

Roots of Civic Identity

International Perspectives
on Community Service
and Activism in Youth

Edited by
Miranda Yates
James Youniss

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Miranda Yates and James Youniss have brought together an international collection of essays that describe the state of community participation among the world's youth. Authors from around the globe use fresh empirical data to present portraits of contemporary youth constructing their civic identities through such means as community service and political activism. The image of "generation X" as socially disconnected and apathetic is contradicted by young people's efforts to comprehend the complexities of society and to work toward the realization of social-moral ideals. The findings contribute to a theory of political socialization that bases youth's understanding of political aspects of society and citizenship on participation in community and civic activities rather than on the intake of abstract pieces of formal information. To this end, youth seek to resolve ideological tensions, such as in Northern Ireland, Israel, and Palestine; to overcome corrupting political practices, such as in Italy and Taiwan; to deal with disillusionment, such as in Palestine and the emerging Eastern European nations; and to bridge barriers against youth's meaningful participation in the working of society, such as in Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Special conditions, such as the diminution of the welfare state, for instance, in former West Germany, and the rapid turn toward democracy in former East Germany offer insight into the process through which youth try to establish meaningful person-state relationships, both individually and collectively defined.

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7. Adolescents and the “Social Contract”: Developmental Roots of Citizenship in Seven Countries

CONNIE FLANAGAN, BRITTA JONSSON, LUBA BOTCHEVA,
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Genuine politics – politics worthy of the name, and the only politics I am willing to devote myself to – is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community, and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility, expressed through action, to and for the whole. (V. Havel, 1992)

According to Walzer (1989), “a citizen is, most simply, a member of a political community, entitled to whatever prerogatives and encumbered with whatever responsibilities are attached to membership. The word comes to us from the Latin *civis*; the Greek equivalent is *polites*, member of the polis, from which comes our political” (p. 211). Becoming a citizen, assuming the rights and responsibilities of membership in a social group, is a marker of attaining adult status in many societies. But what prepares people to assume those responsibilities? How do they come to understand and exercise their civic rights? What motivates them to become engaged in civil society?

The project discussed in this chapter, *Adolescents’ Interpretation of the “Social Contract,”* addresses such issues. We focus on the roots of citizenship and ways that young people develop a commitment to the commonwealth. By the *social contract* we refer to the set of mutual rights and obligations binding citizens with their polity. We contend that there is an intergenerational bargain implied in the process of social integration, that is, a promise that one will enjoy the rights and reap the benefits of the social order if s/he lives by its rules and fulfills the responsibilities of membership. Of course, social change upsets the conditions of the bargain. Thus, it is not surprising that attention to questions of citizen-

Adolescents’ Interpretation of the “Social Contract” is a collaborative project directed by Connie Flanagan. This project was supported in part by grants from the William T. Grant Foundation and the Johann Jacobs Foundation to Connie Flanagan.

ship – what it means and how it is fostered – tends to increase when concerns about the stability of political regimes are on the rise. Such anxieties may arise when new, untested democracies are born, the situation, for example, in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Concerns are also voiced when massive social movements challenge the status quo, as was the case in the youth movements of the 1960s in Europe, Australia, and the United States.

In recent years, the themes of political stability and civic trust have again become prominent in public discourse. Several factors may be contributing to these apprehensions. First, trends of rising self-interest among adults and adolescents in Western democracies have motivated discussions about whether the values of the market have extinguished commitments to the commonwealth. Engaging youth in service to their communities has been recommended as an antidote to these trends. Second, political stability is jeopardized when the economic security of large segments of a population erodes. Under the pressures of globalization, opportunities for secure employment and a good standard of living, especially for people with little formal education, are diminishing. Relatedly, the stage of adolescence, the time before the age of majority, has become a protracted period in postindustrial societies, leaving many youth with no clear social niche. If large numbers of young people feel disaffected from the political system, its stability may be undermined.

The lack of a social niche is a problem shared by youth across industrialized societies, but it is exacerbated by the pace and unpredictability of social change in Central and Eastern Europe. During the era of state socialism, partnerships between industries and schools ensured a relatively smooth school-to-work transition with students guaranteed a job after completing their education. In the 1990s there have been profound changes in the social contracts of these countries. As many state-run enterprises closed, unemployment soared, and youth, especially those with few skills and little experience, were disproportionately affected.

The terms of the new contract imply more individual initiative and less reliance on the state. However, it seems that many members of the current generation as well as their parents would prefer aspects of the old bargain. About half of the several hundred Bulgarian teens in a recent study felt that the state should take care of most needs in society (Botcheva & Kitanov, 1996). In Hungary, Csapo (1995) found that adolescents' initial euphoria about political and economic changes in 1989 had declined by 1993 as the hard realities of the transition set in. The most pessimistic youth felt that the problems associated with the tran-

sition were inherent in the new social order, whereas the optimists (who were in the majority) felt such problems were a temporary phenomenon. Education may account for some of these differences in outlook since the better educated are more likely to reap benefits in the new social order. In fact, Macek, Tyrlik, and Kostron (1996) have shown that better educated youth in the Czech Republic tend to assess the social changes there more positively than their less educated peers.

Scholars seeking answers to the question of how polities are stabilized point to the importance of diffuse support in the population for the principles of the social order (Easton & Dennis, 1969). Our project focuses on the developmental roots of that diffuse support by examining ways that young people in different countries and from different social backgrounds within a country construct an understanding of the contract that binds members of society together. Drawing from Vygotsky (1978), we contend that an individual's thinking about and relationship to the polity are the product of social activity. In this chapter, we argue that engagement in the voluntary sector connects young people to the broader polity, and, in that process, they develop an understanding of themselves as civic actors, engaged in the issues and capable of addressing the problems of their polity.

Our findings are based on a survey of more than 5,600 12- to 19-year-olds from seven countries. The decision to survey a broad age range was based on our interest in uncovering developmental change in young people's perceptions of the social contract as well as in their civic values and commitments. The choice of countries for the study (Australia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, Sweden, and the United States) was based on two criteria: (a) the length of their experience as democracies and (b) the role of the state in the provision of social services.

Four countries in the study (Russia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) could be considered fledgling democracies. Because these nations have had only a short period when democratic institutions or infrastructure could develop, we have labeled them "transitional societies." The current generation of young people and several that preceded it grew up with relatively little experience of a political community in the sense of opportunities to practice open public debate (Karpati, 1996). Prior to 1990, one of the major tasks of schools, media, and youth organizations was to achieve political homogenization by minimizing differences between individuals (Karpati, 1996; Pastuovic, 1993). The political activity of youth in that era was restricted to officially sanc-

tioned groups such as the Young Pioneer and Comsomol organizations. Membership, although quite high among secondary school students, was expected, if not required (Csapo, 1994).

Since 1990 building democratic societies has been a high priority of these nations, and changes in curricular content and instructional styles in schools have been recommended as primary means for achieving that goal (Rust, Knost, & Wichmann, 1994). Gradually, membership in youth organizations including the Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, and church-related groups is growing, replacing the void left by the disintegration of groups like the Young Pioneers. There is consensus in these countries about the need to prepare young people to participate in democratic societies but less agreement about how to accomplish that objective. Much of the focus has been on curricular reform. However, since teachers who trained and worked under the old system would assume primary responsibility, there is some concern about their reverting to past practices.

During the Soviet era, the situation in schools mirrored that in society, where low levels of civic trust and political efficacy constrained public discourse and political action. There were, however, significant differences between countries in the amount of constraint and the freedom to voice dissenting opinions. For example, in the 1980s, political satire was openly broadcast on Hungarian television, and signs of youth's disaffection from the official ideology were apparent as early as the seventies and eighties. Not only were there subgroups of youth who were clearly disaffected from the system, but it was young people who organized demonstrations to commemorate the 1848 struggle of Hungary for independence from Austria (Csapo, 1994). These actions reflected a growing national spirit that contradicted the politics of international socialism.

In contrast to the relative freedom in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia a so-called double morality was obvious in the caution with which people monitored their interactions in public (Macek & Rabusic, 1994; Scheye, 1991). Only in private interactions did many feel free to speak their mind. In such a context where political parties were banned, voluntary associations played a critical role as an outlet for dissent and a means of organizing political opposition. According to Havel (1990), the roots of citizen movements such as KOR, Solidarity, Neues Forum, Charter 77, and Civic Forum can be traced to the opportunities people had in non-government and nonpublic contexts to be authentic and to feel free to disagree. Eventually these movements were successful in achieving the

political reforms of the early 1990s. And, as in most historical movements, youth played a prominent role.

In Bulgaria youth were active in the strikes and demonstrations of 1990–1991, movements that later led to changes in the government. Representatives of the student movement participated in the work of parliament in the early days of political change there. In Hungary the first new political party was a youth party with membership restricted to those under the age of 35. FIDESZ, the Alliance of Young Democrats, which was already organized in 1988 when the Communist party was still in power, gained 21 seats in the first free parliamentary election of 1990. However, in the years since free elections in the Central and East European nations, many students and young people have withdrawn from the political fray. Despite early euphoria about the pace at which political change was expected to occur, scholars now believe the work of building the new democracies will take generations (Keri, 1996).

In these four transitional societies, the state has played a major role in providing entitlements. However, the standard of living for the average family is quite low. Since the introduction of fiscal shock therapy and rapid privatization in the early 1990s, the results of free elections have swung back and forth on the political spectrum as the citizens of these nations seek a balance between the efficiencies of private enterprise and the assurances of state entitlement and welfare programs.

All of the remaining three countries in the study (Australia, Sweden, and the United States) have enjoyed longer histories as democratic polities with practices of electoral politics in place and partisan allegiances that reflect group interests relatively stable. Practices in schools, families, and youth organizations that are meant to prepare young people for civic participation have evolved. In each of these countries children, especially those from middle-class backgrounds, are encouraged to form their own opinions and to voice them, even if that means disagreeing with adult authorities (Flanagan et al. 1996). Underlying such practices is the belief that the foundation of a democratic system is a citizenry that can think independently and disagree in a civil fashion.

Youth groups such as Scouts and 4-H serve a similar function in stabilizing the polity. Although typically thought of as apolitical organizations, these groups teach young people life skills that integrate them into the extant social order. For example, the principles of a market economy are learned via projects that emphasize entrepreneurship, individual initiative, and competition for awards. Democratic principles of tolerance

are learned in workshops and clubs; cooperation and interdependence are fostered via leadership training and group projects. By contributing to the norms, ethics, and values of youth, these voluntary organizations strengthen support for the polity as well as commitments to the principles of the market in the next generation.

As the primary educational institutions of democratic societies, schools have a special charge to foster the civic competencies of the next generation, and research has shown that certain practices have proved effective in accomplishing that goal. For example, in classrooms where students are free to dissent and are also expected to listen to different perspectives, students are more aware of and able to think critically about civic issues (Newmann, 1990), are more tolerant of dissenting opinions (Ehman, 1980), and know more about international affairs (Torney-Purta & Lansdale, 1986).

The three stable democracies in our study can be contrasted on a second dimension of interest to the project, that is, the role of the state in providing social welfare. With its ardent commitment to equality in social distribution and broad entitlements for residents, Sweden epitomizes the modern social welfare state (Jonsson, 1996). In a society with such an interpretation of the social contract, the civic responsibility of a good citizen is to contribute to the equalizing of outcomes by paying a significant portion of personal income toward the public welfare.

By contrast, the principles of an "opportunity" society prevail in the United States (Verba & Orren, 1985). The rules of the social contract emphasize an even playing field where each individual is supposed to have an equal chance to prove him/herself. But there is an expectation of uneven outcomes. Thus, many Americans tolerate large disparities in income believing that such disparities are due to individual differences in effort or merit. In fact, the United States has the dubious distinction among the countries in our study of having the largest differences in income and the fewest entitlements for its members. Even in the political arena, a supposedly level playing field, inequalities in participation are more pronounced in the United States than in other democratic countries (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). However, a high proportion of the political participation that does take place is motivated by concerns for the broader community (Jennings, 1991). Individuals are encouraged to compensate for what the system fails to provide. Charity and philanthropy are considered acts of goodwill to the needy, and young people are introduced to these norms via volunteer projects in schools and youth organizations.

Like the United States, Australia is committed to an individualist ethic but one that is tempered by strong social welfare assurances. Not only does government assistance subsidize the welfare of a broad range of groups, but the health care of the entire population is insured by a system of socialized medicine. These entitlements are supported by a progressive tax system. However, the fact that every large city has a homeless population suggests that individuals do fall through the cracks, and there are voluntary efforts by charitable groups to respond to such needs. Approximately 19% of the population 16 years of age and older does some type of volunteer work, but there is not a strong emphasis on getting adolescents involved.

In this chapter we highlight some of the results of our collaborative project, which indicate that voluntary work in the community may enable young people across these different types of polities to identify with the commonwealth and the contributions they can make to it. The advantage of such a cross-national study is that it allows us to look both for commonalities across countries as well as for differences between them in the definition of civic responsibility and the practices that promote it. By comparing volunteers within each country with their compatriots who have not been volunteers we believe claims can be made that voluntary work is associated with adolescents' commitment to the commonwealth across different types of polities. At the same time, the content of that voluntary work is likely to differ between countries.

We present differences between countries in terms of the percentage of youth engaged in voluntary work and the hierarchy of civic values they endorse and interpret these differences in light of the contrasting social contracts and concepts of citizenship espoused in the countries. Because societies differ in the way they have defined social goals and in what they consider just policies (Dworkin, 1978), we expect that youth growing up in different systems would have distinct ideas about the role of the state and the rights and obligations of citizens. Finally, we elaborate on the distinct forms of voluntary work across countries and discuss the special functions or meanings of engaging in such activity in different political contexts (Goodnow, 1996).

Connecting Community Service to Citizenship

As part of the survey for our study, we asked youth in each country, "Do you ever do volunteer work in the community?" The response to this question alone provides interesting information (see Table 7.1) and

Table 7.1. *Patterns of Youth Volunteering Across Seven Countries*

Do you ever do volunteer work in the community?

	Australia	U.S.	Sweden	Hungary	Cz. Rep.	Bulgaria	Russia
Yes (%) ^a	149 (28.1)	366 (51.5)	152 (19.9)	605 (60.4)	515 (46.3)	390 (42.2)	143 (23.4)
No	381	345	610	397	597	535	469

^aPercentage of youth in each country who indicate they do volunteer work is shown in parentheses.

we focus on two findings. First, according to the youth's reports, volunteering in the community is a practice in all of these countries – from a “low” of nearly 20% of the Swedish sample to a high of 60% in Hungary. In fact, in four countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the United States) nearly half or more of the adolescents reported that they had engaged in some type of voluntary effort. Second, we can infer that the differences between countries in terms of the percentage of youth who do such work reflect, in part, the social contracts and norms in each country. For example, it is not surprising that Swedish youth are the least likely to volunteer. In a country with a high standard of living and a strong social welfare system, the need for volunteers is minimal. One of the rights of citizenship is an assurance from the state that people's needs and the health of the whole community will be met. The social contract also provides many guarantees in Australia, and there is not a strong emphasis on youth involvement in community service. The main responsibility of a young person is to do well in school and qualify for higher education. Finally, the large number of American youth who have volunteered points to the emphasis on such activity in general and in schools in particular. The United States prides itself on a tradition of community volunteering, and there has been a trend in recent years of school districts' mandating the practice as a prerequisite for high school graduation.

The percentage of youth who report they have done volunteer work is high in three of the four transitional societies with Russia an exception to this pattern. The relatively low percentage of Russian youth reflects the fact that this is not a common practice for any age group in the country. By comparison, youth from Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic report very high rates of participation, a result that should be understood within a historical context. In the socialist era, volunteering was an activity expected of good citizens, a way to express one's loyalty and patriotism. Not only was it normative, but there were some social pressures to volunteer. In such a milieu, one could question the extent to which youth were genuinely motivated to volunteer. However, this question is not substantively different from ongoing debates in the United States about mandating community service as a prerequisite for high-school graduation. The data reported in this chapter were collected 5 years after the political transitions in the Central and East European nations. Perhaps the mandate of the socialist era was effective in making volunteer work a normative aspect of young people's lives. We can only speculate. There has, however, been considerable discussion about the

need for youth organizations and school curricula that prepare the next generation to assume an active civic role.

Forms of Voluntary Work

In most of the countries in our study, schools and youth organizations seem to be the main route to involvement, followed by churches or temples and local community projects. By far the most common activities in the Central and East European countries are ecological ones – from recycling and cleaning up of parks, rivers, and public lands to reforestation in response to natural and man-made disasters. Reforestation projects are critical in the former Czechoslovakia (now the autonomous Czech and Slovak Republics), where reliance on burning high sulfur coal for energy production has effectively destroyed half of the forests, a trend that is expected to continue for several years (Adamova, 1993). “Clean the World” day is an annual event in Hungary, when adults and youth in communities come together to clean up their neighborhoods. In the Czech Republic youth engage in collecting herbs and fruits that may be used as pharmaceuticals, and on summer holidays they help reconstruct and restore historical ruins, castles, and fortresses. Some Czech youth also help to monitor the disposal of waste in their local communities.

Cleanup days are also a popular activity in Australia, where an environmental consciousness is promulgated in schools and communities. Individual initiative is often the impetus for such activities as the origins of “Clean Up Australia” day attest (i.e., a local yachtsman, appalled by the rubbish around Sydney Harbor, promoted the concept). Now, volunteers of all ages come together yearly to clean up parks, beaches, rivers, and Sydney Harbor. The American youth in our study reported a high rate of involvement in one-time efforts such as walkathons or bikeathons to raise money for a wide range of causes such as combating hunger or cancer. Those who engaged in volunteer work on a regular basis primarily worked with younger children, either reading to them, tutoring, coaching, or directing plays. Nationally, about 36% of Swedish youth are members of some government-supported youth organization. The overriding goal of these groups is to keep youth occupied and out of trouble. Raising money to support these organizations is a common form of the youth’s voluntary effort. As we have already noted, there is little need for social aid within Sweden. However, relief efforts for nations ravaged by wars or by natural disasters and fund-raising for medical research are outlets for those who seek out such involvement.

Although it accounts for a smaller percentage of youth activity in most of the countries, assistance for the disabled, elderly, poor, and homeless and relief work for refugees are typical activities organized by religious groups. To return for a moment to the “social contract” metaphor, it is worth noting that, compared to the ecological activities listed, this form of voluntary work affords a qualitatively different opportunity for youth development. Whereas most of the ecological activities are group oriented and focus on “our” water, forests, and air – resources and quality of life indicators that are common to everyone – efforts to assist the needy or displaced members of society tend to be individual acts of charity directed at others. These contrasts may be important distinctions in terms of the civic lessons learned in each type of activity and the function or meaning of the activity within the culture (Goodnow, 1996). The target or content of the activity, that is, protecting the environment or tutoring children, may be less important than whether it is organized as a group or individual effort. Political goals are rarely accomplished by the efforts of a single individual, and youth may be more likely to learn political skills in activities that emphasize collective action.

Finally, in some communities, local organizations offer opportunities for youth involvement. Examples are provided from two countries. In the Czech Republic volunteer fire fighters, foresters, or amateur theater groups operate in some communities and youth can usually get involved. In Australia, outlets for youth engagement can vary by the ecology of the region. Youth may participate in the Bush Fire Brigades, common in rural areas during the summer. In coastal areas surf lifesaving is a voluntary effort in which primarily teens are involved.

Importance of Civic Goals

Is volunteering in the community a developmental precursor of civic engagement? Our study was correlational so we cannot answer this question definitively. Yet ample evidence from other studies shows that involvement in voluntary youth groups is related to civic engagement in adulthood. Furthermore, adolescence is a time for exploring interests, forming personal commitments, and making preliminary decisions about the direction of one’s life. With this in mind, we thought it important to explore the relationship between adolescents’ engagement in voluntary work and the concepts they were forming of themselves and their future. Therefore, as part of our survey, adolescents were asked, when they thought about their life and their future, how important it was for them

to achieve various goals. Among the choice of goals were a set of civic commitments such as contributing to their communities; contributing to their society and country; helping the less fortunate; preserving the earth and protecting the environment for future generations; doing something to protect animals; combating pollution; and being active in politics. Table 7.2 shows the results for these questions for volunteers and nonvolunteers in each country.

In terms of the hierarchy adolescents assigned to these goals, environmental objectives were at the top of the list – far more important to the average adolescent than any other civic commitments. Next in overall importance ratings was the adolescents' intentions to do something for their society and country, and to help the less fortunate, in that order. Lower overall ratings were given to doing something to improve their communities. Being active in politics was rated least important, far below the other goals. The low importance attached to political activism is consistent with other work, which shows that youth, especially from working-class families, are generally uninterested in politics (Bhavnani, 1991; Bynner & Ashford, 1994; Torney-Purta, 1990). Although we were not asking adolescents about being active in electoral politics, perhaps the word *political* is just too narrowly construed in this way. Unfortunately, because political activity is often conceived within a partisan framework, voluntary work and other types of community involvement tend to be ignored as opportunities for political activity and learning (Flanagan & Gallay, 1995; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). Furthermore, political action implies a belief in one's ability to be an effective member of the polity, a belief that social change is possible and that one's actions can impact the political process (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). The relative inexperience of adolescents in connecting political activity with group goals may be implicated in their cynicism about politics. In another study, comparing how late adolescents and young adults in Hungary perceived the domain of politics, Josza et al. (cited in Keri, 1996) found that, whereas young adults thought of it as something malleable, adolescents felt that people could have little impact.

In contrast to the goal of political activism, the importance ratings for the other civic commitments were all above the midpoint, indicating that overall young people endorsed goals that went beyond a narrow notion of self-interest. However, there was a general decline in such commitments between early and late adolescence, a trend that was consistent across countries. This result converges with the trends in political cynicism we have reported in other work (Bowes, Chalmers, & Flanagan,

Table 7.2. *Comparisons of the Civic Commitments of Volunteers with Nonvolunteers in Seven Countries*

	Helping the less fortunate M (SD)	Being active in politics M (SD)	Helping my society/country M (SD)	Improving my community M (SD)	Protecting the natural environment M (SD)
Australia					
Volunteer	3.89 (.80)***	2.46 (1.12)	3.65 (.72)**	3.57 (.75)***	3.95 (.78)
Nonvolunteer	3.47 (.88)	2.34 (1.10)	3.41 (.83)	3.15 (.77)	3.85 (.84)
Sweden					
Volunteer	3.50 (.84)***	2.66 (1.04)*	3.48 (.77)**	3.09 (.87)*	3.97 (.79)
Nonvolunteer	3.10 (.89)	2.36 (1.06)	3.22 (.82)	2.84 (.85)	3.83 (.79)
U.S.A.					
Volunteer	3.81 (.90)*	2.89 (1.14)**	3.65 (.83)***	3.65 (.85)***	3.64 (.86)
Nonvolunteer	3.58 (1.01)	2.58 (1.14)	3.38 (.92)	3.23 (.92)	3.57 (.85)
Bulgaria					
Volunteer	3.81 (.75)***	2.50 (.97)	3.81 (.76)***	3.64 (.76)***	4.21 (.62)***
Nonvolunteer	3.53 (.84)	2.42 (1.07)	3.58 (.82)	3.40 (.78)	3.97 (.68)
Czech Republic					
Volunteer	3.65 (.69)***	2.19 (.87)	3.74 (.67)***	3.79 (.61)***	4.21 (.61)***
Nonvolunteer	3.28 (.77)	2.11 (.83)	3.42 (.74)	3.44 (.70)	3.97 (.67)
Hungary					
Volunteer	3.58 (.81)***	2.06 (.92)	3.41 (.78)***	3.33 (.68)***	4.05 (.66)*
Nonvolunteer	3.22 (.90)	1.97 (.95)	3.23 (.84)	3.09 (.80)	3.92 (.74)
Russia					
Volunteer	3.75 (.94)***	2.34 (1.19)	3.98 (.86)***	3.88 (.84)***	4.38 (.73)***
Nonvolunteer	3.11 (1.07)	2.32 (1.20)	3.44 (1.02)	3.29 (1.01)	3.93 (.90)

Note: Results of ANOVAs. Means and standard deviations are presented for each country. All scales ranged from 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important.

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

1996; Flanagan et al., 1996), and we suggest several interpretations of this age-related decline in civic commitments and parallel increase in cynicism. First, whereas younger adolescents may find it easier to think altruistically, older youth, approaching the end of their formal school years, may focus on issues of self-sufficiency, such as how they are going to earn money and support themselves. Alternatively, the decline in civic commitments may be part of a larger developmental trend. Between early and late adolescence, there is an increase in sociocentric awareness – of the social order, of institutions, of the economy (Adelson, 1972). We believe that one of the costs of this expanded sociocentric awareness is a growth in cynicism as youth become aware that the world is not a perfect place and leaders are not uniformly benevolent. Sigel and Hoskins (1981) contend that, after the massive dose of indoctrination about the virtues of the polity and its leaders students get in civics and social studies classes, late adolescents may become cynical when faced with dissonant information.

Youth's Civic Commitments across Countries

We turn next to a comparison between countries in the hierarchies of adolescents' civic commitments. As the results in Table 7.2 show, whereas environmental goals were, overall, the highest priority of youth, Americans, on average, rated them significantly lower than their peers in other countries. Adolescents in the four transitional polities (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Russia) seemed to have a particularly strong commitment to environmentalism. Compared to youth in the stable democracies, they gave higher ratings to stopping pollution, protecting animals, and preserving the earth for future generations. The role of environmental movements in the political changes of Central and Eastern Europe and the salience of these activities as outlets for youth will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Commitments to do something for the less fortunate were lower among Swedish and Russian youth compared to all others. The low ratings of the Russians are hard to explain but may reflect the lack of emphasis on charity in the society. They may also reflect the impact of the devastating economic decline of Russia during transition. In effect, Russian youth may be too busy surviving to help their neighbors. The low ratings of the Swedes are less surprising, given the relative absence of less fortunate people in a society with a strong commitment to equality and a high average standard of living. Compared to their peers in the

other countries, the Swedes rated doing something for their society and making a contribution to their local communities as less important goals as well. Perhaps our indicators of civic commitments were too internally focused in the sense of asking youth about their own societies. In a society where the state ensures the general welfare, the civic commitments of youth may be better tapped with measures of global rather than local concerns. Finally, although being politically active was low overall, American youth were more likely than any other group of adolescents to endorse this goal.

Comparisons of Volunteers with Nonvolunteers

Turning next to comparisons between those youth who volunteered and their compatriots who did not, the results in Table 7.2 show that community volunteer work was consistently and significantly associated with three measures of civic commitment. The pattern was the same in each country: That is, compared to their compatriots who did not volunteer, those who did attached a greater personal importance to (1) working to improve their communities, (2) helping the less fortunate, and (3) doing something to help their country and society.

As noted earlier, the environmental goals were more important overall in the transitional societies. Within those societies it was the volunteers who were most committed to such goals; that finding is not surprising in light of the ecological emphasis of their voluntary work, for example, cleaning up rivers, reforestation, and monitoring the disposal of waste. Apparently, environmental consciousness was associated with such activity since these youth, more than any others in the study, tended to think of themselves as stewards of the earth.

The environmental awareness and activities of youth may be an offshoot of the prominent role that ecological movements in these countries played in fostering political change and in developing constructive, democratic methods of protest (Fisher, 1993; Jancar-Webster, 1993; Persanyi, 1993). The environment provided a perfect symbol to garner public support for overthrowing the old regimes. Not only was its deterioration symbolic of the myopic planning behind much of the Soviet press for industrialization, but the polluted air and water were a cost that everyone bore equally. Furthermore, in a context where political parties were banned, these causes were attractive because political issues could be raised in what was arguably an apolitical framework, a context that others have referred to as a safe public talking-space (Jancar-Webster, 1993).

One can point to environmental actions prior to 1990 in each of the Central and Eastern European countries that ultimately led to the demise of the old regimes. In 1989 public demonstrations protesting the low quality of air and water engaged whole families in Czechoslovakia. In October 1988, 40,000 demonstrated in Budapest against plans to dam the Danube River. Pollution of the Danube from chemical plants in Romania was a focus of protest movements in Bulgaria, and some scholars contend that imprisonment of some leaders of those movements ultimately led to the fall of the Zhivkov regime (Jancar-Webster, 1993). Since the early 1990s, when the political objectives of overthrowing the old regimes were met, much of the vitality and membership in these movements has waned (Jancar-Webster, 1993) and some of the environmental goals of these movements may be sacrificed to market pressures.

Conclusion

The social contract study focuses on the fact that, in the course of growing up, children develop an understanding about the bargain that inheres between people and the polity that make their society "work." One important way that democratic polities "work" is that people become engaged in defining them and in creating the social glue that holds them together. The stability of political regimes depends on such commitments to the commonwealth, and in the twenty-first century the voluntary sector is expected to play an increasingly prominent role in building civil societies and stabilizing polities. As part of the third sector, what Rifkin (1995) refers to as the "social economy," it is likely to compensate for the private (market) and public (government) sectors' failures and will also provide an arena where, collectively, people can bring political pressures to bear on those sectors.

In this chapter we have argued that voluntary work is an opportunity through which the next generation can develop a sense of membership in the polity. At a time when they are considering who they are and where they are headed, exposure to others' perspectives, to social conditions and social groups with which they may not be familiar, can be a means for enlarging an adolescent's community of relationships and concerns. Aristotle defined the *polis* as, above all, a network of friends pursuing a common good. The voluntary sector provides an opportunity for young people to step beyond the boundaries of their familiar surroundings and see the common good in broadened perspective.

Cross-cultural studies provide a unique window for understanding an

activity such as volunteer work. According to Goodnow (1996), by looking at the form and the function of activities across cultures, we gain a better understanding of the role those activities play in human development. The results of this study suggest that the activity of voluntary service assumes somewhat different forms across countries, in some cases focusing on environmental concerns and in others emphasizing service to the needy. There seems to be a universal function of service in fostering a civic ethic and integrating youth into the broader polity. At the same time, service may have specific functions or meanings within cultural or historical contexts. For example, in the United States, it connotes charitable work that compensates for the shortfalls of the private and public sectors. In contrast, during the Soviet era in the Central and East European countries, the voluntary sector functioned as one of the few "free spaces" (Evans & Boyte, 1992) for expressing political opposition.

Across countries, voluntary youth organizations are one of the primary avenues through which young people engage in service. Because these groups play a unique role in stabilizing polities by developing diffuse support among the younger generation, we turn to a brief discussion of these organizations. Historically, youth organizations from the Scouts to 4-H to Young Pioneers have shared a common mission in fostering the character of the next generation of citizens. By providing structured outlets for leisure time under the guidance of adults, such groups integrate young people into the norms and mores of the broader society. Although these organizations tend to attract conformists rather than rebels, longitudinal studies of American youth suggest that, because they provide a reference group with prosocial values, voluntary youth groups other than sports teams may inculcate a resistance to delinquency (Larson, 1992).

Besides encouraging constructive prosocial norms, youth organizations stabilize political and social systems either overtly by emphasizing specific ideological commitments or more subtly by communicating an affinity with the nation (Harber, 1991; Yogev & Shapira, 1990). In this chapter we have alluded to the political agendas of the Young Pioneer and Comsomol organizations. But even supposedly apolitical groups serve social and political agendas by communicating the ethos underlying the society's social contract or, conversely, by providing a context where alternative perspectives can be aired. For example, in the early twentieth century, the Boy Scouts provided a counterbalance to what some perceived as the softening effects that urbanization and white-

collar work were having on traditional male roles (Hantover, 1978; Macleod, 1983). In a similar vein, debates in some contemporary 4-H groups in the United States point to a clash between those who want youth to appreciate the principles of free enterprise and those who would rather the organization promote democratic principles and social tolerance as values for youth (Meredith, 1996).

Politics, according to Easton (1990), is the authoritative distribution of values. But politics is also contested ground. The voluntary sector provides a context in which youth can explore the competing principles that are the foundation of their social order and decide for themselves which they stand for or against. We have discussed voluntary work as an opportunity for the social integration of youth – enabling them to be contributors to and feel like an integral part of their communities, and to “buy into” the norms and values of those communities. To the extent that voluntary work gives youth a voice, encourages them to discuss and even question the conditions of the “social contract,” it can be a force not only for social stability but also for social change.

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