

## INDUSTRIAL YOUTH, HOUSING AND SOCIALIST EXPERTISE IN LATE SOCIALIST ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT.** This article examines the part played by foreign academic literature translated into Romanian during the 1970s. Dwelling on the activity of the Centre for the Study of Youth Problems (CSYP), it aims to highlight the national authorities' efforts to mobilize youth for a new industrialization wave as part of an encompassing global trend of making the youth into an object of professionalized knowledge and policy. To this end, it analyses how the internationalization of expertise by transnational production and circulation of knowledge changed the Romanian scientific practices and recalibrated the experts' visibility within the state's decision-making processes. My contribution explores the shifting relationship between public housing and industrial growth as a foundation for socialist labour politics, the transnational emergence of a 'rule of experts', and the political interests around research on youths and their living conditions.

**Keywords:** youth, housing, Romania, knowledge production

At the end of the 1960s, the growing European and global expertise on youth, labour, and housing emerged as a central field of intellectual and political interest for the Romanian socialist state. While transfers of knowledge and professional interactions in various political and institutional settings have recently become essential dimensions of a renewed interest in late socialist attempts to 'go global' (Bockman, 2011) little is known about how East-European states employed this emerging expertise to tackle domestic social and economic shifts, and even less in the intertwined domains of youth, labour, and housing policies. This article aims to take the first step in filling this gap. It examines the part played by foreign academic literature translated into Romanian during the 1970s in the national authorities' efforts to mobilize young workers for a new industrialization wave as part of an encompassing global trend of making the 'youth' into an object of professionalized knowledge

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and policy. To this end, dwelling on the activity of the Centre for the Study of Youth Problems (CSYP), I look at a body of Western social science productions about labour, mobility, material culture and housing, and flesh out how the internationalization of expertise by transnational production and circulation of knowledge changed the Romanian scientific practices and recalibrated the experts' visibility within the state's decision-making processes. My contribution explores the shifting relationship between public housing and industrial growth as a foundation for socialist labour politics, the transnational emergence of a 'rule of experts' (Mitchell, 2002), and the political interests around research on youths and their living conditions. More concretely, it will address two questions: First, how did a new political imaginary of socialist youth and its investigation in various micro-scientific contexts help the Romanian state rearticulate its politics of urban development in conjunction with its economic and cultural policy? Second, how was this political imaginary linked to the emergence of 'youth' as an issue of knowledge, policy, and expertise at broader European and global level after 1968?

This intellectual path is particularly relevant in the context of the late 1960s Romania's economic policies. As the opening up of the national markets to the global economy since the 1960s drove East-European countries into reconsidering their public spending, increasing debt, and stimulating consumption, Romania took a surprising turn: it initiated a new program of extensive industrialization. While strengthening regional and national economies had been an ordinary reaction to global changes, what is particular about Romania is the pairing of the massive heavy industrial growth with the reconsideration of the idea of socialist youth. The Romanian authorities appointed economists, sociologists, architects and urban planners to assess how a better comprehension of youth's practices on the shop floor and beyond the factory gates would raise industrial output. Building on conceptual frameworks informed by post-Fordist categories, experts considered how young workers' motivation, career expectations, family ties, and life plans were adjusted by labour experiences. These investigations unveiled the Romanian approach to industrial work as very much grounded in a transnational, to a large extent Western, intellectual tradition.

I hypothesize that, on the one hand, by 1968 the regime enjoyed the highest political legitimacy, but the adoption of the concept of 'multilaterally developed socialist society' at the 1969 Communist Party Congress called for a renewed social contract between the country's leadership and the people. As the state expanded the industrialization program, gaining a better comprehension of young workers would be central to resource redistribution and to national infrastructure's modernization. On the other hand, similar to

other states of the socialist bloc, the young Romanians became more concerned with their own social status, which inevitably led not only to shaping counter/sub-cultures on the generational basis (Bren and Neuburger, 2012), but also to deepening social inequalities based on age, gender and class (Koleva, 2008; Archer, 2017). This encounter would foster the emergence of a hybrid language that once put into practice generated hybrid experiences among the policy-makers, experts and the youth.

As scholars have recently pointed out, the youth's emancipation in the 1960s led a decade later to social upheavals, system crises, and multiple transmutations worldwide. Whilst fuelled by different causes (college educations, racial and women's emancipation, inflation, unemployment), they were to some extent a token of an impending 'crisis of industrial society', as industrialization, according to some Western Marxists, would have produced similar effects everywhere regardless of the ideological context (Burawoy, 2003). Moreover, the 'simultaneity of like responses across disparate geographical contexts suggests interlocking causes' (Klimke and Nolan, 2018: 4) – that is a generational shift occurred within post-war urban and industrial order. Analysing the 1970s Romania from this angle is important because it can highlight the nuances of a complicated process during which Romanian specialists have adapted, integrated or assimilated Marxism-Leninism with ideas taken from international flow of scientific production. More concretely, it can highlight how foreign knowledge produced effects locally as a result of adaptations, re-articulations or rejections of a scientific literature already adjusted under a myriad of ideological and economic factors. Paying a particular attention to social science literature – the main professional national journals, foreign books translated into Romanian and reviews of Western publications – the paper will highlight how these translations have mediated the relationship between social scientists and political power. In this way, my contribution uncovers the generationally specific life courses that tie the rising of a socialist consumption culture to professional status and advances the state of the art by offering a fresh reading of industrial youth's voice from a generational stand view. Extracting the approach to youth housing from the confined national boundaries of policy-making and approaching it within a methodological path recently set up by the 'socialism goes global' trend, this article advances our knowledge on how youth, as a product of a particular social context, was reimagined as a social category with a specific lifestyle. To this end, working youth and housing can be seen as encounters of flows of knowledge and models of territoriality, a reading that made its way onto the political and scientific agenda of the 1970s on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

## **Institutional Context**

One cannot part the emergence of youth studies in Romania from the mid-1960s re-institutionalization of sociology. Then, after a two-decades-long academic marginalization, sociology departments had been established within the most important national universities. Widely discussed by the scholarship from both political and biographical stand view (Bosomitu, 2015; Petrovici and Poenaru, 2017), the growing production of sociological knowledge in late socialism was quite pragmatic in scope. Recent social and economic shifts caused by industrialization and urbanization raised numerous concerns among decision-making factors about labour mobility, professional behaviour, social emancipation, leisure, aspirations, or everyday practices. As a result, the state needed solutions that would have generated productive communities and would have created a versatile workforce. To this end, based on the countless studies, surveys, local analyses, and prognosis funded by the Romanian state, experts were expected to make a case for forms of economic reorganization that would have subordinated social policies on young labour force (housing, or educational and health infrastructure) to the needs of flexibilization of the labour market and the constraints of international economic dynamic (Amin, 1994).

Under these circumstances, social research grew increasingly interdisciplinary. The findings of economists, architects and psychologists soon became instrumental for sociologists in their aims to assess ‘the defining features of local social life.’ This was the case of several newly established sociology departments at the universities of Bucharest and Cluj; additional research would have to be carried out by institutes affiliated to the Romanian Academy of Sciences. However, the growing number of specialized departments across the national academia, and the subsequent flourishing of scientific output had little contribution to a better comprehension of youth and of their worlds. The task of assessing generational and gender implications of the shifting relationship between work, knowledge, and infrastructure lied elsewhere. In 1968, the leadership of the Communist Party decided to set up the Centre for the Study of Youth Problems (CSYP), a large research structure that would have functioned under the direct control of the Central Committee’s Union of the Communist Youth. Somehow surprisingly, this political subordination proved profitable on the long run. Unlike other sociology departments that were shut down by the Romanian government in the late 1970s, CSYP’s activity ran uninterrupted until 1990; throughout this long period, the institution benefitted from many state-funded projects, as well as from official support for international professional collaborations and publication of research works.

The scientific quality of CSYP's research is rather heterogeneous. Several investigations conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s under Ovidiu Bădina's coordination unveiled a consistent and valuable body of information about time budgets, family integration, work practices and career expectations. Other studies remained unpublished, still locked away in an institutional archive currently under-researched. Mostly empirical and lacking theoretical sophistication, these works can, nevertheless, flesh out many facets of a complicated process of transnational production and circulation of knowledge and the way such productions acted as vectors of negotiation of knowledge within the socialist state. For instance, the institutional collaboration between CSYP and the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was instrumental in the gradual re-engagement of the national scholarship with Western intellectual debates. From the late 1960s onwards, many CSYP researchers travelled abroad to attend conferences and training programs. The institution also invited foreign specialists to Romania to deliver lectures and consolidate contacts. Translations and reprints of foreign scientific literature followed naturally.

When assessing the central part played by party-affiliated structures in the making of a scientific agenda about youth one should take a step back from the dominant scholarship that ties post-1968 Romanian social policies to Nicolae Ceaușescu's personal agenda. Furthermore, researchers should position themselves critically towards a glorified historiographic narrative that fosters Romania's scientific opening to the West as manifest of an opposition from the interior, namely 'an alternative to the pressures of the socialist countries so that Romania would regularly get involved in the common research actions of the socialist states' (Zamfir, 2015: 90). Instead, by expanding the analytical space and by considering the involvement of actors, I argue that Romanian authorities' upward interest in youth was located at the crossing of two paths: a growing awareness about the medium and long-term repercussions of generational shifts worldwide and the emerging political relevance of social sciences in domestic affairs. On the one hand, I build on the idea that Romanian realities cannot be separated from events occurred internationally. Similarly to the research centres on youth established in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia about the same time, CSYP scientific approach was very much framed by a general European reconsideration of youth's ideals and politics after 1968 (Gildea et al., 2013), which became central in making essential planning for forms that considered the knowable differences in the young population around the world (Glaeser, 2010; Solovey and Cravens, 2014). On the other hand, I bear in mind that the everyday practices of working youth-oriented both the experts' research agenda and the state's medium and long-term strategies of territorializing

industrial production and its social infrastructure and reshaped the power relations between an emerging specialist field and Bucharest-based as well as local politicians. Moreover, as Irving Horowitz has put in an article published in *Viitorul social* [The Social Future], in the 1970s the dominant organizing principle seems policymaking [...] There are many indications that the next few years will see an increasing institutionalization of research and expertise conducted by social science as part of the process of policymaking [...] In a sense, we are at a turning point: the main problem in a time of affirmation of social science is not their scientific status, but the political and social usefulness that one gives to these sciences (Cernea, 1972a: 660).

### Looking West

By the late 1960s, the emerging interest in young workers led to many inquiries about research methodologies, experts' agency, and the political relevance of this knowledge on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Such paths, however, did not evolve isolated from each other. Unlike the early post-war years when the East-West divide was openly acknowledged as a barrier against professional interactions, the increased permeability of the Curtain since the 1960s facilitated many trans-national conversations, which shaped Romanian youth studies as entanglements of policies, models, knowledge, and practices that had not only a national but also a local and transnational life.

A large number of foreign scientific texts reprinted in Romania illustrate this trend. One excellent example is *Revista de referate, recenzii și sinteze* [Journal of essays, reviews and summaries], a monthly periodical of the Centre for Information and Documentation in Social and Political Sciences. It brought together reviews, conference reports, interviews with international scholars about new transnational trends in social research. It also provided national experts with a good opportunity to publish personal interpretations of various theoretical worldwide debates. In many respects, this collection of texts is remarkable because it fleshes out the amount and type of theoretical sophistication available in Romania at the time and it contextualizes CSYP's research activity within broader frameworks of knowledge exchanges. These productions also unveil how the making of a new approach to Romanian socialist youth was complicated by the rigidity of the dominant national scientific language and its doctrinaire limitations. For instance, for a quite long period of time, the review published articles that built on long-established statements about irreconcilable differences between socialist and capitalist systems. A number of sociologists, thus, voiced their scepticism about the emerging tendency to question working youth from a generational stand view and argued

instead that priority should be given to class analysis. However, as the frequency of transnational contacts increased and the number of scientific translations grew exponentially a new reading made its way into the professional discourse, one that made a case for placing youth's integration, motivation, performance, and expectations at the core of social scientists' practice. Starting with the late 1960s, socialist experts afforded more time to assess the heterogeneity of various bloc social categories, like the working class, and came up with additional methodologies to investigate groups and how they were shaped by the technological progress (Draguț, 1973).

This shift came to life either by mobilizing older pre-WWII traditions or by constructing new bridges of scientific collaboration both within and beyond the socialist bloc (Calsat, 1972: 51). To a certain degree, East European scientific production continued to be translated into Romanian. The consolidation of several professional networks within the socialist bloc has developed along the lines quite clearly outlined by a transnational agenda about youth. Priority was given to Polish and Hungarian research, while Soviet knowledge became increasingly marginalized parallel with the deepening of political tensions between the two countries. Beyond the Iron Curtain, the circulation of scientific knowledge about industrial dynamic illustrates many of the moment's uncertainties. In spite of Romania's century-long traditional cultural contacts with France, few scientific productions of French experts about factory work made their way into Bucharest professional environment at the time. This happened because France was particularly interested in rural changes and paid little interest in industrial sociology methodologies. In return, Romanian experts turned towards Anglo-Saxon knowledge.

What was the relevance of such knowledge in a socialist country like Romania? The short answer to this question would be the future. A more complex answer would problematize the ways in which the growing concern for industrial development made imperative for forms that accounted the medium and long-term implications of the increasing social and political visibility of the working youth and the rising protest cultures throughout the world. From this perspective, ideological disparities were less important. As a Polish sociologist has put it: 'Keeping a backup to the theoretical and methodological concepts of the Western sociology of labour, dictated by specific social conditions, is not to reject all ideas, hypotheses, and laws. Some scientists have rightly pointed out that certain categories of the Anglo-Saxon sociology of labour and industry if properly adjusted, could be applied with better results in Poland than in their home country' (Markiewicz, 1972: 223). To this end, knowledge production and transfers would tellingly sketch the reactions of a semi-peripheral socialist state to a set of problems related to impending changes in the cultural model of the industrial societies (Ban, 2014).

A large body of scholarship translated into Romanian afforded ample room to highlight how the critical reading of functionalist sociology in North America shook the foundations of the Western social research. Moreover, students of 1968 complained that sociology failed to address the needs of the many and made a case for major methodological changes (Cernea, 1972b: 901-936). To this end, a new type of social research meant systematic analyses of various facets of society and a closer look at the heterogeneous everyday experiences of various groups and social categories. Labour played an important part here. Many texts covered issues related to industrial sociology, a field of investigation that 'was born from a radical critique of the errors emerged from the scientific organization of production and from the systematic exploration of what it was unable to perceive' (Mottez, 1972: 243). More concretely, it became increasingly evident that unlike Taylorism that tied productivity to wage level, the new labour reality from the mid-1960s onwards made necessary for a better comprehension of other work-related aspects like job satisfaction, hierarchical interactions, or career perspectives. Accordingly, such scientific knowledge translated into Romanian would be central in the experts' attempts to trace new interconnections between technology, youth's professional status, and social change (Bădina, 1973).

### **Grappling with concepts**

Integrating this knowledge into the national practice called for methodological adjustments. The first research on working youth was completed in 1968. Focusing on rural areas, the investigation looked at various facets of young workers' living and working conditions. In spite of an ambitious research agenda, the results were formulated rather propagandistically (Bădina, 1970). Over the following years, however, CSYP researchers conducted several campaigns in factories and in urban and rural settings, which aimed to overcome past methodological shortcomings and come up with a more refined reading of the 1960s social shifts (Bădina, 1972a; Bădina, 1972b; Bădina and Mamali, 1973).

To this end, researchers joined their efforts to articulate a scientific practice that would meet at least two mandatory conditions. First, it had to stress the militant character of sociology. A central thesis in Romania during the interwar, the idea that social research should actively contribute to the general well-being and to the emancipation of the many re-emerged within the professional field by the late 1960s. More likely, the experts' growing exposure to a body of scientific literature that critically engaged with the political and economic transformations of the moment boosted further interrogations about the reforming capacity of sociological works. Second, it had to enhance the



relationship between scientists and their subjects by bringing in young workers' self-representations and their particular solutions to systemic shortcomings. By the early 1970s, sociologists became increasingly preoccupied to adjust their research questions so that investigation topics would also address young workers' agenda.

In 1972, Cătălin Mamali elaborated a new methodological framework called: *tehnica situațiilor simetrice* [the technique of symmetrical situations]. In a number of publications on industrial youth, he argued that social scientists were not only responsible about how to apply and use the results of their knowledge, but also about the workings of the process of knowledge production. The research conducted in several industrial settings around the country aggregated sufficient data to show how social reality would have transformed itself under the researcher's practices. Unintentional and, sometimes, uncontrollable adjustments of the object under investigation - the young workers' image about themselves and about the world (including the researcher's methods, techniques, and purpose of his activity) – played an important part in altering the value of collected data. To secure an improved accuracy of their results, therefore, social scientists were expected to join their efforts with decision-making factors and representatives of the youth (Bădina and Mamali, 1973: 127-141).

To a certain extent, this principle was successfully applied by the mid-1970s Romania. As a result of a better cooperation between researchers and decision-making factors, reports and syntheses were sent to the central and local authorities, while industrial bosses, political leaders and representatives of the Romanian government met several times to assess the long-term implications of these investigations. Furthermore, an important number of publications disseminated their findings. However, bringing youth's subjectivities into the investigation unveiled a number of problems related to time budgets and everyday experiences on the shop floor and beyond the factory gates. Although CSYP paid a particular attention to work-related aspects - integration, professional expectations and hierarchies, mobility, and employment status – youth's accounts pointed out towards an interconnection between work performance and their living conditions, which carried major implications in terms of industrial territorialisation and labour force mobility.

### **Translations at work**

In the West, this sociological literature about shop floor interactions and industrial youth served as an excellent means to re-use data collected by the welfare state programs during the previous decades and plan for the future. The development of socio-psychology and the advancement of cybernetics led to an

increased political visibility of social scientists; it further enhanced power positions among industrial bosses and various decision-making factors. Focusing on issues like integration, community building, and social deviance, the new official social agenda revolved around how to design public projects that would best address the changing needs of the workers. An immediate outcome was, for instance, a new type of urban planning. Moreover, housing began to be addressed as part of regional development programs where various types of industries would provide employment for an increasingly flexible, skilled and mobile labour force. Transportation networks would provide the infrastructure for a growing number of commutes, while the quality of life would depend on the comfort of accommodation and the proximity of family.

In Romania, such knowledge brought forward a rather complicated situation. The national decision-making factors aimed to trace how changing patterns of labor within factories, especially as a result of technologization of production lines, adjusted the recruitment policies. However, this body of concepts widely debated upon on both sides of the Iron Curtain, which summed up a decades-long blend of social science models and practices into the public programs financed and conducted by the state, was given conflicting interpretations. More concretely, at the time, two intellectual views on housing as an agent of social transformation of the industrial youth have emerged: one belonged to the sociologists, and the other to the architects.

Sociologists took the first step and launched an investigation about industrial youth's living conditions and everyday experiences beyond factory gates. They set their research field in several residential estates of studios and one bedroom apartments. The quality of housing was evaluated in terms of comfort, consumption practices, material culture, availability of radio or television sets, ownership of home appliances, and socializing opportunities. However, the scientific effort uncovered much more information about life in these ad-hoc industrial communities than was initially expected. Contrary to an official rhetoric claiming that the experience of industrial labour would have forged social cohesion and new forms of solidarity, youth's tendency towards individualization and social polarization became increasingly visible as Romania turned more urbanized and modernized. Moreover, differentiations in the payment level coupled with diverse cultural and educational backgrounds led to further social gaps amongst youth and complicated their adaptation to the demands of the new workplaces. Experts were quick to emphasize that such data were only partially relevant. Most of the time, the integration of newcomers into the urban communities proved a lengthy and complicated process. But these findings were strong enough to raise additional questions about the potential impact of young workers' living conditions upon labour productivity.

To this end, sociologists expanded the analytical space and diversified their methodology by bringing in consistent social-psychology models. Moreover, researchers stressed that to assess the long-term social implications of industrialization and to plan housing efficiently one should consider youth's professional aspirations, namely their 'concrete conditions of work and life, their concerns and interests' (Grigorescu, 1972: 428). Further investigations conducted on the shop floor looked at the relationship between work and the rewards system. The results, however, were somewhat puzzling. For example, when asked to prioritize potential job benefits, most young employees referred to a friendly working environment, material gains, or the opportunity to get involved into the decision-making processes of the company, a so-called 'economic democracy'. Housing, however, weighted less than other incentives, something confined to a 'professional context.' Moreover, for many young workers securing an apartment as part of a job contract became important only insofar as it ensured independence from family (Weintraub, 1973: 103).

This data, however, raised questions about the type of lodging suitable for youth. What was their housing needs and how would these evolve in the long run? What meant quality lodging? Where should youth be accommodated? Who and with what resources should build residential units for the young employees? When asking such questions sociologists considered both financial aspects and youth's comfort. More concretely, they were concerned about the profitability of public spending in state-owned apartment urban buildings, particularly since statistical data about labor turnover revealed that youth switched at least three jobs before turning 35 years old. Furthermore, as investigations conducted on industrial youth revealed, many young workers found difficult to adapt to the new working environment and saw in the separation from family an additional source of pressure. Solutions were hard to reach. Research carried out in several Romanian industrial communities showed that as long as there was a well-developed railway network building urban residential estates and encouraging rural-urban migration was rather costly and inadequate for long-term planning. In fact, sociologists claimed, more than 42% of commuters would not have moved into the city even if they were given adequate housing (Chelcea, 1973: 399). This was the context in which experts began to talk more and more about the social benefits of daily commuting. By discouraging rural-urban migration, regional systematization projects would have provided alternative solutions to housing needs.

A critique of the sociologists' solution came from another profession. 'Practitioners' (Chepes, 1972: 677) rather than social planners, architects, too, nuanced a Western-oriented corpus of knowledge about population policies, demographic dynamics and medium and long-term daily comfort. However, they

argued that urban housing was part of a modern approach to industrial labour and made a case for massive spending in building state-owned urban dwellings. Architects saw in the authorities' agenda about housing for young workers an excellent opportunity to test some recent ideas about urban growth. Based on numerous Western publications, including studies by professors at Harvard University, Gheorghe Sebestyen argued that 'the evolution of working youth's social requirements' could not be separated from an urban living. From the architects' stand view, therefore, urban and modernity were two intertwined notions. Gh. Sebestyen and M. Caffè, among others, stressed the negative implications of daily commuting upon the young employees. They were concerned that public transport and the distance between work and home, would adversely affect the management of time budgets. In fact, according to Sebestyen, sociological research conducted both in the USSR and in Switzerland pointed out that the increase in industrial labor productivity was proportional to the size of the city (Sebestyen, 1973: 916-926).

### **Conclusion**

This article builds on the idea of an interconnection between shaping a professional agenda on youth through transnational production and circulation of expert knowledge, articulation of a medium and long-term project of state development, and institutional reconstruction of sociology. Moving away from readings that favour political history and state-centred perspectives, this paper de-centres the Cold War, widely defined in terms of a binary opposition between East and West, and argues instead for looking at the youth policies as entanglements of policies, models, knowledge, and practices. In this respect, my paper argued that housing policies for young workers best illustrate local manifestation of a number of processes and shifts: Romania's increasing exposure to the worldwide economic transmutations of the 1970s, a growing visibility of behavioural and social sciences in political decision-making worldwide, and national and regional ideological adjustments that redraw the socialist bloc's political hierarchies. To this end, the article relied on the research activity of the Centre for the Study of Youth Problems to unfold the socialist state's industrialization program beyond the frameworks of top-down central planning. It employed this ample trans-national conceptualization of industrial youth after 1968 to reinterpret various managerial domestic cultures. Such analysis lays the ground for future investigations on how geographical mobility influenced class (trans)formation and social reproduction of labour and opens up new research paths that can critically analyse N. Ceaușescu's project of constructing a distinctive nationhood (Merl, 2011). Furthermore, as the

relationship between economy and its territory changed by the late 1960s worldwide (Amin, 1994), this angle of investigation would assess how national and local policies on youth were negotiated and socially constructed to generate productive communities and to create a versatile workforce.

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