

POLITICAL SCIENCE REVISITED

POST-COMMUNISM IN RETROSPECTIVE. RECAPITULATIVE SYNTHESIS OF THE TRANSITOLOGIST STUDIES: CURRENTS OF THOUGHT, EXPLICATIVE MODELS, REFERENCE AUTHORS

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Abstract. *Post-communism, a unique historical process, constituted, starting with 1989, the central problematic of social development analyses, being at the origin of a considerable scientific production. The objective of the analysis is to present and assess, in the form of synthesis and by means of a typological approach, the main explanations offered in different fields of social sciences. There will be emphasized, depending on the analysis grid proposed, both the dominant research orientations, the analytical particularities of each type of explanation, identified according to specific variable and the respective qualities or limits of these theoretical discourses in relation to this problematic.*

Keywords: *post-communism; synthesis; transitologist analysis; reference authors; explicative models.*

Introduction

Post-communist transition formally ended with the accession of the ex-communist countries to the European structures. Even if this process (transition as a modernization, Westernizing, Europeanization project) continues, the period of the great radical transformations (institutional-political changes of the East-European economies and societies) concluded. Thus, after two decades since the fall of communism and at approximately 10 years since the conclusion of the transition experienced by the formerly communist countries, a literature balance, although difficult, is possible and useful but, still, inevitably incomplete, due to the exceptional variety of the scientific production.

Indeed, the uniqueness and complexity of the East-European transformations mobilized intellectual effort and dominated after 1990 the scientific agenda in all disciplines focused on studying change and social development. Papers, doctoral theses, conferences, seminars, have as problematic and research topic this new

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historical process. The interest for this phenomenon was not only of a theoretical nature. The academic discourse concretely and significantly influenced the agenda of reforms; many of these studies constituted the intellectual support of the transformation policies, and they were found in the reports and recommendations made to governments in transition. The academic theories, even when simplified, exaggerated or diluted, have conceptually oriented, sustained and legitimized the political decisions and directions of change.

The essential contribution of this study comes from the analysis elaborated in the doctorate thesis (Mot 2004), but the distance in time allows and warrants the review, modification, development of the first synthesis attempt. The selective literature taken into consideration for this analysis and, in general, post-communism studies can be divided into two categories. A first category comprises the works published until the ending moment of formal transition and the commitment of the post-communist countries into a new stage of their evolution (European integration process). Since the interest for post-communist change, as a particular type of historical development, does not end after this date, a new research tendency is outlined, in the form of retrospective studies, more critical and focused especially on the consequences of the transformations produced in the first years post-1989 (Rogers 2009). Thus, we have a sufficiently wide corpus of knowledge to perform a comparative assessment of the studies of this complex phenomenon, the typologies and classifications proposed allowing not only the ordering of the abundant scientific material that was produced for this problematic, but also highlighting the particularities of the different research schools, of the main explicative models and of certain reference authors.

The post-communism problematic

The fall of communism and the passing of the ex-socialist countries to capitalism and democracy raised fundamental problems, of intellectual and political nature, regarding the radical social change of systemic type. Market economy, capitalism, democracy, are phenomena occurring spontaneously or are they created in the same way in which communism was created and implanted in Eastern Europe? In other words, can capitalism and democracy be built stage by stage, according to an ideal model? And if yes, is there, at the current level of knowledge, a special technology which could be used to construct a new society, starting from a rational project and without repeating past errors, such as, for instance, the communist utopia? Does the past matter in historical change? Is transformation dependant on an evolution *pattern* established in time, or, on the contrary, are we free not only to choose the future we desire, but also able to achieve it? These are the main questions that animated the debate on post-communism and to which economists, political scientists and sociologists tried to give an answer, giving privilege, depending on the specific of their disciplines, to the problems analyzed, the paradigms used, different types of explanations and solutions to the complex, theoretical and practical problem of post-communist change.

Analysis and assessment grid

The post-communist transition gave rise to a vast scientific creation. For a systematic presentation of this theoretical debate, we chose a classification grid which allowed the illustration of both the main types of explanations and the particularities of each type of discourse, executed within the different research disciplines.

The first cutout takes into consideration the variety of explanations both depending on the level and variables of analysis (internal and external factors) and on the impact (positive or negative) that these influences are susceptible of exercising on the change process analyzed. Starting from this grid, we shall examine and assess the analytical quality, the explanatory power of the different types of studies, but also their epistemological pertinence for the research of this unique historical project.

Within this first cutout, within each explanation model, we shall outline types of analysis on several conventional research fields (economics, political science, political economics, sociology). Each type of discourse, representing a specific field of knowledge, has different theoretical and conceptual fundaments, is focused on the analysis of different phenomena and studies a class outlined by transformation issues, thus being subjected to specific evaluation criteria. Thus, while the economists develop theoretical discourses regarding the reforms for passing to the market economy, the political analysts have placed the focus on studying the political change as democratization process, the political economy analysts studied thoroughly in particular the role of the institutions and institutional rules in the economic and political transition, and the sociologists were concerned with the structural and historical constraints of change.

Types of explanations of the post-communist change

Considering the level of analysis (internal and external factors) and the type of influence, positive or negative, which these determinants exercise, we can distinguish four types of post-communism analyses¹:

¹ This cutout which inspired by Pickel and True (Pickel and True 1999) has only approximate value, taking into account the richness of the literature, which emphasized a diversity of explanations combining different types of analysis and superimposing different variables in the analysis of the particular aspects (causes, effects) of post-communism. Of the classifications that do not intersect, other than partially, with our typology, we can give as example the study made by Poznanski, who distinguishes between two types of visions on transition, depending on the role of the actors (elites vs. social groups), on the type of privileged reforms and the results of transformation: an individualist perspective and a collectivist perspective, each with several research directions. Thus, for Poznanski, parts of the individualist approach are the liberal, institutionalist, personalistic and evolutionist studies. In what concerns the collectivist perspective, it is divided in several research orientations: the school of « breaking from the past » (related to the Marxist political revolution view), the modernization current and the structuralist perspective. If we consider the influence exercised on change, the collectivist school is, in general, positive, except for the structuralist analyses, while the individualist vision is negative, except for the liberal perspective (Poznanski 2001). Other authors, for instance Crawford and Lijhpart, highlight three major directions for researching post-communism: the perspective of the « legacy of the past » or of the « path dependency », the structuralist approach and the analyses in terms of rational choice of the actors (Crawford and Lijhpart 1995).

A first vision, “neo-liberal”, places the focus on the exogenous factors and their essentially positive action. Part of this group of studies, which we can call “externalist”, the economic theories of passing to the market economy and the political theories on democracy, which, having the same epistemological fundaments, propose a same explanatory model of change, in its two dimensions, economic and political.

A second type of analyses which regroups (neo)institutionalist studies and political economics research consider the importance of the influence, which is positive, of the internal factors in explaining the results of the transformations.

A third theoretical position, the “evolutionist” analyses (meaning the perspective of the “legacy of the past” and the evolutionist-institutionalist economy), gave explanatory priority to the internal determinants considered as exercising a negative action on the evolution of post-communism.

Finally, another type of analyses targets the explaining of the negative effects that the external phenomena connected to the process of generalizing neo-liberal capitalism was, as the studies focused on the internal/external dynamics, comparably and paradoxically, little represented in the literature, especially in the analyses of the first years of post-communism.

Observation: The types of explanations proposed in this retrospective are ideal-typical. The boundaries between the different research models are often fluid, since it is difficult to be included in the same rigid type of explanation. For example, if the first group of studies is relatively easy to determine, the outlining between the neo-institutionalist and the evolutionist studies is more difficult to synthesize from the epistemological viewpoint. Unlike the liberal scheme, clear and coherent, the neo-institutionalist and evolutionist analyses, introducing to the explanation holistic elements (context, history, structures), are considerably richer and nuanced, their explanatory principles being identified as belonging to extremely diversified theoretical traditions. The choice of the classification criteria (type of variables, type of influence) allows, however, the surpassing of the eclecticism of these analyses.

Research of neo-liberal type (external/positive influence)

These studies are an amalgam of economic, political theories, of strategy and *policy (policy advice)* precepts, which constitute the grounds for achieving capitalism and democracy according to the liberal occidental model.² The specificity of this perspective is that it places focus on the decisive importance of the global external factors (integration in the new political and economic world order — by means of European integration in the case of the Eastern and Central European ex-communist countries — under the imperatives of generalized capitalism and

² Correspond to the voluntarist analyses of Crawford and Lijhpart and to the liberal perspective identified by Poznanski (note 1).

democratization) as being essential determinants of the post-communist project and of the success of the transformations in the transition from socialism to capitalism.

In this “externalist” vision of change, dominated by the neo-liberal ideology, the post-communist transition as radical systemic change must and can be achieved as a grand project of “social engineering” through institutional techniques and procedures (“*neo-liberal institutional engineering*”). In other words, the economic and political transformation is, essentially, a process achieved through political means. Change is not a historical phenomenon, but a constructivist project. This type of explanation emphasizes a positive relation between performances and political reforms executed in the logic of the “institutional design”. The main argument provided by the partisans of this approach establishes a direct and clear link between the mere application of the liberal model (the Anglo-Saxon variant), by means of radical institutional reform policies, and results (model of economy and society).

Prescriptive-normative approach, this ethnocentric and optimistic vision on post-communism explains only the formal, procedural change of the institutions, ignoring the national particularities (different initial condition, history, context, structures, social networks, configuration of interests in each country), the demonstrations being organized according to the following logical reasoning: the same external stimuli produce the same results. In other words, this type of analysis mechanically deduces positive results following the rapid and faithful application of institutional “recipes”, meaning of the formal institutions of the standard market economy and liberal democracy. The simple application (imitation, copying) of the western institutional model is sufficient for the effects (performance-based economies, functional democracies) to be the same. Thus, conceiving the introduction of the market system and of liberal democracy as a unitary process of change, for the strategists and the neo-liberal analysts, the success in putting into practice the institutional arrangements is a precondition, not only for the success of the economic reforms, but also for the consolidation of democracy.

The post-communist transformation is considered an intentional action, a voluntary project. The change process is triggered and achieved through the political will and action to replace the old system. Being an approach of the clear, definitive and irreversible “break” from the past, the explanatory element of change are the interests, calculations, choice, decision and rational behavior of the political and economic elites, these studies being located, from the epistemological point of view, in the micro and institutionalist analysis perspective (methodological individualism and rational choice institutionalism). Given the essentially voluntary dimension of this conception with strong pragmatic elements, this research current emerged as an action “guide” and approach of political expertise in the economic restructuring and the democratic change in the ex-communist countries. The neo-liberal strategy imposed as a unique model of public intervention and action program.

The analyses having as basis the neo-classical (but also monetarist) economy explain economic transformation, while in the theories of democratization (transitologist studies) is explained the political process of passing to democracy.

The two types of analyses, vindicating the same epistemological suppositions, offer a unitary vision of the passing to capitalism as economic and political order. The transformation imposed “from the top”, the change of power (democratization) precedes and determines economic change (the expression “political capitalism”).

This rationalist-individualist analysis and transformation model is strongly ideological; the vision is indeterminist, a-historical, prescriptive. The explanatory force of this type of research consists precisely in the universalist vocation of the neo-liberal philosophy and ideology which supports it. Thus, in essential lines, the neo-liberal type of studies are a recapture and extension of the research that analyzed other controlled social change experiences, namely the modernization of the post-colonial societies in the 1960’s or the democratization in the 1980’s in Latin America and South Europe.

a) *The economic analyses of passing to the market economy*

In the perspective of this type of analyses, the application of the new economic legislation and of the basic institutions pertaining to the capitalist economy (private property, capital and financial market, elimination of trade barriers etc.) are “technological” means for “building” capitalism as a controlled societal project. This type of explanation conceives transformation as a transition process from a known given economic system (socialism) to another known economic system (capitalism) and any restriction of the market principles reduces the efficiency and performance at the level of the global system. Based, therefore, on the criterion of efficiency as fundamental reasoning of the system reduced to the only market component, this vision conceives reform as rational project whose success is exclusively connected to the rapid and simultaneous application of the formal institutions of market economy. In such a vision of change, it would be sufficient that the ex-communist countries adopt the occidental institutional model in order for the effects, namely the type of capitalist development, to be the same. Economic change, namely the creation of capitalism, is thus a politically-guided process (transformation “from the top”) whose objective is the modernization of the ex-communist space, conceived in a globalized vision.

The economic reforms targeting the introduction of the market economy through “shock therapy” would be the only ones able to eliminate the deficit of performance conceived depending on the neo-liberal vision, namely as increase and efficiency, and not in terms of development and distribution, through measures of neo-classical economy, of price liberalization and monetarist measures and within which the suppression of the role of the State is essential for the success of the transformations (Sachs 1996)³. The social aspects (social costs, deterioration of human capital) of institutional economic change and of the reform policies are either ignored or minimized. The causes of the negative effects, namely recession or decline, which most countries experienced as a consequence of adopting the liberal model, are considered as being especially the result of the gradual policies

³ This author is not only among the most well-known, but, he is also artisan of “political capitalism” and promoters of the shock therapy, being part of the teams of western counselors of the transition governments.

that certain countries employed in the transformation process. Also, where the shock therapy had evident negative consequences, the neo-liberal economists justified these effects through the fact that the economic policies were applied either in an incompetent manner, or incorrectly (without observing the prescribed sequences), or too slowly, or too late, or invoking the negative influence of the internal factors (thus granting some explanatory power to the approaches focused on the «legacy of the past»)⁴, but without re-debating the superiority of the liberal policies, the only ones capable of achieving the clear and final break from communism.

This type of research constituted, at the same time, the theoretical and political fundament of the programs and *policy* measures proposed to the post-communist governments by the international financial organizations. Thus, this vision of change dominated since the beginning the position of the IMF and the World Bank, but also of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (BERD) towards the Eastern countries, imposing on them, by means of political and economic pressured, the application of the shock reforms according to the principles of neo-liberalism as pre-condition either for the accession of these countries to the structures of these institutions, or in order to consent to the granting of financial aids and assistance.

b) *Theories of political democratization*

The studies on transition (transitologist) and those of democratic consolidation are closely related, with respect to the conception of modernization and the general analysis approach, to the ensemble made up of the neo-liberal studies. Indeed, the post-communist transition as vast and radical systemic change implies the simultaneity of the two processes, the economic and the political, of change. In this sense, we are currently speaking of a single democratization process conceived in its two dimensions, political and economic. Still, given the type of change the ex-communist countries went through, the importance of the political in change is essential, because capitalism and market economy were introduced through institutions. Thus we understand why different aspects regarding the formal political institutions (system of parties, elections, constitutional arrangements), namely aspects related to their creation, to legitimacy, to the consolidation of these new structures own to democracy, were given special attention in the theoretical debate regarding transition.

There is in this literature several explanation models, depending on the objectives targeted, the type of variables or the theories that ground the investigation.⁵ In

⁴ We notice that neo-liberalism resorts to “immunizing defense stratagems” (Popper) in order to prevent any objective assessment which could emphasize the negative impact of the external pressured on the changes according to the liberal model, thus invoking either the strategic position, or the geo-political situation, or the passing mentalities or the level of civilization of certain ex-communist countries (Sachs and Woo 1994).

⁵ A comparative study of the analyses of democracy and democratization elaborated during the first transition decade we find in Valerie Bunce. The author presents the theories as a function of objectives (the origin of democracy, the democratic « design », the quality and stability of the democratic project) and of the explicative variables (economic development, political elites, constitutional system, aspects related to State and nation), this panorama highlighting the respective contributions of the liberal and regionalist approaches (Bunce 2000).

spite of this diversity, the “transitologist” literature and that of “democratic consolidation” which dominated the field of political science after the fall of communism argue the same voluntarist-normative vision, anti-determinist and uni-linear, of the political change conceived according to the model of liberal democracy. Placing the focus on the procedural, minimalist dimension of democracy, this approach necessarily favours the role and behavior of the elites and of the institutional construction in the process of political democratization. In this vision, the formal political institutions determine not only the stability and quality of democracy, but also the success of the economic reforms. This point of view is analytically correct, because in a radical transformation achieved in a constructivist logic of the social order by means of a “social technology”, as is the case of the post-communist change, democracy is the privileged means of achieving modernization and the largest part of the analyses proposed by the theories of democratization implicitly legitimate the idea of the compatibility between democracy (political development) and capitalism and liberalism (economic development).⁶

The first researched on post-communism (transitologist literature), widely inspired by the studies of democratization elaborated for another historical period and for other contexts (Latin America, South Europe), approached East-European transformation as a characteristic phenomenon and being part of the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991). Thus, post-communist change is analyzed as a conceptual and theoretical equivalent of other transitions to democracy, placing the focus on the common and general characteristics of a process of passing from an authoritarian (totalitarian) regime to a democratic regime. The political analysis is performed with the aid of the political and institutional determinants.⁷ Even if the explanatory factors differ depending on the authors, the emergence, stability and consolidation of the democratic systems are almost always the effects of institutional elections, meaning of constitutional arrangements (Ester 1997), of the type of political regime or of the system of parties (Kitschelt, Manslefdova, Markowski and Toka 1999). This vision of democratization, as well as the classical theories of political modernization of the 1960’s mentioned before, suggest and support the idea of the existence of a universal evolution model and of a unique political development trajectory for all societies, model which is imposed by imitation, constraint or contagion (Ethier 2010).

The analyses of democratization, being part of the neo-liberal current, are perspectives which favour the positive influence of the external factors as key-element of change. These explanation schemes, for which the new institutions, as well as the norms and regulations own to neo-liberal democracy, can eliminate

⁶ This supposition of the relation, necessarily, unconditionally and positive (compatibility) between capitalism and democracy is a “recycling” of the central idea of the development theories of the 1960’s which dominated the analysis of extra-western societies in their passing to modernity and which constitutes an important chapter in comparative politics.

⁷ For a literature review on transition and democratic consolidation it is useful to read the work of Ph. Schmitter (Schmitter 1996). Also indicated is G. Ducatzenzeiler for the thesis of the need to exceed the analyses of the process of democracy consolidation dominated by the perspective based on political variables and the movement of the research towards new orientations proposed by political economics or the field of international relations (Ducatzenzeiler 2001).

by themselves the influence of the communist past, identify as main explicative variables of the process the context and immediate circumstances of change, namely the pressure and the imperatives of democratization and liberalism as main determinants (to read opportunities) of the choices and strategies of the elites (Linz and Stepan 1996).

In this vision of the “break from the past”, the explanatory elements are the interests, calculations and behavior of the actors in the analysis of democratic change. The rationality of the political decision-makers being, in fact, perfectly conform to the postulate of the economic rationalism which is at the basis of the economic neo-classical theories privileged in the analysis of the economic transition, we understand quite easily the “elective affinity” existing between this group of theories defined through a strong intentional element and their voluntarist, pragmatic orientation. Indeed, this type of analysis, being an a-historical and abstract model, imposed as an approach centered by the solving of the problems raised by the functioning of democracy and by the political expertise. Placing little focus on the local particularities of the historical and sociologic context in the Eastern countries, and mainly targeting the organizing of the democratization process according to a large “drawing” and following definite and general evolution laws, these studies on political modernization constituted, together with the liberal economy analyses, the theoretical fundament of the post-communist transformation policies.

*The neo-institutionalist studies
(internal factors / positive influence)*

This second type of analyses is specific to the comparative studies of the (neo)institutionalist type performed in the field of sociology and political science, including in the *policy-making* studies and focus on the role and influence of the internal factors of the success of transformations. Unlike neo-liberal studies, this approach, although accepts the importance of the influence of the exogenous factors, through the fact that it moves the explanation from the external context to the internal context and introduces structures and history into the analysis, makes relative the autonomy of the political in the change process and, hence, of the role of the actors (elites) in transition.

*The neo-institutionalist studies
(of the institutional «design»)*

Etatist analyses for the greater part, these studies consider most often that the explicative variables, either the State capacities (Böröcz 1999), the institutional configuration (Elster, Offe, Preus 1998) and the policy choice, the configuration of the State/ civil society relationship (Schoenman 2005), of the learning capacity of a society (Dawisha and Deets 2006), more to interpret, and less to explain in terms of cause-effect the success or failure of transition. This perspective which regroups the studies analyzing the institutional construction do not re-put in debate

the positive impact of the exogenous factors and of the occidental development model, but in this vision of the change it proposes, the institutional arrangements — as internal variables — particularize the assimilation of this universal evolution prototype. Although the advanced explanations are more nuanced, the logic of the argumentation is not essentially different than that of the liberal studies. We are in the same reasoning model: institutions are necessary and sufficient for the success of changes, while they are not the unique cause of the success of transformations according to the “social engineering” project, but only significant factors which determine the choice of the type of transformation policies or the variety of economic strategies, the transformation models appearing, thus, as a plurality of combinations of the market/democracy relation (Frye 2010).

The political institutions considered in broad sense, namely the political parties (Kitschelt 1999), the interest groups, including the corporatist structures (Cook 2007), and especially the State, but also the norms and the regulations, determine the capacity of the elites to operate reforms capable of reconciling the political project (democracy) and the economic transformations (liberalization). Hence, in this perspective focused on the issue of reconciling the two aspects, of political and economic change strongly inspired by the debut historical institutionalism of Karl Polanyi, for whom performances are the result of the economic and institutional-political structures.

b) *Comparative political economics*

Focused on the comparative analysis of the post-communist transformations at the national level, these studies take into consideration also the importance of the external factors as a variable that the post-communist economies must take into account. Still, although it is admitted that globalization transcends the States, the national cultures and economies, the influence of the external dimension differently determines the internal evolutions.

Even though the transition from socialism is essentially an internal issue, this process cannot be isolated from the evolution of the exterior context which is part, in the vision of these analysts, from the context of change. The external factors play a key-role in post-communism, but they act only through the stimuli or the shocks on the internal context shaped mainly by history and the internal actors. “The new world order”, as well as other world orders of the modern era, has its own systemic logic which is subordinated to the evolution of the national systems (states, economic systems, cultures). Still, in spite of the importance of these external evolutions, and mainly of the world economy, at the level of the national societies, social change is crucial through its consequences. Thus, in the analysis of post-communism, there must prevail the national level and the level of the national State. The results of the action of the external forces are determined by the reaction of the different economic, political and cultural realities which characterize each society, the historical contexts and the strategies of the national actors being decisive for the variety of the results (Grzymala-Busse 2006).

Hence, the importance of the comparative economic policy consists in the ability to capture the connection between the national structures and the global

forces, meaning the economic globalization and the integration on the world market, but the external factors are not direct determinants of change, which remains a particularly internal process. Still, some authors consider that the discourse, with a strong ideological character, on globalization and the transnational structures exaggerates the significance of the influence of those determinants on the internal process or even make relative their positive influence on the national evolutions (Grigorescu 2006).

Evolutionist analyses (internal/negative)

As alternative scheme for interpreting post-communism having as basis the evolutionist philosophy, this type of analyses constituted as a theoretical answer to the dominant neo-liberal rationalist paradigm. Significantly semantically, we notice that these studies are, in general, elaborated not around the concept of «transition», but around the term «transformation» which understands the idea of continuity, of duration. In this theoretical and ideological perspective, post-communism is a gradual, evolutionary, long-term change. In this historical equation, what we know is the past that determines the present (and the future) and even if we can anticipate the effects of the actors' actions, we cannot anticipate the answers or the behavior of a society facing change.

The political studies of democratizations

These analyses called of the “legacy of the past” (Crawford and Lijhpart 1995) or of the “path dependency”⁸, and which emerged as an answer to the liberal transitologist studies, grant, as well as the studies focused on the “institutional configuration” evoked above, priority to the influence of the internal factors, namely to the context and national specificities.⁹ But this approach emphasizes the negative impact of these factors. Post-communism is not a *tabula rasa*, such as the relative success of transformations depends on the manner of adaptation of the old socialist structures and on the information institutions of the new model of social order, or on the rhythm of the transformations and of the social practices built in time. The emerging institutional structures are determined by the concrete realities that influence the decisions and action of the actors. Taking into consideration the complexity of the national contexts, these researches demonstrate that to the same influence forces coming from outside, Eastern Europe not only answers differently compared to other regions that experienced the same type of democratic change, but even within this regional ensemble, the countries assimilate differently the common influences. The model of capitalism and liberal democracy does not necessarily produce the same effects, history and especially the communist past, but also the pre-communist

⁸ “Path dependency” theories were first used in the institutionalist economy and then in comparative politics (Pierson 1997) from where they were diffused in the studies on post-communism. For the importance, as well as for the limits of using this analytical approach in studying the democratization process, in general, and, respectively the post-communist transition, see Bayer and Wielgoths (Bayer and Wielgoths 2001).

⁹ For a perspective of the first regionalist studies, see the analysis of Geddes (Geddes, 1995).

one, particularize the different answers of society to the imperatives of the political modernization. Favoring the regionalist approach, these studies explain how the own characteristics of this groups of countries and of each separate country lead to different models of institutional structures and post-authoritarian democracies. In other words, these analyses explain how the passing to the democratic regime, having as basis other economic and political premises, cause other effects and ask for other solutions (Jowitt 1992; Bruszt and Stark 2003).

If in the “liberal” perspective the actors’ choice is the explanatory element of institutional change under the imperative of the external forces, in the vision of the analyses of the “legacy of the past” the configuration of the internal factors, meaning the social, economic and cultural conditions modeled by the real socialism developed by each country singularize the answer of each context to the external influences. It is thus assumed that the action and the behavior of the elites, as well as the relations of power, as determinants of the process of transition to democracy, are mediated by institutions, but have their primary origin in the specific conditions created by the past and which are either the socialist institutions — State and regime — (Pfaff 2006), or economic backwardness (Berend 1995), or the weakness of the communist political system and the absence of the managing elites (Poznanski 1992), or the incomplete process of the national construction (Chirot 1997), or the footprint of nationalism, the persistence of the communist institutions and of the communist elites in the power structures (Higley, Kulberg and Pakulski 1996), the legacy of the centralized State and of order economy (Jowitt 1992), the nature of social, cultural and human capital (Badescu, Sum and Uslaner 2004), as well as the ethnic and religious identities and, in general, the particularities of the civil society, or the mental structures (Denzau and North 1994), or still the economic and political culture (Miller, Stephen and Basingstoke 1998).

If we refer to the studies analyzing the democratic evolution (consolidation), these are largely focused on the analysis of the elites and of the quality of the political leadership (Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski 1998); the dynamics of the cultural, ethnic and religious identity (Orr 2008) and especially of political identity; the configuration of the social and class structures (Lubecki 2004); the analysis of the work relations (Freze 2000); the national-nationalism variable (Auer 2000); the type of political movements (Tismaneanu 2001); the configuration and particularities of the civil society (Rose-Ackerman 2007), societal values and behavioural models (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011), but also on the generational dynamics (True 1999), all these factors constituting constraints for the success of post-communist transformations.

From the epistemological point of view, these analyses are essentially retrospective and place their explanation at the level of institutions (historical and rational choice institutionalism) and on structures. Their importance consists in the ambition to show that there are significant differences within the groups of new democracies and to test the way in which the circumstances of time and historical space differentiate the influence of the external determinants, of the international norms and pressures, in the post-communist context. This approach, taking into

consideration the initial conditions, as the parameters exercising constraints on the democratization process and allowing that there can be several evolution models, especially political, determined by the type of communism developed by each country, exceeds the insufficiencies of the liberal studies. Still, although they appreciate the importance of the social, economic and cultural *patterns* in the transformation process, these studies give the main role in change to the elites — whose preferences and strategic options are structure by the context — and to the institutions. From the epistemological point of view, the main insufficiency of the regionalist analyses is their empirical character. While the studies belonging to the liberal perspective are focused on the elaboration and verification of hypotheses, starting from the general theories of change, the studies focused on the “legacy of the past”, in the absence of a theory of transformations, is limited to inductive analyses, without general theoretical significance.¹⁰ Contextual and often organicist in their approach, this type of studies are interpretative analyses of change and less process explanation schemes.

b) *Studies of evolutionist economy*¹¹

These researches are also focused on internal variables and their negative impact on the passing to the market economy. A more nuanced analysis could emphasize more common epistemological characteristics, such as, for example, the diachronic aspect of transformation or the comprehensive approach of social change, between this type of studies and the (neo)institutionalist perspective, but also similarities with the sociological approaches of political democratization.¹²

Indeed, the evolutionist school proposes analyses of the post-communist economy in the spirit of the theories of institutionalist economy and economic sociology. This economic model is the conceptual and theoretical fundament of gradualism as reform strategy and *policy* program. Unlike the neo-classical theories, the evolutionist model rejects the neo-classical market system, placing the focus on the wide variety of really existing market economies, as well as on their deviation in relation to the prototype of the liberal economy. The economic evolutionism, often etatist, is a relatively skeptical position, with respect to the unconditional success of the economic transformations conceived as a formal-institutional

¹⁰ See Bunce's comments on the respective limits and contributions of the theories of democratization (Bunce 2000).

¹¹ For a general perspective of the fundaments of the evolutionist economy, see the classical work of Nelson and Winter (Nelson and Winter 1982), and for a reviewed vision, see Nelson (Nelson 1995).

¹² The retrospective proposed in this article considers the different approaches as typical-ideal, identified as such depending on several variables and essential characteristics. In this synthesis of literature, it is a matter, mainly, of the type of influence (positive / negative) of the internal / external factors and of the disciplines of social studies analyzing transition. Still, a more varied typology of the transition studies and, hence, more sophisticated, can be achieved and would be necessary. The boundaries between the different research models are often fluid, such as it is difficult to be included in the same rigid type of explanation. This is the case of the institutionalist-evolutionist studies, as well, which have in common certain traits with the macro-structuralist studies, but also with the organizational (functionalist) type institutionalism or even with the rationalist institutionalism, depending on the concrete manner of operationalizing the concepts or the analysis variables proposed by certain authors. See, with respect to the variety of institutionalist approaches, the work of Thelen (Thelen 1999). In what concerns the analysis of post-communism in institutionalist perspective, see Cappocia and Zibblatt (Cappocia and Zibblatt 2010).

transformation and proves to be relatively tolerant with respect to the institutional dualism, namely in relation to the co-existence of institutions belonging to the two systems, socialist and capitalist, at least in a first stage of transition.

The anti-teleological perspective, evolutionism conceives transformation not as a transition from a determined system to another one, also known, but as an open process which advances by trial/error. The explicit assumption of this approach is that the systemic reform cannot be successful only by means of institutional “design”, that reform must be achieved stage by stage, and the change of the informal institutions is staggered in time compared to the formal change and the latter, as any formal change, triggers unexpected effects, even more so as we are in a systemic transformation logic, of “social construction”.

There are several variants of this type of analysis, centered either on the fall of communism, or on the post-communist transformations. Thus, the studies performing the critical analysis of the socialist economy and its disintegration as a consequence of the dysfunctionalities of the command systems place the focus either on the economic macro-structures (Blanchard 1996), or on the analysis of the micro-fundaments of the centralized state structures and, as a consequence, give privilege to the institutional approach of organizational type or to that vindicated from the *public choice* school (Murrell 1991). Other analyses, which are inspired more directly from neo-institutionalism, execute studies of comparative institutionalist economy, attempting to show how different institutions, especially ownership, influence the economic behavior of the actors (Bernhard 2000). Finally, another analysis direction, the actually evolutionist economy, more sociological than the previous one, tries to demonstrate that the very evolution of the institutions, namely the emergence, evolution and change thereof, modeled by time, is a variable that influences the performance and the dynamics of the economic systems (Murrell 1991; Daianu 1998).

The importance of these studies, which have as epistemological sources the organizational theories, economic institutionalism and economic sociology, is to have emphasized the fact that the structural economic factors, legacy of the communist past, but also the institutional arrangements, are more important, or equally important, for the success or failure of the transition to the market economy, than (as) the role of the decision-makers and of the political factor, generalized in the rationalist-liberal analyses based on the neo-classical economy. In spite of the characteristics own to each type of analysis proposed by the different authors, these researches have demonstrated the need of a gradualist vision on change, pleading for a transition through “small steps” and underlining the danger of answering to a utopia — socialism — with another utopia — the radical passing to the market economy through the shock therapy (Burowoy 2001).

Also, the merit of this type of theories is to have underlined the ambiguous character of the results of the neo-liberal policies and to have identified their cause, either the systemic functional imbalances of the transition economies, or the system of economic institutions considered inadequate in relation to the transformation needs or with the context of change.

*Explanations centered on
the external factors/negative influence*

This fourth type of explanations which places the focus on the negative effect of the external factors on the post-communist transformations was almost absent in the first years following the fall of communism, although the changes that characterized the evolution of the world political economy played an essential role not only in making the revolutions, but also in the execution of the post-1989 transformations. In spite of this evidence, the nature and significance of the action of these forces on transition in ex-socialist Europe were considerably ignored, or minimized, in analyses. This absence is surprising given the fact that the general phenomenon of opening the national economies under the regional and global pressures for liberalization and integration, necessarily affected the ex-communist systems, as well, their vulnerability towards the external pressures and shocks manifesting strongly after 1990. Or, precisely this aspect of the integration in the global economy, as factor that played a decisive influence on the institutional construction and on democratization, or of the manner in which the performance of the ex-communist countries during transition was influenced by the imperatives of integration in the world economy, was given only superficial attention (Hellman 1998).

This minimization of the influence of the external factors, designed as pressure and constraint, is an anomaly similar to the phenomenon noticed in the 1980's with respect to the theory and practice of political and economic change in the historical context of the third World evolutions and, especially, in Latin America. Even then, the studies were quasi-dominated by analyses focused on political modernization and on the democratization process, marking a radical break from the previous social change studies (dependency theory, the theory of the uneven exchange) which placed focus on the negative impact of the world capitalist system and of the action of the international actors on the peripheral developing contexts (Haggard and Kaufmann 1992). The same tendency we notice also in the post-communist transition analyses. At the moment when the external variables become very important to the dynamics of the national contexts, they disappear from the analyses as key-factors of development, or this action is presented, as we already noted, in a reductionist perspective, namely in a neo-liberal vision.

The absence of the analyses focused on the external influence conceived as pressure (constraint) on the national developments is explained both through intellectual causes¹³, but also through causes of special economic conjuncture of the world economy, dominated by liberal tendencies, in which occurred the revolutions and the post-communist transition. Thus, except for a few analyses (Greskovits 1998; Van Zon 1998), the studies articulated and centered on the action of the external factors are little represented.

¹³ It is a matter of the disciplinary fragmentation of political science into two research sub-fields, namely comparative politics and international relations, but also of the field of political economics into two branches, comparative political economics and global political economics, which imposed different and opposed conceptual visions on the development phenomenon, focused either on the internal factors or, respectively, on external variables. See Caporaso (Caporaso 1997).

This absence can be mainly attributed to the fact that the expansion of capitalism and neo-liberalism was accepted almost unanimously and non-critically as being one of the (positive) causes of the decline and fall of communism. Thus, in the conditions of globalizing the neo-liberal type of capitalism and of the proliferation of the thesis of convergence of the capitalist development models according to the Anglo-Saxon prototype, the economists and politologists analyzed the post-1989 transformations depending on this liberal model as being the only development alternative, necessary and possible everywhere, and universally desirable. Moreover, the capitalist development became a determining variable of the democratization process of these countries. In this perspective, the integration of the former communist countries in the world economy and the structural reforms are understood as means that favour democracy and are opportunities for its consolidation. Although there was a radical gap between the theoretical — economic and political — discourse on transition and its concrete results in Eastern Europe, namely social unrest and economic decline, which, even relatively, is still general in the first decade post-1989, the greatest part of the studies, except for the “neo-liberal” literature, do not focus on the exogenous factors or reduce their influence to a minor role, essentially positive, in explaining the post-communist modernization.¹⁴

This type of analyses multiplied, however, with the progress of Eastern Europe on the path of economic liberalization and of integration into the world structures, and especially in the context of preparing the process of accession and integration in the EU. Also, after the triggering and accentuation of the world financial and economic crisis (2007-2008), the evolutions in the post-communist countries, already definitively part of the world system, are analyzed in this global context of negative evolutions.

A mention must not be omitted from this general picture. That is the European literature focused on the analysis of the post-communist transformations in the perspective of the geographical and cultural belonging of this space to the European continent and in the vision of reintegration — economic, political, institutional — of these countries, after half a century, in a Europe undergoing a historical transformation in itself. However, in the case of these studies also, the reforms requested by the integration in the European project — project of a liberal nature — are analyzed in the logic of the positive influence that the constraints, the conditionalities, exercise on transformations.¹⁵

The world political economics

This literature analyzes the influence that the global structures (production, world markets, security structures, financial, communication structures, systems of ideas, cultural models, technological progress) exercise on the composing elements (states, markets, national cultures, multinational corporations, international organizations,

¹⁴ The studies focused on the negative effect on the consolidation of democracy are, together with the progress of transition, increasingly numerous. See, for example, among others, Whitehead (Whitehead 2001).

¹⁵ See, for example, the collections of the magazines *Le Courrier des pays de l'Est*, *Etudes européennes*, *Comparative European Politics*.

including NGO's etc.) and which, in their turn, affect the global system. These structural connections were rarely analyzed in the Eastern-European context, at least in the first years after 1990. There are, still, several researches which approached either the impact of global capitalism on the fall of communism (Mygind 1998), or the effects of the cold war and of the competition between the great powers on the fall of communism (Lebow and Kappen 1995), or the influence exercised by the neo-liberal ideology on the evolutions in the post-communist space (Szacki 1996).

Analyses from the field of international relations

This corpus of research focused on the study of international relations analyzed the interactions between the post-communist States and the international actors transcending the national contexts. The authors analyzed either the influence exercised by the multinational companies that entered after 1990 on the East-European markets (Wedel 1998), or the effects of regional/global integration on those economies and societies (Amin and Thrift 1994), or the influences exercised by a series of transnational actors, meaning the elite networks (business, political), of non-governmental agencies (Henderson 1998) or cultural associations (Fawn 1995), or, also, of the international institutions and organizations (Pop-Eleches 2008).

We can also mention several examples of studies that, without systematically analyzing the significance of transformations at the level of the world economy on the post-communist process, are notable through the nuanced analysis of the new characteristics and tendencies of the current dynamics of the capitalist world system (Hopkins and Wallestein 1998). We can add to these rare studies the structuralist (Berend 2001; Janos 2001) and systemic (Pickel and True 1999; Chossudovsky and Marshall 2010) analyses which link the national evolutions to the changes occurred at the global level.

In conclusion, there were no studies of post-communism which to equal the contribution that the theories of (neo)dependency brought to the analysis of (under)development in Latin America or, in general, the contributions that historical sociology or the theory of the world system brought to the analysis of the capitalism's historical development phenomenon. These classical paradigms approached the modernization process as always involving national trajectories within the transnational structural and international relations contexts. Although the analysis suggested that the external pressure on the post-communist countries can be assimilated with the emergence of neo-imperialism, they did not, however, develop articulate theoretical analyses (Gowan 1996; Stiglitz 2002), or the theoretical statements were not sustained by an adequate empirical material (Altwater 1998).

Conclusions

Post-communism was the central and even the obsessive topic, of an extremely large and varied scientific literature. Integrated into the general theoretical debate regarding change and historical development, especially of controller social change,

this unique phenomenon generated, and continues to feed the interest of researchers from different social disciplines. The analysts produced varied explanations of this phenomenon, proposed different analysis models. Our analysis answered this concern for the ordering and evaluation of the special diversity of these interpretations.

Thus, at the end of this synthesis which attempted to emphasize the main tendencies that dominated the research on post-communist transition, structured depending on the level, type of analysis and interaction dynamics (internal/external), we can generate several general observations: a) there are analyses focused on explanations in terms of influences, internal or external, but few studies on the conjugated effects of these internal and external determinants; b) moreover, surprisingly, the analyses elaborated in the perspective of historical sociology are still little represented; c) these approaches that value history are especially focused on communism (recent past) and do not target the far past (analyses in terms of development or long-term trajectories); d) external economic or political factors intervene as univocal explanation; e) the domination of the liberal vision and of the explanations based on the neo-liberal doctrine; f) there is a progressive movement, with the progress in change, of the explicative paradigms, from liberal-type analyses towards contextual studies and critical approaches.

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