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Petr Macek¹, Stanislav Ježek¹, and Alexander T. Vazsonyi²

Abstract

The paper introduces a set of four studies focused on adolescents in the Czech Republic. In the first part, authors reflect on the cultural background, the political, social, and psychological factors that have had influence on several generations of adolescents in the period of the communist totalitarian regime. They also describe the social changes brought by the democratization of Czech society since the early 1990s. Second part of the paper reviews the life and changes in the behavior of Czech adolescents over the past 20 years. Based the findings of three studies representing three cohorts of adolescents (1992, 2001, 2010), it is argued that current Czech adolescents are becoming more like their Western peers. Compared with the 1990s adolescents, the current cohort is more realistic in their expectations, oriented more on achievement, social pleasure, and material values. Their relationship to formal authorities is weaker; especially, the relationships with parents and teachers are more liberal.

Keywords

Czech adolescents, social change

¹Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

²University of Kentucky, Lexington, USA

Corresponding Author:

Petr Macek, Institute for Research on Children, Youth and Family, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic.

Email: macek@fss.muni.cz

This special issue probably differs from other special issues in that it is not bound by one particular topic. It is the result of a collaborative between Macek and Vazsonyi (who had the opportunity to spend a semester at Masaryk University as a Masaryk-Fulbright Distinguished Chair in 2010) that resulted in an open call for a Special Issue of *The Journal of Early Adolescence* to spotlight Czech scholarship on adolescents and adolescent development. The Special Issue brings together a set of papers focused on research on adolescence in the Czech Republic. There are currently two main organizations that target research on adolescence, namely, The Institute for the Research of Children, Youth, and Family at Masaryk University in Brno and The Psychological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Thus, the authors of the papers part of this issue are researchers at these two institutes that, for a long time, have been involved in longitudinal research of psychosocial adolescent development, health and social risks in the development of children and youth, the impact of new media on the lives of children and adolescents, and school-related issues in the general adolescent population and in specific groups of gifted and disabled adolescents.

The four papers that are part of the special issue are a nice reflection of ongoing work on adolescents at both organizations. The first paper describes the developmental patterns of experienced fears in early adolescence based on longitudinal data. The second paper reports on the different types of anti-social behavior in association with family context, an analysis of data from a representative sample of Czech adolescents from urban areas. The next study connects two topics that are very relevant for today's adolescents: Their sexual behavior and the influence of new media on their everyday life. Also the topic of the fourth paper—perfectionism in gifted students—represents a current and significant issue among the youth. It shows that in a society that applauds achievement and self-regulation, perfectionism may play both adaptive and maladaptive role depending on the specific conditions and events in an adolescent's life.

It is the juxtaposition of the specific cultural, historical, social, and situational determinants of psychological development that is common feature and the purpose of this special issue. Adolescents in the Czech Republic represent a specific culture-bearing unit defined not only by a geographic region but also by mutual interaction, common language, and communication (Chick, 2001; Naroll, 1970). In their today's lives, Czech adolescents participate in the global Euro-American culture, but, at the same time, they belong to the Central European region where they look for their national identity. They share many common features with their peers from other Western European countries. Obviously, they also have many characteristics originating from the specific historical experience mediated by their parents,

teachers, and other significant adults who lived a large part of their lives in a totalitarian communist regime. If we were to try to characterize the purpose of this special issue, we could say that we would like to show how the Czech adolescents are “basically alike and excitingly different” in the European context (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999b, p. 165; see also Goosens, 2006; Macek, 2003).

Cultural and Historical Background of Young Czechs

Is there anything interesting or special about current adolescents in the Czech Republic? Not at first sight; they do not differ much from their peers from other European countries and the globalization trend is clearly evident in adolescent behavior and lifestyle (Arnett, 2010). To a degree, adolescents from all over the world communicate via information technologies, use the same information resources, listen to the same music, and buy clothes from the same companies. They find new friends on social networks, define their peer groups in new ways, and establish close relationships with similar-minded peers (and adults) elsewhere in the world (Arnett, 2002; Larson & Mortimer, 2000). We suppose also that they argue with their parents over the same issues, maybe only communication strategies are a bit different. However, at the same time, diversity in adolescence and different paths to adulthood are evident, too (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). This is based not only on the growing economic inequality of families (Kerckhoff, 2002) but also on the specific cultural background, social norms, and rules typical for the society the adolescent lives in. Moreover, diversity can be related to specific historical and social events and changes that determine adolescent life in terms of future expectations and personal plans and goals, identity formation, or development of self-efficacy and control beliefs (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000). For these reasons, it is useful to closer examine adolescents’ lives in a particular country, in particular, social, political, and cultural conditions, such as adolescents in the Czech Republic. The fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the resulting political and economic reorganizations during the 1990s dramatically influenced everyday life of these countries’ citizens. Such instances of social upheaval have raised questions concerning how young people are affected socially and psychologically by societal changes (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000; Piquart & Silbereisen, 2005). However, it is difficult to demonstrate the direct influence of social changes on the individual. Just as we cannot control all personal, situational, and interpersonal influences that are important for the psychosocial

development of youth, we cannot simply predict the psychological consequences of societal changes either. Moreover, according to the paradox of revolution, changes at socio-psychological levels are much slower than those at the political-economic level (Marková, 2004).

Briefly, let us take a closer look at the historical and social context in which today's Czech adolescents live. This country had experienced various periods of social changes and discontinuity in the past. Historically, the Czech region belongs to countries sharing the European Christian cultural heritage. Czechoslovakia (established in October 1918) was an industrial and democratic European country until 1939. After World War II, Czechoslovakia became a communist country dependent on the Soviet Union, which affected the everyday lives of all age groups. The official ideology between 1948 and 1990 was based on an atheistic worldview and the Marxist notion of collectivism. However, this form of collectivism was anonymous, disrespecting the interests of individual people. The majority of adolescents and young people put up with massification (Macek & Rabušic, 1994). Not only economy but also human destinies were centrally planned and controlled. The success of one's life career was determined by political loyalty. Among the unquestioned consequences of totalitarianism, the profound demoralization of citizens, learned helplessness, and undemocratic thinking and distrust in institutions have been generally diagnosed as being the most significant. This then also had had a profound impact on the lives of adolescents growing up at that time (Klicperová, Feierbend, & Hofstetter, 1997).

Adolescents During Times of Social Change

This situation changed at the end of the 1980s in the context of political changes and democratic pressures and processes taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. It is remarkable that Czech students were those who initiated the so-called Velvet Revolution in November 1989. This event started a new way of political pluralism and democracy in Czech society (Macek & Polášková, 2006).

Even though there is not enough evidence from empirical research, we have every right to suppose that a number of Czechs in middle and late adulthood (including parents, teachers, and other important adults in the lives of adolescents) experienced their own identity crises during the time of social change and redefined their previous lives in many respects. A lot of people had to rearrange their personal values and choose a new life goals and perspectives. There was an actual "social moratorium" offering a great chance to experiment—the legal environment was extremely vague, the tolerance to breaking social norms was high, a number of people were very optimistic in

their view of the future. Similarly, the first “post-totalitarian” generation of Czech adolescents at the beginning of the 1990s perceived social changes extremely positively, because they represented personal opportunities and challenges for them (e.g., getting a good education, the possibility to travel and live abroad, and political and ideological freedom; Macek et al., 1998). The peaceful split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia (January 1, 1993) was the result of the effort to look for new national identities of Slovak and Czech politicians; yet, for a majority of young Czechs, this new fact meant more likely intensifying their feeling of Europeanism.

In the second half of 1990s, the situation changed significantly due to the economic and political crisis. Sheer optimism was replaced by slight pessimism, the feeling of instability rose considerably. The period of imaginary moratorium was concluded with the forthcoming accession to the European Union, and the Czech society found itself more likely at a stage of developing “identity achievement” when exploration was clearly aimed at accepting long-term commitments. Moreover, social possibilities acquired a much more realistic and specific shape (Macek, 2011). The Czech Republic became a full-fledged member of the European Union in May, 2004. Therefore, over the past decade, the social status of young Czechs had become genuinely equal in the European context. They can freely travel, work, and study all over Europe and have the same opportunities for personal development as their peers from other countries. What was perceived by the previous generations as a positive social change and new opportunities is simply taken for granted by the young generation. Czech youth today experience great personal freedom but, at the same time, feel more uncertainty and unpredictability in their future.

Adolescents in the Czech Republic Today

At present, the Czech Republic has about 10.5 million people. Adolescents (demographically the group of 10-25-year-olds) make up 21% of the total population. The Czech Republic is an ethnically homogeneous country. The majority of adolescents are Czechs (94% of the total population), while there are 2% Slovaks. Other more frequent minorities are formed by Ukrainians, Romans, Vietnamese, Germans, and Poles. Although the total number of minority members is small, the number of immigrants, especially young people from Eastern Europe and Asia, is increasing.

Early adolescence is usually related to pubertal changes. The mean age of menarche for Czech girls is comparable with Western European countries and occurs before the age of 13; boys mature a few months later (Macek, 2003). Similarly, as in other advanced Euro-American countries, the period of adolescence tends to be extended. In the Czech Republic, we can also

identify the separate developmental stage labeled “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Macek, Bejček, & Vaníčková, 2007). If we look at adolescence as a gradual progress through specific stages on the path from childhood into adulthood, the two important milestones and “rites of passage” are the ages of 15 and 18.

The age of 15 marks the end of compulsory school education (but only 2% of Czech adolescents do not proceed further to study at secondary school). It enables the adolescents to be employed with certain limitations related to the work of youth. At this age, sexual contact and intercourse with another person becomes legal. For young Czechs, the age of 18 means full legal responsibility. They gain the right to vote, can get married, are legally allowed to obtain a driver’s license for car, can be fully employed with no limitations, and can buy and consume alcoholic beverages (for more details, see Macek, Lacinová, & Polášková, 2011; Macek & Rabušic, 1994).

Considering beliefs and values, most Czech adolescents are quite liberal and tolerant (e.g., regarding drugs, abortion, sexual behavior). A large majority hold no religious beliefs at all. According to the data from 2008, only about 14% of contemporary adolescents declared themselves as religious (Rabušic & Hamanová, 2009). The majority of these were Christian (83% Roman Catholic, 4% Protestant). The number of practicing Christians has not been growing significantly over the past years; yet, there is an increase in various subcultures and religious and interest groups. In this respect, it is appropriate to add that very often, adolescents do not seek abstract ideas and values but rather choose a particular reference group and an authority they can trust (Macek et al., 2011).

Many cultural specifics of adolescent life stem from the education system and school-related activities, as well as the main daily activity of adolescents. To a much lesser degree and less distinctly, we see differences also in psychological characteristics (Goosens, 2006; Nurmi, 2001). According to the results of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the overall performance of Czech education was at a good level. However, the problem is that education is often based on passive perception of knowledge and information. It is necessary to develop students’ active approach toward their own education, critical thinking, communication skills, and creative performance, which, hopefully, will later lead to a self-responsible and mature civic and career behavior (Rabušicová, 1991). Another criticism related to education and school system is directed at the discrimination of Roma children and adolescents. The Czech education system is not well-prepared to educate ethnic and racial minorities. Minority discrimination, which presents some challenges, stems from the fact that some children cannot speak Czech well enough to attend “regular” school and are then occasionally misdiagnosed as persons with a mental handicap.

In 1995 and 1998, a survey was conducted repeatedly in which pupils and students assessed school atmosphere and their own schoolwork. The results showed that with pupils' and students' growing age, the evaluation of school environment becomes worse, especially concerning its democratic character and perceived support from teachers (Mareš & Ježek, 2002). Adolescents often agreed that nobody assumes responsibility either for school environment or for classes. This was the most evident for students of vocational secondary schools, who still prevail in the adolescent population. In this study, the key role of teacher-student relationship was confirmed—A majority of the students surveyed did not describe their teachers as helpful and open persons who accept criticism and respect their opinions. However, they simultaneously appreciated that teachers believe in their abilities. These results showed that teachers perceive students much more as their subordinates than possible partners for a dialogue. Obviously, they cannot be denied good intentions—to pass on to pupils what they regard as important and necessary, as well as persuade them that they want the best for them. Such intentions are perceived and appreciated by students. However, what students miss is the respect for their opinion and manifested needs. It was also clear in the international comparison that Czech adolescents do not see their teachers as carefully listening partners in a discussion to such a degree as their peers from countries with a long-established democratic tradition (Flanagan et al., 1996). At the same time, it must be said that the surveyed students did not perceive themselves as very active and they did not assess their own ability to cooperate very positively either. They did report that they would like their teachers to respect their opinions and ideas, yet, simultaneously, they did not want to give up the “protective arm” of their school. In their opinion, their school should take care of them or at least cooperate with them when looking for a job. This opinion was characteristic of adolescents of the 1990s. On the one hand, they expressed their need of freedom, making their own choice, and independence at various levels (individual, group, organization); on the other hand, they were held back by inexperience and insecurity, connected with the reaction to the freedom of choice, from taking over the responsibility for their own actions (Macek, 2003).

Czech Adolescents in the European Context in the 1990s

There exist only very few studies documenting the behavioral and psychosocial characteristics of Czech adolescents. One is the international study EURONET conducted in the early 1990s (for more details see Alsaker &

Flammer, 1999a). Twelve samples of adolescents (aged from 14 to 16) represented two groups of European countries: There were five Western European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Norway, and German-speaking and French-speaking parts of Switzerland) and six Central and East European samples from postcommunist countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and Russia). The sample from the United States was added for comparison. Even though the EURONET study did not include representative national samples, it was relatively broadly conceived offering international comparison in adolescents' daily lives. More specifically, the research was focused on adolescents' daily activities (Flammer, Alsaker, & Noack, 1999), their future expectations (Nurmi, Liiceanu, & Liberska, 1999), perceived control in different domains of life (Grob & Flammer, 1999), and coping strategies, self-esteem, and subjective well-being (Grob, Stetsenko, Sabatier, Botcheva, & Macek, 1999). The basic question was whether it is possible to trace cultural differences between European countries. It was hypothesized that adolescents from postcommunist countries will differ more from those from other European countries (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999a).

The differences between the postcommunist countries and Western European countries were only partially confirmed. Findings showed that there was a clear gap between the four Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, and Russia) and Western European and Scandinavian countries, especially in terms of daily activities and values. Czech and Hungarian adolescents, who represented the Central European region, were "in-between" in a number of the examined characteristics or resembled their West European peers to a greater extent (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999a; Macek, 1999). It was also quite evident in examining the importance of future goals and anticipations. Future expectations and interests reflect subjective motives and wishes, as well as possibilities offered by the given society/culture. Implicitly, they also give evidence about adolescents' value orientation (Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi et al., 1999). It was typical of adolescents from Western European and Scandinavian countries that they emphasized the importance of goals related to their future professional career, education, and spending leisure time (especially boys). In contrast, adolescents from Eastern Europe stressed more material goals (money), success, and prestige; furthermore, they emphasize goals connected to usefulness and responsibility (to parents, homeland). Czech adolescents did not quite belong to either cluster of countries. They presented a great importance of education and future career; however, they did not place so much emphasis on their leisure activities. They also rated positive relationships with people and wish to be useful in society as important (see Figure 1). More concretely, it was manifested as placing

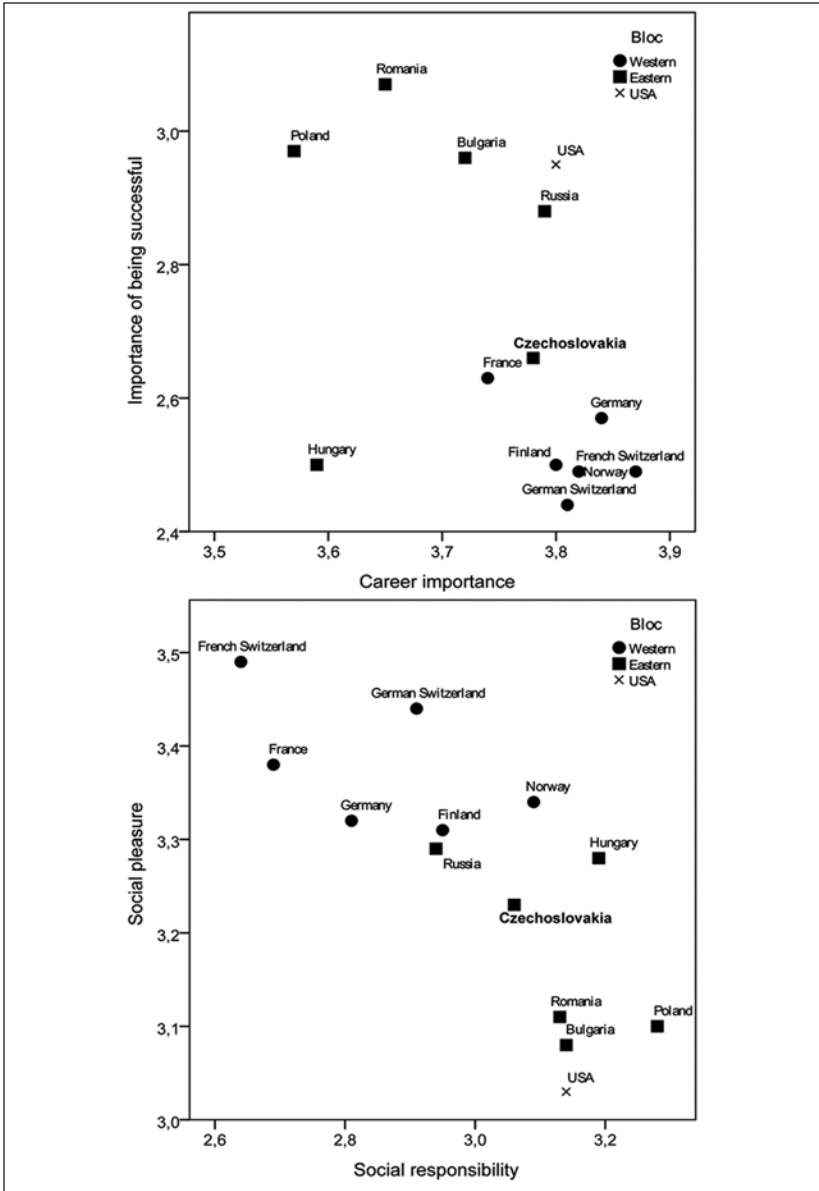


Figure 1. The position of Czechoslovak adolescents between Eastern- and Western-bloc countries in terms of four value orientations based on the importance of personal goals.

emphasis on partner and family life, on taking care of aging parents, and also the need to receive approval and acknowledgment from others (Macek, 1999; Nurmi et al., 1999).

A similar picture pertained to adolescent-control beliefs in three domains of life—personality development, future workplace, and school environment. The position of Czech adolescents was not exceptional here either; again from the perspective of the west-east classification, they ranked “in-between.” They most resembled the French as well as Germans, Hungarians, and German-speaking Swiss (Macek, 1999). All these samples were characterized by the belief about a greater influence on personality development and future career and, simultaneously, by little faith in their influence on school classes. Such differences are understandable; assessing one’s own influence on school is a much more concrete and current matter than assessing the more or less future influence on one’s workplace (Grob & Flammer, 1999).

According to the daily activities profile on a regular school day, Czech adolescents most resembled their peers from Germany, Switzerland, Finland, and Norway, who are similarly loaded by school activities, that is, length of classes, home preparation for school, and time spent on the way to/from school. From Eastern Europeans, they differed most in their having more free time and also having less homework (Macek, 1999).

The area of life in which Czech adolescents were most similar to their peers from other postcommunist countries (above all Hungarians, but also Poles and Bulgarians) concerned daily hassles (Lazarus, 1993). As opposed to adolescents from Western European and Scandinavian countries, they were confronted with more problems with money, preserving their own privacy, with their own health, and, in the first place, they had more problems at school. A hypothetical explanation for a higher occurrence of problems at school can be found in a different atmosphere and conditions of school life in postcommunist countries (prevailing distance between teacher and pupil, emphasis on discipline and complying with requirements, ongoing transformation of education and school system, and increasing requirements for independent and self-responsible behavior; see Csapo, 1994; Macek & Rabušic, 1994).

Even though we can say that adolescents from all countries felt good, the mean level of subjective well-being was above the theoretical average indicated by the scale (Grob et al., 1999). Czechs proved to be a specific sample. Their first uniqueness was the generally lowest score of life satisfaction and self-esteem. With the exception of Hungarians, they significantly differed from all other countries. This result did not mean that they were dissatisfied with their lives or that they assessed themselves negatively, but they were less satisfied with their lives and themselves than their peers from other countries.

An entirely different picture was offered by the results in the case of the variable of life-reality acceptance and positive attitude to life—Czech adolescents had the highest score of all respondents here (Macek, 1999). In other words, contrary to adolescents from other transforming postcommunist countries, Czechs in the early 1990s were characteristic of current realism (they humbly accepted the current life situation and took things as they were). Nevertheless, their anticipations of a desirable life standard were very high; the criterion for comparison was the life of their peers in the neighboring Germany or Austria. From this point of view, they were less satisfied with their current lives and were very self-critical. That was also manifested by a lower reported level of self-esteem (in comparison with other countries).

As a whole, the international comparison from 1992 showed that Czech adolescents do not differ considerably from their peers from other European countries. As is mentioned in general conclusions of the EURONET study, Czech adolescents “did not fall far from average” (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999a, p. 167). Obviously, there is not such a thing as an average-European adolescent, but as we already mentioned, it was the Czechs and Hungarians who showed being “in-between” between Western European and Eastern European culture as real Central Europeans. More specifically, they were similar to their closest adolescent neighbors—Germans and Hungarians. Interestingly enough, it was these two countries that have been most interrelated historically with the Czech countries and have a similar cultural background in many aspects. Germans resembled Czechs especially in the daily activities profile (school attendance, leisure time, dating) and in the frequency of daily hassles; on the other hand, Hungarians are similar in their self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and well-being. What distinguished Czechs from Western European neighbors was a different experience of the current life situation. They had similar future expectations in many domains of life, but they usually experienced a greater discrepancy between reality and wishes. This discrepancy can be, on the one hand, motivating for their self-development, but, on the other hand, stressful and decreasing their emotional well-being (Higgins, 1989; Macek, 1999).

Social Changes Over the Past 20 Years Among Czech Youth

Unfortunately, in the years to follow, such an extensive intercultural research of European adolescents has never been repeated. However, if we focus only on Czech adolescents, the EURONET study (with the same methods and in comparable samples) has been replicated two more times—in 2001 and 2010. Therefore, we have comparable data from three samples, representing three

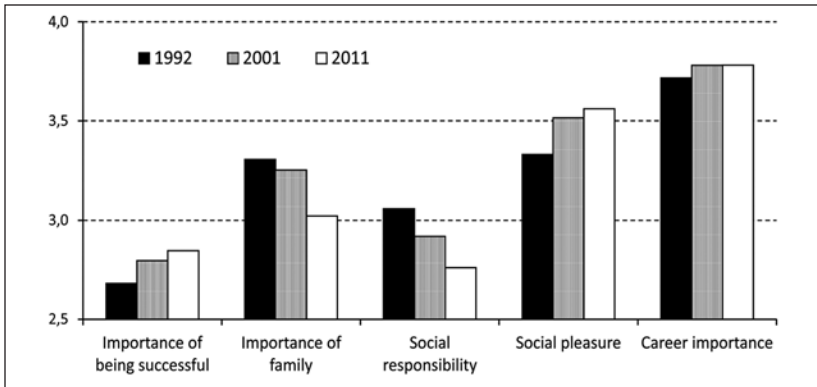


Figure 2. The development of five value orientations: Cohort means from 1992 to 2011.

different cohorts. The first one is the post-totalitarian generation described above, the second one is a generation of adolescents on the threshold of the new millennium, who spent their childhood in the period of turbulent societal changes, and the third one represents the generation of current adolescents, who have no direct experience with the previous political regime and who have spent all their lives in freedom and democracy. In general, the changes bring Czech adolescents more close to their Western peers from 1992. For example, the previously described value orientations have changed more toward success, social pleasure, and career, and away from family and social responsibility (see Figure 2).

A more detailed comparison of two cohorts of Czech adolescents (1992 and 2001) has already been published (Macek, 2003, 2011), and a study reporting results from the third sample is under preparation (Macek, 2013). Now, we will concentrate only on some shifts and changes that have occurred over the past 20 years. First, current Czech adolescents differ from previous generations especially by different personal experiences. What was appreciated in the early 1990s by young people as new possibilities—for example, freedom of opinions and attitudes, possibility of good-quality education, traveling abroad, space for self-realization, and so on—is viewed by current adolescents as an everyday reality, possibly, even taken for granted. The characteristics accompanying the life in today's Europe have also become common attributes of their lives (e.g., development of information technologies, globalization of culture, relativization of traditional values, vague identity, postponement of parenting, etc.). The lifestyle of the current Czech youth in the past decade has been characteristic of a relatively high degree of

individual free choice; however, it is also accompanied with a higher degree of personal and social insecurity (Macek, 2011; Sak & Saková, 2004). Crucial change in the lives of Czech adolescents was brought about by new informational technologies. Their influence was captured by the EURONET research only marginally; yet, the comparison of the three examined cohorts is illustrative. In the 1992 study, there was hardly any work with the computer reported by Czech adolescents, and it was not on the list of examined adolescents' daily activities in the international comparison either. Nine years later (2001), Czech adolescents reported spending on average 34 minutes at the computer screen on a school day, while in 2010/2011 it was already 101 minutes (Macek, 2013). These results correspond with the recent data from other studies according to which the Internet and other information technologies strongly determine the lifestyles of current Czech adolescents. The Internet is used by 93% of Czech adolescents aged 12 to 18 years (Lupač & Sládek, 2008). Czech adolescents spend on average approximately 12 hours online per week (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011); older adolescents spend somewhat more time online than younger ones (Šmahel & Konečný, 2007). Similar to the other countries in Europe, mobile phones are widespread among Czech adolescents—99% reported using a mobile phone.

The time spent at the computer and new media should be seen in relation to adolescents' other activities. The more they sit at the computer, the less they sleep and also spent less time at school and doing their homework. Despite some myths, it has not been confirmed that time spent at the computer would negatively correlate with time dedicated to sports or reading books (Macek, 2013). Furthermore, we looked for an answer to the question whether the current adolescent generation is the same, from the perspective of future goals and anticipations, as the aforementioned "post-totalitarian" generation from the early 1990s. In other words, we tried to find out indirectly whether the past period of societal changes has led to the change of adolescents' value orientation.

The comparison of analogical data of three cohorts shows some shifts. The current sample compared with sample from the 1992 rated higher importance to spending free time with friends, getting good education, and the goal to earn a lot of money. On the other hand, current adolescents rated lower the importance of their wish to be useful for their country, have good relations with others, or to have children of their own. In the case of future parenting, we found a shift in the presumed age when it should take place—The 1992 generation planned to have the first child at the age of 24; the present generation wants to become parents mostly in their thirties. These results correspond with the current data on parenting of young Czechs: The mean age of the birth of the first child has risen over the past two decades demonstrably,

and, today, almost 50% of children are born to mothers more than 27 years of age (Macek et al., 2011).

With regard to the frequency of daily hassles, it has slightly increased over the past 20 years—adolescents of today have more problems with parents, peers, and also with a possibility to sports. Despite that, if we look at these data in absolute numbers, the current adolescent respondents do not see their lives as very problematic either. This finding also corresponds with the assessment of life satisfaction and subjective well-being—in these characteristics of Czech adolescents, there have been no significant changes over the past 20 years (Macek, 2013). At the beginning of the 1990s, the one characteristic we chose as the most descriptive of Czech adolescents was their high level of interpersonal dependency, especially on authorities. Common experiences with adolescents and the results of our research show that this dependency on adult authorities has weakened. Besides the increasing importance of autonomy, an increase in the importance of peer relationships was also found. Czech adolescents enjoy the positives and negatives of a fairly individualistic culture with some remains of collectivistic culture represented mainly by their parents, teachers for whom the accommodating to the social transformations is still an ongoing process. The overwhelming majority (85%) is without religious affiliation; they discriminate between good and evil from circumstances rather than from given rules and norms (Rabušic & Hamanová, 2009). Certain relativization of norm and values has several psychological consequences. The weakening of general moral consensus strengthens the meaning and value of autonomy and self-worth. Whether something is right or wrong, good or bad, moral or immoral is not defined by generally accepted standards, norms, and rules; it is rather the result of social negotiation and the ability to stand up for oneself. In this context, it seems that one of the key characteristics determining the feeling of self-worth in a young person is the awareness of one's personal and social competence and the awareness of one's power over his or her life (Macek, 2003).

Even though the comparison on the three cohorts in the EURONET study does not offer a complex portrait of all areas of life, behavior, and experiences of Czech adolescents, using the results of other studies (e.g., Ježek, Lacinová, & Macek, 2011; Macek, 2003; Macek, Lacinová, & Polášková, 2011; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011), we can offer a more general conclusion. First, Czech society underwent a significant transformation over the past 20 years. The democratization of society led to an increase in personal freedom and responsibility. This applies to the last few cohorts of Czech adolescents. The majority of them do not experience their growing up as a period of crises and conflicts with authorities. In comparison with the past, they

more often experience it as a free space that needs to be filled. The time required for studies and career preparation is much longer now, and marriage and parenthood are postponed until their late 20s.

Second, social changes and the openness toward new influences, mostly through the new media, brought more diversity into adolescents' lifestyles. Despite global influences, many local subcultures emerge that differ in their interests and life strategies. In comparison with the early 1990s generation, two trends are salient: The dependence on adult authorities has decreased, and, besides the increased emphasis on autonomy and self-regulation, the importance of free and open communication with peers and adults has also increased.

Third, adolescents' relationships with parents have changed. The current generation does not spend more time with their parents than the previous one did. However, it is evident that adolescents still perceive their parents as the most important referential persons influencing their lives. Research shows that the relationships with parents or within family play a crucial role in adolescents' emotional well-being, their value orientation, or study and career choices. Open communication plays a major role as well. Conflicts with parents are not barriers if adolescents can express their opinions and feel that their voices are accepted.

Fourth, Czech society is much more liberal than 20 years ago. This also has negative consequences for today's adolescents' lives. Generally accepted moral norms and rules are weaker, and the concepts of good and evil are much more relative. Material and hedonistic values are preferred, and adolescents have little guidance or support in deciding what is right and what is wrong for their lives. We can hypothesize that the relativization and weakening of norms and values lead toward more emphasis on the present, present situation, and present feelings and toward the postponing or refusing of long-term commitments. Such changes are evident in the changed ways of spending free time. Compared with the past, today's adolescents more often prefer passive forms of leisure-time activities, simple entertainment, and short intense experiences. Limited job market for high-school or college graduates fosters the feeling that one must stay very flexible and adapt life goals and ideals without concentrating on the long-term perspective.

Overall, we may say that "being a Czech adolescent" is more interesting than uninteresting, more attractive than unattractive, and more happy than unhappy. As such, adolescents appear to be often reluctant to leave this period of life, today perhaps more so than previously. The contributors' part of this special issue focused on early Czech adolescents and provides an interesting glimpse of current scholarship that is ongoing in the Czech Republic today; they also provide

insights how Czech early adolescents, despite having experienced and continuing to experience unique developmental challenges compared to youth in other developmental contexts, face some of the same challenges faced by youth elsewhere. The four papers are part of the special issue that focuses on online exposure to sexual materials, a longitudinal study of fears and Czech youth, the salience of the family context for early adolescent antisocial behaviors, and how perfectionism is developmentally important over the course of a decade in a group of mathematically gifted Czech youth. In this sense, the papers deal with issues and topics that are salient not only in the Czech Republic but also in other developmental contexts or cultures. This highlights, to some extent, the shared challenges and problems faced by youth across different cultures.

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Author Biographies

Petr Macek is professor of social psychology and Chair of the Institute for Research on Children, Youth, and Family at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. His major research interests include various aspects of psychosocial development of adolescents and emerging adults and integrative approaches to identity issues.

Stanislav Ježek received his PhD in social psychology from the Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Studies. His current research interests focus on adolescent psychosocial development, autonomy formation during emerging adulthood, learning environments and research methods.

Alexander T. Vazsonyi is the John I. and Patricia J. Buster Endowed professor of Family Studies and professor of Psychology at the University of Kentucky. He received his PhD in Family Studies and Human Development, with a minor in Sociology, from the University of Arizona. His major research interests include adolescent adjustment and well-being (problem behaviors, deviance, violence, and health compromising behaviors), with a focus on development in context (family, school, neighborhood, and culture).