

# Introduction

*Matthias Schwartz and Heike Winkel*

In early 2015, about one year after the overthrow of the old regime in Kiev, after the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the outbreak of war in Eastern Ukraine between separatists supported by Russians and Ukrainian troops, a significant youth initiative arose in Ukraine: students from universities and colleges all over Ukraine compiled a video message for their fellow students at universities in Russia. The widely distributed video contained a number of scenes, each showing several student groups gathered around different speakers giving short speeches. In an effort to oppose the narrative of a Ukrainian ‘fascist’ threat which dominates the public discourse in Russia, the speakers in the video evoked the spirit of the Maidan protests, presenting themselves as revolutionaries. They called on their Russian contemporaries to not rely on Russia’s official mass media reporting on the events taking place in Ukraine, but instead to be critical and seek objective truth about the situation. It did not take the Russian studentship long to answer the public address in the form of similar video messages, and more groups from other Russian and Ukrainian universities joined them, with video clips in support of or in opposition to the official Russian media perspective pouring in from Crimea, Lugansk, Lviv and Moldova. All of these video messages were recorded in the same manner, designed in the same style and presented different perspectives on the events.<sup>1</sup>

Of interest here is the ways in which these video messages function as means of youth intervention and youth self-representation in the Russian–Ukrainian propaganda war. All of the young people shown in the clips are dressed casually and neatly and make an engaged, assiduous, cheerful impression. In their appeal, the pro-Ukrainian students conjure a long-established Soviet-style notion of youth, stating that students in both countries stand for ‘progressive motions, the strength and future of a nation’, and that they were counting on their fellow students’ solidarity.<sup>2</sup> In the Russian video, this motif is taken up to underscore the idea that students are their nations’ ‘best representatives’.<sup>3</sup> In terms of content, each side represents the official version of the conflict supported by its respective government,

## 2 Introduction

while the emphasis on youth was meant to grant their statements a specific authenticity.

However, a closer look at the clips reveals that the ideal evoked in these messages is ambiguous. The Ukrainian students appear to be the heirs of their fellow students who fought for democracy in the Orange Revolution in 2004. Back then, after the collapse of the socialist societies in the region, many had hoped that the young people would at last complete the political transformation into a better world for which their parents had fought. Yet these political upheavals failed in one way or another, and in comparison to the diverse rebellious crowd at the Maidan, with its self-organised units and sectors, improvised armour and weapons, highly imaginative disguises, and uncompromising deeds, the young students in the video look as gentle as lambs.

Moreover, these staged and thoroughly planned video messages present a progressive youth that is totally conformist to political strategy, managed by policy-makers on both sides of the conflict. There is no spirit of rebellion or self-assertion against an older generation, against state institutions or other authorities present in these statements. We see young adults acting as agents of political mainstream and civil affairs rather than a generation of youth that is willing to think and act differently than their parents' generation. This is not only symptomatic for the role that young people played during the 'revolution of dignity' in Ukraine 2013–2014, which was originally initiated by students who were soon pushed aside by other social groups and activists, but also of great significance in a broader perspective. These video messages shed light on the fact that the notion of youth itself has undergone substantial change over the last decades.

The book takes precisely this finding as a starting point in order to take a closer look at the meanings of youth cultures in Eastern European societies. It operates on the assumption that the conformist youth who appear in the videos and present themselves as loyal to their respective government might be seen as exemplary for the broad majority of young people in post-socialist countries, despite the fact that the videos are obviously staged. Therefore its focus is not on scandals with public appeal initiated by rebellious youngsters, on dissident counter-cultures or artistic breakings of taboos, carried out by what seems to be a very small minority. Radical art collectives such as Voina and Pussy Riot or the women's rights advocates from Femen may be impressive examples of young activists who gain attention worldwide, but they are not representative of the cultural practices, political engagement, public belongings and social networks – of the distinctive self-images, codes, fashions and imaginary communities – that most young people in Eastern Europe are part of. In order to achieve a closer understanding of Eastern European youth cultures today, we want to suggest a focus on everyday routines and imaginary belongings that incorporate and transform regional, transnational and global influences and tendencies.

Eastern European youth cultures have undergone significant transformations between the Soviet period and today. The new generations growing up a quarter of a century after the breakdown of state socialism have knowledge of communist regimes and the Cold War only from schoolbooks, movies or the memories of older friends and family members. One might therefore ask if the adjective 'post-socialist' is still applicable to these young people. At the same time, the neo-liberal market economy and globalisation have reshaped post-socialist societies even more fundamentally than Western European ones who did not have to cope with regime changes in parallel with new economic and globalising forces. The change to Eastern European societies has been not only fundamental, but has also taken different directions in different states: most of the post-socialist countries have joined the European Union, while some have had to cope with civil wars and separatist movements, including the former Yugoslavian countries as well as Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, whereas Belorussia and Russia have chosen a more authoritarian way. In light of these heterogeneous development paths, many scholars object to the region-based term 'Eastern Europe' because it undermines a differentiated approach to the diversity of experiences and implies the existence of a homogeneous entity that in reality is rapidly vanishing.

The book takes up precisely these scholarly reservations in order to more thoroughly analyse youth cultures in Eastern Europe in a globalised world. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss in more detail the challenges that arise in regard to the study of youth cultures in Eastern Europe before giving an outline of the volume's structure and objectives.

## **Redefining Eastern Europe**

The designation 'Eastern Europe' has a long history, starting in the age of Enlightenment, when the region was originally constructed in western discourse as a distinctive backward area of the Continent. The region was later firmly established as a threatening communist bloc during the Cold War (Wolff, 1994; Chernetsky, 2007; Todorova, 2009), and the term was never used as a positive self-definition. As mentioned above, in the 25 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the region has diversified significantly, but this did not mark the end of Eastern Europe as a joint research field in western academia. The common social and cultural heritage of the socialist era is still more or less present, as are the consequences of its downfall, such as rapid privatisation, the economisation of public goods and contested political systems.

At the same time, Eastern Europe, like other world regions, is deeply influenced by globalisation processes. Recent research has been reflecting on these developments, pointing out the particulars of the evolution of Eastern Europe in this context. Proponents of the so-called transition theory

#### 4 *Introduction*

have put forward the thesis that the crash of state socialisms was received mainly as a liberation from economic and political constraints and marked the beginning of a steady catching-up process for countries that aspired to first-world status politically, economically, socially and culturally. In this framework, people from Eastern Europe were regarded as successors and imitators of their western paragons. Other theorists regarded even the demise of state socialisms as a result of cultural globalisation and not as a culmination of internal forces (Ther, 2014).

The authors of this volume aim to take these research conclusions one step further. Beyond the controversial matter of whether the transition experience is dominantly influenced by internal (post-socialist) or external (global) factors, whether it has an intimidating or motivating effect on the population, this volume takes into account its uniqueness to civilisation. The crash of socialism in Eastern Europe coincided with the increase and acceleration of globalisation processes. This caused peculiar overlaps and interactions of effects and developments that differ with regard to certain realms of experience. When confronted with an unsettling globalised world in which conventional values and understandings are being challenged, people from Eastern Europe encounter these challenges with a vast amount of experience of living in countries with unstable political structures and social institutions, precarious economic perspectives, and uncertain moral and cultural ties. What the so-called transformation theory regarded as a transitional phenomenon specific to post-socialist Eastern European societies, are in fact realities that many industrial countries are now facing in times of global finance crises and EU austerity programmes. Southern European countries such as Spain, Greece or Italy, where we observe extremely high youth unemployment and youth migration, are just some examples of this situation. Therefore, the integration of the Eastern European experience into the field of youth studies can be used to gain a deeper and more differentiated understanding of the challenges that countries in the East as well as in the West face in times of globalisation.

### **Rethinking youth**

Our understanding of youth cultures has been deeply affected by shifts in the common notion of the meanings of youth itself. Global developments after the end of the Cold War questioned the widely accepted understanding of youth as a limited transitional chapter of life between the end of school education and the beginning of steady employment, which is a rather specific understanding of the term, typical for the post-war period in Europe and North America (Wyn and White, 1997; Heath and Walker, 2012). Young people in a global world can no longer rely on a pre-set interim social status. In times of radical global change that results in multiple instabilities and uncertainties, life trajectories become increasingly complex, and so does

the transition to adulthood. In academic research, this finds its reflection in an intense epistemological and methodological discussion, which aims to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of young people's life and of 'youth' as a life stage. Sue Heath and Charles Walker have given an excellent account of the methodological innovations that new research can build upon within this field (Heath and Walker, 2012). In particular, recent studies have begun to examine the consequences of globalisation for the transition to adulthood in a cross-cultural perspective (Walther, 2006; Dolby and Fazal, 2008). Such research challenges the notion of youth as a 'force of renewal', established as early as 1904, when George Stanley Hall coined the phrase 'storm and stress'. This notion has deeply informed social and cultural studies, which recognised the transnational existence of a life-stage distinguished by a strong wish to oppose established structures and to promote social and cultural change (Gidley, 2001). Lately, it has been increasingly questioned with regard to non-western cultures outside Europe and with regard to changing social premises (Hodkinson and Deike, 2007; Chandra, 2009).

Regarding post-socialist Eastern Europe, this concept of youth seems to be particularly inadequate, not only because of the different status of young people in socialist societies (Riordan, 1989; Kelly, 2007; Beacháin and Polese, 2010), but precisely because of the aforementioned sweeping social changes that the countries have gone through over the last decades (Slowinski, 1999; Mitev, 2004; Róbert and Bukodi, 2005; Kuhar and Reiter, 2012; Kirmse, 2013). The work by Hillary Pilkington and her colleagues on cultural globalisation and Russian youth cultures (Pilkington et al., 2002), is a ground-breaking example of this more differentiated understanding of globalisation with regard to the Russian case. While on the one hand acknowledging strong West–East and core–periphery dynamics of cultural globalisation, Pilkington and her co-authors denied the total homogenisation of all regional differences in the wake of it. Instead, the authors described multiple ways of targeted and selective adoption of global cultural products into the local context. Pilkington then suggested that 'Russia's response to globalisation continues to throw up challenges to western hegemony' (Pilkington et al., 2002, p. 226), precisely because of its understanding of the role it is playing in this process (see also Pilkington et al., 2010; Gololobov et al., 2014).

Recent research efforts examine these diverse effects that globalisation has on young people in different countries, including Eastern Europe (Bagnall, 2005; Blossfeld et al., 2005). These effects are not necessarily aggravating. Ken Roberts (2002) suggests, for example, that globalisation did not necessarily make young people's lives more insecure and immature. Instead, he argues, precisely because Eastern European youth conceived the transition as a liberation opening up new opportunities in individual freedom, mobility, education and welfare, they were eager to explore, and were, in fact, in an advantaged position compared to their western counterparts.

This argument opens up a further perspective for an unbiased reassessment of the Eastern European youth's experience, acknowledging their proactive role, without conceptualising their life-stage as pre-set by certain social, cultural and imaginary conditions (see also Kovacheva, 2000; Kovachev and Chrisholm, 2002).

This volume wishes to expand these research efforts to redefine Eastern Europe and to rethink youth and seeks to contribute to a more differentiated re-evaluation of cultural and political participation that some recent studies have begun to engage in (Loncle et al., 2012). This will serve a broader scope of perspectives, as Eastern European youth cultures refer to different patterns, traditions and understandings of participation than their western counterparts, grounded either in communist traditions or in dissident sub-cultures, for example. Vice versa, conformism or disaffection with politics or everyday life was regarded differently in Eastern Europe than in western countries.

Starting from such re-evaluations of the Eastern European region and the conditions of youth in a globalised world, the book focuses on the cultural practices of young people in a broad sense. As used in this volume, 'culture' refers to the ways people make sense of common experiences, to strategies of identity building in a political, civic and social field, and to certain behavioural practices of acting, forms and significance of public participation. Accordingly, the volume emphasises four perspectives on youth cultures in Eastern Europe, outlined in four parts.

## Reconsidering generational change

Part I features contributions that offer reflections on the way the notion of youth as an agent of change underlying the traditional concept of generations, coined by Karl Mannheim, is challenged in the Eastern European context. In 'The End of Childhood and/or the Discovery of the *Tineidzher*' (Chapter 1), Catriona Kelly starts with a historical perspective by examining representations of childhood and youth in Soviet propaganda, arts and personal experience, which are typical for socialist concepts of youth. She works out a remarkable contradiction of a high visibility of youth, on the one hand, and an unspoken prohibition on the representation of puberty and adolescence on the other. It becomes apparent that in Soviet culture, youth is more an ideological concept symbolising vigour, power, vitality and future than a biological and sociological transition phase, connoted by the word 'teenager'. In doing so, Kelly suggests that the Soviet experience can be used to challenge the western concept of youth as a distinct life phase determined by a high degree of individualisation and estrangement from established norms and institutions. From this perspective, socialist models of youth mobilisation cease to be seen as just a deviation from some western authentic ideals of youth. Instead, they shed light on some tendencies we

can observe in post-socialist Eastern Europe that are also typical for contemporary post-industrial globalised societies in general, where individual career-building leads to an acceleration of life trajectories that challenges the possibility of maintaining a period of juvenile freedom and unconstrained experience.

Ken Roberts, Christine Steiner and Herwig Reiter tackle these changed post-socialist life trajectories in more detail in arguing that generational experiences are becoming much more situation-dependent and less foreseeable. In 'Youth Cultures and the Formation of a New Political Generation in Eastern Europe' (Chapter 2), Roberts offers a macro-analysis of the effects that transformation processes in the wake of the crash of state socialist systems had on young people in Eastern European and Middle Asian countries. He reflects on the particular situation young people had to cope with in undergoing a double transformation: their personal puberty paralleled with the political transitions experienced by post-socialist societies, which have no historical precedent, from state-communism into (nominally) democratic members of the global market economy. From the perspective of research, this raises the question whether western sociology's concepts and theories of youth are able to comprehend these novel circumstances. Roberts's general conclusion is that they are, and that the notion of political generations is exemplary in this regard. Post-1989 Europe experienced increased and intensified processes of individual dis- and reorientation that undermined the process of generation building. While the generation of 1989 can be defined by a somewhat homogeneous shared experience, the heterogenic developments in the following period brought about a high degree of pluralism in regard to young people, with various degrees of estrangement from and engagement in their countries' politics. Yet as Roberts reminds us with regard to the twentieth-century Western European experience, this disaffection of young people with political activism may undermine confidence in and the legitimacy of existing political elites and their policies as well. This, however, might give way to the development of a new political generation, which creates new policies and brings forth political change.

Christine Steiner's and Herwig Reiter's chapter 'Fast Forward to Capitalism? Accelerated Youth in Post-Socialism' (Chapter 3), complements Ken Roberts's macro-sociological perspective with a comparative empirical analysis of two young men from Lithuania and East Germany, two countries that shared several decades of real socialism before entering very different societal trajectories of establishing institutions and cultures of capitalist market democracies. The authors suggest that young people showed a great ability to adapt to the conditions of accelerated change by being extremely flexible in creating fast and steady career paths. The concept of accelerated youth they are proposing brings an innovative feature to the transformation paradigm by rejecting the idea of Eastern European youth as trying to catch up with their western contemporaries. In addition, 'accelerated youth'

may serve as a scientific tool to describe not only Eastern European experiences, but youth biographies in a contemporary globalised market economy in general. In any case, it adds to the reconsidering of Eastern European youth cultures the important notion that the majority of young people undergo this age period without being part of political movements, social organisations or (sub)cultural scenes.

The last two chapters of Part I look more closely at the cultural implications of these non-political life trajectories and how they change the notion of what Mannheim would have called 'generation in actuality' and 'generational consciousness', which nowadays constitutes itself in 'unconscious' traumatic ways. Papović and Pejović deal with the ambivalent relationship between mainstream and underground cultures in two successive post-socialist generations of young people. In their contribution 'Revival without Nostalgia: The "Dizel" Movement, Serbian 1990s Cultural Trauma and Globalised Youth Cultures' (Chapter 4), they provide an analysis of the revival of Dizel as a movement that developed in the post-war Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and served as an embodiment of the country's nationalist ideology. Its members promoted a Mafioso fashion style, listened to the newly constituted music genre 'turbo-folk' and ideologically mobilised Serbian nationalistic stereotypes against others in former Yugoslavia. About ten years later, in the post-Yugoslavian Serbia of the new century, Dizel had an enormously successful revival amongst youth and became a sort of 'mainstream subculture'. Papović and Pejović undertake an analysis of the reasons for this comeback and show how the estrangement with politics in actuality not only shifts the perception and performance of cultural legacies, but also enables popular cultures to transform ideological narratives. Following the general dynamics of floating youth styles and fashions in a globalised present, youth cultures thus unconsciously may contribute to the failure of a local – in this case Serbian – society to cope with the cultural trauma caused by the wars.

Tamara Hundorova develops a similar argument in regard to the vanishing constellations that might constitute a 'generational experience'. In her chapter 'Symptom of the Loser and the Melancholy of the Post-Soviet Generation', she analyses the trans-generational effect of post-Soviet trauma in contemporary Ukrainian literature, as evidenced in the symptomatic literary character of the 'loser'. The loser's 'sick body' emerges as a widespread phenomenon in Ukrainian youth prose during the 2000s, and characterises how the post-Soviet generation identifies itself. As a symptomatic phenomenon, the loser indicates the presence of a direct link between social collapse and an individual's somatic states, and simultaneously stages the crisis of communication between generations, characteristic of post-socialist youth. The melancholy connected to the sick body prompts characters to adopt the mask of the loser, reflecting *ressentiment*, homelessness and a reluctance to enter the adult world. The loser thus in a way appears to be the inverted



mirror image of ‘accelerated youth’, when even dramatic political events such as the ‘Orange Revolution’ or the ‘Euromaidan’ are unable to constitute a common ‘generational consciousness’, because, similar to the Dizel movement, the loser perceives ‘generational change’ as just another extravagant game of traumatic post-socialist experiences.

### **Popular belongings: Subcultural places and globalised spaces**

Part II analyses forms and functions of popular youth cultures in the post-socialist realm. This includes the emergence and development of local formations, participation in and resistance against the forces of globalised trends, the engagement with western popular youth cultures as well as the role of former underground dissident subcultures in the contemporary context.

The first two chapters present globalised youth cultures such as hip hop and football fanatics and show how their local belongings and subcultural codes and practices are reshaped in relation to mainstream culture and commercial business. Anna Oravcová’s analysis in “‘Rap on Rap Is Sacred’: The Appropriation of Hip Hop in the Czech Republic” (Chapter 6), gives insight into the practices, styles and attitudes of this fairly new post-socialist subculture, dating its origin back to 1993. Based on in-depth interviews with Czech rappers, content analysis of their lyrics, and participant observation, this chapter explores the different forms of appropriation of hip hop in the Czech Republic and thereby contests the notion of simple mimetic cultural imports from the USA into the post-socialist realm, instead emphasising a highly self-confident approach with regard to local standards and needs. Oravcová outlines the discourse evolving around the proper mode and status of hip hop music as mainstream or underground culture. Authenticity becomes the crucial discursive tool in these debates of who is or is not a ‘true’ hip-hopper. However, Czech hip hop is for the most part performed by white middle-class men who mostly depict quite traditional and stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity, especially in the form adopted by right-wing organisations. At the same time, however, political activists, social workers and educators are trying to spread hip hop among Roma youth in order to reach out to them. By doing so, members of the Czech hip hop culture engage in exactly the same discussions that we find in the West about the question of the authenticity of youth subcultures in the wake of their commodification and commercialisation.

Football as a site of subcultural practice is also subject to rapid commercialisation. In their chapter ‘Flaming Flares, Football Fanatics and Political Rebellion: Resistant Youth Cultures in Late Capitalism’ (Chapter 7), Dominik Antonowicz, Radosław Kossakowski and Tomasz Szlendak explore the phenomenon of football fanatics in the light of rapid political, economic and cultural modernisation, with a particular focus on the rapid

transformation of Polish football caused by the organisation of the Euro2012 championship. The authors examine football fanatics and their rebellious subculture as a form of resistance in the period of late capitalism. To characterise this change, the authors introduce the concept of social ‘archipelagos’, which, in contrast to traditional subcultures, describe a much shallower, less engaging and softer notion of belonging that refers to lifestyles rather than values. By doing so, the chapter explores various aspects of the clash between traditional football subculture dominated by working-class youth, the fragmented *subworlds* in archipelagos, and the transnational forces of commercialisation that have ‘colonised’ football since the beginning of the 1990s. While overall youth’s social space is fragmented into various distinctive lifestyles, the football stadium remains one of the few places in which many different young people share their subcultural belongings together.

The subsequent chapters provide a closer look at these fragmented belongings in a globalised world, which occur when traditional subcultural codes of authenticity or resistance fail to constitute distinctive underground heroes or rebellious subjectivities. In ‘Everything Feels Bad: Figurations of the Self in Contemporary Eastern European Literature’ (Chapter 8), Matthias Schwartz offers an analysis of Eastern Europe’s frustration prose by young authors born in the 1970s and 1980s, written in the first decade of the twenty-first century in Poland, Russia and Ukraine. What is common to most of their literary protagonists is a general feeling of bewilderment, desperation and loneliness that dominates their daily lives, which in Poland, for instance, was discussed within national media as being typical of the so-called Generation Nothing. Through an analysis of the literary works of Dorota Masłowska, Mirosław Nahacz, Irina Denezhkina and Serhiy Zhadan in particular, the chapter shows that their heroes feel bad because of a double paradoxical figuration of the self: on the one hand, they still long for the ideals of young outsiders, of rebels without a cause and of the angry, wild men and women canonised in western pop culture, but at the same time the heroes’ re-enactments of globalised modes, styles and subcultures do not fit into the post-socialist reality of social fragmentation and the neo-liberal market economy they live in. Frustration prose thus serves as a means to articulate the ambivalent feelings and to offer imaginary negotiations and reinventions of adolescent identities.

Alfrun Kliems presents another case of the shifting notion of underground belongings and subcultural subjectivities in a globalised world in ‘“Bright reference point of our youth”: Bondy, Podsiadło and the Redefinition of the Underground’ (Chapter 9). She offers an analysis of Jacek Podsiadło’s essay *Podróż dziękczynno-błagalna, totalna i realistyczna do świętych relikwii Egon Bondy’ego* (A Grateful Pilgrimage in the Style of Total Realism to the Holy Relic of Egon Bondy) (2008), reading it as a fictionalised reflection on the continuity and discontinuity between the underground and pop culture, both of which figure here as potentially subversive forms of