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Individual and Country Level Determinants of (Post)Materialist Values in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at analysing the level of postmaterialist values in East European countries as well as the main individual and country level predictors of the postmaterialist value preference. The data from the World Values Survey (WVS) and the European Values Survey (EVS), conducted on the nationally representative samples in the period from 1990 to 2008, were used. The main analysis was performed on the data from the fourth wave of EVS (2008/2010), on the total of twenty countries and 30,393 respondents. A number of individual (age, education, income level, size of town, economic hardship in formative years) as well as country level variables (inflation and unemployment rate, Human Development Index and GINI index values) were used. The results have shown that the level of postmaterialist values in Eastern Europe, measured by the standard four-item index, is relatively low and relatively stable in the period 1990–2008. Younger, urban and more educated respondents as well as the citizens from more developed and economically stable East European nations are more inclined towards postmaterialism. The significance of the current socio-economic conditions for the variation in postmaterialism as well as the insignificance of economic security during the formative period of political maturation calls into question the assumptions of Inglehart's original model. The possible alternative mechanisms of value change as well as of the (post)materialist conception are discussed.

Keywords: (post)materialist values, value change, East European countries, European values Survey.

1. Introduction

Since Inglehart's seminal work (Inglehart, 1971), postmaterialist values, understood as assigning priorities to self-expression and quality of life as opposed to physical and economic security, have become a very

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important heuristic tool in social sciences. In his early work, postmaterialist values were viewed as a main manifestation of value change in advanced societies, main component of democratic political culture and a sort of a cultural precondition of democracy (Inglehart, 1971; 1990; 1997).¹

In the original model, postmaterialist value change is explained by two hypotheses (Inglehart, 1990). *Scarcity hypothesis* claims that individual values reflect socio-economic environment – the largest subjective importance is assigned to the most important ungratified needs, in keeping with the principles described in Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1954). Material (lower) needs when ungratified take primacy over all other needs, but once satisfied they are taken for granted and some other (postmaterialist) needs gain more importance. The prosperity (e.g. economic growth in Inglehart's terms) is thus conducive for spreading of postmaterialist values.

The socio-economic environment has the most prominent role, but its relationship with value priorities is not one of immediate adjustment. The early (formative) years of individual development are what matters. *Socialization hypothesis* states that one's value preferences reflect the (socio-economic) conditions from one's formative years, until early adolescence. People tend to hold the early instilled preferences and "the statistical likelihood of basic personality change declines sharply after one reaches adulthood" (Inglehart, 1990, p. 69). In short, individual and societal values do not change overnight, but gradually and by generational replacement. This would also imply that the faster the economic growth, the greater the cohort differences.

Two hypotheses combined imply that the shift towards postmaterialist values is not to be expected within every society. If this were the case, the model would be strongly confounded by and inseparable from the life-cycle effects, the inherent tendencies of individuals to accept materialist goals more as they grow older. Starting from the 1970s onwards, Inglehart and his associates have confirmed the tendency of younger age cohorts to be more inclined towards postmaterialism over and over again, first on a limited number of developed Western democracies (Inglehart, 1971) and some other developed societies over the globe more recently (Abramson&Inglehart, 1992; Inglehart, 1997; 2007; Inglehart&Welzel, 2005). Postmaterialist value shift is (or, at least, was) restricted to the countries that achieved a long-term economic development.

Based on such sound empirical grounding, back in the last decade of the 20th century, Inglehart predicted that the number of postmaterialists will exceed the number of materialists in the ratio 5:3 until 2010 (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992), despite the gradual effect of generational replacement, the fall in birth rate in the late 1980s, economic ebb and flows etc. Inglehart (Inglehart, 2007; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) reported that there was a significant value shift in the period from 1970 to 2000 in the predicted direction in several developed West European countries; a similar trend has been found elsewhere (Clarck & Dutt, 1991). However, not only that this trend towards postmaterialism in some countries was very weak, absent, or reversed (a declining percentage of postmaterialists) (Boltken & Jagodzinski, 1985), but, generally, in the developed countries of Western Europe, changes take place in the direction of enlargement of the mixed type group (Arts & Halman, 2004).

Plenty of other studies did not confirm Inglehart's empirical and theoretical assumptions. Despite the model predictions, numerous studies failed to confirm significant relationships between the acceptance of postmaterialism and some of the model's crucial variables. Davis and Davenport (1999) report no significant correlation between age and postmaterialist value preference and significant negative correlation between the income level and acceptance of postmaterialist values – quite contrary to model's predictions,

¹ In his more recent work, Inglehart has argued of self-expression (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) or emancipative values (Welzel & Inglehart, 2009). However, postmaterialist values figure as one of the most important components in both cases.

the more affluent individuals ranked materialist goals higher. Duch and Taylor (1993; 1994) disqualified the relevance of economic conditions during one's maturation period for postmaterialism, proving the very important role of one's education level as well as the influence of some other variables which Inglehart's model does not account for (such as, for instance, population size of settlement). Other scholars found strong influence of current economic context (such as inflation and unemployment rate at the time of survey) on the postmaterialist preference (Clarck & Dutt, 1991; Clarke et. al., 1997; Clarke et. al., 1999; Duch and Taylor 1993; 1994). These pieces of empirical evidence can hardly be explained in terms of Inglehart's model and question both the scarcity and the socialization hypothesis.

East European countries are a very interesting case for the validation of the postmaterialist values shift model as well as a relatively under-researched area in that sense. Available empirical evidence is mostly in line with Inglehart's predictions and shows relatively low preferences for the postmaterialist goals in Eastern Europe (Arts & Halman, 2004; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Inglehart, 2006; Pavlovic, 2006; 2009) but there are some exceptions that show relatively high percentage of postmaterialist in the former Soviet Republic countries (Duch and Taylor 1993). Bearing in mind poor economic performance of communist regimes, painful and in some cases even traumatic events after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the transition period that followed, modest economic and political performances of newly established democratic governments et al. the shift toward increasing postmaterialist preferences is not to be expected. In line with that, some studies have shown small cohort differences in Eastern Europe and greater importance of some other factors (such as education, socio-economic conditions at the time of the survey etc.) (Duch and Taylor, 1993). Furthermore, even when intergenerational differences are in accordance with Inglehart's assumptions (the younger are more postmaterialist), those differences in some cases can hardly be explained in terms of the scarcity and socialization hypothesis. Serbian youth, for example, is found to be more inclined toward postmaterialism (Pavlovic, 2009), but it is the population stratum that grew up and spent their formative years during the period of extreme economic hardships (during the 1990s). Inglehart (Abramson & Inglehart, 1994) argued that relatively high levels of postmaterialism in ex-communist countries can be explained by the sense of security that communist regimes offered (safe jobs, low rents, free education etc.). However, there is a big problem with this kind of argumentation. According to the theory, economic growth causes postmaterialism, but if the postmaterialism is high and economic growth absent, then some other factors are conducive to economic security. In that way, the presented model becomes unfalsifiable. Postmaterialism would in that case be double or multiple caused – by the sense of security based on country's economic growth as well as by the sense of security based on some other diffuse source(s). Others called for the reconceptualization of the concept of postmaterialism, treating it as an indicator of democratic political outlook or values related to political liberalism (De Graaf & Evans, 1996; Duch and Taylor 1993; Warwick, 1998).

Presented evidence and available data suggest that some of Inglehart's basic assumptions are debatable as well as that there are some very important individual as well as macro/country level factors that are either not accounted for in the theory or contradict it. This study offers some additional evidence on the determinants of postmaterialist value preferences in East European countries and has two main aims: (1) to determine the level of postmaterialist values in Eastern Europe and more recent changes with this respect, and (2) to determine the main individual and country level determinants of postmaterialist values.

2. Methodology

Sample. The data from different waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Survey (EVS) were used (as described later). The main analysis was performed on the nationally representative

samples in twenty East European countries (N=30,393) from the fourth wave of EVS (conducted from 2008 to 2010). The following countries were included in the analysis: Albania (N=1,534), Bosnia and Herzegovina (N=1,512), Bulgaria (N=1,500), Belarus (N=1,500), Croatia (N=1,525), Czech Republic (N=1,821), Estonia (N=1,518), Hungary (N=1,513), Latvia (N=1,506), Lithuania (N=1,500), Moldova (N=1,551), Montenegro (N=1,516), FYR Macedonia (N=1,500), Poland (N=1,510), Romania (N=1,489), Russian Federation (N=1,504), Serbia (N=1,512), Slovak Republic (N=1,509), Slovenia (N=1,366) and Ukraine (N=1,507).

Variables and measures. Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence of their relevance as well as the available empirical data, the following individual level variables were used:

- *Age* (measured in years);
- *Education* (country specific educational level is recoded in three categories: lower, middle, upper);
- *Monthly household income* (country specific income values are recoded in twelve-point scale, from less than 150 euros to 10,000 euros and more)²;
- *Size of town* (eight-point scale, from under 2,000 inhabitants to 500,000 and more)
- *Economic (in)security during maturation.* The answers to two four-point scale questions “Parent(s) had problems replacing broken things” and “Parent(s) had problems making ends meet” were summed and treated as a measure of perceived economic hardships during adolescence/formative years.
- *(Post)materialist values.* The standard four-item index (Inglehart, 1971; 1990) was used as a measure of (post)materialist values. Respondents were offered four social goals towards which their country should strive in the following ten years. Out of four offered goals – *fighting rising prices, maintaining order* (materialist values), *giving people more say in important government decisions, protecting freedom of speech* (postmaterialist values) – the respondents were asked to choose the two which they considered most important. The respondents who chose two materialist goals obtained the score of 1 (materialist values); those who chose both postmaterialist goals obtained the score of 3 (postmaterialist values), while the respondents of mixed priorities obtained the score of 2 (mixed type).

As far as country level variables are concerned, the list includes several socio-economic indices:

- *Human development index.* HDI is a composite measure of four aspects of human development: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling, and gross national income per capita. It is often treated as an indicator of a country's level of social and economic development.
- *Unemployment rate.* Refers to the share of the labour force that is without work but available for and seeking employment.
- *Inflation rate.* Measured by the consumer price index that reflects the annual percentage change in the cost to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services that may be fixed or changed at specified intervals.
- *GINI index.* It is a measure of the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution³.

All of the measures for country level variables are from 2008, which is the period when the fourth wave of EVS (used in this study) was conducted.

² Preexisting variables in EVS data set for the recoded educational level and recoded income level were used.

³ Data for HDI, inflation rate, unemployment rate and GINI index by country are obtained from data.worldbank.org (accessed 10/09/2014).

3. Results

The results will be presented in two sections. First, the data on the level of postmaterialism in East European countries will be presented. The analysis of the determinants of the postmaterialist value preference will follow.

3.1 The level of postmaterialism in Eastern Europe

The level of postmaterialist values in Eastern Europe at the end of the former decade (in 2008) is relatively low (6.3% in average, varying from 1.1% to 14.2%). The data are presented in **Table 1**. The highest percentage of postmaterialists was found in Slovenia (14.2%), Czech Republic (10.8%)⁴ and Macedonia (10.4%). Bulgaria (2.1%), Ukraine (2.1%) and Russia (1.1%) are countries with the lowest percentage of postmaterialists.

Table 1. Percentage of postmaterialists in East European countries by waves of EVS and WVS

	1990/1994	1995/1998	1999/2001	2008/2010	Net change
Albania	-	0.5	4.1	6.8	+6.3
Belarus	2.1	5.1	6	6.4	+4.3
Bosnia-Herzegovina	-	3.2	4.6	3.5	+0.3
Bulgaria	9.7	4.2	3.2	2.1	-7.6
Croatia	-	15	19.1	8.3	-6.7
Czech Republic	5.8	-	9.7	10.8	+5.0
Estonia	6.4	4.9	2.5	6.1	-0.3
Hungary	4.2	2	2.4	7.8	+3.6
Latvia	9.8	4.5	4.8	6.7	-3.1
Lithuania	12.6	3.5	6.3	4.1	-8.5
FYR Macedonia	-	4.4	4.8	10.4	+6
Moldova	-	2.8	5.6	4.8	+2
Montenegro	-	6.5	6.4	6.2	-0.3
Poland	9.7	5.4	7.6	6.9	-2.8
Romania	7.6	4.6	7.1	4.2	-3.2
Russia	2.8	1.6	1.7	1.1	-1.7
Serbia	-	6.1	6.1	5.6	-0.5
Slovakia	6.2	6.3	4	8.8	+2.6
Slovenia	7.3	13.9	16	14.2	+6.9
Ukraine	-	2.5	3.5	2.1	-0.4

Note: Data are weighted by country weight variable available in the EVS dataset to adjust socio-structural characteristics in the sample (gender and age) to population parameters; “-” implies the missing data; data for 1995-1998 are taken from WVS as well as the data for Russia and Belarus for 1990-1994 and Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia for 1999-2001; all other data are from EVS. Net change was calculated in the following way: $(\%2008/2010 - \%1999/2001) + (\%1999/2001 - \%1995/1998) + (\%1995/1998 - \%1990/1994)$; if the data for some wave were missing, they were excluded from the applied formula.

⁴ Slovenia and the Czech Republic are known to be rare exceptions regarding a relatively high proportion of postmaterialists in Eastern Europe, comparable to those found in some developed Western countries (see, for example, Arts & Halman, 2004).

It seems that the trend in value change is not best described by the changes in the level of postmaterialism. The fact that the percentage of postmaterialists is increasing or decreasing does not necessarily imply that the percentage of materialists changes accordingly. The picture is rather complex. For example, from the 1999/2001 to the 2008/2010 period, in Bulgaria, Belarus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia there is a common trend of a decreasing number of materialists and a growing number of the mixed type, adjoined with a country specific, varying trend in the change of postmaterialist goals preference (i.e. increase or decrease). In Croatia, Czech Republic, Russia and Slovenia, the reverse trend is visible – the number of materialists is growing, while the mixed type is being (slightly) reduced; at the same time, only in the case of Croatia there is a significant change in the (decreasing) percentage of postmaterialists between the two periods. Finally, there are countries (for example, Poland or Ukraine) in which the proportion of three value types in the beginning and the end of the past decade is almost identical, implying the absence of any value change.

The story of a value change in the recent decade in Eastern Europe seems to be a story of a mixed type value profile. If a certain trend in value change in the observed period is present and persistent, it is identifiable in the enlargement of the mixed type category, similar to what has been recorded in the Western societies (Arts & Halman, 2004). The most recent EVS data (2008/2010) have indicated that out of twenty countries shown in **Table 1** only in Russia and Moldova materialists outnumber the mixed type category (but by a small margin); in every other country, the majority of population (>50%) is characterized by the mixed type. There is no country in which the postmaterialist category outnumbered any of the remaining two at any point in time.

3.2 The predictors of postmaterialist values preference

In the analysis of the individual and country level predictors of postmaterialism, hierarchical linear modelling was applied with the postmaterialist index as dependent variable. Before entering the analysis, all variables were standardized and checked for possible multicollinearity between the country level variables (not detected). Standard procedure in this type of analysis was followed (for example, as suggested by Hox, 1995) and the main results are summarized in **Table 2** and **Table 3**.

Table 2. Estimates of random parameters and explained variance from three models

	Null model	Full individual model	+ Country level variables
Individual level variance	0.325	0.318	0.318
Between-country variance	0.013	0.011	0.005
Explained individual level variance		2.1%	
Explained country level variance		15.3%	61.5%
ICC	0.038		

The model with no predictors, the so-called null model, shows that 3.8% of the variation in postmaterialist values stems from the variation between countries (ICC=.038) (**Table 2**). Although significant, between-country variation in postmaterialism is rather small. Adding the individual level predictors to the model can account for 2.1% of individual level variance and 15.3% of the country level variance. The addition of country level variables to the model raises the percentage of the explained between-country variance to 61.5%.

The estimates of fixed effects (**Table 3**) showed that, at the individual level, younger, more educated and urban population strata are more inclined towards postmaterialism. Age is one of the most important variables in Inglehart's model, directly probing for the relevance and validity of socialization hypothesis. Cohort differences are in accordance with the model predictions but it is an open question whether they can be explained by the model. Intergenerational differences after the period of economic growth fit the proposed model. Still, as stated previously, the young population strata in post-communist societies spent their formative years in times of great social/political/economic turbulences⁵. Even if we acknowledge the economic growth after the fall of communism (at least in some parts of Eastern Europe), it does not unequivocally imply the economic security *per se* (which is, essentially, what matters).

Table 3. Estimates of fixed parameters

Fixed effects	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	1.688	.016	19.773	103.413	.000
Individual level					
Age	-.054	.004	21210.450	-12.700	.000
Education	.038	.004	21208.382	8.785	.000
Monthly household income	.009	.005	20692.661	1.932	.053
Size of town	.019	.004	20932.413	4.723	.000
Formative economic (in)security	-.005	.004	21153.102	-1.306	.191
Country level					
Inflation rate 2008	-.041	.018	19.882	-2.232	.037
Unemployment rate 2008	.027	.020	19.685	1.357	.190
GINI coefficients 2008	-.005	.018	19.785	-.276	.785
HDI 2008	.074	.020	20.395	3.730	.001
Model fit					
Chi square	36013.73				
AIC	36037.73				

Note: entries are standardized coefficients; Maximum likelihood estimates.

As others have noted already (Duch & Taylor, 1993), fast economic growth can cause great socio-economic turmoil and even prevailing economic insecurity. Furthermore, the observed cohort differences at least question if not disqualify the supposed role of the sense of security that the communist regime offered (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992). If this were so, the more postmaterialist oriented would in fact be those who lived under the communist regimes (i.e. older respondents) and the intergenerational differences reversed or absent. However, the young are indeed more postmaterialist, but the model's interpretation of that fact is debatable.

Some other data shown in **Table 3** additionally question Inglehart's assumptions. Education has proven to be a significant predictor of postmaterialism, as found elsewhere (Duch & Taylor, 1993; 1994; Pavlovic, 2009; Warwick, 1998). In Inglehart's theory, educational level is nothing but an indirect measure of one's economic welfare in formative years (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992; Inglehart, 1971; 1990; Inglehart&Abramson, 1994; Inglehart&Welzel, 2005). However, bearing in mind that educational level can "equal" a large number of different factors (formal or non-formal indoctrination, current socio-economic status of respondents or social background, the degree of acquisition of different skills, knowledge, values etc.) treating it *only* as an indirect measure of family welfare seems an unjustified simplification. It seems more appropriate to treat these pieces of evidence as an indirect manifestation of the prodemocratic

⁵ The youngest respondents are 18 years old; those who participated in the 2008/2010 EVS study were born in 1990.

character of postmaterialism (Duch & Taylor, 1993; 1994; Pavlovic, 2009; 2014b). The important role of population size of settlement can be understood in a similar vein. There is no reason to assume that the respondents from rural areas spend their formative years in higher physical-economic insecurity than their peers from urban areas. However, growing urbanization can influence the preference of postmaterialist goals, because the respondents from urban areas will come across confronted ideas, customs and attitudes earlier and be sooner socialized for the democratic norms of tolerance and the protection of freedom of speech (Duch & Taylor, 1993; 1994; Pavlovic, 2009; 2014b). That has nothing to do with Inglehart's scarcity or socialization hypotheses.

Finally, insignificant influence of income level or, more importantly, economic welfare in adolescence as well as the significance of some country level variables further questions the model's assumptions. Similar to what others have reported (Clarke & Dutt, 1991; Clarke et. al., 1997; Clarke et. al., 1999; Duch & Taylor, 1993; 1994), the preference of items in the battery is under a strong influence of economic context in the time period when the questions were asked. The differences in country's inflation rate as well as the Human development index values *at the time of the survey* can account for the between-country variance in postmaterialism. If postmaterialist values are the consequence of early socialization, then the contemporary economic conditions should not exert a significant influence on the postmaterialist preference. On the other hand, there is no evidence that economic conditions during the formative period have a prominent role in postmaterialist value preference.

4. Conclusion

Based on the presented data we can draw some more general conclusions and highlight some of their important implications.

The significant influence of country's inflation rate as well as the level of socio-economic development *at the time of survey* on variation in postmaterialist values heavily calls into question the proposition of (post)materialist values as early instilled, unchangeable value preferences (at least in Eastern Europe). The age differences are present (as the model predicts) but their interpretation should be more balanced and careful or even revised. Bearing in mind the dramatic changes after the fall of communism, the interpretation of intergenerational differences in terms of the long-term socio-economic development resultant seems quite improbable (at least in some East European countries). As found elsewhere (Clarke et al., 1999; Dutch & Taylor, 1993), postmaterialist index scores are under the relatively strong influence of the current, prevailing economic context. These influences are often described as period effects (Inglehart, 1990), a small temporary deviation from the relatively stable and previously determined level of postmaterialism, but it seems that these short-term variations are all there is, especially if we have in mind the irrelevance of the formative economic security. This interaction between the postmaterialist battery content and one's economic preoccupations and concerns is strongly evidenced in the work of Clarke and associates (1999). They have shown that if the item "fighting rising prices" in the standard battery is replaced with "fighting unemployment" the percentage of materialists highly increases; the unemployment was rather bigger economic issues at those times than inflation and it strongly influenced respondents' items selection⁶. The data shown here are in line with that. The postmaterialist battery included the "fighting rising prices" item and the citizens of the countries with a higher inflation rate (i.e. economic issues regarding rising prices) chose it more often. This further implies that even one's

⁶ A very important possible implication of this is that postmaterialism in different countries should be measured with different items, according to country's prevailing economic issues.

materialistic concerns could be expressed by the selection of postmaterialist item(s) because there is no adequate materialist goal (Clarke et al., 1999). The person worried about rising unemployment and facing a standard four-item battery might choose “giving people more say in important government decisions” to express preferences for accountable policy regarding the economic/materialist issue in question. In that sense, the enlargement of the mixed type speaks clearly of what the East Europeans see as main problems in this part of Europe – further economic development as well as the further development of democracy. All these pieces of evidence undermine the validity of socialization hypothesis. On the other hand, the lack of relevance of income level and economic (in)security during adolescence directly questions the scarcity hypothesis. The level of current or formative affluence seems irrelevant to postmaterialist preference. Alternative conceptualization of postmaterialism would better fit the observed data.

Numerous scholars have already proposed a view of postmaterialist values as a measure of the pro-democratic political outlook, sensitive to the prevailing and more recent experiences. Finding the strong influence of education and the lack of relevance of several indices of formative affluence, De Graf and Evans (1996) argued that standard postmaterialist index does not measure postmaterialism, but values related to political liberalism. Similarly, Warwick (1998) treated it as a measure of political values, showing that the educational level has greater impact on postmaterialist scores based on a standard four-item battery, than on the postmaterialist index constructed of other items without political connotation. Even the age or cohort differences can be explained in terms of rising educational level among youth. In some studies, once the education is controlled for, the cohort differences become smaller, even trivial (Duch & Taylor, 1993; Warwick, 1998). This viewpoint does not argue that educational institutions encourage the development of postmaterialism, but that some items in the battery will be rather accepted by those who, during their years of schooling, learned to appreciate the values they stand for. The important role of education and urbanization found in this study additionally supports this view.

Finally, there are some other issues that are often overlooked. The postmaterialist value thesis, rooted in the Maslowian conception of human motivation, equals human values with the main ungratified needs. Postmaterialist goals are placed in the higher order need area, being important and pursued only when and if lower order needs (materialist goals) are fulfilled. However, if values are indeed equivalent to needs, “then the lowly rat, to the extent that it can be said to possess needs, should to the same extent also be said to possess values” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 20). Low ranking of some goal does not necessarily mean that the goal is already accomplished and taken for granted. A person can highly value something because he/she wants something that does not already “posses”, as well as because he/she already has it, but wants it more. Similarly, something can be ranked low because of the inability/immaturity to appreciate it, because it is already achieved and taken for granted as well as because something is neither accomplished nor wanted (Rokeach, 1973).

This bears special relevance if we have in mind that respondents are essentially asked to rank *societal*, not their own *personallindividual* goals and that these two are not in any way analogous. Bottom line, Abraham Maslow talked about individual psychology and the paths in individual self-actualization, not describing the roads to national self-actualization (Marsh, 1975). Unconditionally and uncritically applying his theory of human motivation to the society as a whole would be a sort of “psychologizing”. The two are only partly overlapped. It is quite possible and probable to have higher order needs in private sphere and lower order needs in public sphere and *vice versa*. If one is asked to evaluate the important aims that society should pursue in years to come, it seems sound to do so bearing in mind the prevailing issues and current socio/economic/political context as well as not just his/her own (un)gratified needs but the needs of his/her compatriots. Societies change, their main obstacles on the road to further development change, and so do their evaluations as well as bases for those evaluations. The idea that these evaluations are

somehow “frozen in time” and rooted in the (individual and societal) past deserves at least an alternative reconsideration. Instead of the *retrospective* and *egocentric* rationale implicit in the standard (post)materialist model, *prospective*⁷ and *socio-centric* nature of citizens’ evaluation should be taken into account and made more prominent.

In other words, instead of exclusively treating postmaterialism as a “thick” culture variable, which is essential, fundamental, coherent, durable (Mishler & Pollack, 2003), a “thin” view of postmaterialism, as rationally based, reciprocally related to political institutions, dynamic etc., deserves additional consideration. There is ample evidence of the relevance of political and economic evaluations for numerous political attitudes, beliefs and values in East European countries (e.g. Boda & Medve-Balint, 2014; Loewenberg, Mishler and Sanborn, 2010; Pavlovic, 2013; 2014a; Rose et al., 1997; Whitefield & Evans, 1999) and their explanation in rational choice terms. A research studies focused on modelling the (post)materialist value preferences in different societies and political regimes (Voinea, 2014; see also Voinea, 2013) has shown that macro-political conditions have a significant influence on individual value preferences, a sort of downward causation/macro-to-micro phenomena, which further influence one’s attitudes and behaviours towards the macro setting. Taken together, these findings imply that effective democracy might “cause” postmaterialism – positive evaluations of democracy’s performances would influence more support for its norms and values (i.e. the postmaterialist items), which would in turn further strengthen country’s democracy and so on.

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⁷ A benign reminder of what the respondents were asked for: to evaluate the goals that their own society should strive towards in the near future (ten years’ time).

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