



Class, Friendship, and the Postsocialist Transition:

Identity Work and Patterns of Sociability in Central Europe – East and West

Dražen Cepić

Ph.D. thesis defence on 26 March 2013

Abstract

In this thesis, I analyze the emergence of class boundaries in postsocialism in the realm of sociability and friendship making. The goal of this study is to provide a dynamic account of the ways actors draw symbolic boundaries toward people of different social status, as well as to explore the mechanisms of shifting those patterns across different “orders of worth”. At the same time, by using qualitative network analysis, it is addressed how these processes affected the actual choice of friends. I explored these issues by conducting indepth 105 interviews with upper middle class and working class respondents in Croatia and – in an asymmetric comparison – the upper middle class in Austria.

The topic of class formation in postsocialism has been researched with qualitative, experience-near approach to friendship and identity building, as well as specific mechanisms through which these processes took place: the rise of private schooling, transnationalization, and the new entrepreneurial networks, sometimes crossing the bonds of legality, and entering the gray field of corruption and nepotism. At the same time, it is observed how the new influences were contradicted by the existing path dependencies – both in the form of the social hierarchies which managed to survive the project of destratification, and on the other hand, by legacies of the old regime in the form of egalitarian values.

Finally, the area perspective does not represent a purpose to itself: even though postsocialism has stood in the center of this research, this study also contributes to the broader discussions about the nature of class divides in different contexts. Given the comprehensiveness of the theoretical and conceptual framework, this concerned several disciplinary fields: friendship studies, social network analysis, the scholarship on boundary maintenance, and even more abstract discussions on the role of actors in the times of social change. Despite the primarily empirical nature of my approach, this study also attempts to offer theoretical and methodological contributions in the broad field of study bound by cultural sociology, social anthropology, economic sociology, sociology of worth, and qualitative approaches to social stratification.



Jury: Graham Allan (Keele University), Jörg Rössel (University of Zurich), Dražen Cepić (candidate), Martin Kohli (EUI) (Supervisor), László Bruszt (EUI)

Bio: Dražen Cepić holds a degree in Sociology and Philosophy from the University of Zagreb, an MA in Sociology and Social Anthropology from the Central European University in Budapest, and an MRes in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute in Florence. As an exchange student, he also studied at the Humboldt University in Berlin and University of Vienna. His research interests include cultural sociology, economic anthropology, postsocialist studies, sociology of friendship, social network analysis, and qualitative approaches to social stratification.