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It is widely accepted that the former communist elite had transformed itself in the new capitalist elite in post-communist countries. A lot of papers described how the former communist managers became the leaders of new market economy, e.g. Soulsby & Clark (1996), Kryshstanovskaya & White (1996), Higley et al. (1996) or Lee (2009). As Higley et al. (1996) noticed “the elites who operated the communist regimes largely survived those regimes’ collapse. Their survival was greater in the economic and administrative than in the political realm, and it was more pronounced among ‘deputies’ than among top leaders.” The Romanian experience is also significant. But less known is the process of developing the power and influence during the communist regime. So the main research question of the paper is focused on the appropriate methodology to investigate how the communist elite (or a part of it) were selected during the decades of communism.

1. Introduction

As many authors observed transition societies from communism to capitalism offer unique settings for social research. Eastern Europe “became a ‘living laboratory’ in organizational transformation within a context of profound institutional change” (Child and Czegledy, 1996, pp. 167). The number of papers focused on communist organizational system, on informal networks developed in communist countries or on the communist regime influence on the transition to capitalism is consistent. Usually, the researches tend to be limited at a single country study case. Also they tend to be focused on the post 1989 period, eventually with some reflections on the influence of the communist regime. This influence is often used for explaining current differences among two or more countries.

The number of researches investigating Romania is quite small. It can be noticed that Romania was not included in most of researches (e.g. the cross-national comparative study of elite recruitment in postcommunist Eastern Europe published by Theory and Society in 1995 or the papers published in the special issue of Organization Studies on ‘Managerial Learning in the Transformation of Eastern Europe’ in 1996).

But not only the transition process offers opportunities for social research. The ‘communisation’ process that took place in organizations can do this as well. The analysis of the personnel files will be relevant in describing the elite selection process along the whole period of communism. The empirical findings that could be identified through this research could be “conducive to theory development” (Soulsby & Clark, 2007). If revolution means in essence a matter of elite change (Pareto, 1935), and if the 1989 events in communist East of Europe could be labeled as a revolution, this study focused on the post-communist organizational elite will bring useful insights.

2. Romanian communism – from origins to the demise

Until the Second World War Romania was an Eastern Europe country, at the Orient gates, but closed to the Western civilisation. In this period, about 75 percent of Romanian political elite were graduates from Western European universities (Jacob and

Gavrilovici, 2006). After 1945 Romania was “abandoned” in the zone of influence of the Soviet Union. A new elite was formed “copying in spirit and shape the Soviet elites, and approved by Moscow” (Iacob and Gavrilovici, 2006).

Before 1989 Romania was, under Ceausescu, one of most ‘orthodox’ communist countries. Like any other country from Soviet sphere, Romanian regime was “hierarchical, centralized and autocratic” (Soulsby and Clark, 1996). The main principle of communism was the sub-ordination of the individual to the working class objectives.

As in other communist countries, the elite had an institutionalized character. The communist leaders were legitimized only by the membership in the Communist Party power structures. With the same argument, the same political elite determined the strategies, the objectives and they planned in every detail all Romanian organizations. Organizations were result of the work of many people, but a few people controlled them once created – those few people were the Communist Party leaders or they were appointed by the Communist Party. They controlled the organizations in an authoritarian and visible way in order to assure the fulfillment of the communist program. In fact, as Gelb (1981) observed in the Soviet Union, the working class was dominated by the elite of professional managers and bureaucrats. As Clarke noticed (2004), the management style of the Soviet enterprise was “authoritarian paternalist” with a manager having absolute authority, and with “a rigidly hierarchical formal structure.”

3. Management in communist Romania

The country development led to a higher level of complexity in most activities. So an elite of professionals emerged at the top levels of all organizations. The Romanian academic and scientific elite were eliminated in the first two decades after 1945. Until the seventies the new political/professional elite was educated mainly in the Soviet Union. Starting with the seventies, Romanian universities begun to produce greater number of graduates (especially in engineering and technology) to respond to the objectives of development set by the Communist Party. The elite educated in the Soviet Union was attached more to the communist ideology than to the profession, but things begun to slightly change for the young people educated in Romania in the seventies and the eighties. At a certain point, two elite categories could be distinguished in the Romanian communist society.

In the last decades of communism, the Romanian managers like almost all Eastern European managers, become “highly versed in taking entrepreneurial initiatives and making informal personal arrangements” (Child & Czegledy, 1996). More than that, a very good knowledge of the country’s cultural and institutional environment characterize managers formed in the communist period.

4. Management after 1989

As other authors already showed (e.g. Hollinshead and Michailova, 2001), in the first decade of post-communism, like Albania, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavian republics or former USSR states, Romania was less successful in achievement of economic stability. Considered by Higley et al. (1996) among the less successful cases, in the first decade on transition Romania experienced a “stop-go transformation” (Hunya, 1998) characterized by a considerable state influence in the economy, weak commitment to reforms and lack of public trust in public institutions. In a period of counter position between shock therapy and gradualism, the former being considered “a value in its own right”, while the latter “was equated with timidity and unwillingness to change” (Csaba, 2009), Romanian elite opted for a slow reformism, usually under external pressures.

5. Research method – how to investigate?

The theoretical framework proposed to develop a research methodology is elite theory. There are three arguments for this choice. First, the communist society was officially 'elite driven'. In fact, the whole society was structured to respond to the power need of working class, represented by the Communist Party. In all communist countries, based on coercion, the entire social and economic control was concentrated in the hands of the communist parties (Klicperova et al., 1997). As Russell (1938) noticed the dependency of power on organizations, almost all organizations were designed or re-designed to respond to the Communist Party objectives. As a result, in 1989 all Romanian society structure was highly centralized (Soulsby and Clark, 1996). Second, legitimacy is an important issue in this analysis. Ideological legitimacy was the key argument for dominating the whole Romanian society by the Communist Party. But professional and managerial competences had gained a growing importance in the last two decades of the communist regime. Those competences became a source of legitimacy. This kind of legitimacy assured the survival in important positions for most of the managers after 1989 events. Last but not least, access to elite membership was strictly controlled during the communist regime. Numerous gatekeepers existed and controlled the process of access in the Romanian communist elite. The research findings showed that a significant part of the gatekeepers continued to exist and to control after the demise of the communist regime.

The objective can be reached by analysis of the personnel archive of a selected industrial organization along four decades of communism. During communist period the personnel department played an extremely important role in the management process. A detailed file was kept for every employee and the recorded details regarded: social background, education, professional track, Communist Party membership etc. This individual files were extremely important in taking decisions not only in organizational context – selection, promotion etc, but in political career as well. The archives were stored inside of the organizations until 1990, and after the falling of the communism they were sent to National Archives of Romania – an institution subordinated to Ministry of Administration and Interior. The access to the archives is granted for research purposes.

The suggested research technique will be document analysis. The analysis will be focused on the personnel files of the middle and top management employees of selected industrial organizations. According with the standard content of the files, a research instrument will be developed. The analysis will be made along four decades. The result will also provide the possibility to relate with the broader political context. In addition interviews will be made with employees from different levels that experienced the organization in the last two decades of communism.

6. Concluding remarks

The professional part of the Romanian communist elite played an important role in the country's transition to capitalism. In spite of the strong contestation they faced in 1990, they won influence and power based on factors generated by the communism. They weren't adepts by the communist ideology, in fact in the last decade of the communist regime they compete with the political leaders. On the other hand, they weren't the capitalist apostles or the free market advocates. They just took advantage of an unique combination of circumstances. The factors mentioned below together with the in-existence of competition led to the important role played by these communist organizational elite. They controlled the Romanian economy for almost a decade after the demise of communism.

The analysis of the personnel archive of communist organizations can be helpful

in order to understand the process of selection of the professional communist elite. The detailed files were created for every employee during the communist regime. The analysis of the personnel files will be relevant in describing the elite selection process along the whole period of communism.

7. References

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