

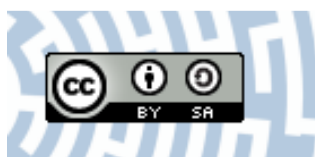


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## Introduction

The fundamental questions on the interdependence of the economy and the economic awareness and the relationship between these two are not always easy. In general, they are formulated as if the two were separate systems that interact with each other. Some researchers treat each system as an independent variable and, depending on the views, explain economic phenomena by referencing both separately. Karl Marx regarded the economy as a factor influencing social awareness, whereas Max Weber regarded social awareness as an element influencing the economy. Who was right? It would be safest to say that there is an impact on both sides and that both human awareness affects the economy and the economy affects social awareness.

The latter is part of a wider economic culture. The relationship between awareness and the economy is more often pointed out by sociologists than economists. This is primarily due to the fact that sociologists are the scholars more often involved in awareness and culture, i.e. the soft data. Economists in turn are trained in the use of quantitative data, which is not likely to awaken sensitivity to cultural data. The interests of both academic groups in terms of research concerning culture, including the awareness of economic societies, are revived when economic growth starts to accelerate in some countries or regions and the explanation for it is hard to conceive by turning to the known models. Only then does research on other factors, including cultural ones, begin to play an essential role.

This issue was thus raised on the occasion of noting the economic success of countries of Southeast Asia, especially Japan, Thailand, and more recently China. Also, the rapid development of some regions of India (e.g. Bangalore) indicates a large share of cultural factors at work contributing to this success, including economic awareness. And finally, this problem is present in the analysis of the economic development of post-communist countries, whose development is irregular. These countries include the Visegrad countries – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Future economic development of each country and its prosperity depends on the economic awareness of

the members of its society. The Visegrad Group countries are struggling with the long term effects of their communist past, but on the other hand, through their membership in the European Union they are under constant influence of the free market economy and democracy. These circumstances affect the consciousness of the young generation that will build the future economy of these countries.

Why did we choose the younger generation? The students who are currently in their twenties were born already after the fundamental political, social and cultural changes. This category of young people in the Visegrad Group countries have no experience of living in the period of real socialism, their life experience has been built within the realities of the free market economy. It is a generation of youth who has a chance to be fully integrated into the economic, social and cultural heritage of the Western world, and the first one whose rights are a reality of capitalism with all the opportunities and threats that this system creates. It is them who have the biggest opportunities to start their own businesses and to achieve success, but who will have the experience of the precariat more often than the other social groups.

Accordingly, the aim of this publication is to diagnose the state of the economic consciousness of the young generation of the Visegrad Group countries and to answer the question: what is the stage of development of the economic awareness of the young generation of the Visegrad Group countries? In what areas of economic awareness (entrepreneurship, work, consumption) are the young from certain countries more active? What are the country-specific similarities and differences in particular areas of economic consciousness of the young generation from V4 countries?

The answers given in this book will stem from an analysis of the sociological research conducted among university students from Poland's four partner countries – the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The research was carried out thanks to the financial support of the Visegrad Standard Grant: “**The economic awareness of the young generation of Visegrad countries**” no. 21420008. Its participants were four partner universities: the University of Silesia in Katowice, Palacky University in Olomouc, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, and Szent Istvan University in Godollo<sup>1</sup>. The research was also additionally

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<sup>1</sup> The following universities were the grant beneficiaries: the University of Silesia in Katowice as project leader, and grant partners: Palacky University in Olomouc, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Szent Istvan University in Godollo. The participants of the grant-financed project were the following employees of these universities: University of Silesia in Katowice – Prof. dr hab. Urszula Swadźba (coordinator), dr Monika Źak, dr Rafał Cekiera (staff members), Palacky University in Olomouc – PhDr Jaroslav Sotola Ph.D. PhDr Mario Rodriguez Ph.D. (staff members), Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra – PhDr Monika Strbova Ph.D. PhDr Viera Zozulakova Ph.D. (staff members), Szent Istvan University in Godollo – Prof. dr. Csaba Ballint Illes C.Sc., Dr habil. Anna Dunay Ph.D. (staff members).

conducted by the employees of the Department of Sociology of Ostrava University<sup>2</sup>. The following book was written by grant partners from three of the mentioned universities and the employees of the Department of Sociology of Ostrava University. It consists of the chapters as follows.

Chapter 1, written by Urszula Swadźba, discusses the theoretical premises of the research. The definitions and understanding of economic awareness, especially the economic awareness of young people, is presented therein. The theoretical model of economic awareness is graphically illustrated as are its 6 elements: economic knowledge, value system and economic aspirations, work and entrepreneurship, value of money and saving, attitudes towards poverty and wealth, consumption. These elements are discussed in detail while the author makes references to both theory and empirical research. The research hypotheses and their verification methods were formulated, consequently the next point presents the methodological bases of the research, in other words the premise of conducting common empirical research, the method of constructing the questionnaire and the choice of the research sample, conducting research and the method of its statistical analysis.

Chapter 2 written by Urszula Swadźba and Monika Žak is a demographic and social characteristic of the structure of the interviewed students' group. The following characteristics, separately for each national group of respondents, were presented: gender and age of the students, degree, mode and field of study, as well as their place of residence. All of these characteristics allowed making comparisons between students from different countries. In addition to that, the information about students' families was obtained: family status, education of parents, household material conditions.

In the next chapters, in accordance with the assumed theoretical model of the research, the authors discuss: the value system and economic knowledge of the students, the value of work and its features, internal and international career-driven mobility, value of money and savings, attitudes towards wealth, poverty and consumption. Each chapter contains a short summary. The authors make cross-sectional analyses. Each of the authors, presenting their own part of the research, analyzes the responses of the students from each V4 country.

Chapter 3 written by Nicole Horáková and Markéta Jalůvková is an analysis of the system of values of the interviewed students from V4 countries. The basic analysis is preceded by a short characteristic of the changes in the value system. Consecutively, the students' values, set against the general system of values, were discussed. The system of the values of the young people was juxtaposed with the results from other European researches on the subject. The next part of the article is about the attitudes towards taking on challenges in life. These were

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<sup>2</sup> Research carried out by: PhDr Nicole Horakova Ph.D., PhDr Petra Sobanova Ph.D., PhDr Marketa Jaluvkova Ph.D.

divided into three different strategies: liberal, bold and passive. The third part of this chapter concerns the role of economics in life.

The topic of Chapter 4, written by Urszula Swadźba, is the analysis of one of the elements of economic awareness – work. Theoretical issues of work, professional work and work values are shortly outlined. The author presents different types of work undertaken by the students of the V4 countries during both the academic year and the holidays. Then she analyzes the crucial elements of awareness, such as: work among the other values, statements regarding work and work features. Summing up the research results, the author constructed several types of students based on their responses to the questions about getting work experience and their work evaluation.

In Chapter 5 Rafał Cekiera analyzes the declared and realized mobility of the students on the contemporary labor market. Initially the author discusses the contemporary labor market in V4 countries, particularly highlighting the level of unemployment. Then he moves to an analysis of the students' declarations regarding readiness to go abroad for work. These declarations are juxtaposed with their opinions on migration and the benefits (or a lack thereof) it might bring. In the summary he compares the mobility of the interviewed students from V4 countries.

Chapter 6 written by Hungarian project partners Anna Dunay and Csaba Ballint Illes tackles the problem of the entrepreneurship of the V4 students and their attitude towards wealth and poverty. The problems presented in this section are: the attitude towards wealth and poverty as well as activity and entrepreneurship. The authors analyze the students' declarations on the potential of using their own initiative and the barriers blocking them. These problematic aspects are illustrated by statistical calculations.

The attitude towards money and savings is the main topic of Chapter 7, written by the Slovakian partners – Monika Strbova, Viera Zozulakova – and Urszula Swadźba. It opens with briefly outlining the authors' theoretical analysis of the discussed attitudes towards money and students' preferences in this domain. The authors show the role money plays in the students' value system as well as point to its meaning in their lives. Besides national differences, they also point out the ones resulting from household material conditions declared by the students. In the summary, types of approaches are outlined, based on the declared attitude towards money.

The last chapter – number 8, written by Monika Žak, is an analysis of the consumer attitudes amongst students. The author begins traditionally – with a short theoretical introduction. Consecutively she presents the students' attitude to daily shopping as well as towards the concept of quality brand goods. She analyzes the students' preferences for spending or investing money. In the summary the author sketches several types of students based on their attitude towards consumption.

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In the conclusion, Urszula Swadźba makes a synthetic presentation of the state of economic awareness of the young generation of the V4 countries. She describes its individual elements and makes comparisons, highlighting similarities and national traits and the differences they result in. Consequently, she constructs certain types of students by referencing different elements of their economic awareness that allowed distinguishing the differences amongst them.

At the end of the book one finds the bibliography for all chapters as well as the questionnaire of categorized interviews. The authors' academic profiles are also presented.

The subject of our publication on the economic awareness of the young generation lies at the borderline between economics and sociology, therefore it is rarely discussed in an international context in a comparative fashion. We hope that our publication will fill this gap in academic literature as the authors' analyses summon the V4 young people's ways of thinking and navigating the socio-economic reality surrounding them. We also firmly believe that the publication of this book will contribute to the cooperation between scholars from the Visegrad Group member countries.

*Urszula Swadźba*