



BLACKBOX YOUTH

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON EAST-EUROPEAN YOUTH CULTURES

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ABSTRACTS

José Alaniz (University of Washington, Seattle)

Colorful Pictures: RESPEKT Comics and Russian Youth

Launched at the 2011 KomMissia comics festival in Moscow, with support from a European Union grant, the ongoing social activist project “Respect: Comics from Around the World” (Respekt: komiks iz raznykh stran) addresses the problems of intolerance, racism and neo-fascism in Russia through a medium its practitioners consider tailor-made to reach today’s youth: comic books. Distributed free to young people in physical form as well as online, the small chapbooks with red covers are designed to reach a population “used to flashy visual images” (privykla k iarkim vizual’nym obrazam) and presumed unresponsive to traditional text-heavy formats, according to Respect founder Khikhus (Pavel Sukhikh). Relying in part on the sociological research of Ulriche Zeimer, Agata Dubas, Elena Omelchenko and others, as well as interviews with Respect artists, the proposed conference paper examines Respect’s outreach strategies and the biases about contemporary Russian youth which underlie them; the advantages and limitations of comics as values-driven pedagogical tools for this demographic; and the media context out of which Respect emerged, namely the recent rise of comics reportage for political activism (as in the work of Viktoria Lomasko and Anton Nikolaev). In particular I will focus on the Respect stories *Escape (Pobeg)* by Alim Velitov, *The True Story of Skinheads (Nastoiashchaia istoriia skinkhedov)* by Alexei Iorsh and *What?! (V smysle?!)* by Roman Sokolov, for how they employ unique comics and caricature techniques to teach “tolerance” in ways accessible to (an imagined notion of) Russian youth.

Maciej Bernasiewicz (University of Silesia, Katowice)

Worldview discourses in Polish magazines for young people and hip-hop music

The author discusses two selected popular discourses — a message of young people’s magazines and hip-hop music. Making use of the method of content analysis, the author makes a categorization of the most important worldview notions included in the young people’s magazines, such as health, problems with identity, body, partners and hip-hop texts, such as life, respect, blocks of flats, politicians. The world view notions popularized by pop-culture reveal the contemporary processes taking place within the scope of identity, axiology and purposes of a contemporary teenager. Contemporary young people don’t have great ideals. They want only a health, employment, flat, own family. Charles Taylor is calling such aspiration as affirmation of the everyday life.

Yaryna Borenko (Centre for Educational Initiatives Lviv, Ukraine)

Concepts of patriotism within education and youth policies in Ukraine

The implementation of the concept of patriotism in education builds a gap between modes of socialization and lifestyles of the youth and cause a kind of “double thinking” and value based conflicts between school administration and students,

formal and informal education, nationalistic and extreme leftists youth groups. In my paper I will explore: the political meaning of formal education; the definition of patriotism in education and youth related issues; tendencies in non-formal education; the role of non-state actors and informal groups by building a critical attitude towards the official concepts of patriotism; media impact on understanding patriotism in education and youth related issues.

Tom Junes (Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Wien)

No more politics? 1989 and the end of the 'classical' student movement in Poland

This paper will discuss the disappearance of the 'classical' student movement as a fundamental element of student politics in Poland. Herein, it will primarily focus upon an analysis of student politics during the Communist period in order to present a series of conceptual problems. After the demise of Communism the political, social and economic role of students in Polish society changed drastically causing a caesura in the manner in which the phenomenon of student politics manifested itself and how student movements appeared from as far back as the 19th century. This paper will argue that in the two decades following the fall of Communism, Polish student politics as such saw fundamental change to such a degree that has led the student body to lose the potential for political mobilisation it possessed until 1989. This paper will then discuss some of the conceptual problems that have arisen and followed from this evolution.

Catriona Kelly (University of Oxford)

The End of Childhood and/or the Discovery of the Tineidzher? Reflections on Age Boundaries and Boundaries in Chronology

In Soviet culture, the high visibility of childhood and youth in propaganda, the arts, and personal experience was accompanied by an unspoken prohibition on the representation of of puberty and adolescence. The proposed paper looks in detail at the dynamics and causes of this situation, and examines the extent to which cultural transition has (or has not) led to different perceptions of the biological and cultural boundaries between phases of the life cycle.

Stefan B. Kirmse (Humboldt-University of Berlin)

How far does "Eastern Europe" go? Experiences of Youth in Central Asia

Discussing young people's everyday lives in post-Soviet Central Asia, and experiences of cultural globalization in particular, Stefan Kirmse tries to shed light on the similarities and differences in young people's lives across the former socialist space. Drawing on ethnographic research in Kyrgyzstan, he suggests that Central Asian youth, especially in urban locations, are currently participating in many of the

same globalizing processes that can be observed elsewhere – both in the former socialist bloc and further afield. Thus, it is necessary to integrate the study of Central Asia and the Caucasus more fully with sociological research on Eastern Europe. At the same time, Kirmse argues that experiences of youth in Central Asia differ by socio-economic context, rural and urban background, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, when seen as a life stage, Central Asian youth retain certain specificities within the former socialist space, from a high degree of social polarization to the appropriation of a wide range of donor-funded and religious ‘youth spaces’.

Alfrun Kliems (Leipzig/Berlin)

Old Young Man. Popculture and its Aging Protagonists

In *Podróż dziękczynno-błagalna, totalna i realistyczna do świętych relikwii Egon Bondy’ego* (A Grateful Pilgrimage in the Style of Total Realism to the Holy Relic of Egon Bondy, 2008), the Polish poet Jacek Podsiadło recounts a journey that an admirer of the Czech Underground artist Egon Bondy entered upon to see his idol in Bratislava, Slovakia. At second glance, the essay disguised as story turns out to be a discourse on the impossibility of Underground art in the early 21st century. Rather, after having been Underground’s sibling other, Pop Art has come to absorb and undo the subversive potential of 20th century counterculture. Thus, Podsiadło’s Pilgrimage allows for a reflection on the political, historic, and aesthetic status, and interrelation of Pop and Underground Art.

Félix Krawatzek (Nuffield College, University of Oxford)

Youth Mobilisation in its Relation to Politics. Comparing Perestroika and the Putin/Medvedev era

The Kremlin’s official efforts to control and mobilise young people have received some attention in the media and scholarship in Russia and beyond. This instrumentalisation of youth has been deemed unacceptable and incompatible with democratic values. However, what has widely been ignored in these treatments of the topic is the political mobilisation of youth beyond groups such as *Nashi*. This indicates that youth has not exclusively turned into an object of political calculations but at the same time into one of its core subjects. This paper wishes to investigate the complex and often contradictory political behaviour of young people in the current political regime in Russia and compare it to the period of Perestroika.

In a first step the manifold ways in which youth has expressed its political opinion after the diffusion of the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” into the Russian domestic context in 2005 will be studied. The diffusion of this transnational event into the Russian domestic context led to a change in the political expectations (*Erwartungshorizont*) of young people. The political sphere and what young people can achieve within it, was redefined in that process. As part of that analysis, the diversification of techniques of mobilisation will be explored, taking into account groups such as *My*, *DPNI* or *AKM*.

In a second, comparative step, the identified patterns of mobilisation and the relation to the political realm are to be compared with youth mobilisation during the Perestroika period. Although Perestroika was sometimes called a youth revolution by contemporary (academic) observers and reforms of the Komsomol constituted an important element of it, the political mobilisation of youth has not received great attention in research. This paper wishes to enquire into the involvement of youth “as youth” in that period.

The questions which guide the comparison of both periods are as follows: What has driven young people to mobilise in public and move beyond political lethargy? How have young people maintained their mobilisation? What attitudes towards the political are expressed with the mobilisation?

Sabina-Adina Luca, Dragos Dragoman, Bogdan Gheorghita (‘Lucian Blaga’
University of Sibiu, Romania)

Young people in Romania. How ‘new media’ shape social communication and political activism

In the context of increasing voting abstention and scant conventional political activism, one can acknowledge today the soaring of social mobilization in Romania. And this is especially valid regarding young people, who recently supported various social and political actions, from environmental and community issues to overtly political claims. How could one explain the increasing political participation in the form of unconventional action, as protest? Could new media, including new networks as Twitter or Facebook, be responsible for the increasing young people social mobilization we recently noticed in Romania? Who are those young people mobilized? Are they the same with those who are conventionally active? Using in-depth interviews and a series of focus-groups, we intend to assess the impact of new media on young people’s involvement and to estimate the changes occurring regarding political activism. Could one expect to see those young people active in unconventional forms to catch up with most classical activism or the keep in the realm of post-modern activism? These questions are essential in deeply understanding the way political activism will change in a post-communist society and how young people conceive politics in the context of new emotional communality shaped by the new media.

Matthias Meindl (Universität Zürich)

The Fight and/or the Youth: Russian Youth Movements and their Representation in Russian Literature

The talk will make some general remarks on the role of youth movements in political and popular culture in Post-Soviet Russia and give some examples of their representation in literature. It will also give some examples of the mobilization of youth against art and literature. The talk will then concentrate on the representation of the (in the meantime) forbidden National-Bolshevist Party in literary texts from inside of the Movement (Eduard Limonov, Dead Head, Sasha Prilepin). A close reading of Prilepins Novel *Sankya* (2006) will contest the parallels, the author has

been drawing between his writing and Socialist Realism. The talk will ask which functions are served by the depiction of youth movements in literature and in particular if there is some ritualistic political value to be found in these texts, or not.

Anna Oravcová (Charles University, Prague)

Czech Hip Hop Underground

The article focuses on Czech hip hop subculture, namely the so-called underground. It examines Czech rap music in its “glocal” form. This case study from an insider point of view is based on interviews with active hip hoppers, participant observation and content analysis of Czech rap lyrics. The study was part of a research project focusing on current youth music subcultures in Czech Republic. The main scope of the project was to look at the concept of youth as well as re-examining the concept of “subculture” and more current concepts within cultural studies.

In response to commodification and commercialization of hip hop, the question of authenticity becomes crucial. Number of Czech hip hop artists crossed over to popular music dividing the Czech hip hop scene to so-called “mainstream” and “underground”. Underground is understood to be closely tied to the “original” roots of hip hop as a former African-American oral culture. That includes being more political, pro-active and oriented on the art of rhyme. These hip hoppers see themselves as more than mere fans of hip hop music. For them hip hop is a lifestyle, a lifelong commitment, not only a rebel phase between the adolescence and adult life.

Other topics, such as the gender relations within Czech hip hop subculture, the values of hip hoppers and their relationship to their parents’ generation, are also included in the study. Hip hop is fairly new post-socialist hip hop subculture (the origin can be date back to 1993). The article examines the cultural translation of American hip hop and its appropriation by the members of Czech hip hop subculture.

Jovana Papović and Astrea Pejović (University of Belgrade)

Nationalist iconography of the nineties in contemporary youth discourse in Serbia

The first years of the Yugoslavian conflict in the 1990s and the rise of Milosevic’ nationalist discourse in Serbia completely changed the iconography of then-youth. While the mainstream in Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was mainly reflected in Rock’n’Roll culture and represented an enlightened (cosmopolitan) communism, popular culture in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia found its representation in the nationalist ideology paradigm - Turbo-folk music. As a newly constituted music genre it found its embodiment in ‘DIZEL’, a movement that was visually represented through a Mafioso fashion statement. ‘Dizel’ subculture soon became a mainstream cultural movement that incorporated nationalistic ideology and lasted until the beginning of 2000s.

Today, official Serbian politics balance between the still alive ‘90s nationalist ideas and EU integration. The current socio-political crisis in Serbia brought about an aggressive revival of the ‘Dizel’ movement amongst youth with a significant difference in ideology: the ‘90s nationalism discourse of Slobodan Milosevic’s government that

aimed to distinguish 'Serbs' from other Yugoslavian nationalities-ethnicities, compared to a contemporary nationalistic discourse which aims to distinguish Serbs from Europe and European mentality tuning them to their 'all time brothers' the Russians.

New 'Dizels' are youth with greater political power. While 'Dizels' in the 1990s were a fashion subculture, today they are street warriors, mainly hidden behind football supporters (hooligans). Their power lies in close connection with right wing radical organizations, to which they serve as a proxy - army, furiously demolishing the capital city after events such as Gay Pride or big protests against an independent Kosovo.

This paper examines imagined roots of 'Dizel' movement and how youth today recreate and represent nationalist cultural codes of the nineties and juxtapose them with current political situation in Serbia.

Hilary Pilkington (University of Manchester)

Punk – but not as we know it: Rethinking Youth Culture from a Post-socialist Perspective

Youth cultural practices in late- and post-socialist Europe have been viewed all too often as purely mimetic of their precursors in the West and their study reduced to a process of filling in the 'local colour' of rock, hip hop, pop etc scenes. This paper reassesses how the study of youth cultural practice in Eastern Europe informs theoretical and empirical debate about youth culture. It briefly charts the trajectory of academic writing on East European youth cultures and suggests the region's state socialist past (which made social inequalities relatively insignificant at a time when, elsewhere, youth cultural studies were dominated by class-based readings) combined with the explosion of inequality in the post-socialist period (by which time class-resistant post-subcultural theories led anglophone academic discussion), makes it an interesting vantage point from which to reconsider academic paradigms. It argues for a perspective that integrates structural and cultural factors shaping young people's lives. It suggests that we might move forward western theoretical debates – often stymied in arguments over nomenclature ('subculture', 'postsubculture', 'neo-tribe') - by shifting the focus of study from 'form' ('subculture' etc.) to 'substance' (concrete cultural practices) and attending to everyday communicative, musical, sporting, educational, informal economy, and territorial practices. Since such practices are embedded in the 'whole' rather than 'subcultural' lives of young people, this renders visible how cultural practices are enabled and constrained by the same social divisions and inequalities that structure society at large.

Drawing on a recent study of post-socialist punk, this paper argues that the study of punk in places usually considered marginal to its inception and development can disrupt established canons of knowledge in a productive way. It focuses on findings from ethnographic research conducted by the author on a particular punk scene in the northern Russian city of Vorkuta. Embedding punk practices in their structural location, it is argued, not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the meanings of cultural practices themselves, but also the importance of thinking about subcultures not in semiotic isolation but as located within 'whole lives'. Further, the paper explores the relationship between 'subcultural' and 'everyday' lives by tracing tropes of 'mutation', 'mutant' and 'moron' within the music, performance and self-

identifications of the city's punk scene members. It suggests that the practice of, and meanings attached to, 'mutation' among scene members provide an illustrative example of a routine boundary crossing between 'everyday life', marked by heavy physical and emotional demands of routines of paid employment and family lives, and 'subcultural life', as a practice of the enactment of (a consciously temporary) freedom from them. As such, it is argued, their study thus has important implications for the contemporary theorization of punk, and youth culture more widely.

Robert Pruszczyński (University of Warsaw)

Masculinity without a rebel, a rebel without a masculinity. Polish cinema, youths and national stereotypes (Żamojda, Żuławski)

The object of my thesis is to analyze two movies, which reflect the problems faced by youths in transition to adulthood, "Młode wilki"/„Young Wolves” [1995, directed by J. Żamojda] and "Wojna polsko-ruska"/„Polish-Russian War” [2009, directed by X. Żuławski]. The first movie was made during the post-communist transformation, at the time of indulging in *Americanism* and carnival reversing of the old order (moral, economic, religious etc.). Flirting with USA symbolizes the relationship of one of the protagonist with an American girl, an immature and unsuccessful infatuation. „Young Wolves”, in terms of formal approach, refers to the American gangster cinema, homoerotic buddy movie and a road movie.

The grotesque Żuławski's production shows that, several years later, the youngest generation becomes apathetic, bored with consumption and has no idea for life. Ruski/Russky (the negative word associated with Russian) becomes the only (negative) reference point, an empty space, as opposed to the conservative identity, which is constructed around that concept. „Polish-Russian War” is an adaptation of the bestseller, written by a teenage Dorota Masłowska, who smoothly conveys the mentality and language of PLN 1200 gross generation. [The Polish minimum wage, circa 400 EUR per month].

Herwig Reiter & Christine Steiner (Deutsches Jugend-Institut, München)

Two different countries, two different pathways to capitalism - one new youth?

Lithuania and East Germany share a real socialist past that lasted for a couple of decades. Yet their two decades of post-socialism represent very different societal trajectories of establishing capitalist market democracies. Lithuania was one of three former Soviet Republics that went through a most radical socio-economic transformation towards a national economy and competitive democracy joining the European Union in 2004. East Germany became EU-European even before when it was merged with West Germany and its national economy dissolved in 1990. In this essay we argue that despite these apparently very different experiential backgrounds for today's youths it is possible to identify commonalities with regard to the actual conditions of growing up in contexts of accelerated change.

Ken Roberts (University of Liverpool)

Youth Cultures and the formation of a new political generation in eastern Europe

Since 1989 the youth of Eastern Europe have been making their life-stage transitions in countries that have been making their own transitions (or transformations), which have no historical precedent, from communism into (nominally) democratic members of a global market economy. This paper discusses the mixed and changing attitudes of elders towards the young in Eastern Europe which have ranged from condemnation of materialist youth who are failing to continue the historical task that their parents began, to nostalgia-tinged regret that post-communist youth are denied the opportunities and security from which their parents benefitted. The paper also discusses the recruitment of new members of the countries' political classes, and other young people's various degrees of estrangement from and engagement in their countries' politics. The paper concludes by discussing whether western sociology's concepts and theories of youth are able to comprehend the novel circumstances experienced by young people in post-1989 Eastern Europe. It is argued that 20th century European experience of the formation of new political generations suggests that the political activism of disaffected youth may not instigate immediate change, but may nevertheless undermine confidence in and the legitimacy of existing political elites and their policies. Its full political formation is more usually delayed until a new generation has matured, at which point it produces new leaders who offer new thinking and policies which respond to the issues, problems and opportunities which have by then arisen.

Matthias Schwartz (Freie Universität Berlin)

Everything Feels Bad: Figurations of the Self in Young Post-Socialist Literature

In his study "Nothing Feels Good" about "Punk Rock, Teenagers, and Emo" (New York 2003), Andy Greenwald showed how this music functioned as a "never-never land, a shield against the demands of aging and the real world" in the 1990s and early 2000s, and gained enormous popularity among teenagers, especially in rural areas in North America, as the first music to so actively celebrate "high-stakes emotional desperation" (p.43). However, the medium in which this emotional depression and loneliness found its language and its narration was the Livejournal, the social networks. In Eastern Europe, one can observe similar phenomena that brought about new figurations of the self, not only in music and on the internet, but also especially in literature. Through a comparison of the works of authors including, in particular, Dorota Masłowska, Mirosław Nahacz, Zachar Prilepin, and Serhiy Zhadan, this paper seeks to discover which models of adolescent belonging and subject constructions between post-socialist melancholy and globalized world are conceptualized in this literature.

Vlad Strukov (University of Leeds)

'Optimistic' Youth: Media Environment, Politics of Space and Construction of Identity

Iuris Podnieks' film *Is It Easy to be Young?* [Legko li byt' molodym? 1986] problematised the Soviet youth at the start of perestroika and paved the way for the social and cultural transformation of the late 1980s-early 1990s. Twenty five years later, David Roitberg released a cinematic remake of the Soviet production [Legko li byt' molodym? 2011]; it incorporates interviews with eighteen youths who—in the style of popular documentary of the 2000s—discuss their lives and engage with contemporary life in Russia. Both the films present quite a gloomy view of the Soviet and Russian youth as they capture them at the time of significant social change. While empathizing with their subjects, the films signal for the social and cultural inertia of the youth.

The paper will explore the role of youth and politics of (self-)representation in a different type of media environment. While Valeria Gai Germanika's 2010 television series *The School* [Shkola] provoked the Russian society and encouraged the discussion of whether it is easy to be young in the contemporary world, the focus of this paper will be on the Russian television channel 'Dozhd'. The channel is branded as 'optimistic' and it provides the viewer with a set of values that can be defined as socially active and engaging. I will attempt to argue that the channel has built its popularity by appealing to a new type of Russian youth that I would call 'the afisha type'. Here I refer to the readership of the *Afisha* journal—aspiring, intellectual urban youth—and I utilise the concept of 'afisha', or self-advertising, to indicate how a new type of social identity is constructed. My argument will be based on the analysis of Dozhd podcasts and the role the channel plays in the age of post-broadcast media.

Gleb Tshipursky (Ohio State University)

Youth Communal Policing: Public Discourse and Volunteer Militias in Post-Soviet Russia

Through studying volunteer youth militias in post-Soviet Russia, my paper aims to contribute to the conference goal of overcoming the methodological and conceptual "black box" associated with the traditional conceptualization of a cohesive "youth" and "generation." Volunteer militias of young people wearing red armbands have grown into an increasingly common sight in post-Soviet Russia during the last years. They patrol the streets and combat what they consider violations of public order. This essay uses newspapers, television broadcasts, legal documents, political statements, legislation, and digital media such as websites, blogs, and social networks, to examine the public discourse about these volunteer patrols.

Contemporary rhetoric by those authority figures supporting militias praise these institutions for imposing social controls on and disciplining the population, thus positioning young patrol members as the quintessential builders of post-socialist national communities. Furthermore, participation in militias was supposed to reform youth into model subjects and ideal Russian citizens. However, public discourse also contains criticism of patrol activities, which spotlighted the flaws inherent in volunteer militia activities. These statements underscore the challenges faced by government social engineering efforts designed to cultivate well-ordered populations. More

broadly, my evidence suggests that concepts such as “youth” and “generation” homogenize a diverse set of discrete experiences and identities, and need to be rethought on the basis of evidence from Russian sources.

Patryk Wasiak (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study)

“Video-Fans” and “Computer Bosses”. Consumer Electronics and Youth Identities in the Late State-socialist Poland

My aim is to discuss cultural and social practices of media consumption by youth in the late state-socialist Poland. Practices of consumption of different high-profile media technology artifacts of the era such as VCRs, Hi-Fi equipment and home computers played a role in shaping identities of Polish youth of the 1980s. In the master narrative of Polish social history, only the activities of youth who became actively involved in political opposition are recognized as valid research topics. However, practices of acquiring and use of consumer electronics are widely included in popular narratives of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) nostalgia, shaped by the last PRL youth generation (Kot 2008, Koziczyński 2007).

In my presentation, I discuss examples of youth identities shaped around the practices of media consumption. For instance, a youth owner of a privately imported VCR could become a “video fan” who was familiar with the pirate movie market as well as technical details of VCRs and manufacturers’ brand rankings. A computer user could become a “computer boss”, a counterpart of hacker, by trading pirated software in the electronic bazaar. However, to gain real prestige among other computer users one would also have to be proficient in programming and hardware modifications. Youth media consumption practices are recognized as a legitimate and important field of study by cultural studies scholars. However, this topic is not yet recognized in the contemporary cultural history of Eastern Europe. While showing how technology consumption significantly influenced cultural practices of youth and establishment of peer networks, I challenge the popular notion that youth who hadn’t joined youth anti-communist organizations lived in lethargy. My paper is partially based on recent empirical studies of video and home computer use in Poland. I also refer to studies from the forthcoming volume on of media technologies appropriation in Eastern Europe (Wasiak and Hagen, forthcoming).

With my presentation I intend not only to present new research topic, but also to join the discussion on the conceptual framework of the prospects of the Soviet bloc youth culture studies.

Heike Winkel (Berlin)

Loners and Gangs. Communitarity in Contemporary Eastern European Literature

Youth cultures are predicated on a complex interrelationship between collectivity and individuality. On the one hand, the emergence and evolution of postwar youth cultures is to be understood as an integral part of cultural modernity. Therefore it indicates the dissolution of traditional social structures, the separation of individuals from their roots, ties and norms and increasing processes of individualization. On the other hand, the uncircumventable foundation of every youth culture is the collective.

After all, their most important function is to provide collective strategies of dealing with new social, cultural and economic situations. More so, they become visible only through collective style, rituals, conduct codes, and historical experiences which serve to define gangs, movements, scenes and generations. The paper intends to show how in contemporary Eastern European fiction narratives on youth gangs and loners are used to both represent and subvert patterns of collective and individual identity-building. It addresses works by Jáchym Topol, Zachar Prilepin, Serhiy Zhadan, Eva Hůlová and Jaroslav Rudiš.

Anna Zhelnina (Centre for Youth Research, Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg)

“Young Politics”? The emergence of the social network of young politicians in St. Petersburg, Russia (example of the Polit-gramota discussion club)

“Alternative speakers”, “an alternative to traditional politics” – these are the keywords used by the participants of the St. Petersburg based Polit-gramota project to describe it. The project includes a web-site and a social network of young politicians and those interested in politics, and the “Polit-gramota Debates”. Both the web-site and the debates exist since 2006 and have become an important socialization space for young politicians and journalists, bringing together representatives of different parties and political ideologies. The club and the network that emerged around it soon stepped over the boundaries of “young politics” – they were an alternative to ‘traditional’ (boring, not conflicting, dominated by ‘official’ point of view) politics that allowed real discussion and competition. Some of the ‘young politicians’ from the network became important figures in St. Petersburg’s political sphere. After 5 years the off-line debates, became rarer: the organizers ‘grew up’ professionally and preferred to organize debates on television and support the web-site as more ‘traditional’ forms of activity. The social network of young politicians, however, remains an important resource for the participants (now acting as ‘real’ politicians and journalists).

The club and the network can be seen as a space for professional socialization of young politicians and journalists (who otherwise claimed to be “fenced off” from the ‘adult’ politics – the ‘youth wings’ of parties were sometimes described by young politicians as a means to ‘keep the young away’). They trained the necessary skills and joined the mainstream politics. It can be interpreted as a collective way of overcoming boundaries (‘youth’ vs. ‘adult’ politics) and achieving a certain status in the professional community.

The empirical research was conducted in the framework of the project “Youth Solidarities in local and global context: economics, politics, culture” (supported by the Basic Research Programme of the Higher School of Economics in 2011).