THE ROLE OF FAMILY SOCIAL CAPITAL IN YOUNG PEOPLE’S TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK IN BULGARIA

Uloga socijalnog kapitala porodice u prelasku mladih iz škole ka zaposlenju u Bugarskoj


KLJUČNE REČI porodica, mreža, socijalni kapital, tranzicije mladih, podrška

ABSTRACT Large-scale surveys rate Bulgaria and the whole of South-East Europe as societies poor in both formal and informal social capital. At the same time studies show that families in the region remain closely knit and norms of reciprocity, empathy and support among members of extended families are valued highly. To throw light upon this contradiction the paper presents results from a qualitative research into family support for youth transitions from school to work in Bulgaria conducted in 2002-2003. It uses of data from in-depth interviews with 46 young people one year after graduation from school or university and 34 of their parents. The paper analyses in more detail three case studies representing different patterns of family support. The role of the family remains important under post-communism when it acts as a network for its members and with the access to other social networks external to the family.

KEY WORDS family, network, social capital, youth transitions, support
The World Value Survey, the New Democracy Barometer and other large-scale comparative studies rate Bulgaria and most of South-East Europe as societies poor in social capital (Raiser et al., 2001; Rose et al., 1997). The country fares low in formal social capital measured in membership of civic organizations as well as in informal social capital in terms of friendship ties and voluntary activities. Value scales indicate low levels of trust in institutions, interpersonal and generalised trust among the Bulgarian population. At the same time more qualitative research shows that families in the region remain closely knit and norms of trust and reciprocity among members of extended families are widely practiced and highly valued (Kovacheva and Mitev, 2004; Tomanovic, 2003; Ule and Kuhar, 2003). Are we witnessing a very low level of social capital in the transitional society of post-communist Bulgaria or are there different forms of social solidarity that uphold the social fabric despite the rapid social change?

The reviews of the extensive literature on social capital (Edwards et al., 2003; Mihailova, 2004) suggest that the operationalisation of the concept in large-scale value surveys neglects the subtler micro processes such as parenting styles, communications, investment of time and mutual expectations through which families generate and garner social capital. Quantitative studies usually build upon the tradition of Putnam and Fukuyama who are more interested in social capital as a structural feature of communities and nations and much less in the role of the family in the development of social capital. Putnam (2000) examines civic associations as creating the form of ‘bridging’ social capital that best serves the goal of social integration since it unites people across different social divides, while the family stimulates the formation of ‘bonding’ capital which brings together homogeneous groups reinforcing exclusive identities. For Putnam the increasing diversity of family life is a major cause of the decline of social capital in modern societies, while Fukuyama (1999) argues that diminishing family allegiances might increase trust in civil society and stimulate new forms of associations that constitute the tissue of social capital. However, these accounts often neglect the hierarchies of power within the family along generation and gender lines, and in particular the agency of young people is not recognised (Edwards, 2004; Seaman and Sweeting, 2004).

The role of the family in the production, accumulation and transmission of social capital has been imbedded in the concept of social capital as first developed by Coleman and Bourdieu. For Coleman (1988) social capital is a resource within the family, which arises from intergenerational relationships. Parents invest time, attention and expectations in their children, which in turn enable the younger generation to increase their human capital. Whereas Coleman sees the financial and cultural resources of the family as neutral for the accumulation of social capital, Bourdieu (1983) analyses the links between social and other forms of capital perpetuating social inequalities. For him the size and the quality of family social
capital depend on the possession of other capital by the family and the resources of family networks which in turn are moulded by wider social structures.

Social capital research in Central and Eastern Europe

In the region the development of the concept first arose from studies of the informal economy (Sik, 1994; Kolankiewicz, 1996). Most of the discussion concentrated on the problems associated with social transformation and social capital was considered a tool for achieving economic growth and institutional change (Aberg, 2000). Methodologically, a quantitative perspective dominates research on social capital in the region and makes use of indicators established in Western literature. The few qualitative studies are more critical towards the concept and more reflexive of its forms and tendencies (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999). This is important as the concept of social capital arrives in a very different social context. Processes of change, influencing the formation of social capital, are often in the opposite direction to those examined in Western theories. Rather than having increased delegation of children’s education to public agencies, there is a growing reliance upon parents and less state interference. Instead of mothers entering the labour market, there are more opportunities for women to stay at home than at the time of state socialism when paid work was an obligation. Instead of using social capital as ‘the most effective policy tool’, until now it was rather neglected in official policy documents.

Research in the region has revealed the importance of family solidarity as a form of social capital during communism and beyond. Mozny (2003) argued that family networks served to compensate the deficiencies of the centrally planned economy through gifts and return gifts. Under post-communism kin ties and friendship networks are essential for business start-up and growth, as well as for households to cope with the economic difficulties of transition (Kolankiewicz, 1996). Much less is known about the effect of family social capital in assisting youth transitions in the transitional societies in Eastern Europe.

The social context of youth passage from education to employment has radically changed after the collapse of communism. In Bulgaria the educational boom (doubling the numbers of those enrolling in institutions of higher education), the unfriendly labour market (offering temporary jobs, habitually without a written contract), and mass unemployment (reaching 25% among those aged up to 25 in 2003) are all new experiences unfamiliar to the parental generation. At present young people experience a prolonged movement within the educational system and a problematic entry into the labour market. Youth school-to-work transition is not just extended but filled in with frequent spells of unemployment, precarious jobs,
attempts to start their own business and/or find work abroad, as well as additional studies and training, often in fields completely different to the initial orientation. Studies and work no longer follow each other but are often mixed in various combinations. The transformation can be described as a ‘flexibilisation’ of youth passage from school to work, that is, a turn toward de-standardisation and deregulation of youth transitions (Kovacheva, 2001).

The FATE study

This paper presents results from ‘Families and Transitions in Europe’ (FATE) - a qualitative study into family support for youth transitions from school to work in Bulgaria and eight other European countries conducted in 2002-2003. It makes use of data from in-depth interviews with 46 young people in Bulgaria one year after graduation from schools and universities in urban localities. This information was matched with data coming from 34 in-depth interviews with their parents who reflect upon young people’s life plans and experiences of school, work, unemployment, friendships and housing situations. The purposive sample was drawn from a sampling frame of respondents in a survey of students completing their education and stratified according to educational level (low, medium and high) and gender.

The theoretical framework of the project did not concentrate on social capital but more generally on family support for youth transitions (Biggart et al, 2004). When studying material, emotional and practical assistance provided by parents to their offspring, the social contacts of the family came up as important particularly in Bulgaria and Spain. Other aspects of the analysis also bear upon the understanding of social capital such as parental advice, access to information, and practices and expectations of reciprocity. The data does not allow to fully test hypotheses developed in the conceptualisations of the leading scholars of social capital. This paper attempts to outline the processes of formation and mobilisation of different forms of social capital by focusing on internal processes in the families, such as parental styles of assistance and young people’s agency in job search.

Following Edwards (2004), we define family social capital as the quality of relations of family members both inside and outside the family, which increase their access to resources and facilitate their agency to create and use resources. The paper starts with examining the dominant norms for parental support in the new conditions of liberalisation of social life. Then, using qualitative data from parental interviews

1 Families and Transitions in Europe (FATE) is a 9-country interdisciplinary study carried out in 2001-2004. Methodological details are available at http://www.fate.ac.uk.
mostly, the analysis focuses on the processes of creation and transmission of social capital depending on the parental styles of assistance. Here we present three case studies: the family as a network (bonding capital), the network of the family (bridging capital) and the family not mobilising social capital. In the conclusion an attempt is made to assess the relevance of the concept for understanding family support for youth transitions and more broadly, its implications for generational relations in the family.

**Norms of family support for the young generation**

While family support for the young generation had been strong during communism, it became even more crucial under the conditions of post-communism when the previous clear-cut routes into employment collapsed and youth faced growing insecurity in educational outcomes and labour market entry. The FATE study showed that in Bulgaria it was an accepted norm for parents to provide as much support as they could, and as long as they could. This understanding is summed up in the words of a 60-year-old retired teacher, father of a university graduate: ‘How long would I support her? As long as my legs are strong and as long as my eyes see.’

Respondents among parents noted that gratuitous support from the older generation for the younger had always been a feature of Bulgarian families. At the same time they considered that with the regime change and growing insecurity young people now needed more support than their parents did when they were making their youth transitions. The mother of a young man, graduate of a secondary professional school, expressed a common belief:

*We did not need that much support from our parents at the time. It was easier for us. There were much less schools to choose from, and much more factories to work at. Now the young and their parents are left to fend for themselves* [mother, 38, accountant].

It was a shared belief among parents that in Bulgaria at the time of the survey the labour market was unfriendly toward young people. ‘There is so much unemployment now. If the family cannot find a job for the young person, he is lost’, a 42-year old hairdresser, mother of high school graduate explained. While only three parents in our sample had found the jobs their children worked in, using their own social contacts, many more were those who explained their children’s unemployment with the lack of family connections. Interviewees argued that the role of social connections had grown since the regime change. Both parents and young people considered that to get a well paying job in Bulgaria you needed ‘connections’.
Education, skills, personal qualities have no value on our market. Only connections matter [young man, 19, high school graduate].

We cannot help her find a job. All our friends and relatives are people like us. [father, engineer, 43].

By ‘connections’ our respondents commonly understood a vertical dependence – a patron-client relationship. They considered it as a prolongation of the practice from the past when high status (usually that of the party nomenclatura) was exchanged for goods and services provided by those placed lower on the social scale (Raychev, 2003). With the growing social inequalities under post-communism, these vertical exchanges are getting more difficult and less active. A lot of the horizontal links that existed during communism – for example between salespersons selling different kinds of deficit goods: citrus fruits and lamb meat, cement and tiles – are becoming obsolete, as market provision of such goods has grown in importance.

So what forms of social capital are being created and mobilized in Bulgarian families in order to assist young people’s transition from school to work?

**Forms of family social capital**

Following Coleman (1988), we make a distinction between the type of social capital garnished and mobilised within the family and the type of social capital built by family members but active outside the family. To examine the first, we look at the processes in the family as a network and for the second we study the networks of the family.

**The family as a network**

To illustrate this type of social capital in the family we examine the case of the Ivanovis. This is a three-generation household where our respondents were Daniela, 24-year-old university graduate, working as an English language teacher on a part-time basis and her parents: Dima (47, nurse) and Stoyan (51, technician). In the same flat there lived Dima’s parents who were 89 and 93. The parents counted two more members in the family: an elder son (27) a pilot living in Sofia, and a younger son (21) working as a waiter in Dubai. The family had not directly contributed to finding a job for their daughter – she was directly invited by her employer, having graduated the second best in her class. What the family did was to support her financially and emotionally while studying and with advice for her career plans. When she wanted to quit her university studies and go abroad with a
friend to work as au pair, both her parents and elder brother engaged in the discussion.

*I am glad that I discussed this option with them first. It looked very promising to go to the UK while everything here was so gloomy, grey... My mother and father naturally were afraid but what counted most was my brother’s opinion. He suggested that it was wiser to first finish the studies and then go wherever I wanted. And they were right, of course. My friend returned after two years, very disappointed* [Daniela, 24].

The whole family acts as a network of friends. Unlike Coleman’s proposition that there is a negative influence from the number of siblings in the family, the Ivanovis represent an example of the enriching role of siblings who help each other in difficult situations. It was the sister Daniela who searched and found a legitimate employment company on the Net, when the younger brother wanted to work abroad. It was the elder brother, thanks to his well-paid job, who gave the money needed for the younger brother to go to Dubai. The pilot expected discharge from the army and the father said in his interview that his three children were considering in such a situation to go abroad together.

The agency of the young was encouraged by the parental educational style, which the father defined as ‘negotiation’. In the words of the mother:

*We advise her but do not direct her. We cannot make decisions instead of her... We discuss everything together and then she does what she decides herself.* [Dima, 47].

The negotiation style is the one in which parents think that decisions should be made by the child while the parents have to provide information, advice and emotional support. These democratic relations encourage higher career aspirations in the young. Here parents see themselves as friends of their children, not as mentors or guardians. The norm of trust between generations is most explicit in the network family. Such a quality of relations acts as social capital in the way that encourages the formation of skills to negotiate and manage conflicts.

The role of the third generation was not discussed in the interviews with the Ivanovi family where the grandparents, due to their advanced age, were the ones whom the other two generations took care of. Instead of participating in discussions, they were important in the learning experience for the young – to take responsibility, to organise their time in consideration of others’ needs. In other families – a fifth of our sample was three-generation families - grandparents were more active, providing practical support with housework, as well as affection and advice. A young man said about his grandmother:
“She is a very intelligent person and very modern, too, though of great age. A very democratic woman, I can discuss any issue with her. Absolutely. She is a well-read, educated person” [young man, 23, university graduate].

In the Ivanovi family reciprocity was an unspoken but commonly practiced norm. Both parents stated that they also received help from their children – emotionally and practically. His family’s understanding was very important for Stoyan when he was unemployed for a year and had to take a job below his qualifications. Dima cited her children’s help with computer technology as indispensable. The Ivanovis are an example of the trend towards family becoming a supportive network — a ‘network family’ in which all individual members contribute to the creation and accumulation of social capital. The trust and reciprocity were highly appreciated by the young woman in the family:

Emotional support is the most important. Financial support is also important. But the most important thing is the relationship between parents and children. It is the foundation of many things… [Daniela, 24].

The Ivanovis were a rare case in the families interviewed in Bulgaria in having three children. The norm was two children and having one was more common than bringing up three. We should not make the assumption that it was only the large size of the family that acted as a form of social capital, however. There were smaller families who also had a democratic type of relations between generations, readily exchanging information and advice. We found evidence of this type of social capital in about a third of the families in our parental sample. Parents commonly defined their educational style as ‘diplomacy’, ‘negotiations’, and ‘friendly discussions’. One family where the father had a medium size enterprise, the mother was a housewife and the son was studying for an MA, seemed to reproduce Coleman’s ideal of a family with high social capital. The son claimed that he put all important decisions before the ‘family council’, and was expecting to reciprocate the help he had received from his parents by joining the family business upon completing his studies.

The network of the family

The Dimovis are an example of a family keeping a wide network of friends and relatives. The father Ivan, aged 60, is a retired teacher who works as a night guard in a small private company. His wife Maria, 59, is a retired clerk. We first interviewed the daughter in the family, Gergana, 24, who was a graduate of Russian language. At the time we interviewed the father, she had already left Bulgaria. The Dimovis had many contacts: relatives and friends in the village where the father came from, colleagues and parents from the school where he worked, and neighbours in the community in which they were currently living. The daughter also
had friends from the neighbourhood and the university. The networks of the father and daughter mixed mostly due to the father’s efforts to exercise control over his daughter’s peers. He also knew Gergana’s boyfriend and had funded their summer and winter holidays.

The social network of the family – other relatives, neighbours, friends and acquaintances – provided practical, financial and emotional support. One year after graduation from the university Gergana was again studying in a college in order to keep her student status and apply for a work permit in the UK. It was the family’s social contacts that provided advice for this career step. Ivan explained why he had helped his daughter leave the country:

*I know that the light and happiness will leave our home with her. But why should I keep her here to serve some bullhead with a lot of money? You know what the Bulgarian businessmen are like – they exploit young people by making them work long hours and paying them next to nothing...I am sure she will succeed there. I have arranged everything - a friend helped her get a visa and organized the whole trip... And we have another contact there to transfer her student visa into a business one* [Ivan, 60].

Gergana’s emigration was not only a conscious strategy of the whole family but required the mobilisation of a wide network outside. It was a source of information about the necessary documents for the student visa and advice for the relevant behaviour during the trip and after that. The undertaking required a lot of money and since the members of the network did not have enough to provide themselves, two friends served as guaranties for the father to take a loan from a private bank. On her part, the young woman also acted in accordance with the family strategy and spoke highly of her father.

Unlike the Dimovi family, the Ivanovis did not act as a horizontal democratic network because there was a strong concentration of power (‘knowledge’, ‘advice’) in the older generation. We define this style as protective, which is linked to parents’ efforts to influence their children’s educational and work career toward a choice the parents thought was right and to protect the young from risks and insecurities. Ivan compared the difficult parental role to a gardener trimming a peach tree and summed up his belief in the following way:

*It is the parents who can direct their children in their transitions. It is the parents who should lead the children in their studies. It is the parents who can find them a proper job* [Ivan, 60].

The protective parenting style was spread among a third of the Bulgarian sample while it was rare in the other countries in the FATE study. In Bulgaria many parents tried to compensate for the lack of institutional opportunities by a sacrificial parental support, limiting their own consumption, taking additional jobs, selling property. The interference and control over offspring’s decisions were seen as a
strategy to diminish their chances of making mistakes. Parents’ assistance included not only choice of schools, but also employers and even friends. A mother in our sample who had stopped her daughter enrolling at a university in another city as being ‘too far away from home’, insisted that her daughter met with friends only at home when she was present. The mother offered them food and participated in their talks and was proud to announce: ‘I am a Mother Theresa to them’.

The protective style with a strong authoritarian inclination was typical for the two families of Turkish minority origin that participated in the Bulgarian study.

‘We, parents, know better as we have made the same mistakes when young. We have the right to set the borders and the children are obliged to keep to them’ [mother, 41, seamstress].

The two Turkish families are interesting in having a type of social capital with ‘strong ties’ (Granovetter, 1973) on an ethnic base. They kept a closed network inside the ethnic community and most of their friends and relatives lived in the same suburb near the city. One of the families had tried to emigrate to Turkey 15 years ago but could not settle down and came back after two years. The explanation the mother gave was the lack of social support at the new place. Her own parents had remained in Bulgaria and there was no one to care for the children while the parents were struggling to establish themselves.

The role of grandparents although forming a separate household comes up as important here, in the network capital of the family as well. When living in villages, they support their children’s families with fresh and preserved fruits, vegetables and meat. The circulation of food between the village and the city was traditional for Bulgarian society in the patriarchal past till the mid 20th century. The constant deficiencies of the centrally planned economy during communism raised the importance of self-provision and subsistence production in households. The market reforms in the last decade of the 20th century did not put an end to this practice but rather turned small-scale subsistence production into an effective survival strategy (Kovacheva, 2002). Besides the agricultural home produce distributed among a wider circle of relatives, the families supported each other by taking care of grandchildren. Many parents had received such help when they themselves were young parents and it was a common expectation that they would do the same for their own grandchildren. Although with the development of the market economy in the country private services also became available while public kindergartens still existed at affordable prices, taking care of small children by grandparents was accepted as normal and desired for both sides. It was perceived as mutually advantageous both financially and emotionally.
**The family not mobilising social capital**

In the Bulgarian sample of the FATE study there was another type of family that was unable or unwilling to mobilise their social capital. We will analyse the case of the Zlatevis – a family consisting of mother, 52, on a disability pension; father, 58, a bus driver; son, 19, unemployed; and a grandchild, 5, who is the son of their daughter, 23, a single mother currently working illegally in the Netherlands. We first interviewed the son, Branimir, who had a high school diploma for an airplane mechanic but could not find a job matching his qualifications. He did not look for another job as he expected to be taken into the army for obligatory military service but was not called up on the first two regular dates. He started working for a construction company in the summer without a contract but lost 10 kilos of weight and left the job receiving half of the money he was promised. In his interview he said that his latest plan was to apply to study law at university, but meanwhile would finish a training course in catering and would look for a job as a waiter. Branimir was an example of a ‘yoyo’ transition (Walther et al, 1999) in our sample largely pushed into it by the failure of institutions to fulfil their role. The airplane factory for which the vocational school prepared its graduates was laying off a third of its workforce and delaying payments for the rest; the army was also reducing its staff and postponing the recruitment of young men for their 9-month military service; and the labour office offered neither jobs for young men with such qualifications nor advice about a career plan.

The parents in the family followed what we defined as an ‘independent’ style of support for their son. They felt unprepared to provide guidance in a situation where the state seemed to be falling apart. Many of our respondents when asked about the forms of state support their child had received in education or in job searches, asked in turn: ‘State support? What support?’ Danko, Branimir’s father, went further, answering: ‘State support? What state?’ He was very bitter about the current reforms and considered that the state had withdrawn from its responsibilities to the young. He blamed the state not only for the lack of support for young people’s transitions but more strongly for the slow development of the economy and the resulting high youth unemployment. He saw it responsible for severing the links between schools and enterprises. Also the state did not provide enough information about the types of education that were in the market and what their job prospects were.

Danko described his own parenting style as ‘non interference’. He thought his son had made the wrong decision to wait for the army to call him and not to apply to the university upon graduation as many of his schoolmates did.

*Well, this is mistake, his mistake. I do not reproach him, although this is mistake. But, people learn from their mistakes. One has to err, to burn himself,*
before he understands that he has made a mistake. Otherwise nobody can convince
him that this is wrong... We also have made mistakes and have not listened to the
adults. As they say, wisdom cannot be poured down into you via a funnel... [Danko,
58].

While Danko interpreted his ‘independent style’ as a conscious choice, for the
mother Nenka this was an imposed strategy. She said that what they could offer to
their son was only emotional support because they as parents did not feel
knowledgeable enough to propose ready-made decisions. The circumstances had
changed so much that their own experience could not offer points of reference for
their children’s transitions. Nenka considered that they lacked ‘contacts’ to provide
useful information for their son. The factory where she had worked previously was
closed and many of her former colleagues were themselves unemployed. Their
daughter was staying abroad pressed by the circumstances – ‘only to send money
home for her son’ and did not recommend emigration to her brother. The parents had
tried to help Branimir join the army and had gone to the regional headquarters but
could not find ‘connections’.

The independent parenting style was common for about a third of our
respondents in Bulgaria. For most of them this was an imposed decision, as they saw
their former networks dissipate or become disfunctional because of the changing
circumstances in Bulgarian society vis-a-vis education, the economy or even global
influences. Many families felt that they lacked enough resources, educational,
financial and social, to influence young people’s decisions. The two families from
the Roma minority in the country are another example of this style, the ‘choice’ of
which was explained by the parents’ admittance of an inability to find a successful
strategy in the new situation. While the Roma parents had all finished school up to
the 8th grade and had worked in state enterprises, though currently unemployed, two
of the sons were semi-illiterate and had no work experience. The mothers wished to
have helped their sons finish schooling but both failed. Similarly, they had tried to
speak with officials in the labour offices to help their children get jobs but had also
failed to succeed. Their ethnic contacts were not effective in finding jobs for their
young, as there was high unemployment in Roma communities all over the country.
The family social capital was mobilized for survival in circumstances of grave
poverty rather than to secure the success of youth transitions from school to work.

Discussion

The concept of social capital is a useful tool for studying the role of family
resources in young people’s transitions from school to work. Analysing the internal
processes in the family, the values and norms of communication between family
members and in establishing and activating contacts outside the family reveals an important form of support in young people’s efforts to manage modern life. Rather than measuring a level of social capital by devising universal indicators independent of the social context, we tried to examine different understandings and practices of social capital creation and accumulation in families with different resources.

In Bulgaria where for several generations the families have relied upon two full-time earners it would be difficult to use the concept to argue for a traditional model of the family. High public expectations of the state have not yet made it feasible to turn the idea of social capital into an excuse for cuts in welfare spending. Rather, the setback here is the widespread understanding of social contacts as ‘connections’, as particularistic networks that undermine meritocratic principles in the job search process. Faced with radical social restructuring, persisting economic difficulties and growing insecurity, families garner bonds of trust, support and reciprocity to secure the successful transition of the young generation into adulthood.

In FATE we established three styles of parental assistance, which were linked to three different types of social capital strategies: the family as a network, the network of the family and (voluntary or imposed) an inability to mobilise family social capital. The mode of social capital in which the family forms a network, which acts as social capital for its individual members, is becoming very important in the present social context of rapid social change and the opening of the country to the European and global influences. Under conditions of a growing individualisation it stimulates the formation of self-identity for the young, the required ‘identity capital’ (Cote, 2002). The second form – the network of family friends and relatives - is also an effective strategy for supporting young people’s transitions from school to work. It serves as social capital, providing information and contacts with employers and other institutions. These two types of social capital are not mutually exclusive, although in the first we found a tendency to close the family circle in itself and underestimate the usefulness of ‘weaker’ ties with friends and members of the community. The negotiating style, while highly advantageous to the young in developing useful skills in the modern risk society, might turn the family into a closed circle unresponsive to the community. The danger of the networking type in Bulgaria is the neglect of trends towards the individualisation of family members. The third strategy – the denial of the use of, or inability to use and accumulate, social capital - is forced by the collapse of institutions in the community and the state. It brings about a lot of risks and opportunities – it stimulates the individualisation of the young, the early taking up of responsibility and the young might adapt better than their parents to the changing situation. But they might also be left with few resources to combat unfriendly labour markets and insecure educational paths. This strategy raises the importance of young people’s agency,
similar to that in the ‘negotiation’ style but in a context of greater structural constraints.

Although we cannot claim representativeness for our data, nor do we want to quantify qualitative data, it seems clear that family resources influence parents’ philosophies and their strategies to create and mobilise social capital. Class was a distinctive factor affecting parental strategies. Educational level, the character of the job and the income it yielded, together with current employment status, determined the social position of the parents and the structural constraints they met when trying to assist their offspring’s transitions. While practicing all three styles, the most common among working class parents was the one encouraging the child’s autonomy. Often parents felt that this was an imposed decision and detested the limitations in providing help. The protective style was most typical for the group with medium resources. Middle status parents in medium-to-low-income service jobs tried to compensate for the lack of resources by strongly interfering in their children’s choices accompanied by high expectations. The parents with the greatest resources in our sample, those belonging to the emerging upper middle class, expressed preferences for a negotiating style, where issues were discussed openly in the family, the parents’ role was to provide advice, information and contacts, while the decision was taken by the young person. Clearly, not only economic capital was important. Those parents with more cultural and financial capital could provide better guidance for their children.

Gender also influenced parental strategies to support their offspring in their transitions from education to employment. Fathers were expected to be more distant, reserved and concentrate on providing for the young financially. While fathers had a great interest in their children’s transitions, this was manifested only in ‘important’ decisions, while the everyday practical and emotional support was mothers’ obligation. Mothers were more emphatic, readily providing emotional support. Mothers seemed to be more involved in negotiating, serving as mediators within the family: between the young and the father, and outside - between the young and their schoolteachers, employers and state officials (in the army and labour offices). They often helped their children overcome mistakes they had made. Mothers also carried the main responsibility for the housework while their grown up children lived in the parental home. Ethnicity was another factor, which rendered specificity in parenting strategies. The two Roma families had the most limited resources at their disposal to support their sons and were unable to use their social capital. The two Turkish families applied a protective style and managed to mobilise network capital to ease their children’s transitions to employment. The four minority families were Muslim but did not attribute their choice of parenting style to their religion (nor did parents from the Bulgarian majority). A more distinctive feature of these families was that they were more traditional in expecting their offspring to live close and care for them in return. The norms of reciprocity, which existed in all styles, were explicit in
the interviews with Roma parents. As a mother from the Roma minority put it: ‘No Roma son will leave his mother alone when old.’

The role of the family in young people’s transitions is clearly important – with social support provided within the context of the family and with the access to other social networks external to the family. The family as a network gives more advantages to young people when it is open to relations with friends and acquaintances and is engaged in making friends and social networks. Parents can act as effective counsellors to the young, not in imposing ‘clever’ decisions but in a democratic way. Stimulating the young to form modern skills such as negotiation, reflexivity and flexibility. It is the family that remains most effective in forming the values of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity necessary for a thriving civil society.

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