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Myth, rhetoric, and ideology in Eastern European education: schools and citizenship in Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

Educational study is always a matter of choice between different theoretical paradigms (Paulston, 2003). Sometimes, however, it also runs the risk of taking a dichotomized and ideological stance. Comparative education is an emblematic case in point, especially the excessively ideologized versions of comparative thinking inspired by the cold war (Sander, 1997). The choice to interpret citizenship and education through the lens of such concepts as myth, rhetoric, and ideology is not to promote a particular worldview in a dichotomized and ideological sense, nor to reveal "negative" or dysfunctional issues. On the contrary, the concepts of myth, rhetoric, and ideology provide a more appropriate framework and theoretical approach to enable us to highlight important aspects of the realities under investigation. Such an "eschatological search," however, must not be viewed as an exclusive trait of these contexts, even though the intensity of social tensions and the dissolution of traditional identities make it more evident (Tismãneanu, 1999, p. 61). I will first discuss a conceptual framework of myth, rhetoric, and ideology and then apply it to Eastern citizenship and education. These concepts are addressed in three sections dedicated to different historical phases: presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist.

Citizenship and education as historical and mythological/
ideological constructions: A conceptual framework
During the past sixteen years, both international and national observers have analyzed the social and educational transformations at work in postsocialist contexts mainly within a neoliberal and new-management conceptual framework. This approach represented the main line of reasoning, even though some scholars and many practitioners were well aware of and equally disenchanted with the disjunction between rhetorical function and practical outcomes of the reform strategies such as decentralization and democratization. Conversely, political and social scientists questioned the prevailing neoliberal vision as well as the reform rhetoric introduced by key international agencies such as the World Bank and the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), though the reforms were introduced with some differences (Robertson, 2005). Historians and political analysts drew attention to difficulties, internal distortions, and peculiar social and mental phenomena, such as "anticommunism with a communist face" and "fantasies of salvations" (Tismãneanu, 1999). Some scholars (Kozma, 1992) have observed that the traditional concept of "political culture" does not apply to postsocialist realities, at least during the first decade since the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989, and that concepts such as political mythologies and ideologies are more appropriate. In fact, some analysts adopted general political paradigms, notably the neoconservative paradigm to explain the phenomena (Kozma, 1992, p. 93).
Hence, a more critical interpretation of these educational settings is necessary given the complexity and lack of linearity of the postsocialist transformations. In line with Freeden (2000), this study argues that at a theoretical level, political ideologies are linked to and sustained by educational ideologies and myths. Yet, at a practical level, their relationship is not deterministic. This is the case of imposed ideologies, such as the socialist one, which produced educational and social paradoxes. On the one hand, political myths are seen as substitutes for a more formal political culture, that is, as rituals that "guide processes in which policies are made and public opinion is formed" (Bennett, 1980, p. 167). They are also unquestioned truths about society. Conversely, political ideologies are somewhat different phenomena: "[w]hile the myth is telling a story, the ideology is based on systematic ideas" (Tismãneanu, 1999, p. 37). Both have in common the appearance of a coherent narrative, based on emotional elements, which give an illusionary sense of protection.1 On the other hand, educational "rhetoric" or "ideology" represents a key concept in the study of education reforms. It is a form of "merged rhetoric" of themes derived from different educational theories: the human capital, the new common school, and the clientelism theory (Paris, 1995). "This overlap [of different themes] is more than rhetorical. As a practical matter, our institutional arrangements seem to reflect the attempt to combine these various aims" (ibid., p. 51). The ideology of school restructuring shows both the fragmentary implementation of different theoretical issues and an exceeding of expectations,

which are often contradictory. Its main function is to replace the lack of vision of contemporary reforms.

Educational myths and "idols" are linked with the effects of globalization on educational matters, the creation of "national imaginaries" and the process of citizenship formation (Popkewitz, 2003, p. 269). A sociohistorical strand in comparative education examine how universal principles, such as the "cosmopolitan Enlightenment," "liberal democracy" or more generally rational systems of reasoning underlying the idea of human progress are locally embodied in foundational narratives of the nation. These latter are intrinsically intertwined with and supported by pedagogical ideas widely diffused on a global scale and locally reinterpreted. In this sense, it can be assumed that political ideologies and mythologies, in their global/local dynamic, are closely linked to educational issues, serving the processes of national invention and reinvention.

Roots of Eastern European citizenship: From nation formation to the socialist era

Focusing on citizenship allows observers to analyze the elite's ways of receiving and reinterpreting political ideas at different historical moments.

The selective dynamic of political ideas and their successful impact on some social groups (i.e., the Eastern European intelligentsia) may be explained by the particular modernization phase and geopolitical conjuncture. Such an acquired "thought heredity" became part of the elite's political representations in the form of up-to-date political languages, acting as tradition filters for successive ideas and ideologies.

Many scholars believe that this is the case of Eastern Europe2 during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which reveals a common pattern if compared to West European countries. Between 1770 and 1850, Eastern Europe was undergoing a process of late modernization. It was the first important attempt at providing an original reinterpretation and synthesis of the ideas of the French Enlightenment and German Romanticism. The citizenship profile in Eastern Europe was molded round this ambivalence of different traditions: first, the rational choice represented by the historical cosmopolitanism and paternalism (as Josephinism) of the Hapsburg empire, and second, the romantic alternative represented by the feelings of belonging to an ethnolinguistic community. This ambiguity of civic and ethnic components of citizenship, forged during the 1848 Revolutions, produced an "ideological confusion" between liberalism and nationalism and subsequently generated "the great debates which influenced and continue to influence the development of the politics of this area" (Neumann, 2001, p. 39).

In other words, the cosmopolitan ideal as represented by the French rationalist Enlightenment was entangled with particularistic-nationalistic visions. It is interesting to note that East European nationalism has been interpreted as a localization outcome and reaction to globalizing ideologies. Thus, over the nineteenth century, and in contrast to the universalistic ideology of Western liberalism, it was mostly ethnic, while during the socialist period and the Soviet domination it was largely civic (Shulman, 2002). The cultural climate during the first half of the nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the French rationalist Enlightenment, as attested in Poland by Father Kornarski's initiative of reforming the *scolopi* schools in order to instil the ideas of the Enlightenment and civic virtues in the new elite. Another example comes from the analysis of school speeches and other public discourses between 1831 and 1877 in the Romanian provinces of Walachia and Moldova. The prevailing model was the patriot-citizen, based on moral and religious values and inspired by a Christian civic culture ("the good Christian"; Murgescu, 1999, p. 43). However, as most authors note, this initial cosmopolitan orientation was rapidly superseded by the romantic feelings of national belonging as a particularistic perspective, which contributed in the long run to the prevalence of ethnicity and of cultural differences. This orientation was emblematically represented by Herder's thought, and politically favored by the overwhelming influence of Prussia in the East. More generally, it has been argued that Herderianism favored the idea of a linguistically and ethnically organic

community, explicitly excluding cultural pluralism and, at the same time, impeding the social emancipation of these populations.

In actual fact, the eastern regions of Europe were characterized by the lack of a middle class and by limited urbanization. The main drawback was the social distance between the people and the elites. The emancipation and democratization processes were limited to the privileged strata of the population. The abyss thus created between the elites and the lower classes underwent recurrent renewal.

Traditionally, political science considered that the dual pattern of a cosmopolitan versus Herderian orientation was at the origin of the wellknown contraposition between a good/Western/civic and a bad/Eastern/ ethnic type of nation creation. However, this oversimplification of Eastern citizenship has recently been radically questioned on empirical grounds (see Shulman, 2002).3 On the other hand, some scholars such as Dressler give a positive evaluation of the Herderian influence for its "integrative synthesis of cultural and social forms" (1999, p. 54). The goal of the "cultural nationalism" was to synchronize "liberal politics and centralized democracy, represented by the French Jacobin universalism, with cultural autonomy of nations characterised by a plurality of languages and religions, without imposing any criteria for defining identity" (Dressler, 1999, p. 54). The problem is not with Herderianism itself, but its interpretations and instrumental uses by elites (*rétro-nationalisme*). The 1848 European revolutions and the subsequent period of national identity formation, in the second half of the nineteenth century, were nevertheless influenced by a plurality of traditions: not only the prevailing Herderian4 ethnoculturalism, but also the cosmopolitan values represented by the French Enlightenment and practically endorsed by the Ottoman empire in the area of its influence. The main difficulty of the process of national construction was the weak tradition of civic culture and the overestimation of the "collective-individual." Thus, the new political philosophies were based first and foremost on mythologies such as "common origins" and "continuity," that is, *daco-romanism* for the Romanians and *sarmatism* for the Poles. These early political myths, mostly an elite invention, also influenced the idea of the national school, viewed as an opportunity to both civilize and form the nation. The poor classes viewed school mainly as an opportunity for social redemption, as documented by the Romanian school speeches of the time.

Until the nineteenth century, the building of national identity in the region was a matter of geography: the nations were composed of various regions and provinces, mostly under foreign control, but they all shared the same influences cross-nationally. Historical conditions created a variety of local realities: from autonomous Galicia under Austro-Hungarian dominance, to the regions under German and Russian cultural oppression. The Polish high sense of community was favoured in Galicia by the use of their own language in schools (Tworzecki, 1996); in other parts of this country, identity was a matter of struggle for culture and language. It is then not difficult to understand the role played by the school as the central arena for the struggles over culture and national language. The issue of national identity, in all the countries here considered, resembled a mosaic of "internal voices" or of "national souls," depending on how national cohesiveness is assessed by different scholars or mentally represented by the people themselves. This cultural diversity, prior to the process of nation formation, is still discernible in regional differences as confirmed by the voting behavior pattern, strength of civic culture and, especially, ideological and political orientations (Tworzecki, 1996).

During the first half of the twentieth century, the polarization of public themes around a cosmopolitan ideal, such as the "European idea," and an endogenous ethnospecificity became even more manifest. Public discourses supporting industrialization and urbanization processes were paralleled by the circulation of particularistic ideologies, such as "traditionalism" and "agrarianism," the latter in the Romanian versions of *samanatorism* and *poporanism.* Thus, Hungarian culture oscillated between urbanism and populism (Gyurgyak, 1991). Further, the experience of fascism in Hungary and Romania, with the enactment of racial laws and the Nazi occupation of Poland, influenced civic culture, reinforced intolerant values, such as anti-Semitism, and introduced behavior patterns and mentalities of political repression also cultivated by the communist regimes.

At the turn of the century, educational developments became increasingly bound up with political ideas and ideologies. The traditionalist and agrarian political cultures in Romania favored the building of rural schools for the masses, which had been hitherto largely ignored. This resulted in a substantial decline in illiteracy. Another significant consequence was the creation of a "rural" sociology, which influenced pedagogical thought, producing the theories of pedagogical "regionalism" and "localism." These theories, based on statistical and empirical analyses, were supposed to improve the social and cultural conditions of small rural communities.

In all probability, the idea of a differentiated curriculum for rural and urban areas did not produce the expected outcome. On the contrary, it ran the risk of aggravating an already polarized situation. In practice, rural education continued to be inadequate. Because the intellectualistic tradition of the Romanian school was slow to die, education in rural settings was neither really pragmatic, nor did it promote an explicit political and civic education. It therefore ran the risk of strengthening existing stratification. The "dual" rural/urban education reinforced the crystallized "dual" citizenship on social grounds. Not surprisingly for that time, the idea of "two kinds of children" was also put forward, in accordance with the "ethnical spirit of the Romanian pedagogy" (Stanciu, 1995, p. 213).

This analysis reveals the extreme significance of social stratification and polarization in explaining Eastern European realities. The resemblance of these social realities explains the "Eastern" internal contradictions and, consequently, partially validates a differentiated East/West national pattern. The source of Eastern nationalism lies in a peculiar social stratification, which traditionally lacks a consistent middle class and cuts across urban/rural differentiation. The configuration of the political myths and ideologies, with their educational subproducts, confirms the relevance of social factors as an underlying pattern in the formation of Eastern European national identity. Unlike in Western countries, where the label "urban students" refers to a more disadvantaged or "at risk" social group, in Eastern Europe, especially in countries with huge discrepancies between rural and urban contexts such as Romania, the term has come to indicate a relatively privileged group.

Experiencing communist ideology in its "real socialist" meaning
From the perspective of educational outcomes, a process of ongoing stratification was rooted in school practices, especially after the 1970s. The communist sociopolitical and educational experiments in Central and Eastern Europe displayed common traits as well as differences. The communist parties and regimes officially promoted the communist ideology. It is questionable whether its historical and actual consequences can be analyzed as the result of a genuine political culture, though the only one accepted, or as the outcome of a "negative" coherent structure of thinking that obscures incongruous elements in order to uphold a particular social order. As Freeden (2000) points out, this is a matter of context and it is characteristic of any given ideology.

The communist ideology exhibited an eschatological dimension of moral and societal progress. The discrepancy between its high aspirations and its practical forms is revealed by the expression "real socialist" meaning, coined by the socialist people themselves at the time of the communist disenchantment and collapse. On practical grounds, during Stalinism a certain democratic effect of social justice has been noted, even though it was more visible in the poorest national settings. These positive outcomes, which were limited to the initial stage of the socialist period, were rapidly replaced by many other social and political dysfunctions, such as the discontinuity between socialist citizenship and its precommunist model, the lack of political information and pluralism, which would have created a more critical and authentic citizenship, and finally the emphasis on social rights to the detriment of civil liberties and political, economic, and cultural rights. The communist ideology denied alternative discourse on social developments, which meant that the official discourse based on collectivism, democratic centralism, polytechnic/vocational education, and citizenship education had a mere ritualistic political function. Besides, such catchwords "produced" or veiled exactly contradictory outcomes and paradoxical realities, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. This was true not only for dictatorial and "sultanistic" Romania, but also for authoritarian Poland and

"advanced post-totalitarian" Hungary (Linz & Stepan, 2000, p. 208). As a matter of fact, the ideological cage was for all those countries a common *trait d'union* that remained a ritualistic duty until 1989. Education in communist settings was full of such paradoxical effects. The communist "hidden curriculum" was more than an educational output. The ideological "duty" of education was paralleled by deeply rooted social habits that sharply contrasted it. Unsurprisingly, the statistics of political officials did not acknowledge this effect, a general trend in the East. However, this was not the case of teachers, parents, and students, who were particularly pragmatic in coping with the real situation, as characterized by paradoxical and counterproductive effects. The latent curriculum was the outcome of excessive educational centralization. In fact, the myth of a classless society was related to "democratic centralism."

The long-established centralizing tendency of East European educational systems was once again strengthened by means of political ideology. This had the effect of producing tremendously rigid configurations. However, proclaiming educational uniformity did not mean that the education actually received was the same everywhere and this for several reasons. Historically, in some contexts, such as in Hungary after 1975, a certain diversification of the educational offer was created by changing the standardised curriculum into a *core curriculum,* based on minimal standards and complemented by a local version and a personal choice (Bathory, 1986). Conceptually, it is hard to believe that the socialist uniform *syllabus,* defined as "one curriculum–one textbook" and "the curriculum is a law," would have reach a complete standardisation of the educational practices. In addition, it must be considered that "where the central curriculum is dominant, there it will inevitably appear a latent curriculum" (Bathory, 1988, p. 127).

Such paradoxical issues show how communist egalitarian politics resulted in highly selective educational institutions, strong discrimination between academic and professional pathways and special training of gifted students. A well-known comparative study on educational inequalities, *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries* (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993), plainly demonstrated that officially promoted politics produced unexpected outcomes and paradoxical effects. But this was not a novelty in the socialist area. In fact, from the 1970s onward public opinion, especially in Hungary, was accustomed to the shocks engendered by the publicity of International Energy Agency (IEA) studies results (Bathory, 1992) and other internally conducted studies on the ongoing stratification, which became, however, a common sociological topic in the area. Mass education in communist settings was not so successful in promoting a lessening of social class discrepancies. In the Polish case, an "unintended positive effect" has been reported regarding gender equality, "as this effect was neither a stated aim, nor an expected outcome" (Heyns & Bialecki, 1993, p. 304). In the Hungarian case, social inequalities and the influence of the "father's profession" on educational achievement as a predicting factor of educational and social success, were more significant than in other West European settings. Similar findings are reported for preunification East Germany. The enrollment quotas, intended as democratic measures favoring disadvantaged people, had a very limited effect. They proved efficient mostly in the immediate postwar period and in the case of the elementary school (Barbu, 1999).

Another peculiar effect was a certain "encyclopaedism," an overcharged and compulsory elitist curriculum. In fact, the emergence during the 1970s of a *sui generis* social class, the so-called *nomenklatura,* was another sign of reinvigorating the process of stratification, also supporting more elitist orientation. The other side of the coin was that the education for the masses had an unbalanced and thus excessive professional and technical profile, brought about by the "polytechnic education" myth.

The "polytechnic principle" revealed itself from the outset as typical Soviet rhetoric, which informed all the Soviet educational reforms from 1921 to 1984. While it was supposed to represent a genuine search for an educational solution to the classical distinctions between intellectual and manual work, its obscure and shifting meaning testified to a mostly ideological function (Mincu, 2004). In fact, this was a rather ambiguous notion, given its practical implementation as both an educative principle

transversal to the levels of the school system and, at the same time, as mainly concerning the lower secondary level. Soviet education itself displayed this shifting meaning with every reform. Another ambiguity is linked with its theoretical application: as a technical dimension of the curriculum or as a laboratory practice (Smart, 1968). Ambiguous, and thus ideological, as it was, its practical consequences have been impressive: a massive "specialization" of secondary education schools as technical, agricultural, and industrial profiles and the quasi-absence of general academic profiles. Highly selective rituals accompanied the collectivist rhetoric: "school Olympiads," demanding selections, "private lessons" for privileged urban students who wished to gain entrance to the best schools. An ethnography on an East/West sense of self-efficacy in 1990 Germany reports that, under the collectivist veil, classroom interactions generated informal hierarchical classifications and thus an elitist orientation (Oettingen, 1999). This illuminating analysis helps us to understand the way collectivism was practically implemented. In fact, it assumes that traditional and Herbartian-style5 methodological cultures sustained power disparities, masculine values and thus a competitive school ethos. The outcome was the institutionally produced demotivation of the lowest performing students, a category that significantly overlaps with the socially disadvantaged groups. However, this was the same target group that collectivism was ideologically supposed to protect. The dysfunction of communist collectivism as a form of cooperative teaching was shaped by the specificity of social and educational contexts. Such undemocratic regimes produced an elitist-individualist counterculture that opposed truly collectivistic-cooperative values.

Citizenship education also reflected all the above contradictions. The overarching educational and societal goal was the promotion of the communist citizen according to the precepts of morality, ideology— intended as an explicit educational dimension—and patriotism. The sharp divergence between the communist theory of social change and its practical effect, especially in the past twenty years of the socialist period, resulted in an artificial conception of citizenship that lost most of its original persuasiveness. The educational strategies to promote the new citizen were based on traditional pedagogy. The citizenship profile was that of a disciplined hard-working subject, able to exhibit accepted public behaviors in a "civil" rather than "civic" sense. This pedagogy was far from reaching the expected goals. Actually, some Romanian field studies, for instance Nestian (1988) demonstrated that less ideological and more creative approaches were more efficient in instilling commitment to communist values and genuine patriotism. It has been concluded that "literature could instil patriotism only on condition that it display an undoubted artistic value." The excessive moralism of some narratives drawing on *clichés* originated by "samanatorism" and "proletcultism"6 reached undesirable effects: "They bored like a rainy day in the autumn, since they embodied a hyperreality from which the artistic emotion was expelled. Their weak patriotic message was the result of an equally weak aesthetic value" (Nestian, 1988, p. 20).

Collectivist ideology, the classless society and socialist democratization were different names for the same thing: the great communist aspiration of social cohesion. Such a political ideal remained mostly a chimera, although some observers noted a certain "flavor" of solidarity (Garton Ash quoted by Tismãneanu, 1999, p.133). Many scholars highlighted the individualistic and atomistic configurations of Eastern European societies. The solidarity ring as a political myth of social uniformity was contrasted by concrete forms of corporatism in the Polish case (Zielonka, 1989), by the rediscovering of different forms of pluralism, such as religion, or by the accentuated and peculiar stratification after the 1970s as previously discussed. A nationalistic revival was also noticeable, which depended on the manipulation and promotion of artificial solidarity in times of economic difficulties by the politicians.

It is not hazardous to assert that the communist educational landscape was teeming with rhetorical catchwords, ideological slogans, and political and educational myths that did not take account of the real situation. Socialist citizenship is best described as the "paradox of social cohesion" formulated by Saunders (1993), and revealed by the inefficacy of "imposed collectivism" as a duty to interact or collaborate with other people (p. 85). The parents' obligation to collaborate with teachers and

schools as unique educative agency is an example (Svecovà, 1994). The role of the teacher-parents associations was only to support the school as unique educative agency. Parents were responsible only with regard to the rules for their children and the accomplishment of the patriotic duties, for example, assuring the requested amount of materials for recycling practices in Romania. Excepting the Hungarian attempt to institute a more substantial collaboration with parents in 1985, parents' disaffection with schools was clearly denounced by the "private lessons" system in the area (Timar, 1990, p. 30).

The communist ideology had nevertheless a differentiated influence on the educational systems of the socialist area, from an intensive indoctrination with nationalistic overtones in the Romanian case to a ritualistic duty in Hungary and, finally, to a communist ideology promoting a pluralistic scene in Poland. The different impact of the ideological factor is mainly to be linked with the sociopolitical internal dynamism.

For instance, in the advanced post-totalitarian Hungary the official duty to comply with ideology guaranteed remarkable educational, social, and economical innovations.

Reinventing politics and restructuring education
Political mythologies in continuity

The political scene of the 1990s exhibited many traits in continuity with the previous historical stages as well as plural political references. For instance, in Hungary two main political ideas were revived, urbanism and populism, which were typical of the 1920s (Schlett, 1991). They reflect the traditional contradiction between the adhesion to European values and the appreciation of peasant culture. In addition, several "political cultures" have always been at work in Eastern Europe, perhaps with the exception of Poland, where the Catholic Church has played a unifying role. The reason for the existence of fragmentary political cultures lies in the above-mentioned discrepancy between the elites and the masses, in terms of the "geographical distribution" of national identity and the uninterrupted regeneration of the dual citizenship pattern (i.e., a cosmopolitan orientation versus a particularistic traditional peasant culture).

Eastern European political settings were also represented by "political mythologies" of salvation (Tismãneanu, 1999, p. 13). These, however, were mere "ideological surrogates" competing with common political ideas. Examples of "political mythologies" are "the return to Europe" (Silova, 2005, p. 129; Tismãneanu, 1999, p. 61) and to a certain extent even the regulative ideal-type of "civil society" (Keane, 1998, p. 41). Such syncretic phenomena perpetuated ancient collectivistic passions and a low level of trust into the institutions of the state. Hence, immediately after 1989, they performed a unifying function in terms of public discourse and served as visible markers of personal identity, in the absence of a more active or ethical commitment to politics. As a result, public behavior showed self-compassion and victimization as well as fear of the "other" as a rejection of difference and otherness. These mythologies are classified as (a) salvation-focused and authoritarian, (b) messianic and demonizing (ethnic nationalism), (c) revengeful (i.e., decommunization and political justice), and (d) reactionary and restorative (Tismãneanu, 1999).

During the initial stage of Eastern European transitions, such mythological foundations of politics, which emphasized ethnic relations and superficial cohesion, nevertheless sustained the reconstruction of a sense of community. In addition, the dominance of the ethnic roots of citizenship

can be observed in the renewed postcommunist nationalism. At a general political level, the theory of a neoconservative ideology as the expression of an endogenous orientation brought about the resurrection of precommunist and thus out-of-date institutions, given that the communist period was considered a mere historical accident. At an educational level, the consequences were curriculum nationalization, the revival of "old" educational structures "for new purposes" (Silova, 2004, p. 85), and the privatization of the educational system. Hungarian liberals and populists agreed on such strategies based on ideological and rhetorical motivations (Kozma, 1992). A similar neo-conservative scenario is reported in the Polish case, still at the end of the 1990s. Significantly, this may be considered a sign of the slow normalization of the political scene (Tomiak, 2000).

"The language of civil society"

The postcommunist reconstruction aimed at reinventing politics in terms of the creation of a truly "political society," given the people's disenchantment with politics under communist regimes and the reconstruction of state institutions. However, the *leitmotif* seems to be the rebuilding of civil society, intended as a social and moral transformation as well as a remedy to the communist atomisation effect. As many scholars have showed, such an ambitious purpose raises some doubts, since the formation of civil societies is a historically and culturally unplanned process. The catchphrase "civil society" represents the Eastern or Marxist counterpart of the more classical citizenship idea (Keane, 1998; Turner, 1993) and it is meant to imply civil solidarity and morality. During the socialist phase it played the role of an "effective moral and political utopia" (Keane, 1998, p. 21), while for the difficult transition processes that of a more tangible guiding vision. As Keane (1998) maintains, we assisted at the worldwide diffusion of the "language of civil society . . . with a variety of different meanings, and for a wide variety of purposes" (p. 21). In point of fact, the civil society ideal sometimes happened to turn into no more than another ideological slogan. This was the case of social and moral settings with weak civil societies, such as Romania. For some observers, Romania was completely lacking moral and civic resources so that civil society renewal was deemed quite impossible. Despite the difficult reconstruction of "civil society," which remained more a rhetorical exhortation than a real outcome, this initial supposition was too pessimistic even for an atomized and postdictatorial country such as Romania.

The difficulties and paradoxes of the transition processes, such as an individualism of possession, intensive stratification processes, corruption, and superficial democratic forms—the "decorative pluralism" (Barbu, 1999, p. 125)—are parallel public discourses that focus on community, participation, and the common good, familiar collectivist values updated with an unexpected communitarian flavor.7 It is doubtful whether this represents a genuine search for the reinvigoration of social values and virtues, or whether it is mostly a renewed form of rhetorical government and administration of the public sphere. Poland may represent an exception, because of its strong Catholic culture, commonly recognized as one

of the main ingredients of a genuine communitarian perspective.

The method to renovate education

During the 1990s, a "re-regionalization" process emerged, suggesting significant differences between the pathways of transitions and citizenship patterns. Nevertheless, Eastern European education systems continued to be more similar than dissimilar to the communist past, as the imported new "forms" preserved the "old contents." At the outset, postcommunist education displayed the temptation of differentiating itself from the "totalitarian and monolithic education" of the socialist past. Educational debates moved from an ideological recuperation of some precommunist school structures to the "best model to be imported" policy, viewed as a quick fix solution to "rapidly pass through the savage phase" (Birzea, 1994, p. 25). Some major scholars involved in political decisions declared that there were no models to reproduce, that it was "not easy to opt for a liberal or a centralistic model," and that "situations [were] very different" (ibid., p. 25). From interviews it emerged that other scholars recognized, more or less overtly, that restructuring strategies were actively favored by some precisely identifiable international "partners" (a specific country), and that "prominent scholars offered advice." Many more admitted that international financing was not neutral but ideologically driven and conditioned. Some others appreciated the "method" of international guidance, offered by request, as a cooperative form of peer-review involving international specialists. This use of an external consultant was viewed as an important way to put pressure on local politicians, and thus, as a positive incentive to change (in interviews with the author in 1999–2000).

Democratization through decentralization

The unequivocal sign of the lack of vision of educational reforms was the recurrent emphasis during the 1990s on two "priorities:" the decentralization and democratization of education. Obviously, these labels were justified by the real situation of the educational systems. In fact, after almost fifty years of excessive centralization, both the Polish and Romanian systems exhibited very similar organizational and structural traits. From a political point of view the Polish experience with communism, as an authoritarian regime after the 1980s and with important sources of internal pluralism (e.g., the Catholic Church, the strength of civil society, the strong socialist tradition of the beginning of the twentieth century, and the historical opposition to Russian imperialism) was more similar to the Hungarian experience as an "advanced post-totalitarian regime" of gradual withdrawal from communism. However, from an educational point of view the resistance of the initial influence of Soviet education principles8 (Szebenyi, 1992) linked with a traditional methodological culture and the weakness of the internal resources to diverge from this pattern; for example, the peculiarities of the political and social scene, the historical precedents (Mitter, 1991) of the educational systems, the contacts with the international and then "western" pedagogy and the capacity and desire to undertake educational reforms made Polish and Romanian education immediately in the aftermath of the 1989 events more similar than dissimilar.

The Hungarian system, however, was an exception, having initiated

politics of decentralization long before 1989. In fact, already in 1978 the center attempted to delegate the innovative function to lower levels of the system and thus to initiate an experimental stage; allowed for the possibility to adapt the centralized curriculum to the local contexts and introduced teaching autonomy (Nagy, 1994, p. 46). A more substantial attempt to reform the system was made in 1985 with the law of school autonomy, which undertook significant provisions toward decentralisation. Its efficacy was however partial and the result were inconsistent given the incongruence between school autonomy and a centralized curriculum that was only adapted on a local base, the lack of a control since the inspection system was replaced by school guidance, different regulations of primary schools (local authorities) and secondary schools (central authorities), the imprecision of defining the autonomy concept itself and actors' mentalities. The 1985 Hungarian Reform Act was more a matter of legislative innovation. However, it was a singular and outstanding watershed with the centralised past, a useful precedent that opened the way to a radical decentralization of the Hungarian education.

As far as democratization is concerned, all these systems needed substantial changes, since the socialist intentions of social equality produced systematically ad-hoc hierarchies and peculiar stratification dynamics. The two priorities mentioned above displayed, however, an ideological function, as revealed by the educational strategies chosen for implementation and by their effects. The significance of the decentralization movement was rather radical since it was inspired by the politics of Thatcher and Reagan of the 1980s (Beresford-Hill, 1998). This was also the case of the 1985 Hungarian educational reform and the postcommunist restructuring. Moreover, the single strategies and the coherent reforms produced for almost ten years after 1989 produced only rhetoric and thus disappointing outcomes. This was also true for the Hungarian case during the 1980s, which survived a long adjustment phase. The reason is that truly decentralizing politics are sustained by specific mindsets that are not easily modifiable and take time to become reality. Numerous reforms worldwide reached a "deconcentrated" systemic configuration that sometimes carried out a regional neocentralistic effect, as is the case in Poland and Romania. This effect is a clear sign of the discrepancy between educational aims, at a rhetorical level, and mentalities, at a practical level, which can be viewed either as a negative outcome or as a first step toward the introduction of more substantial changes.

Most studies on decentralization show that it is not a simple and homogeneous strategy (Fullan, 1993; Halasz, 1999). In fact, it involves different levels and areas of educational governance and the relationships between the general system of public administration and educational administration translate into different decentralizing strategies. Additionally, it is commonly argued that centralization was more appropriate for a state-led (communist here) massification of the education process, and that recent autonomist politics uphold flexibility as well as a democratic process of educational differentiation and individualisation. Other scholars adopt a more subtle view, arguing that "neither centralisation nor decentralisation works" and that "both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary" (Fullan, 1993, p. 22).

For these reasons, educational decentralization as a "general cure" was

more of a myth, at least in the postcommunist settings here considered. Looking at the results it has produced so far, especially in highly centralized countries such as Poland and Romania, it is reasonable to say that during the first postcommunist decade it did not bring about real changes of educational practices. In fact, notwithstanding different educational priorities and peculiar outcomes, such as the civic schools in Poland (Klus-Stanska & Olek, 1998; Laciak, 1998) and the private higher education institutions in Romania, structural diversification was rather limited in these countries and until the late 1990s it could not be described as an "innovative dynamic from below," nor an efficient reform "from above." The continuing convergence between Polish and Romanian education in the late 1990s is given by the nature of the changes, as nonstrategic and fragmentary (Birzea, 1997; Bogaj, Kwiatkowski, & Szymanski, 1999) lacking a coherent and clear vision of a systemic reform. Educational discourses confirm the need for a global and systemic reform and the urgency of its implementation.

On the contrary, it created confusion and artificial change in contexts of inertia (Poland and Romania), as well as financial shortage and inequalities between different regions in "dynamic" contexts, such as Hungary.

It also has been reported that there was a decrease in educational quality. In the past, intellectuals and nonintellectuals alike believed that communist education worked properly because it produced elites and good students. Similarly, after 1989 many believed that an advanced reform of decentralization was a clear sign of a good education. Both convictions reveal educational myths: in the former case, that of a competitive national system of education, legitimized by a limited number of excellent students, often with the "right" backgrounds; in the latter case, the myth of an intrinsic goodness of educational decentralization.

On the democratic side, the vision of postcommunist reforms initially had a more general political meaning. Education was supposed to be "humanized" and "socialized" in a renewed sense of democracy. In addition, rendering education more democratic meant adopting "classical" strategies to allow large groups of people to gain access to education. This resulted in the elimination of highly selective tests and the increased tertiary-level enrolment. At the same time, "democratic education" acquired a more "decentralizing" sense, which involved a diversification of educational provisions and institutions. This trend of "external diversification" and privatization conducted rapidly in a loosely coupled system led some educationalists, like Kozma, to wonder "who owns the school?" (quoted in Halasz, 1998, p. 68).

Old and new ideologies at work

From the study of postcommunist education, it has been noted that the lack of a reforming vision and the persistence of the "Manichean mindset" favored an ideological approach to education and citizenship. The question is whether ideological catchwords can eventually transform social realities or whether they irrevocably lead to a "denial of change" (Popkewitz, 2000). Actually, the lack of real change is most probably engendered by such "mythological" accounts, which ignore real developments, mentalities, and social configurations.

In other words, the question allows for real change to be brought about by social and educational ideologies. Following Archer's interpretation,

Mitter claims that the "ideological factor" was unproblematic in the absolutist state (2004, p. 352). The implicit assumption in his words is that the emergence of regional and global "new educational spaces" has complicated the scenario. The effects of educational ideology in a globalized world nevertheless need further investigation.

For Freeden (2000), an ideology may however induce social and educational change if its characteristics are "flexible" and if the political culture within which it is situated is pluralist. In his words, "if moral and political theory are ordinarily entrusted to tell us how to act, can an ideology, in its dual role, both as theory and practice, do the same?" (Freeden, 2000, p. 305). Moreover, ideology must not be considered as an inferior form of political thought and theories. Postcommunist ideologies, such as the neoconservative paradigm, should not be considered negative or "perverted" political cultures, but products of specific settings and mentalities. It is assumed that even when "ideologies involve distortion, misrecognition or rhetoric, there are contextual reasons for those features, and they too evidence ideational patterns that may be decoded" (Freeden, 2000, p. 321).

Conclusions

The postcommunist area represents an interesting challenge for understanding citizenship and education as ideological phenomena, rhetorical outcomes, and mythological effects. This approach is an attempt to interpret and connect political and educational developments. The East European modernization path was therefore mainly molded by a contradictory fluctuation between the European idea and national identity.

Often, education reinforced sharp social stratification, although the underpinning ideology attempted to reduce it as reflected in endogenous pedagogical perspectives. Education also accentuated an additional discrepancy, the difference between rural and urban education, and, consequently, between a rural and an urban citizen, as in the Romanian case. The communist ideology had a differentiated influence on the educational systems of socialist countries. The existence of rival ideologies, as in the Polish case, or the economic evolution to a free market, in the Hungarian case, shaped a somewhat pluralistic framework. Hence, the communist ideology became a mere ritualistic duty. However, it also created educational and social paradoxes that contrasted starkly with official ideology. During postcommunism, political mythologies and ideologies guided the restructuring of states and educational systems. The globalized educational rhetoric and the myth of educational decentralization tried to renovate educational cultures, but they generated only poor results. The more significant the discrepancy between real social and educational configurations and new reformist visions (i.e., between a civil society and a decentralized education) the more it will impede the achievement of desired social and educational changes.

Notes

1. For instance, in the educational realm we can distinguish the myth of quality education as proved by the extraordinary performances of an elite in the "Olympiads" and jointly held by parents, teachers, and administrators. Its suggestive narrative is obviously different from that expressed by the more systematic ideology of decentralization, satisfying the need to both feel competitive and be reassured.

2. For some scholars, Hungary and Poland belong to Central Europe and
Romania to Southeastern Europe. This controversial issue of terminology is more
a matter of politics than geography, as maintained for instance by Coulby (2000).
For a full account of this issue of terminology see Kozma and Polonyi (2004).
3. In fact, the interpretation of a Western state-led nation building versus an
Eastern ethnocultural nationalism (i.e., from state to nation versus from nation to
state) is not completely convincing. Similarly to Wandycz (2001), who argues for
an initial "Western" model in Hungary and Poland and a later "oriental" model after
traumatic events, that is the Hungarian defeats of Mohacs in 1526 and the White
Mountain in 1620, and the Polish partitions in 1772. Sugar stresses the varieties
of Eastern nationalism, identifying an "aristocratic" nationalism in Hungary and
Poland, a "petty-bourgeois" nationalism in the Czech Republic, a Bulgarian and
Serbian populist-peasant nationalism, and finally a "bureaucratic" nationalism for
the Romanians and the Greeks (Neumann, 2001, p. 50).
4. Herder replaced the traditional concept of a juridical-political state with that
of the "folk-nation" as organic in its historical growth, ethnically and linguistically
homogeneous. Herderianism opposed cultural pluralism and undervalued
the relevance of social factors. His works were frequently cited by Czechs,
Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs, and Greeks and contributed to a widespread use
of the ethnonationalistic thesis, which became a major ingredient of the political
cultures of this area.
5. Traditional pedagogy implies frontal teaching of the whole group of students,
"teaching ex-cathedra," while herbartian pedagogy is mainly associated with the
organization of lesson in highly articulated phases.
6. "Samanatorism" is a Romanian literary strand from the early twentieth
century, cultivating the rural and historical inspiration. "Proletcultism" is a Soviet
literary strand linked with the October Revolution and supporting the idea of a
purely proletarian culture.
7. The sources of the post-1989 perfectionist discourses in Eastern Europe
are the ethos of the communist collectivism still partially active and some more
updated communitarian stances, mainly linked with Catholic culture. For such a
definition of perfectionism see Metz (2001).

8. These principles are educational ideology, detailed state curriculum, state
monopoly of schooling, uniform school structure, and hierarchically centralized
management.

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78 e uropean education

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