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Mapping societal developmental hierarchies in Europe: A Bulgarian perspective

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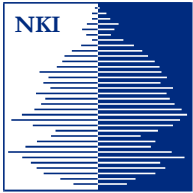
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**WORKING PAPERS ON POPULATION,
FAMILY AND WELFARE**

No 13

**MAPPING SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENTAL
HIERARCHIES IN EUROPE: A BULGARIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

by
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Linda Young-DeMarco

2010

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1 Introduction

In a comparative framework this paper examines how ordinary citizens in Bulgaria view the developmental levels of European countries and certain states outside of Europe. It analyzes how Bulgarians scale countries on development and how that scale is related both to historical discourses about a civilizational slope from east to west in Europe, and to contemporary linear measurements of societal development and economic well-being. The paper also assesses what internal mechanisms this hierarchical understanding of development may have and how it may be related to national identities. We also consider how the views of the developmental hierarchy vary across subgroups of Bulgarian respondents.¹

The empirical data for this paper come from a 2009 nationally representative survey of Bulgarian adults. Each respondent was asked to rate European countries and certain countries outside Europe on their levels of development. We analyze how ordinary Bulgarians rate countries on development and consider whether their assessments form a descending slope from west to east. We also link the assessments of ordinary Bulgarians to assessments of development made by outside agencies such as the United Nations and to GDP per Capita in order to see how the ratings of international organizations and the evaluation of ordinary Bulgarians are related.

2 Conceptualization and Theory

Since the 18th century the development – “the civilization” – of different countries and regions of the world have been understood as being hierarchical with some places far more advanced or developed than others. In this system not only have differentials been established concerning developmental levels and developmental ideals, but it has also been generally assumed that countries seen as less developed have been following the “leading” countries in their course of advancement (Amin 1989; Böröcz 2006; Chakrabarty 2000; Frank 1969; Melegh 2006a; Thornton 2005; Todorova 1997a; Wallerstein 1991, 1997; Wolff 1994). This has been both a general interpretative framework created for scholarly and political purposes and a general discourse which has established its own institutional frameworks. Based on these discursive structures, it has been disseminated widely and has affected the mindset of the general public, but beyond sporadic qualitative analysis little actual research has been done on popular cognitive structures.

This framework appeared as a discourse closely linked to colonization and the expansion of a West-centered world capitalism, which more and more intensively incorporated areas in and outside Europe that were portrayed as being backward or even as barbarian or semi-barbarian. It created a discourse of a “civilizational slope” in which the “West”, with changing contents, took the upper positions while Eastern and Southern European, Asian, African and Latin-American areas took the lower levels

*The Idea of
Developmental
Hierarchies*

¹ We make no judgments about the nature of people’s views of development; we simply observe respondent perceptions of development relative to a number of indicators and historical factors.

(Mignolo 2000; Wolff 1994; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Melegh 2006a). This slope was gradually applied to the whole world mainly through a North/West – South/East axis.

The idea of developmental hierarchies has been widely disseminated among the world's elites, policy makers, and government and nongovernmental organizations (Latham 2000; Meyer et al. 1997; Nisbet 1980). Today, the United Nations divides countries into the categories of developed and developing, with some countries in the latter category labelled as least developed (United Nations Statistics Division 2009). The World Bank uses the categories of industrial and developing, and the International Monetary Fund categorizes countries as advanced or emerging and developing (World Bank 2010; International Monetary Fund 2009). The United Nations goes a step further and places countries on a continuum of development from low to high, published as its Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2007/2008).

Throughout this period Eastern Europe, as Larry Wolff portrays, “was located not as the antidote of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism” (Wolff 1994: 13). This “descending scale of merit” (Glenny 1992: 236) later came to be viewed not only as a “neutral” way of understanding differential development, but actually guided “real” decisions in many spheres of social and political life. Among other significant processes affected was the “Eastern” enlargement of the European Union, a process which resulted in the inclusion, among other countries, of Bulgaria and Romania and the acceptance by all interested parties of the terms and mechanisms of the slope idea (Böröcz 2000; Melegh 2006a).

In-between Countries

In this developmental scaling Eastern Europe could be a very important case for understanding how countries “in-between” high and low levels of development are seen both by others and by themselves. Sociologically, in-between countries may show some of the most important characteristics of the whole system of thinking, because they are the ones which are at the same time in an intermediary contact with the “upper” and the “lower” categories and thus have the maximum amount of possible perspectives on this system (for a similar logic see Wallerstein 1979: 89, 96). Also it has been claimed that these in-between countries sometimes try very hard to differentiate themselves from “next door neighbors” or even internal minorities (Melegh 2006a: Chapters 2 and 3; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997a: Chapter 6).

Concerning the slope mechanism it is worth citing Bakić-Hayden, who used this slope idea with regard to the former Yugoslavia and its recent civil war. He introduced the concept of “nesting orientalism”, meaning a gradual “looking down” on less developed neighboring groups:

The gradation of “Oriens” that I call “nesting Orientalisms” is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more “East” or “other” than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most “eastern”; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies. I argue that the

terms of definition of such a dichotomous model eventually establish conditions for its own contradiction (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 918).

It has been argued that these hierarchical understandings of development have a huge impact on individual and collective identity in shaping orientations and ways for compensating frustrations in being seen at lower levels of hierarchies. Therefore, it is rather important to study how different actors perceive this scaling and how they locate themselves within the hierarchy. It is also important to understand what differing and conflicting perspectives they formulate to deal with the hierarchy, without questioning the basic elements and mechanisms of the “slope” or the perceived hierarchy of developmental levels (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Melegh 2006a).

Despite the relevance of such developmental hierarchies to individual and collective life, very little research has been conducted concerning middling areas like Eastern Europe. There has been some interesting qualitative historical analysis conducted and useful ethnographic analyses conducted in various places concerning related cognitive structures and processes in Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Böröcz 2006; Kovacs and Kabachnik 2001; Melegh 2006b; Todorova 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Kuus 2004; see also Obad 2008). However, there are very little quantitative analyses concerned with ordinary people’s perceptions of the hierarchy. One paper has reported on the evaluation of developmental hierarchies in several countries, with all but one being outside of Europe (Thornton et al. 2010a).

Our research was designed to fill this important gap. We investigate the ways in which ordinary Bulgarians perceive the developmental hierarchy within Europe and the comparison of Europe with several countries outside of Europe. We do so by asking them to rate a substantial number of countries on development and examining the extent to which their ratings replicate a slope from west to east. We also examine how the views of ordinary Bulgarians reflect more local considerations concerning history and political influence.

It is likely that the understanding of international developmental hierarchies will not be distributed evenly in Bulgaria. Our research investigates how such understandings vary by wealth, sex, education, residence, age, and ethnicity. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to hypothesize about how wealth, sex, age, and ethnicity relate to understanding of developmental hierarchies, we expect that such understanding will be greater among educated people and residents of large cities than among the less educated and rural residents.

3 Historical Background of Bulgaria and Bulgarian Identity

Bulgaria is a country located in southeast Europe in a region generally referred to as the Balkans. In its national history the country has been seen as positioned at the crossroads of the big powers in Europe, with the influence of Ottoman (Turkish), Russian, and Western powers alternating in the strength of their control and influence. For five centuries from the end of the 14th through the late 19th centuries Bulgaria was a part of the Ottoman Empire; full sovereignty was achieved in 1908. The Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878 ended the occupation of Bulgaria with a peace treaty signed in

*Historical
Background*

San-Stefano, a village near Istanbul. The Russian-Turkish war left an imprint on Bulgarians' dispositions towards the Russian people, as the Russians were the liberators from a half millennium of Ottoman rule.

The other great powers of Europe (from Central and Western Europe) did not accept the San-Stefano treaty because it guaranteed a large influence of Russia on the Balkan Peninsula. A revised treaty was signed in 1879 in Berlin, which established an autonomous Bulgaria that was to be headed by a prince who was not of Russian origin. A German (Alexander, House of Battenberg, who ruled over the period 1879–1886) was elected to the position, and was followed later by another German (Ferdinand, House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) whose family ruled the country from 1887 until 1946 when the country was proclaimed to be a republic. The ruling dynasty apparently strengthened Bulgarian ties with Germany and other western nations, moving the centre of geopolitical maneuvering from the east towards the west.

In 1946, the country was proclaimed a republic under a state socialist regime, which established the firm influence of the Soviet Union – and of Russia in particular – on Bulgarian political, economic, cultural, and social life. The emergence of a democratic society after the fall of the state socialist regime in 1989 led to an immediate search for strong ties with Western powers and European international organizations. Bulgaria joined successively the European Council, NATO, and in 2007 the EU.

*Culture
and
Identity*

Historically, Bulgaria has had more intense cultural links to Russia and other Slavic nations than to other parts of Europe. Bulgarians have mostly been of the Orthodox religion (83% of the population in 2001; about 12% are Muslims), while in other, non-Slavic parts of Europe Catholicism and Protestantism prevailed. Ethnically, the Bulgarians prevail: 84% of the whole population in 2001, while Turks are 9.4% and the Roma 4.7%. The languages of Bulgaria, Russia, and some other parts of Eastern Europe are Slavic, and the Cyrillic alphabet is in use in Bulgaria, Russia, and partially in some other Slavic countries. However, after the fall of state socialism in 1989 cultural orientations changed strongly in favor of western culture whose influence had been restricted during the state socialist times. The acceptance of Bulgaria in the European organizations opened boundaries across countries and numerous Bulgarians emigrants (estimated to be about a million out of a population of 8 million) moved mainly to Western countries; prevalent norms and institutions in these countries became known and accepted by many Bulgarians.

Bulgaria has historically been among the lowest income countries in Europe. Until the 1960s its economy was characterized by the dominance of the agricultural sector, with a low share of industry. Industrialization of the economy and “catching up” with the West as an alternative modernity, was a central topic of discussion throughout the twentieth century, with particular emphasis during the socialist period. The country was tied closely to the COMECON countries (the economic block of the socialist countries) and thus had continuous interchange to stable markets, particularly to the insatiable Russian markets. Two decades after the start of the transition to a democratic society the significance of Russian markets declined, and global markets now operate.

Bulgaria's position in the world, whether in political, economic, or institutional terms, is characterized as being open to the influence of external supremacy. During the state socialist times it was guided by the "great" Soviet Union; today it is guided by the principles of democracy imported from the west and following the EU regulations. The dominant discourse is that improvement can be achieved by aiming to reach the achievements attained by others. This competitive image clearly appears in Krasteva's introductory comment on Bulgarian identity:

The sense of belonging to the Bulgarian people is combined with long-term discontent with the country's economic and political development (Krasteva 2000: 505).

In the common Bulgarian language, development ("razvitie" in Bulgarian) is understood as the tendency towards improvement in societal life, very much like citizens of English-speaking countries understand the concept. Yet how do ordinary people in Bulgaria understand development and its distribution across Europe and beyond? As discussed earlier we expect that ordinary Bulgarians will see their own country as less developed than those EU countries whose development many Bulgarians are aiming to reach. Furthermore, how do Bulgarians perceive the development levels of a recent powerful ally such as Russia? And, what is the developmental perception of a historical ruler, such as Turkey?

4 Data and Methods

In order to achieve our goal of mapping out the perceptions of ordinary Bulgarians concerning the distribution of development across the countries of Europe and beyond we added a small module of questions to the regular monthly omnibus survey of the National Public Opinion Center at the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (NAPOC). This survey was conducted with a random sample of adult residents in Bulgaria in January-February 2009. The sample was designed to be representative of the Bulgarian population of men and women aged 18 and older. The participants in the survey were interviewed in face-to-face interviews. A total of 1008 respondents participated in the survey.

Survey and the Sample

The module of questions used in this project asked respondents to rate fourteen countries on their levels of development. These questions were introduced with the following statement:

We would like you to think about development in different countries around the world today. We'll be talking about countries as varied as Japan and Mongolia. Think of a development scale that rates countries from zero to ten. The least developed places in the world are rated zero and the most developed places in the world are rated ten. You can use both of those numbers for rating countries plus all of the numbers in between.

At this point in the interview, the respondent was handed a showcard with an eleven-point development scale portrayed. Then he/she was asked,

“Using this development scale, where would you put Country X? “ In a similar way each respondent was asked to rate development for fourteen different countries.

The sample of 1008 respondents was divided into three roughly equal subsamples using a random generator, and each of the three subsamples was asked to rate different sets of fourteen countries. The questions asked were the same, except that the list of countries varied between subsamples. This approach was taken because we wanted to obtain respondent ratings on a large number of European countries and because we wanted to include a few non-European countries in the countries rated. The three lists of countries rated by the three subsamples are displayed in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, we designed each of the three lists of countries to be as comparable as possible, with similar countries in each list, and with countries of similar attributes located in the same position within the lists. We also included some overlap between lists, meaning that four countries, including Bulgaria itself, were rated by all respondents. The final result was a set of ratings for thirty-four countries by Bulgarians.

Table 1
List of Countries in Each of the Three Submodules and the Ordering of Countries in Each Submodule

Submodule 1	Submodule 2	Submodule 3
England	France	Germany
Central African Republic	Central African Republic	Central African Republic
India	India	India
Russia	Belarus	Ukraine
Sweden	Norway	Denmark
Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan
Italy	Spain	Portugal
Nigeria	Nigeria	Nigeria
Croatia	Slovakia	Slovenia
Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Austria	The Netherlands	Switzerland
Poland	The Czech Republic	Hungary
Albania	Turkey	Bosnia/Herzegovina
Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Bulgaria

Some of our respondents answered questions by saying that they did not know the development level of a particular country. In order to handle these situations, the questionnaire included a set of built-in probes to ask respondents to estimate the rating. The wording of these probes is as follows: “Even if you don’t know exactly, about where would you put Country X?”

Our confidence in this methodology of rating countries on development in a linear way is buttressed by research in Argentina, Egypt, Nepal, and Vietnam using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and qualitative probes in surveys (Thornton et al. 2010b). This research has revealed that ordinary people in these countries understand the concepts of development and developmental hierarchies and comfortably use these concepts in their discourse. In addition, Melegh (2006a) has demonstrated that these development concepts regularly appear in a wide variety of texts and images of global foundations, newspapers, and multinational companies as they characterize Europe and other regions of the world. Our experience suggests

that the concept of development and developmental hierarchies are also readily understood and used by ordinary people in Bulgaria.

We analyzed the data from these thirty-four country ratings in several ways. For each country rated, we calculated the average rating for all respondents who rated that country. We did so by aggregating ratings only for respondents who answered the initial rating question for each country without being asked the follow-up probe. Then in another analysis, we calculated the percentage of respondents who declined to rate a country's development level after our initial rating question.

Another step in our analysis involved comparisons of the average country ratings with external criteria of "development". Here we used the gross domestic product per capita (PPP-GDP/cap) in a country and the country's score on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). These data on GDP per capita and HDI were gathered from the UNDP website June 2009 (source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDI2008Tables.xls>). The HDI is a composite index calculated from three indicators: 1, the combination of national adult literacy (% of population over age 15 who are literate) and the gross school enrollment ratio in primary, secondary, and tertiary school; 2, life expectancy at birth; and 3, per capita income (GDP). The GDP measure is often thought of as a purely economic indicator of development, while the HDI provides a broader perspective that includes education and health as well as income.

In addition to visual comparisons of the average respondent ratings of countries on development with the GDP and HDI scores, we calculated Pearsonian correlations between the average respondent scores and the GDP and HDI scores. We also calculated correlation coefficients between GDP, the HDI scores, and each individual's country ratings for every person in the data set. That is, for each individual in the data set, we calculated the correlation between the UN HDI scores and that individual's own ratings on development and the correlation between country GDP and the individual's country ratings on development. The procedures for calculating these individual correlations are identical to calculating the average correlations with the UN HDI and the GDP scores.

We also estimated two sets of regression equations to evaluate how the individual country rating correlations differed across subsets of the Bulgarian population defined by wealth, sex, education, residence, age, and ethnicity. One regression equation predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and GDP, and another predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and the UN HDI.

By definition, a correlation coefficient (R) is a continuous variable bounded in the interval from -1 to +1. To use it as a dependent variable in a regression we transformed it into a continuous variable which changes from minus to plus infinity. We use a complementary log-log regression to transform R as follows:

$$R_T = \ln \{ - \ln [1 - ((R + 1) / 2)] \}$$

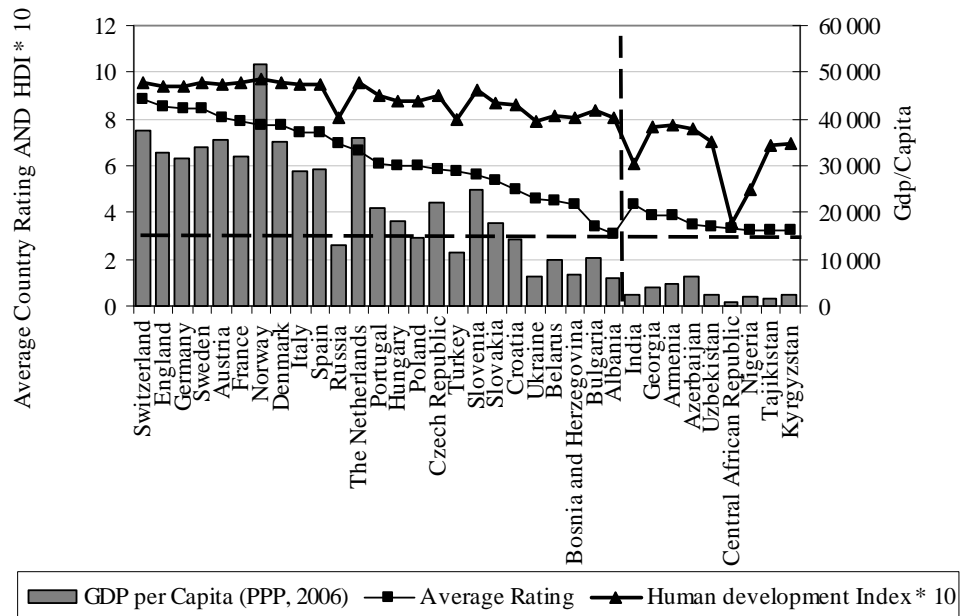
The new variable R_T is used in a linear regression. The coefficients of this regression are displayed in Table 3.

5 Countries on the Slope: Results on Country Rating

*Country
Rating and
Measures of
Development*

Figure 1 plots the average scores that Bulgarian respondents gave to each of the countries rated. In addition, we plot the GDP and HDI scores for the same countries. HDI scores have been multiplied by ten so that they range from zero to ten on a similar scale as the scores given by ordinary Bulgarians. The countries are arranged in Figure 1 so that the countries in a more narrowly defined Europe are arranged in the left side of the figure and countries outside this region are arranged in the right side of the figure. Within those confines, countries are arranged according to their average ratings in the survey, from high to low.

Figure 1
Average Respondent Country Ratings, Human Development Index and GDP per Capita for 34 Countries



We start by looking at the 25 countries within a more narrowly defined Europe (beginning with Switzerland and ending with Albania). The data in Figure 1 clearly show that ordinary Bulgarians rate the 25 European countries according to developmental levels in a rather systematic way that generally moves from Northwest to Southeast. This can be seen in the fact that the eight countries with the highest average ratings are all located in the northwest part of the continent. Also note that these eight countries, along with the Netherlands, have the highest HDI scores and the highest GDP of all countries on the continent. Thus, the ratings of Bulgarians of these countries correspond very similarly to the positions of the countries in income and the HDI.

The ratings of Bulgarians for the Netherlands are somewhat of an anomaly as Bulgarians rate the Netherlands lower than other northwest European countries. In addition, the Netherlands is the only Northwest European country that received average ratings lower than any country outside northwest Europe – in this case Italy, Spain, and Russia. On the basis of a bipolar distribution of values we suspect that this result occurred because Bulgarians were not

familiar with the Netherlands label for this country, and that if we had referred to it with the more familiar label of Holland, the country would have been rated higher. This explanation is consistent with the data in Figure 2 (to be discussed later) showing that a large percentage of Bulgarians said that they did not know the rating of the Netherlands.

Leaving aside the Netherlands, Russia, and Turkey, the next highest rated countries are in southwest Europe (Italy, Spain, and Portugal), followed by the countries of central Europe (Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic). As the focus moves further east and south, the average ratings generally move downward, as do GDP and the scores of the HDI. In this way, these data not only create a very clear slope, but overall they present the historical East/West (or northwest to southeast) civilizational slope as described above (Wolff 1994; Melegh 2006a). Thus, it is evident that ordinary Bulgarians use this developmental and hierarchical model of the world and in this way they follow historic discursive traditions cherished and prescribed by local and international elites and other social actors since the 18th century.

As shown in Figure 1, we observe that, in general, the average ratings of Bulgarians for countries closely follow both the GDP and HDI scores for the same countries. That is, the slope of scores from northwest Europe to southeast Europe is very similar for the three sets of numbers. In addition, all three sets of numbers locate the countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia, South Asia, and Africa at the very lowest levels.

In order to summarize this correspondence, we calculated Pearsonian correlations between the three sets of numbers for the thirty-four countries included in this analysis. Those correlations are as follows: between the average respondent ratings and GDP the correlation is .91; between average respondent ratings and HDI the correlation is .76. The correlations of the average respondent ratings with the GDP and the HDI (.91 and .76) are not only exceptionally high but in the same range as the correlation between the GDP and the HDI (.80) for these same countries. This is true even though GDP is one of the three components of the Human Development Index.

These high correlations between the average respondent ratings and GDP and HDI are especially remarkable when one considers the fact that the respondent ratings require that respondents have a definition of development and that their definition of development matches that of the United Nations (UNDP). It also requires that respondents have a certain familiarity with the countries they are asked to rate and that they are able to rate them in a linear way on the eleven-point scale that we used in the survey. If any of these four conditions failed, the correlations of respondent scores with GDP and HDI would be driven strongly toward zero.

It is also useful to note that the average respondent ratings are closer to the GDP of countries than to the HDI scores – correlations of .91 and .76 respectively. This is clearly apparent in Figure 1 where we can see that the slope of the HDI scores across countries is much flatter than the slope of GDP scores and the slope of average respondent scores. Furthermore, the slope of respondent scores closely tracks the slope of the GDP figures.

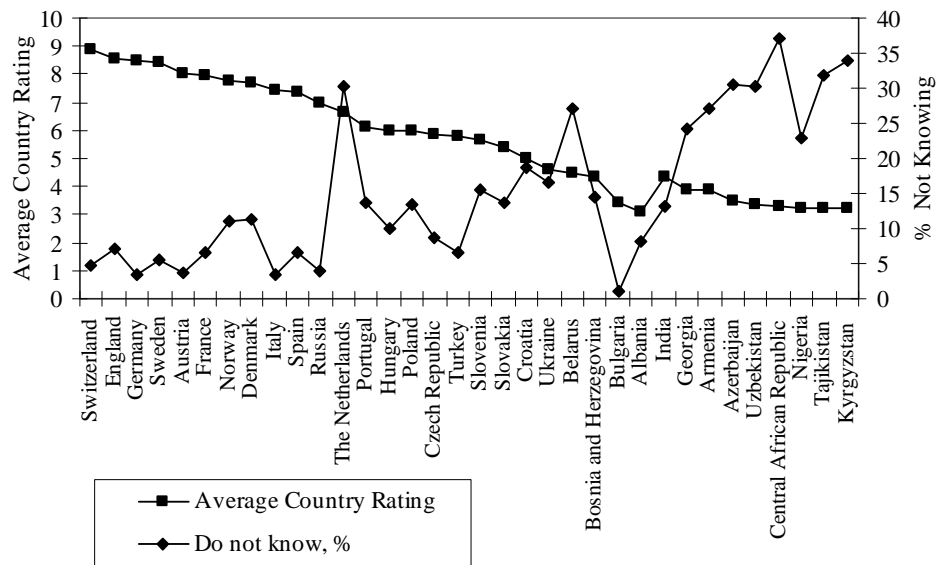
Another way of making this point is to note that HDI scores in eastern and southern Europe are higher (relative to GDP) than they are in northwestern Europe. That is, the rate of conversion of HDI into GDP in the southeast is less than in other parts of the continent. And, most importantly

for us, the slope across countries for Bulgarians is much closer to the GDP curve than to the HDI curve.²

Developmental Slope and the Knowledge of Countries

With regard to the nature of the developmental slope perceived by ordinary Bulgarians, it is important to see that a country being highly rated on the developmental scale is also related to how well ordinary Bulgarians actually believe they know the score of the relevant country. This is shown in Figure 2, where we can see that the only countries ordinary Bulgarians rate high on development are the ones that large percentages say that they know about. When a large percentage of people say they have no clear idea of the developmental level of the relevant country, it is more probable that the country will be rated low by those who rate it. In other words, knowing about and rating a country as highly developed (with the understandable exception of the rating of Bulgaria) occur together. This finding suggests that Bulgarians are more certain when looking up the perceived developmental slope. They are more familiar with the developmental levels of the countries which they see as being above them on the slope and less familiar with those considered less advanced.

Figure 2
Average Country Rating and Percentage Saying that They Do Not Know the Rating



This actually captures one of the crucial elements of the Eurocentrist outlook that is much discussed in the case of elite discourses, where the

² The close match between perceived levels of development and GDP per capita figures seems to be a specific thing to the two post-socialist countries in South Eastern Europe if we put that into comparative perspective. On the basis of a preliminary analysis, during an introductory talk on June 10, 2010, Georgina Binstock clearly showed that as compared to similarly surveyed countries like Nepal, Lebanon, Egypt, USA, Iraq, China, Taiwan, and Argentina, the two “Balkan” countries Bulgaria and Albania were the ones in which respondents had the best correlation between their own ratings and GDP per capita figures, while in the case of all other elements of the HDI they scored much less “precisely” (Presentation at Symposium on The Globalization of Modernization Theory: Clashes of Modernities and Moralities, University of Michigan, June 9–10, 2010). This can be interpreted as Albanians and Bulgarians not only having a better focus on income differentials, but also as a sign of them ignoring their own relatively good levels of education and life expectancy (with regarded to GDP levels), which were mainly due to their socialist pasts (Böröcz 1999).

most important thing is the fixation on the development of core countries (among other authors, Böröcz 2003; Chakrabarty 2000: Introduction), while countries seen as less advanced are also seen to be much less important to know and understand. In this way we can also argue that visibility and perceived development levels come together, reminding us of the inbuilt power mechanisms of the slope (Melegh 2006a: Chapter 1).

Despite the slope's surprising congruence with historical and contemporary scales, there are some notable exceptions or outliers that distort the overall slope model. The first one is Russia which occupies a rather high position in respondent ratings, as they evaluate it similarly to the southwestern European countries of Italy, Spain, and Portugal, well ahead of the central European countries. Thus, it is perceived to be much further up on the East/West slope than its location in historical East/West discourses would suggest. Also, note that Russia's average rating by Bulgarians is also much higher than would be predicted by either its GDP or HDI score.

Outliers

Another outlier is Turkey. Despite its discursive exclusion from Europe and its discursive location further down on the slope, the average respondent score for Turkey is similar to the central European countries of Poland and the Czech Republic (Todorova 1997a; Neumann 1999; Hülsse 2000). As with Russia, the high average ratings of Turkey by Bulgarians are not explained by its GDP or HDI score.

One commonality between Russia and Turkey is that, as discussed earlier, both countries have played powerful, even crucial, roles in Bulgaria's national history. Bulgaria was occupied by Turkey for more than 500 years, from the 14th century through the late 19th century, and it was liberated from Turkey with Russia's help. Following this, Russia has been an influential player in Bulgaria. Both Russia and Turkey were colonial rulers and players with a sense of being great powers that were also much more influential in the region than Bulgaria. It seems that the overall perceived East/West developmental slope is modified with regard to them.

It is useful to note that the modification of general developmental hierarchies by local histories and politics has been observed in similar surveys in other countries (Thornton et al 2010a). For example, a somewhat similar situation can be found concerning the rating of Japan among Chinese respondents, who "underrate" the country as compared to respondents from other countries. Similarly, Taiwanese respondents "underrate" China compared to ratings of China by other people. In the case of Bulgaria there is an "overrating" of local powerful countries, regardless of whether the historically closely-linked country is a "friend" (as Russia is perceived in public discourses) or an "enemy" (like Turkey). In the case of Russia, the "overrating" is such that even the modal rating is 8 out of a maximum of 10, and a substantial number of Bulgarians gave Russia ratings of 9 and even 10. In the case of Turkey the "overrating" is less substantial and may be a tribute to the previous "colonizer" as such historical processes can be linked to setting up hierarchies in which the colonizers always appear as more developed.

6 Balkanism and Developmental Rating

Another particularly interesting country rating is for Bulgaria itself. In the distribution of ratings it is strikingly clear that ordinary Bulgarians have a rather low evaluation of their own country in terms of development. While it is important to note that in all the related surveys conducted with similar questions respondents tended to underrate their own countries somewhat below their HDI figures (Thornton et al. 2010a), the “modesty” of Bulgarian respondents is somewhat extraordinary in international comparison. Ordinary Bulgarians rate their own country as one of the lowest in Europe, and see themselves on the level of Uzbekistan, Central African Republic, and Nigeria. This is striking, especially when we consider the fact that Bulgaria has both GDP and HDI that are considerably higher than in these similarly-rated countries. It is also notable that this view is largely shared regardless of the age, sex, wealth, and education of the Bulgarian respondents. The only real difference according to subgroups is that respondents of non-Bulgarian ethnicity (including Roma, Turkish etc) view Bulgaria’s developmental level as higher than do ethnic Bulgarians.

Interestingly, this line of developmental thinking extends to other countries in the Balkans rated by Bulgarians, such as Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Out of all the countries included in or near the European Union, these three countries receive the lowest developmental ratings by the Bulgarian respondents. Such low ratings for Balkan countries also appear in a survey of ordinary people in Albania conducted in 2006, where Albanians gave their own country a score of 3.1, exactly equal to their rating of the Central African Republic and only somewhat higher than their average rating for Nigeria and Pakistan (Thornton et al. 2010a). Development ratings this low for the Balkan countries are not supported by either their GDP or HDI scores.

It is interesting to note that this particularly negative image of the Balkans is just partially shared by respondents from other countries in previous studies rating the developmental level of Balkan countries. Bulgaria was rated on its development levels in a similar survey conducted in the United States in 2007. In this US survey, people rated Bulgaria relatively low, but higher than Nigeria or the Central African Republic, two countries that Bulgarians located developmentally very similarly to Bulgaria. Thus in this US survey ordinary people do not “underrate” Bulgaria as much as Bulgarians “underrate” themselves.

The especially low ratings of development in the Balkans by Albanians and Bulgarians give the impression that there may be a low and somewhat paradoxically negative self-esteem among people in the Balkans. Maria Todorova (1997a), who has worked on the historic discourses on the “Balkans”, or on “Balkanism”, has made the following remarks on the related, somewhat special frustrations and negative attitudes, which might also play a role in the minds of ordinary Bulgarians:

By being geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other" within, the Balkans have been able to absorb conveniently a number of externalized political, ideological, and cultural frustrations stemming from tensions and contradictions inherent to the regions and societies outside the Balkans. Balkanism became, in time, a

convenient substitute for the emotional discharge that orientalism provided, exempting the West from charges of racism, colonialism, eurocentrism, and Christian intolerance against Islam. After all, the Balkans are in Europe, they are white; they are predominantly Christian, and therefore the externalization of frustrations on them can circumvent the usual racial or religious bias allegations. As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and the "West" has been constructed. With the reemergence of East and orientalism as independent semantic values, the Balkans are left in Europe's thrall, anticivilization, alter ego, the dark side within (Todorova 1997a: 188).

This may mean that Balkanism as a “repository of negative characteristics” creates a kind of frustration that one’s own country is perceived as being close to the development of other countries with lower HDI and GDP values, such as Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Bulgarians may have the view that they as a “European” country live at such a low level as related to high European standards to the west of Bulgaria that their level of development can only be linked to other places with considerably lower income levels. In other words this low rating can be a sign of the combination of a “border identity” (an extreme sense of being in between different poles and levels of development) and an overall frustration concerning economic and social development as already noted above concerning Bulgarian identity. This possible mechanism of creating an extremely negative identity when there is an extreme sense of being on the border region in a hierarchical system is nicely captured by Vesseva (2008) when writing about East European and Balkanic identities:

As Erikson's identity formation suggests, the acquisition of a negative identity is one of the possible outcomes of a crisis caused by the impossibility of identifying with any of the available positive identities that have not been fully internalized because they contradict each other. Such a negative identity can be accepted precisely because even a negative identity is better than a partial identity or no identity at all (41–42).

7 Developmental Ratings and Heterogeneity

We now shift our attention from the average ratings that Bulgarians give countries on development and the correlations of GDP and HDI with these average scores to the correlations of the country ratings of individuals with the country GDPs and HDIs. The calculation procedures conducted at the individual level are the same as the procedures for the averages, except that the correlations are calculated for individuals rather than averages. The distributions of correlations are summarized in Table 2 by decile, along with the mean correlation.

Columns 1 and 3 of Table 2 summarize the distribution of correlations for all respondents with ratings between all countries they were asked to rate and the GDP and HDI respectively. Columns 2 and 4 repeat these distributions excluding the following countries: Central African Republic, India, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Nigeria, Georgia, Armenia,

*Individual
Country
Ratings*

Azerbaijan, Austria, Netherlands, and Switzerland. The exclusion of these countries in the second set of correlations was motivated by our desire to have a set of correlations based exclusively on countries clearly within Europe. Also, recall that there was considerable missing data for the Netherlands, and in an effort to minimize missing data issues for this second set of correlations, we excluded the Netherlands and the two countries – Austria and Switzerland – that were paired with the Netherlands in the other two modules.

The data in Table 2 indicate that most of the individual correlations between country rating versus GDP and HDI are positive and large. Across each set of correlations, the medians range from .61 to .76 and the means range from .57 to .72. Furthermore, there are many large correlations, with 30 percent or more being higher than .68, and relatively few small correlations, with 10 percent or fewer being lower than .29. This suggests that the high correlations we observed earlier between country ratings and GDP and HDI at the aggregate level are not just the result of compensating errors, but also hold for many individual Bulgarians.

More detailed investigation of the distribution of correlations in Table 2 reveals that the individual correlations tend to be somewhat higher between respondents’ development rating and the GDP than the respondent development ratings and HDI. When the correlations are calculated based on all countries, the median correlation between country ratings and GDP is .76 compared to the median of .61 for the correlation between country ratings and HDI. This lower correlation at the individual level for HDI compared to GDP is consistent with the results reported earlier for the average or aggregate ratings.

There is no consistent pattern in the distribution of correlations between those with all countries rated and the correlations excluding countries outside of mainstream Europe or with high levels of missing data. The median and mean correlations with GDP decrease with the country exclusions while the median and mean correlations with HDI increase with the exclusions. We do not have an explanation for this pattern.³

*Country
Rating and
Different
Groups of
Respondents*

We now turn to our regression equations estimating the effects of wealth, sex, education, residence, age, and ethnicity on the individual correlations between country ratings and GDP and HDI. One regression equation predicted the correlation between an individual’s ratings and GDP, and another predicted the correlation between an individual’s ratings and the HDI. Recall that we transformed the original correlations with a log-log transformation and predicted these values with linear regression. With a focus on Europe and a desire to maximize the amount of data available, our dependent variable is the correlations that exclude ratings for the countries of Central African Republic, India, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Nigeria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Netherlands, and Switzerland. The coefficients for these regressions are displayed in Table 3.

³ We would like to note that correlations can be influenced by the amount of variance in the two variables (GDP and HDI). HDI has relatively less variance than does GDP. This difference may lead to the fact that when all countries are analyzed for GDP (column 1) then correlations are higher as compared to values when some countries are excluded (column 2), while in the case of HDI there is a reverse order.

We begin by noting that most of the coefficients in Table 3 are not statistically significant. This includes the coefficients for wealth, sex, and ethnic group.

The coefficients for age, residence, and education are statistically significant. We note first that the age effect is curvilinear, with the smallest correlations estimated for people 18–39 and for those 60 and older and larger correlations for those 40–59. We do not have a ready explanation for this curvilinear relationship.

For residential location, there is an almost monotonic decline in both sets of correlations associated with decreasing city size, although the coefficients are only statistically significant for the HDI correlations. This result suggests, as we expected, that compared to towns-people and villagers, people in large cities have more knowledge of the concept of development, have a concept of development closer to that of the United Nations, have more knowledge of different countries, or are able to use our country development scale more reliably. With our currently available data we cannot decide between these explanations.

For education, there is a monotonic and significant decline in both sets of correlations associated with lower levels of education. The difference between the highest and lowest education groups is .27 and .23 on the log-log scale, depending upon which correlations are examined. There is clearly something about higher education that is associated with higher correlations with the UN HDI, but as with residence, it is not obvious which of the possible explanations are the most relevant.

Table 2
Percentile Distribution of Bivariate Correlations Between Individual Respondent's Ratings of Development and GDP Per Capita and Between Individual Respondent's Ratings of Development and the UN HDI⁴

Percentiles	Correlations with GDP All Countries	Correlations with GDP Some Country Exclusions ⁵	Correlations with HDI All Countries	Correlations with HDI Some Country Exclusions ⁴
10 th	.47	.39	.29	.31
20 th	.59	.52	.41	.46
30 th	.66	.61	.50	.55
40 th	.72	.68	.55	.62
50 th	.76	.73	.61	.66
60 th	.80	.77	.65	.71
70 th	.83	.81	.68	.76
80 th	.86	.85	.72	.83
90 th	.89	.90	.78	.87
Mean Correlation	.72	.67	.57	.62
Number of Cases ⁶	622	804	622	804

⁴ These correlations are computed at the individual response level. They represent the Pearson correlation coefficient between the country scores given by an individual for development (or income) with the United Nation scores for the same countries on development (or income). The possible range is from –1 to 1.

⁵ These correlation calculations exclude the countries of Central African Republic, India, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Nigeria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Netherlands, and Switzerland.

⁶ The number of cases is larger when some countries are excluded than when all countries are included. That is because in order to calculate a correlation for a respondent, he/she has to have good data on every country included in that particular calculation. So, the fewer countries that are included in the calculation, the greater the number of respondents who will have good data on each of them.

Although the results are clear in suggesting a relationship between the correlations and education, the transformation of the dependent variable makes the magnitude of the effects hard to interpret. To achieve an interpretation of the effects based on the original correlations, we made the backward transformation from R_T to R . We did this by calculating the expected values of R_T for ethnic Bulgarian males aged 40–49 of medium wealth who lived in a city and had university or higher education and then converting these expected values back into the original correlation metric. We did a similar thing for people with a primary or lower education that had the same other attributes just mentioned. The expected correlation for the high education group was .81, compared to the expected correlation of .67 for the low education group. Thus, going from the lowest to the highest education group increased the raw correlation by .14.

Table 3
*Regression coefficients and corresponding p-values for two models:
correlations of respondents' development ratings
with (1) GDP and (2) UN HDI*

Variables	Correlations with GDP		Correlations with UN HDI	
	coef.	p-value	coef.	p-value
Wealth (Most wealthy is the base)				
Medium wealth	0.022	0.694	0.029	0.532
Lowest wealth	0.075	0.174	0.064	0.188
Sex (Males is the base)				
Females	-0.030	0.338	-0.035	0.255
Education (Univ. or higher is base)				
College	-0.096	0.101	-0.051	0.355
Secondary	-0.164	0	-0.130	0.001
Primary or lower	-0.273	0	-0.229	0
Residence (Capital is the base)				
City	-0.034	0.491	-0.049	0.226
Town	-0.026	0.634	-0.066	0.158
Village	-0.107	0.138	-0.144	0.043
Age (18-29 is the base)				
30-39	0.083	0.220	0.087	0.192
40-49	0.149	0.023	0.164	0.011
50-59	0.143	0.032	0.157	0.017
60+	0.066	0.312	0.077	0.235
Ethnic group (Bulgarian is the base)				
Turks, Roma, and others	0.086	0.178	0.098	0.155
Constant	0.728	0	0.623	0
N	804		804	

8 Conclusion

We began this paper with the observation that development and the hierarchies of countries are important concepts that have permeated the worldviews and belief systems of policy makers and other elites around the world for centuries. We also observed that these ideas have played an important role in public affairs. Our paper was motivated by the hypothesis that these ideas of development and its hierarchies have permeated the thinking of ordinary people in everyday life in many parts of the world.

We have examined this hypothesis for the country of Bulgaria using survey data collected in 2009 and found strong support for our overall

hypothesis. These data present strong evidence that Bulgarians have conceptual maps of development and its geographical distribution. The average ratings they give to European countries indicate a strong gradient of development that is high in northwest Europe and declines steadily with movement to the south and east, with the low point in Europe being the Balkans of the southeastern part of the continent. Thus, the east-west developmental gradient that has been discussed in the literature on historical and political discourses is very apparent in the perspectives of ordinary Bulgarians; the ideas of development and East-West development gradients have permeated to the grassroots level in Bulgaria.

This perceived gradient of development in the minds of ordinary Bulgarians closely parallels the gradients of gross domestic product and the United Nations Human Development Index. This suggests that the ideas of development and developmental hierarchies have a basis, not only in ideas, but in the distribution of income and related factors across the European continent. Thus we may observe hierarchical imaginations as related to somewhat hierarchical social and economic structures.

Interestingly, the gradients from the northwest to the southeast of both gross domestic product and Bulgarian development country ratings are steeper than the gradient for the UN HDI, with the countries of southeast Europe being closer to northwest Europe in terms of such HDI factors as literacy, school enrollment, and longevity than in terms of income. The East-West gradient of development in the minds of ordinary Bulgarians seems to follow the income gradient more closely than the HDI gradient, with Bulgarians apparently taking particular note of standard of living differences in their evaluations of development levels.

We have also found that the strong geographical gradient of views of development not only exists at the aggregate or average level, but at the individual level. Most individual Bulgarians have an idea of developmental differences across countries, and these ideas are generally in the same direction as that portrayed by the UN HDI and the GDP. Furthermore, most of the individual correlations of country ratings are quite closely related to the HDI and GDP, indicating again the extensive permeation of the development concept to the ordinary people of Bulgaria and the ways that Bulgarians relate development to HDI.

The data from ordinary Bulgarians also suggest that there is a gradient from northwest to southeast in knowledge about particular countries. Despite the fact that Bulgaria is itself in the southeast part of the continent, individual respondents were more likely to say that they could rate a northwest European country on development than they were to say that they could rate some southeast European countries on development. This suggests that people residing in countries on the lower end of the development ladder are focused more intently on countries high above them on the ladder than on countries close to or below them on the ladder.

Our data also suggest that ordinary Bulgarians equate the development levels of southeast European countries to the developmental levels of countries in other regions, including those of Africa and Central and South Asia. This is true despite the HDI scores and GDP of the southeast European countries being considerably higher than those of these other regions. In our research we found strong evidence of special negative self-perception of ordinary Bulgarians, which can be linked to research on national identity on

the Balkans. This is consistent with the negative view as described by Krasteva (2000). According to her:

Discontent with the country's economic and political situation has prompted some people to feel ashamed of being Bulgarian" (Krasteva 2000:507).

We also stress that the overall development gradient from northwest Europe to southeast Europe existing in the minds of ordinary Bulgarians is modified by local considerations such as history and regional influence. This is most evident in the fact that Bulgarians rate both Russia and Turkey higher on development than one would expect from their geographical locations—also higher than one would expect from their GDP and HDI ratings. We interpret this as reflecting the enormous influence of Russia and Turkey in Bulgarian affairs over the past centuries. We also note a strong Balkanism effect, with Bulgarians tending to “underrate” countries in that region relative to GDP and HDI ratings. This “underrating” is perhaps most notable in the case of Bulgaria itself.

Our data, however, suggest the dissemination of ideas about development have not been uniform in the country. Most importantly, this permeation of the idea of development appears to be most widespread in the large cities, among the highly educated, and among the middle-aged. This suggests the likelihood that urban living and education are both instrumental in spreading these ideas, although many villagers and those with less education have also assimilated the ideas of development.

This research in Bulgaria joins a growing body of evidence indicating that knowledge of developmental ideas and its hierarchies have been widely disseminated around the world, including in settings as widely disparate as China, Nepal, Egypt, Iran, Argentina, and the United States. Although these data do not represent all regions and populations of the world, they provide strong reasons to believe that such ideas are widely disseminated and available to influence the behavior of ordinary people throughout the world.

The Bulgarian data go further than any other research on mental maps of developmental hierarchies in that they chart out almost the entirety of the European continent. They show the ways in which ordinary people in one country perceive the European map of development. As we have already mentioned, this mental construction has a clear northwest to southeast slope that matches closely the income gradient. Also the Bulgarian data reflect the importance of local circumstances in mental maps of the distribution of development.

Our data, of course, were collected in only one European country, Bulgaria, and we do not know how ordinary people in other countries map out the developmental map of Europe. Our belief in the widespread knowledge of developmental ideas, however, leads us to expect that they would have the same general map that the Bulgarians have of the overall northwest to southeast gradient. At the same time, the Bulgarian data lead us to the hypothesis that people from other countries would also be affected by their local histories and relationships with neighboring countries. We look forward to additional data collection and analysis demonstrating these patterns for other European countries. It would also be valuable to have such detailed mental maps of development for other regions of the world.

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