

Life-role changes in times of socioeconomic transition

ŽELJKO JERNEIĆ and BRANIMIR ŠVERKO

In its first decade, transition in the former communist countries was accompanied by a decline in peoples' subjective well-being and a shift in their value system towards increased emphasis on utilitarian and individualistic values. These changes could, in turn, have affected the salience of peoples' life roles. To explore this possibility we compared the WIS Saliency Inventory measures of the university student samples and adult worker samples surveyed before and after the transition begun. For the university students the importance of the working role had increased, while participation in, and commitment to, studying had decreased. Also, as predicted, the importance of home and family and of the citizen's role had both increased, as shown by participation, commitment and value expectations. Somewhat different were the results for the adult workers, who showed a pronounced decrease in the importance of the citizen's role. This role disengagement is attributed to a general dissatisfaction with the outcomes of transition in older subjects.

The rush of "transition" in the post-communist societies has elicited an immense attention of scholars. The process has been under scrutiny in a multitude of treatises. Undertaken mainly by economists and political scientists, these studies have concentrated chiefly on the issues of political transformation and economic reforms. However, as a recent book by Miller, White, and Heywood (1998) demonstrates, democracies need more than democratic institutions and economic reforms to survive; they need democratic culture and supportive understanding of the changes. Several recent symposia showed that the transition process has also significant psychological implications (Ten Horn, Šverko & Zinovieva, 1998; Šverko, 2000; Dienes & Roe, 2001). These symposia took the view that studying peoples' feelings is important for understanding the transition process and its outcomes.

Most people in Central and Eastern Europe welcomed the collapse of the communist regimes and the onset of profound socio-economic changes. Many people expected a short period of economic adjustment and a quick resumption of economic growth. But the reality was different.

Transition from the central state control towards democracy and market economy turned out to be a difficult journey. Instead of growth, a dramatic decline in production and social welfare occurred. Although since the mid-1990s some of the more successful transition countries began to recover, in the initial years of transition the output declined in all transition countries (cf., Fisher & Sahay, 2000).

The decline in social output and welfare caused a deep disappointment among people. Based on the data from the *World Values Survey*, Inglehart (2000) recently asserted that the lowest levels of subjective well-being in the world are to be found not among the poorest countries, such as India or Nigeria, but in the post-communist societies in transition, especially in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Needless to say, these countries also experience the highest decline in macroeconomic performance (cf., Fisher & Sahay, 2000). The disappointment and decline of the subjective well-being has been felt in other transition countries, too. In Croatia, where transition difficulties were coupled with the war that broke out in 1991, a follow-up of job related attitudes between 1993 and 1997 (Maslić-Seršić & Šverko, 2000) revealed that the perceived attainability of major job factors was severely low, indicating a profound deficiency in employees' need satisfaction. Similar findings came from an earlier study of a Bulgarian sample (Zinovieva, ten Horn & Roe, 1993). In the Czech Republic, a longitudinal study of a representative panel of households (Pechačová, Hrabá & Lorenz, 1998) indicated a high incidence of distress attributed to the societal change.

Željko Jerneić, Department of Psychology, University of Zagreb, I. Lučića 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: zjerneic@ffzg.hr. (Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to this address). Branimir Šverko, Department of Psychology, University of Zagreb, I. Lučića 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia.

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In parallel with the decline in the subjective well-being, a change in value systems is also found. Studies from Croatia (Jerneić & Šverko, 1999; Šverko, 1999) examined various samples – high-school students, university students, and adult employees – and found three congruent value changes in all of the samples. First, a pronounced shift towards *utilitarian* values, emphasizing material goals and social security. This change was expected: diminished living standards and economic insecurity are conducive to the value shift stressing the lower-level needs. Second, *individualistic* values, i.e. values that emphasize independent life style and autonomy, also increased in importance. This was expected too, because the ideology free enterprise lays strong emphasis on individualism and freedom. Besides, stressing liberty, rights, and independent action of individuals may be underscored in a general post-socialist move away from collectivism. The third change concerned the values that declined in importance. Two social values underwent a decline in valuation when transition begun – *participation in decisions making* and *altruism*. This change may be a collateral outcome of the post-socialist move away from collectivism, but also the result of despair and feeling of helplessness. A support for the view that these changes are not sporadic or limited to Croatia only, comes from the national case studies undertaken within the project “Culture in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional and value change”. These studies indicate that although each transition society faces its own problems, “there are many features that are common to all post-communist states” (Malešević, 1997), and among the common features is the rise of individualist and materialist values.

The present contribution seeks to further explore the value changes in Croatia in the course of transition, in particular the changes affecting the importance of major human life roles – those that manifest themselves in five fields of human life activity, comprising work, study, homemaking, community activities, and leisure. In our approach to the assessment of these roles, we fully relied on the constructs and measures developed within the *Work Importance Study* (WIS), a large-scale, cross-national project in which we participated in 1980s (Super & Šverko, 1995). The *Salience Inventory*, a multi-measure questionnaire developed by the WIS international team, assesses the importance of the major life activities, which are defined as follows (Ferreira-Marques & Miranda, 1995):

Studying: taking courses, going to day or night school classes; preparing for classes, studying in library or home, independent formal or informal study.

Working: activities that produce pay or profit, on job or for self.

Home and Family: taking care of home, shopping and caring for dependents, such as children or aging parents.

Community Service: activities with organizations such as recreational groups, Red Cross, social service agencies, political parties, and trade unions.

Leisure: taking part in sports, watching television, reading, going to movies or theater, pursuing hobbies, relaxing or loafing, being with family and friends.

We were able to compare the role salience of university student and adult workers before and after the transition began. Although this study is only exploratory and descriptive in nature, we had some expectations about possible changes of their life role salience during the transition. In formulating our expectations, we considered two possible influences: the ideological emphasis that accompanied the introduction of a new socioeconomic system and the worsened economic situation that badly depressed the living standards and prospects for employment.

First, we predicted the *increased salience of working*. Transition aimed at the free market system, promoting private initiative, entrepreneurship and economic efficiency, with an emphasis on values stressing upward mobility and material success. In principle, this may increase the importance of working. Similar prediction stems also from the “scarcity hypothesis”, stating that an individual’s priorities reflect his or her socio-economic environment, that is, one places an increased subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply. And it is job openings that are in short supply in many transition countries. In Croatia, many firms went into liquidation or drastic downsizing, and unemployment rate rose dramatically to 22 per cent. Second, as a consequence of increased struggle for survival, another role salience change might happen – *declining investment in studying*. Although Macek *et al.* (1998) believe that the value of education has increased in the postcommunist societies, lowered living standards may depress their engagement in the student role. On similar grounds, we also predicted an *increased importance of home and family*: in uncertain times, when many people face hardships, closer attachment and sharing support within the primary group may be enhanced. At the same time a *decreased salience of leisure* is probable, in particular the participation in leisure activities by employed people (e.g., adult workers). In spite of the high unemployment rate, our recent data (Šverko, Arambašić & Galešić, in press) show that Croatian workers – those who have survived downsizing – work long hours. Today’s employers are demanding taskmasters, and drained household budgets motivate people to accept overtime hours or additional side jobs, thereby reducing their leisure time. Finally, our last prediction is that the *importance of community service or the citizen’s role has increased* during transition. This prediction is based on the

notion that transition to democracy brings equal rights of political participation, with more freedom to believe, behave, and express as citizens wish. This is expected to foster voluntary citizen cooperation and increased investment in the citizen's role.

METHODS

We compared the role salience of the university student and adult worker samples tested before and after the transition began. The initial samples were collected and questioned as part of the original WIS study in 1983 (Šverko, Jerneić, Kulenović & Vizek-Vidović, 1995), seven years before transition. The replication samples were collected and questioned in 1998, seven years after the transition began. The description of the samples is given in Table 1.

The student samples were drawn from different departments of all Croatian universities (Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, and Osijek) and tested in small groups in classroom settings. Both samples were representative of the Croatian university student population. However, the two adult worker samples were samples of convenience collected and questioned individually by trained psychology students. Each student was instructed to find and question a certain number of adult employees of both genders, different ages, and different educational levels. Although not representative of the Croatian workers' population, the two adult worker samples were mutually reasonably comparable in their basic socio-demographic characteristics.

The participants were asked to fill out the WIS *Salience Inventory*. This instrument consists of a series of 4-point Likert-type scales intended to assess the degree of importance of working, studying, homemaking, community service, and leisure. It evaluates each life role according to three measures: a behavioral measure or *role participation*, an affective measure or *role commitment*, and an affective-cognitive measure based on the perception of the possibilities of a *value realization* in a role (known as "value expectations"). The sample items in the Appendix illustrate these measures. As our earlier research proves, the reliability of the role salience measures is good: internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alphas) range from .80 to .95, while the test-retest coefficients amount on average to .70 for the one-month interval (Šverko *et al.*, 1995).

RESULTS

In the analysis of the data, we first calculated the means and standard deviations for each of the 15 role salience measures, collected on both occasions. Then, the means for 1998 were compared to the initial means for 1983, and the 1998-1983 differences were expressed in the standard deviation units, or z-scores. For this purpose the differences between each pair of means were divided by the respective standard deviations of the combined distributions. The significance of differences was evaluated by *t-test* comparisons. Tables 2 and 3 exhibit the obtained results for the university students and adult workers, respectively: means, standard deviations, z-scores, and t-test values. Negative values pertain to the characteristics that underwent a decline in valuation.

Table 1

Description of the samples

Samples	Age		Sex (% male)	Socioeconomic level (percentage)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		1	2	3	Unknown
University students							
1983 (<i>N</i> = 348)	22.1	1.71	34.0	4.4	52.3	37.0	6.5
1998 (<i>N</i> = 360)	22.2	1.34	35.0	4.2	38.8	56.7	0.3
Adult workers							
1983 (<i>N</i> = 344)	33.4	10.75	56.0	15.8	49.2	35.1	-
1998 (<i>N</i> = 269)	37.5	12.56	49.4	15.2	47.5	37.2	-

Note. SES codes: 1 = unskilled or semiskilled; 2 = skilled or clerical; 3 = college or university. Parental SES is used for students.

Table 2

1998-1983 Differences in Role Salience: University Students

Role	1983 (N=348)		1998 (N=360)		$M_2 - M_1 / SD_c$	t-test
	M_1	SD_1	M_2	SD_2		
<i>Working</i>						
Participation	16.5	5.65	20.2	6.85	0.59	7.85**
Commitment	28.5	6.63	29.7	6.26	0.19	2.47*
Value Expectation	58.2	10.77	58.3	10.92	0.01	0.12
<i>Studying</i>						
Participation	30.5	4.90	27.5	5.73	-0.56	-7.50**
Commitment	29.9	5.42	28.7	6.17	-0.21	-2.75**
Value Expectation	54.4	8.45	55.1	10.23	0.07	0.99
<i>Home & Family</i>						
Participation	21.1	5.55	22.7	5.92	0.28	3.71**
Commitment	26.2	6.73	28.3	7.73	0.29	3.86**
Value Expectation	53.0	10.76	56.2	11.43	0.29	3.84**
<i>Community service</i>						
Participation	16.6	6.15	19.1	8.00	0.35	4.67**
Commitment	20.4	7.09	22.9	8.79	0.31	4.17**
Value Expectation	40.8	12.92	48.1	15.64	0.51	6.78**
<i>Leisure</i>						
Participation	29.5	5.84	29.3	6.13	-0.03	-0.44
Commitment	31.9	5.16	32.5	5.67	0.11	1.47
Values Expectation	59.5	9.00	61.0	9.46	0.16	2.16*

As Table 2 shows, most of the 1998-1983 differences for the university students attained statistical significance. By and large, the changes are in the predicted direction. Participation in the working role and commitment to working has increased, while participation in, and commitment to, studying have decreased. Also, as predicted, the importance of home and family, as well as the importance of community service, have both increased as shown by participation, commitment and value expectations.

The results for adult workers shown in Table 3 are somewhat different. The 1998 sample exhibits decreased commitment to studying and decreased participation in leisure activities. However, the most salient change, which dominates the picture, is a dramatic decrease in the importance of the citizen's role, as shown by all three salience measures. In comparison with the 1983 sample, the 1998 sample of adult employees shows much less participation, less commitment and less possibilities for value realization in the citizen's role.

DISCUSSION

Our hypotheses have been only partially supported and the observed changes were not in full agreement in the two samples. Unlike our previous analysis of values when similar changes were congruently observed in different samples (Jerneić & Šverko, 1999; Šverko, 1999), the present analysis reveals somewhat different changes in role importance for students and adult workers.

For the university students, an increased participation in the work role and decreased participation in studying was observed in the replication sample, both in agreement with our predictions. We interpret them as a consequence of diminished living standards during transition, causing many students to seek various part-time jobs to support their living. At the same time, the general lack of full-time jobs in most of the occupations increases the students' concerns about their future employment and, thereafter, com-

Table 3

1998-1983 Differences in Role Salience: Adults (Workers)

Role	1983 (N=348)		1998 (N=360)		$M_2 - M_1 / SD_c$	t-test
	M_1	SD_1	M_2	SD_2		
<i>Working</i>						
Participation	30.4	4.97	30.0	5.66	-0.08	-0.92
Commitment	33.5	5.15	34.1	4.94	0.12	1.46
Value Expectation	59.3	10.45	58.4	11.25	-0.08	-1.01
<i>Studying</i>						
Participation	20.9	7.78	19.9	7.67	-0.13	-1.59
Commitment	24.8	7.81	23.5	7.45	-0.17	-2.10*
Value Expectation	47.4	14.07	45.0	14.44	-0.17	-2.07*
<i>Home & Family</i>						
Participation	25.8	5.96	25.4	6.32	-0.07	-0.80
Commitment	31.5	6.52	32.1	6.82	0.09	1.10
Value Expectation	58.2	10.85	59.5	11.32	0.12	1.44
<i>Community service</i>						
Participation	19.7	7.10	16.5	6.68	-0.46	-5.73**
Commitment	22.5	7.98	19.5	8.12	-0.37	-4.57**
Value Expectation	42.4	14.76	37.9	15.99	-0.29	-3.58**
<i>Leisure</i>						
Participation	25.9	6.67	24.6	6.48	-0.20	-2.43*
Commitment	29.6	6.63	29.1	6.83	-0.08	-0.93
Values Expectation	55.4	11.39	54.8	12.41	-0.05	-0.62

mitment to working. The importance of home and family has also increased, as predicted on the grounds that the meaning of the primary group is enhanced when people face hardships. Finally, in line with the notion that transition to democracy fosters the citizens' voluntary activity, we found an increased importance of the citizen's role in the 1998 university student sample.

This is not, however, the case with adult workers. On the contrary, relative to 1983, adult workers exhibit a striking decline of importance of the citizen's role in 1998. This is an unpredicted finding that merits special attention.

The goals of transition comprise not only the transformation of ownership and the changeover to the market economy, but also the development of a modern civic society. As a matter of fact, the attainment of stable democracy requires the development of participatory "civic culture" (Almond & Verba, 1989), comprising citizens who are informed and active. This is why the marked decline of the citizen's role as shown by all three salience measures – par-

ticipation, commitment, and value realization – requires our attention and explanation. All that we can offer at present is our personal and impressionistic view.

The citizen's role disengagement observed in our adult workers sample may be a manifestation of the general dissatisfaction with the outcomes of transition in comparison with the previous situation – a comparison that the students cannot draw. Borkowska and Kulpińska (1998, p. 479) state that in Poland, after the "great expectations" associated with the demise of communism, "the transformation, recession, and political chaos have brought disappointment and distrust in the new elite". In a similar vein, Piroth (2001, ¶3) asserts that "citizens of post-communist democracies have become increasingly disillusioned with democracy and many have lost interest in the machinations of political leaders". In Croatia, this process may be even more pronounced, because the war that broke out in 1991 aggravated the negative economic outcome as well as the machinations in the course of privatisation. Besides, under the

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Communist rule, Croatia shared with the other republics in the former Yugoslavia a socioeconomic system of a very specific brand. Compared with other communist economies, this system had some liberal features: free movement of people and inflow of capital across borders, reduced degree of central state control, relatively autonomous decision making by enterprises including investment decisions, and sizable trade with the Western markets. This system produced relatively acceptable levels of economic and social security, and gave employees respectable levels of industrial democracy. Transition took away most of the social benefits, including the security of the workplace and the "right to have a say". The outcome may be disappointment and withdrawal, causing adult workers' disengagement from the citizen's role.

Our student participants are younger (see Table 1) and therefore their feelings about the postcommunist reforms may be less rooted in the previous ideology and social conditions. Indeed, it has been shown already that younger people are more supportive of the postcommunist economic reforms (Hraba, Mullick, Lorenz & Večerník, 2001). Besides, given the increased value of education under the new social system (Macek *et al*, 1998), the university students may expect to gain from the change. Consequently, their commitment to community activities and engagement in the citizen's role might be enhanced.

The results reported here suggest that major political and socioeconomic changes may strongly influence peoples' life role priorities, which are otherwise relatively stable behavioral dispositions. It should be noted, however, that the main limitation of the present study concerns the comparability of our 1983 and 1998 samples. Although the samples are reasonably well equated with respect to age, gender, and educational level, there is always a possibility that a sampling error is declared as a "change" in psychosocial phenomena. Therefore, the results of the present comparison should be taken only as a preliminary indication. More data should be cumulated to confirm the observed psychosocial changes.

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APPENDIX

Saliency Inventory: Sample Items for the Participation Measure

What you actually do or have done recently in different life activities?

	Studying	Working	Home & Family	Community Activities	Leisure
I have spent time in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I am active in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I have talked to people about...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
etc.					

1 = not at all, never
 2 = little, sometimes
 3 = quite a lot, often
 4 = a great deal, very often

Saliency Inventory: Sample Items for the Commitment Measure

How do you feel about each life activity?

	Studying	Working	Home & Family	Community Activities	Leisure
It is important to me to be good in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I am very much involved in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I am proud of what I do in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
etc.					

Saliency Inventory: Sample Items for the Value Expectation Measure

How much opportunities do you see to find different values in each of the life activities?

	Studying	Working	Home & Family	Community Activities	Leisure
Use all my knowledge and skills in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
Live your life your own way in...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
Have a high standard of living through...	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
etc.					

1 = none
 2 = some
 3 = quite a lot
 4 = a great deal