the construction was firmer than in most other places. After or before age 16 young people were set on different educational tracks or programmes of training that led to particular kinds of employment where, in the normal course of events, they were expected to remain throughout their working lives. It was possible to break out, but it was always easiest to work with the grain.

Young people were also held in their 'proper places' by the intertwining of family relationships and the control of housing that developed under communism. Some housing was privately owned (the proportions varied from country to country, and in the countryside private ownership was more common than in urban areas). However, there was no 'market' in dwellings. There was no way in which people could (legally) save the money that house purchase would require. There were no banks offering long-term loans for house purchase. Dwellings were sometimes exchanged, but this was most likely to happen within extended families when, for example, a widow might exchange a larger apartment for the smaller flat occupied by younger members of the family and their own children. It was possible informally to rent a room or rooms in a private dwelling, but there were no private landlords who built or otherwise accumulated properties for rent. In order to obtain their own places young people (usually couples) relied on family support. The custom and practice in most places was that the son's family was responsible for accommodating a marrying couple. Dwellings could be obtained from the socially owned stock by placing an individual's name or a couple's names on a waiting list, where the names would usually remain for years during which someone would have to pay for this privilege. Alternatively,

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young people could wait until a family property was vacated (usually by the death of the occupant). By then a younger individual or couple would most likely have moved in, thereby establishing their right to inherit the tenancy. Young people's housing prospects depended on maintaining strong family relationships. Separation (social separation rather than locational) from one's family was a grave disadvantage.

Young people's leisure was equally regulated. There were no commercial provisions, and there were no voluntary organisations that operated independently of the state and communist party. Opportunities to play sports, to watch films, to take part in and to watch concerts and other theatre performances, and to travel away on holiday, were under the auspices of local governments and especially the communist party youth organisations – the Pioneers for 9–16s, and the Komsomol for 16–28 year olds. These youth organisations were present in all schools and higher education institutions, and in workplaces. Leisure time could be (and was) spent privately, with friends and in families. Private life was valued under communism. Its value was accentuated by the absence of voluntary associations and other features of a civil society. It was only in private (if there) that people felt able to talk and act freely. However, in the public sphere young people's leisure opportunities were very firmly constructed by the state and party. In all the above ways, under communism young people's situations were firmly and distinctively constructed.

Then, as soon as communism ended, there was a rapid process of deconstruction. The communist youth organisations simply disappeared. School attire changed from uniforms to free dressing. The new market economies began offering a wide array of goods and services, for those who could pay. Consumer cultures spread more rapidly than the money to allow people to become active consumers. Citizens gained the right to form voluntary associations to promote sports, art forms, religious causes and political programmes. However, Eastern Europe soon learnt, and has shown the world, that it takes time for strong voluntary organisations with deep and wide grassroots to develop, especially under 21st century conditions. Housing was privatised rapidly in most places. Public authorities wanted to privatise the costs of and responsibility for maintenance. Waiting lists for dwellings shortened – in most places there was no longer any point in joining one. In exchange, there were new opportunities to rent and purchase privately, but once again this depended on would-be purchasers having the money. Former links between education and employment snapped. Responsibility for finding a job (and for hiring labour) was privatised. The security with which the old system had embraced young people was replaced by the liberty, and the responsibility, of

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preparing then marketing 'the self' to employers who, in turn, had to learn how to behave in genuine labour markets, and also how to operate in the markets through which they needed to procure supplies and sell their goods or services.

All the above were common experiences during the immediate transition from communism. It soon became clear that it was far easier to dismantle old institutions than to create new ones. Laws can be changed in months. Building new institutions usually takes years. Cultural change – aligning people's expectations and dispositions with new institutions – is most likely to take decades. As they approach or enter their third decade of post-communism, most of the countries continue to regard themselves as in transition.

Youth's new condition in Eastern Europe

There were variants of communism, but under post-communism the countries have become much more dissimilar from one another. The old Soviet republics have become new independent states. The countries of East-Central Europe have looked west (to the European Union and NATO), and no longer appear even to care what Moscow thinks. National cultures and identities have strengthened everywhere. The national language has always become the normal language of education and of all official (state) business (controversial matters in countries such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, which have substantial ethnic Russian minorities, especially since Russian was formerly the international language, and taught in all schools throughout the communist bloc). School syllabuses have been changed to foreground national literatures and histories. The countries differ in how far they have reformed, that is, in the extent to which state ownership and control of the economies have been relinquished, and whether political parties and presidential candidates compete for power on equal terms. The countries also differ in the severity of the shock that was experienced when dismantling communism, and the extent to which their economies have subsequently recovered. Generally, it has proved to be an advantage to be a small country adjacent to the old (pre-2004) EU. Slovenia, with less than 2 million people, and bordering Italy and Austria, has been an outstanding success story. It has also been an advantage (up to now) for a country to be well endowed with natural resources (such as oil and gas) that are in heavy demand on world markets. The Soviet Union disintegrated at a time when new, vast reserves of oil and gas were being discovered within its territory. Until 1991 these reserves, when exploited, were assets that could have bene-

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fited all Soviet citizens. In the event the reserves are benefiting the ex-Soviet republics where they happen to be located (mainly Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan). There were inter-country differences in living standards under communism but these differences now look tiny. Throughout the communist bloc there was a single communist way of life. Similar flats were built everywhere. Consumer goods were always scarce. There was full employment, and full salaries were paid regularly. By 2005 the average income in Kazakhstan (which has large oil and gas reserves) was roughly four times as high as in neighbouring Uzbekistan. Czechs have become richer than Slovaks. Hungarians have become richer than Romanians. Hence the debate that has arisen about whether post-communism has become a redundant concept.

The justification for continuing to use the term is that there have been commonalities in the countries' experiences of the transition, including how their young people have fared and how they have responded, and nowadays there is considerable overlap between the conditions and responses to these conditions of young people in Eastern Europe and in the west. In terms of many of these conditions and responses it is young people in Eastern Europe, not western youth, who are now the more advanced. Their late arrival in the capitalist, global market place has allowed the new market economies to become hyper-modern in many respects.

(i) Young people have been prolonging their education. As mentioned earlier, enrolments in higher education have risen sharply in most of the countries. Also, it is usually general education rather than vocationally specific courses in which the 16-plus age group now enrols.

(ii) A period of under-employment has become normal after leaving full-time education. The symptoms of under-employment are high rates of youth unemployment; high proportions of employment in part-time, temporary and otherwise marginal jobs; and over-qualification relative to the jobs that young people obtain. All these symptoms are evident nowadays in most parts of the world. In the west they are often viewed as indicating weakness, backwardness, in the economies. Not so; the symptoms are products of normal 21st century global market conditions and these conditions are currently more pronounced in Eastern Europe than in the west.

(iii) The normalisation of a life stage variously labelled post-adolescence, post-youth, or (currently popular) emergent adulthood (see Arnett, 2005, 2006). This life stage is marked most conspicuously by a lengthened

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period between completing full-time education on the one side, and, on the other, settling in an adult occupation with a salary that will support an adult lifestyle and marriage and parenthood. Young people have some control over this: some have decided to push full adulthood into their futures. This life stage now exists (and is normal) in most parts of Eastern Europe and in the west, but in the east it has some distinctive features.

- Levels of consumer spending are much lower than in the west.
- A common use of the life stage by East European youth is to travel, partly for the experience, but also to earn money in countries where pay levels are higher than at home. In the first instance most of this migration is the pendulum variety; those concerned intend to return home when they have earned enough to buy a flat, start a business or start a family, whatever their objectives.
- Most young people in the new east continue to depend on their families for housing. Their own life stage housing transitions are typically deferred up to or even beyond the beginning of full adulthood (if marriage and parenthood are treated as crucial markers). In this respect young people in Eastern Europe resemble their counterparts in the Mediterranean countries of the west rather than those in northern Europe and North America. We shall see in later chapters that there are additional senses in which the new east's integration into an enlarged Europe (as a political and economic entity) is more likely to mean Mediterraneanisation than convergence with patterns and standards of living in northern Europe. Young Bulgarians may regard Germany, France or the Scandinavian countries as exemplars, but the older EU country that they are most likely to resemble as a full member is their adjacent state, Greece.

(iv) Biographies have been individualised, self-awareness has been heightened, young people recognise that they need to be more active than their parents were and take charge of their own life courses. Research evidence shows that all groups of young people do this albeit within limits, within constraints that differ according to whether they are female or male, their educational achievements, their family backgrounds and other 'connections', and often most of all according to where they happen to live. However, while aware of differences, young people do not usually perceive these as divisions. They are less conscious of and responsive to constraints and opportunities that are shared with members of any social category than the scope that they as individuals possess to forge their own futures.

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(v) Access to global consumer cultures. All over the world today young people listen to some similar kinds of music and some of the same performers, follow the same global top sports, and wear the same fashions. The global is always interwoven with local features thus producing myriad examples of 'glolocalisation'.

(vi) Post-communist generations of young people are mostly non-ideological. Few have become highly religious (see Need and Evans, 2001). Few are attracted by nationalist appeals. They tend to reject all total ideologies. Most are pragmatists who prioritise making the best of the world as they find it (Mitev, 2004).

Studying youth

This book examines youth in Eastern Europe, and makes cross-national comparisons, in particular sociological ways. These are not the only ways – they are not even the sole sociological ways – in which young people can be studied, but they have particular merits.

(i) Contextualising youth. First, this book sets young people in their social contexts. In a sense, the book decentres young people themselves. The initial focus is not upon young people's minds or the details of their own lives but on how their circumstances are socially structured by labour market contexts, the organisation of education, family patterns and practices, and consumer industries and marketing. The justification is that starting with the contexts (indicated by this book's chapter headings) enables us eventually to best understand young people's minds and lives.

(ii) Youth as a transitional life stage. In this book 'transition' has a dual meaning. It refers to the countries that have been regarded, and which have regarded themselves, as in historical transition since the end of communism. It also refers to the transitional character of the youth life stage, between childhood and adulthood. Youth is not defined as a particular age group. The chronological ages when youth begins and ends have varied greatly by time and place, and both the beginnings and the ends are 'fuzzy' in all modern societies. The virtue of a transitional view of youth is that it reflects the reality of young people's lives – forever changing. Cross-sectional snapshots inevitably distort reality. Understanding youth is always well-served through a longitudinal, biographical perspective.

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(iii) Holism. This book's approach to youth is holistic: we examine all aspects of young people's lives. During the youth life stage, young people experience multiple transitions – from education to employment, in family relationships and housing, from having things bought for them to becoming independent consumers, from benefiting from much state welfare via their parents or guardians to becoming eligible for full welfare rights as full citizens, becoming subject to full adult justice, and becoming fully enfranchised political actors (if they wish). The justification for viewing young people's lives 'in the round' is that their experiences in different domains are interconnected. What is happening in any part of young people's lives becomes easier to understand when experiences elsewhere are brought into view. Influence runs in all directions, but the order of chapters in this book indicates which domains are considered particularly important. Education to work, and family and housing life stage transitions, do not directly determine what happens to young people in other parts of their lives, but these are crucial contexts in which other things are experienced and within which other life stage transitions are made. Furthermore, it is during young people's education to work and family/housing transitions that social class and gender differences widen and harden, usually with long-term consequences.

(iv) Social divisions. Finally, throughout the book we pay attention to differences among young people. The concept of social class summarises a number of these differences. Then there are gender and ethnic divisions, and differences by place. Class, gender and place have basically the same meanings and significance in Eastern Europe and the west, and indeed throughout the rest of the world. Ethnicity is rather different. The main ethnic relations in Eastern Europe are not between white hosts and people of colour from former colonies. This is just one variant of ethnic relations. A global perspective demonstrates the need to treat all ethnic relations with full regard for their specificities. Many young people from Eastern Europe have become migrants in other East European countries and in Western Europe. Throughout the former Soviet Union new ethnic minorities have been created, including Russian minorities in all the ex-Soviet republics except Russia itself. New titular ethnic nationalities and minorities have been created in the 15 new independent states of the former USSR. Georgians, Uzbeks, etc. who continue to work and live in Russia have become foreigners. There are ethnic divisions everywhere, and their significance always lies in the specificities.

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Issues in youth studies

This book engages with, or presents evidence that is relevant to, a series of live issues in youth studies, but without attempting to settle any of the debates or even, in some cases, adopting a definite position.

(i) Globalisation. There is now general agreement among social scientists in all disciplines that:

- During the closing decades of the 20th century globalisation intensified due to developments in electronic communications, the globalisation of the market economy following the collapse of communism, the rise of trans-national businesses and financial institutions, and the creation or enlarged role of international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, NATO, etc.
- Increased inter-dependence does not necessarily lead to homogenisation – everywhere becoming more similar. Youth researchers seem agreed on this: the outcome of globalisation is a variety of examples of glolocalisation – mixtures of the global and the local (see Nilan and Feixa, 2006).

The issue then becomes: exactly what are the global similarities and what are the differences as regards the situations, outlooks and behaviour of young people? The material in this book is relevant, but inevitably inconclusive.

(ii) Structure and agency. This is a long-running debate among youth researchers. The arguments are about the relative importance of:

- Structure, young people's situations, in determining their experiences and life courses.
- Agency, that is, individuals' ability to reflect upon their circumstances, to appraise their own capabilities and inclinations, and then to act purposively and take charge of their own biographies.

There is now agreement that this is not an either/or issue and, indeed, that structure and agency are always implicated in one another. The current argument is about whether late-20th century developments (post-industrialism and associated trends in the west) have amplified the role of agency at the expense of structure, as suggested by Beck (1992) and vigorously contested by Furlong and

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Cartmel (2007). As regards the effects of the post-communist transition in Eastern Europe, this book echoes Furlong and Cartmel's position.

(iii) Unitary or divided life stage? Once again, there is broad agreement among youth researchers that in most countries all over the world new life space has been created between young people completing full-time education on the one side, and entering full adulthood on the other indicated by the character of their jobs, marriage and parenthood. The issue is whether this requires us to recognise a new post-adolescent, post-youth life stage, termed 'emerging adulthood' by Arnett (2005, 2006). This book's position in respect of Eastern Europe is that the balance of advantage lies in retaining a unitary view of youth.

(iv) The scarred cohorts hypothesis. The argument here is that the labour market conditions awaiting young people in recent times are leaving them scarred for life. Charvel (2006), using data from France, argues that the baby boomers (the products of the high birth rates that followed the Second World War) were a lucky generation. They experienced childhood and youth supported by strong welfare states, entered full employment labour markets in which middle class jobs were increasing rapidly, and when the gap between youth and adult earnings was narrowing. In contrast, school and college leavers since the 1970s in most western countries (and in East European countries since the 1980s) have experienced weaker welfare states, have entered labour markets with higher rates of unemployment, and in some places have faced a slowdown in the pace of increase in middle class jobs and a widening gap between youth and adult earnings. In real terms (after taking inflation into account), Charvel shows that in France recent cohorts of school-leavers have earned no more than their parents did when they were young. Charvel also shows that in France, up to now, the occupational positions and earnings that individuals have achieved by age 30 have had long-term implications for their lifetime career prospects. Hence the argument that recent and current cohorts of young people are likely to remain scarred for life.

This argument can be nuanced. There have been differences between countries and between regions within countries. In Eastern Europe young people who tried to start their working lives in the early 1990s were confronted by economies and labour markets that were sinking into deep recession. On the other hand, especially when the economies started to recover, there were opportunities to enter virgin space – to set up businesses in markets where there were no established competitors, and to take jobs in new private sector businesses,

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including international businesses that were investing in the new market economies. More recent cohorts of school-leavers have entered labour markets where labour demand is stronger, but have been confronted by in-post managers and professionals, and proprietors of small businesses, little older then themselves (Marada, 2004).

There are two criticisms of the scarring hypothesis. One is that we simply cannot know, because what happens to recent cohorts of school-leavers in the future is bound to depend partly on what happens in the relevant labour markets. Most children of the Great Depression in the USA were saved from scarring by the Second World War and the full employment conditions that were established and maintained afterwards (see Elder, 1974).

The second and most basic criticism of the scarring thesis is that it misleadingly treats the experiences of the baby boomers as normative (the benchmark of how things ought to be). This book agrees with Wyn and Woodman (2006) who argue that current cohorts of young people treat current conditions as normal, and that viewing their transitions as flawed is an adult perspective that has inappropriately been incorporated into a great deal of youth research. Wyn and Woodman argue that young people today do not expect jobs for life: in fact they accept that it can be difficult to obtain any decent job. On the other hand, they have new options. For example, in the west heterosexual marriage is no longer regarded as an inevitable destiny. Wyn and Woodman urge youth researchers to stop bemoaning how things have changed and recognise that today's young people are devising new ways of working, living, and balancing work and the rest of their lives in ways suited to 21st century contexts. The details are certainly different, but the evidence in later chapters shows that Wyn and Woodman's basic points apply equally in Eastern Europe.

(v) New political generations? Can the 'changed expectations' position be broadened to argue that new political generations are being formed, maybe a single global generation whose concerns and priorities reflect global current youth issues such as under-employment, and 21st century issues such as climate change and international terrorism?

'Political generation' is a concept first used by Karl Mannheim (1952). These generations are formed among the first cohorts to experience historically new conditions; who form new outlooks on life that set them apart from and often in opposition to older generations; who bring new issues onto political agendas; and who form new political movements or transform old ones and thereby transform their countries. The new political generations that were formed in Europe following the First World War were responsible for the rise of the

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communist and fascist movements of that era. After the Second World War a new post-scarcity generation came into existence in the west. In Eastern Europe new political generations were formed under communism. In the countries into which communism was spread after the Second World War, one generation faction became enthusiasts in building communism. Another faction became dissidents (overt or covert) who eventually challenged and overthrew communism in the 1980s. The post-communist cohorts of young people in Eastern Europe are definitely a wholly new political generation (as the following chapters will show). The position of their western counterparts is less clear-cut.

Book plan and sources of evidence

The order of topics in the following chapters is dictated by which needs to follow which in order to maximise comprehension. Hence, labour markets, education, and family and housing transitions precede the chapters on young people's leisure and political orientations and involvements. There are two chapters which review and anticipate what is to follow. Chapter 4 is about the structure-agency debate. Chapter 7 draws on material in the preceding chapters to identify emergent class divisions among young people in Eastern Europe. This is followed by the chapter on youth and politics. The organisation within the chapters on the various aspects of young people's lives is usually to start in Eastern Europe under communism, then to show how things have changed under post–communism, and then introduce comparisons with youth in the west and the rest of the world. This running order changes only in Chapter 5 on family and housing transitions where the narrative flows most easily by putting the west first.

Labour markets are dealt with first of all in the next chapter. This is despite education coming first in children's and young people's biographies. The justification for promoting labour markets is that changes in education are more often responses to trends in economies and labour markets than vice-versa.

This book is not a monograph which reports the findings from a specific research project or group of projects. The evidence is from a very large number of sources and authors, some based in Eastern Europe and others in the west. However, the book draws liberally from a series of investigations in which the author of this book was involved from the beginning of the 1990s and over the following 20 years. The projects in total have gathered evidence from and about young people in a total of 12 different former communist countries.

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These are scattered between Central Europe (Poland, Hungary and Slovakia), south-east Europe (Bulgaria), Russia (specifically Moscow and Vladikavkaz), Donetsk, Dneipropetrovsk and Lviv (all Ukraine), the three South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), and three Central Asia states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). In some of these places there have been successive projects. All told, these projects make it possible to identify what has been common and what has been different in young people's experiences in different places since the end of communism. We shall see that young people's experiences have been sufficiently similar to vindicate the use of Eastern Europe as a category. The evidence from the successive projects also makes it possible to assess how young people's situations, experiences and responses have changed, and how they have remained constant since the early 1990s.

All the projects gathered evidence from young adults aged 20-something and up to age 30. They all collected combinations of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Both feature in the following chapters. The two kinds of evidence are essentially complementary. Most of the qualitative evidence is from narrative interviews in which young people have described their life stories, which in all cases were shaped, to some extent, by a particular stage in their countries' historical transformations. The quantitative data enable us to see exactly which and how many young people shared particular kinds of life stories. Details of exactly when and where all the material was obtained are given as the evidence features in the following chapters.

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