

## СОЦІАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ МОЛОДІ

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### THE ROLE OF INFORMAL CONNECTIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE YOUTH IN UKRAINE

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The article provides the examination of the strategies that are applied by the young people in order to achieve some goals or obtain some services. The question of transformation of the of blat relations into the non-monetary exchange of connection is raised.

*Key words:* connections, corruption blat relations, education.

Many countries of Eastern Europe, and Ukraine in particular, have declared democratic regimes. However, these new democracies face serious problems; people treat the state institutions with mistrust. The post-soviet countries, where transformation towards new political system is taking place, find themselves in a situation in which lawfully elected representatives are not trusted by their electorate, and thus the process of transformation is hindered by the lack of support of the masses.

Ukrainian people have little trust in their government. They believe that many officials abuse of their status for the sake of personal enrichment at the expense of the society. It might seem that the transition to democracy has to influence the formation of active civic participation, but the results of numerous opinion polls show quite the opposite. Citizens do not participate and do not trust most organizations, associations, trade unions, etc. In 2010, about 60 per cent of Ukrainian respondents pointed out that they do not trust political parties [1, p. 515]. 83.6 per cent claimed that they do not belong to any public organization or political movement [1, p. 488]. An interesting situation is also observed concerning the problem of accepting or denying active forms of protest. Only 26.2 per cent are ready to take part in legal meetings and demonstrations; the rest agree to sign collective petitions – 26.7 per cent, or to participate in electoral campaigns – 20.2 per cent, in the case of restriction of their rights [1, p. 501]. Thus, people mainly prefer to rely only on themselves and their friendship connections in order to improve their economic situation.

The system of networks and blat relations during soviet times is studied and described by many scholars such as Ledeneva A. 1999, Lovell S., Ledeneva A., Rogachevskii A. 2000, Radaev 1999, Miller W., Koshechkina T., Grodeland A. 2000, 2001, etc. In these studies, it has been shown that connections and networks were used mainly for obtaining deficit goods and services. With the help of the transformation of the market, economy deficit vanished and now the question of existence and forms of use of connections in post-soviet independent Ukraine can be raised. Do people use connections to obtain some goods or services? In which spheres personal connections are still valuable and can be seen as a main or the only way to obtain services?

Nowadays, there are a lot of studies on the corruption situation in Ukraine (Transparency International, USAID etc.) that include analysis of ways and spheres, where mainly bribes are given with a help of connections. However, these studies tend to examine the situation more from the quantitative perspective of the date that helps to make generalized conclusion.

Yet, this article is based on the qualitative survey that was conducted during 2010 in Ukraine. The main research task was to find out typical cases of using connections by the young adults, discover the spheres of application of these connections and the strategies that youth use. The qualitative semi-structured interviews were held with the young highly qualified people of 25–35 years old with bachelor or master degree.

This group of people was almost not involved into Pioneer or Komsomol organizations, they did not have any experience of participation in formal soviet organizations and associations, they were still too young to know what did it mean deficit and how to cope with soviet authorities. At the same time this group of people is among the first generation that finished Ukrainian schools. These young people are the main audience to whom Ukrainian politicians refer and who can build a new democratic society with an active position of citizens and civil rights implementation.

The purpose was to interview young people who had finished their studies at the public universities and had at least 4–5 years of working experience. Taking into account the delicate character of the research topic, the respondents were chosen according to the snowball technique based on the acquaintance and friends of the friends' contacts of the researcher.

### **The Higher Education System in Ukraine**

The Higher Educational System in Ukraine is presented by the variety of institutions that give possibility to get special secondary education and bachelor, master and doctoral degrees.

There are several levels of accreditation of educational institutions in Ukraine. The institutions such as technical secondary schools and colleges form a part of institutions of level I and II of accreditation. However, universities and academies that give a bachelor or master degree form the III and IV levels of accreditation. Every year more than 100 thousand students graduate from the institutions of I and II levels of accreditation and about 500 thousand students graduate from the III and IV levels of accreditation [2].

According to the official statistics, in 2010 the total amount of young people from 15 till 35 years old is 12 millions of people, that is about 29,8 per cent of the whole population of Ukraine [3, p. 8–12]. The amount of university students consists of 2 400 000 persons. There are 854 institutions in Ukraine. This quantity includes 349 institutions of III and IV levels of accreditation [2].

Table 1

The number of Student and Institutions of Ukraine 1990–2011

	Number of institutions:		Number of students in thousands	
	I-II level of accreditation	III-IV level of accreditation	I-II level of accreditation	III-IV level of accreditation
1990/91	742	149	757,0	881,3
1991/92	754	156	739,2	876,2
1992/93	753	158	718,8	855,9
2006/07	570	350	468,0	2318,6
2007/08	553	351	441,3	2372,5
2008/09	528	353	399,3	2364,5
2010/11	505	349	361,5	2129,8

### Ukraine in the middle of 1990<sup>th</sup>

With the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine gained its independent status, and transformation processes in political and economic systems began. Tatyana Zaslavskaya defined transformation as a “gradual, radical, relatively quick change of the social nature of society caused by external factors and internal necessity” [4, p. 132]. Among distinguishing features of transformation in post-soviet countries are inevitability of long period of anomy and weak controllability and predictability of all processes [4, p. 133]. The authors of the book “A culture of corruption?” underline that the situation in post-soviet countries is “more a transition from communism than a transition to functioning market economy” [5, p. 39]. Hans van Zon, in his book “The political economy of independent Ukraine” (2000), shows that the gap between the rhetoric of the government and concrete policy is huge. Transformation to the market economy during early 1990s was accompanied by the price liberalization that led to 1000 per cent of inflation in 1992 [6, p. 51]. About 40 per cent of the population appeared below the official poverty line.

Process of privatization or grabitization [7, p. 142] of state-owned enterprises involved informal capital redistribution. The main role in this process was played by the former party leaders, or nomenklatura [8].

A typical feature of the social structure change in Ukraine during 1990s was intensive descending stratification. Former skilled workers, scientists, teachers, who used to work for the state organizations found themselves unemployed or unpaid when a lot of organizations collapsed with the fall of the USSR. Comparing Ukraine to other ex-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the following differences can be seen [9, p. 60] :

- In Ukraine more people work without being paid (16 per cent versus 5 per cent),
- The salary of every third Ukrainian is not sufficient to buy all necessities (32 per cent in Ukraine versus 19 per cent)
- 50 per cent of Ukrainians receive unregistered income (versus 20 per cent)
- 52 per cent of Ukrainians “often or sometimes” cannot afford food (versus 19 per cent), clothing – 66 per cent (versus 32 per cent).

Ukrainian population was dissatisfied with current economic situation. According to the data from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 78 per cent of people shared the feeling of economic pessimisms [5, p. 51]. This pessimism was intensified

by the inability of local leaders to solve problems [10, p. 225–232] and by the low level of trust in capability of the central government to improve the economic situation. 75 per cent of the respondents of the focused groups all over Ukraine pointed out that government officials treated them worse during the period of Ukrainian independence than under communist times [5, p. 68].

Since the state welfare system failed to function adequately, the main strategy employed by people was reliance on themselves and family networks [11, p. 19].

### **The Ways to Enter to the Public University**

During the transformation period in Ukraine in early 90<sup>th</sup>, people had very hard economical conditions. However, even in this situation, the value of the education was very high and the availability of a diploma of specialist and/or master degree were seen as an important resource of life success.

In order to enter university in Ukraine it was necessary to take two or three entrance exams. The subjects of these exams depended on the faculty choices. For example, to enter into the psychology department you had to do exams in Mathematics, Biology and Ukrainian language; to enter the law faculty there were exams in Ukrainian history, Ukrainian language and Law; To enter the faculty of economics you had to do exams in Mathematics and Ukrainian language. There were some faculties that had special exams, that consisted in a mixture of several disciplines, like the case of the faculty of sociology. The exam name was ‘Men and Society’, and it consisted of questions about philosophy, history, and ethics. In order to pass this exam, the students had to study some special books or to go to special preparation courses that were held at the university. The same thing happened with the entrance to the faculty of design. In one of the exams, students had to draw a portrait of the person and if you did not have any special additional education, it was very unlikely to pass this exam. Every year in spring there was a week of “Open Doors” when all faculties did presentations of themselves, and where it was possible to find out all the necessary information about the admission procedure. It has to be mentioned that during soviet times the system of higher education was free of charge. However, in early 1990<sup>th</sup> the system of budget places and paid places was introduced. If you do not pay for your studies, it means that you have a budget place, and your education is financed by the state. Yet, if you did not get a budget place you can try to apply for a paid place at the same faculty.

In this section respondents were asked to tell their experience of entering the university, to mention which exams they were taken, when and how they found about the list of exams, and how they were preparing them.

According to the interviews, several entrance strategies were observed.

The first strategy “**reliance on oneself**“ consists in self-preparation for the exams. In theory, the amount of knowledge that was given in school had to be sufficient in order to pass any kind of entrance exams to the university. During the last year at school, pupils more or less had ideas about their future careers and about the faculties in which they want to enter. Thus, normally they dedicated more time for subjects which would be at the entrance exams.

*“I entered university by myself. I had my school diploma with honors. It means that I had a golden medal. So I had only to have interview with the admission board on economics. I passed it and that it is. Many of my friends told me that I was lucky, I do not know, maybe yes [W/30 years old, marketing specialist]”.*

*“I was the best in my school at English. I took part in school competitions at English and I got a second place in the city competition at English. Also I spent a year in the USA. I took part in the exchange program and I was living with an American family and studied in an ordinary American school. It was very interesting experience for me and I was sure that my level of English was enough to enter the faculty of foreign languages by my own. By the way, I also finished school with the golden medal and had a privilege in the admission process. I had to take only one exam – English exam and that is it. All my friends told me that I was naive if I expected to pass without any money. Still, my mother did not have any extra money to pay for entrance exams so I just took the exam. I was completely shocked when I found out that I did not pass [W/29 years old, sociologist]”.*

The amount of budget places is always smaller than paid places and every year it reduces. That is why there is a very big competition for budget places and it is hard to get one. Even if you are a very good student and have perfect marks in your school, it does not guarantee to enter the faculty that you choose. The best strategy in this case is to apply for paid places.

*“You have to believe me; I entered university without any help. I took all the exams and paid for my studies. It was the only possibility to enter. I wanted to enter the faculty of international relations but there, for sure, I had to pay some bribery, otherwise, it would have been impossible to enter. I was smarter and went to another faculty, the faculty of economy and law. That faculty was not so prestigious. I studied one year there and then I asked to move to the faculty I wanted from the very beginning [M/31 years old, economist]”.*

*“In order to enter into the law school I just did exams and paid for my education. Everybody can enter if they pay for the education, even if you do not know how to write, you will get a place. It is a business and nothing more. The university has to get some profit [M/29 years old, lawyer]”.*

It can be seen that for respondents their ability to pass the exams played the second role, they do not believe that they entered university because of their knowledge. They believe that the main reason why they got the place was the ability to pay for their studies.

*“I was forced to pay for my studies; otherwise, I would not have got a place. They told me that there were no more budget places free. However, the admission committee promised me that if I had excellent marks at the first semester I would be able to apply for a budget place. In reality, I had to pay for my studies two years despite the fact that I had excellent marks in all subjects. I felt very bad when I saw that some of my colleagues had been moved to budget places even though they had lower marks than mine. At the end, with the help of a connection of my uncle, we found a man at the faculty to whom we paid money and after this, I was moved to a budget place [W/31 years old, economist]”.*

According to the empirical data taken from the research held in 2006 by the Department of Sociology of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University “High school as a subject of socio-cultural transformation” (representative sample is 3057 students from 31 universities of Ukraine, head of the project prof. Sokuryanskaya), more than 76 per cent of students admit the importance of knowledge during the admission process. At the same time bribes (10 per cent), parents connections (19,2 per cent) and so called financial aid from parents to university (5,1 per cent) are seen as some additional factors that can help to enter university.

The second strategy of entering the university is a **‘reliance on the additional preparation**

**techniques**'. Students participated in preparation courses in the university that they wanted to enter or they had some private classes with some professor from the university.

*"I went to the preparation course, in order to enter faculty of sociology. The course lasted four months and we had lectures in economy, history and culture. I liked that the professors that gave lectures were the professors from the faculty of sociology. I could get to know them better and they can recognize me at exam. I was sure that they would give all necessary knowledge to pass the exam, because only they know which kind of questions they will ask at exam. Nobody was giving us guaranties that we will enter but I think all my friends with whom I went to courses entered the university [W/29 years old, sociologist]"*.

*"In our faculty, it does not matter if you have a school certificate with honors or merits. The most important thing is to draw a portrait of men. Professors can immediately see if you came from an ordinary school or from the secondary drawing school. I did not have special studies in this subject and that is why I took private classes with a professor from the faculty. Still, I was not sure if I would enter. There was an unwritten rule about not taking students without a special secondary drawing education. That is why my father went to the dean of the faculty and paid him 150 dollars. Yes, I know that now it is not so big amount of money but in the early 1990<sup>th</sup> it was a lot. Now you have to pay at least 3 or 4 thousand dollars to enter. Before, only some people gave bribes, but now, everybody have to do it [M/35 years old, designer]"*.

There are almost no negative attitudes towards the bribes in the answers of respondents. Bribes are seen just as part of some processes, like part of the rules that you have to follow in order to achieve your goal.

*"I had two professors with whom I was preparing for entrance exams. One was a professor of Ukrainian language. I wrote dictations with her and later she was in the admission committee. She was giving us the exam and she made sure that I did not do a lot of mistakes in the text. My father paid her for private classes only, but the price for every class was very high, about 20 dollars. It was better to pay and be sure that you will pass. The second professor helped me to prepare myself for the exam 'Men and Society'. I do not think that I could have passed this exam without a special preparation. We did not study all these things at school [W/31 years old, sociologist]"*.

However, it is very important not only to have money to give bribes, but also to have direct contacts with the officials at the university, or to know some mediators who can provide some contacts or just play a role of guarantors:

*"My mother had a friend who was the wife of the professor with whom I prepared for the exam [W/30 years old, sociologist]"*.

*"I finished this faculty and was in good relations with the dean of the faculty. Thus, when my sister wanted to apply to this faculty I went to the dean and paid money. He knew me. That is why he took money [W/31 years old, economist]"*.

*"At our university, there is a big gap between the person who gives money and the recipients. There is a vertical structure of mediators. There is a team of workers that check if there is a trap or no. You can start having private classes with one professor who is not in this chain. Later this professor will tell the dean of the faculty his opinion about the student and will recommend such a smart person. Then some people from the dean's office will contact the future student and will tell him which other steps he has to do [M/35 years old, designer]"*



It can be seen that the ‘reliance on the additional preparation techniques’ strategy is in many cases a hidden bribery strategy. Private classes and trainings are just the hidden ways to pay for entrance exams. It can be called as ‘insurance of entering’.

Moreover, there is a third strategy of entering university that is called ‘**reliance on the bribery**’. In this case, students are sure that there is no other way to enter university apart from the additional payment to some officials. This does not mean that the level of their knowledge was low; on the contrary, many of them had school certificates with excellent marks. Still they do not believe in fair examinations. Sometimes, this distrust is based on their own experience when they were not accepted to the faculties and had to wait one year more to apply again, or what is more common situation, they rely on the experience of others:

*“Informant: We did not have any connections with university officials, we just went and got to know the dean of my future faculty and we liked each other.*

*Interviewer: So you did not pay any money then?*

*Informant: You ask me strange questions, of course we did.*

*Interview: But did you give money personally?*

*Informant: You are very funny. I was not at that meeting, my father went to a dean, told him which company he had and how important was for him that I would study at the faculty of international relations. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to enter and have had a budget place. Later, when I had already finished the university I helped some of my friends to get in contact with a dean and enter university. I just called and told him that some nice people that are my friends want to find out information on admission procedure [W/30, economist]”.*

Every society has certain traditions and behavior patterns, which are considered to be the norm. Often people make different kinds of presents to keep social contacts that can be useful in the future. This context can be traced in a well-known Russian saying: “Do not have 100 rubles but rather have 100 friends”.

The analysis of the strategies of entering university shows that the need to pass exams activate existing family contacts or force to look for strategies that can help to obtain these new contacts with officials. Even though money plays a significant role, yet money plays a secondary role comparing to the connections as a main need.

It can be outlined that the admission system in Ukraine did not offer equal opportunities to all students. The new independent evaluation system of students’ knowledge is on the stage of implementation now. From 2008, in order to enter university, students have to pass Independent Tests on different subjects. The list of subjects can be chosen on the basis of the university requirements and vary between different faculties. The results of the Test can be sent to any university all over Ukraine. The student will be accepted to those universities where academic average corresponds to the results of his/her Independent Test. According to the sociological opinion poll, held in 2009, 82,8 per cent of high school graduates trust to this new Independent Testing System [12, p. 652]. It will be very interesting to compare the old and new systems in the short run.

On the basis of the observed entering strategies, one can assume that the university system in Ukraine had many weak points that made possible to have cases of corruption sometimes. There were situations in which it was very difficult to study and obtain degree without bribes. Nevertheless, all students underlined that there were conditions to pass

exams without any additional payment. If a student attended classes and did all required tasks there was no need to worry, the most important was the knowledge. This information is also confirmed by the national opinion poll<sup>1</sup>. It is shown that to gain a good mark the most important thing is the knowledge (86,4 per cent), participation in seminars (71,5 per cent) and classes attendance (70,6 per cent). However, the presents for professors (7,4 per cent) and influence of some connections (7,1 per cent) still play some role in getting marks.

The use of presents and some connections is highly needed, mainly for those who missed a lot of classes or did not study the subject well:

*“I did not go to sport classes and that is why every half of the year was buying a bottle of Champaign for the professor. It was an easy and quick way to get credits [M/ 29 years old, lawyer]”.*

*“I did not attend seminars on sociology. That is why I had to buy several parcels of printing paper for the department of sociology. This was the way that allowed me to be admitted to the test on this subject [M/31, economist]”.*

Many students underlined the difficulties in passing the exam on Ukrainian language. During 1990th, the rules of orthography were changed and nobody was sure how to write words.

*“I think the main headache that I had in the university was the exam on Ukrainian language. Everybody were putting some money to their student's record book and only like this I got excellent on this subject [W/26 years old, psychologist]”.*

*“Our professor told us that we have to buy a book on Ukrainian Language that she published in order to pass the exam. If you bought the book, you got some extra point. Of course, I bought that book [W/31, economist]”.*

The system of evaluation of students' work changed several times during the last decades. At first, in the 1990<sup>th</sup>, the oral exams and written essays were the main ways of evaluation of students' work. There are some weak and strong sides of this system. As can be seen from the stories of respondents, the main weak point was that the mark could be negotiated with the professor by means of some presents and money. Later on, this evaluation system was changed to the credit system where for each kind of work, the student get some points, and the final mark depends on the sum of points that the students gather during the whole course and exam. Moreover, all exams are taken only in written form, in order to have some evidence to which both the professor and the student can apply. There are also supporters and opponents of the written form of exams. Some professors think that students do not know now how to express their point of view and how to build their arguments. This article does not have the goal of examining all pros and cons of the new evaluation system. Yet, the new system tries to eliminate the impact of briberies and to have equal standards for all students.

### **Strategies to Obtain Job and Medical Service**

After graduating at the university, young specialists faced the need to look for a job. During the interviews, former students showed the stable willingness to look for a job by themselves. Some of them had part-time jobs during their university years, but some of them did not. Yet,

<sup>1</sup> Research “High school as a subject of socio-cultural transformation” held in 2006 by the Department of Sociology of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (representative sample is 3057 students from 31 universities of Ukraine, head of the project prof. Sokuryanskaya).



the main strategy was to look for a job through HR companies and internet. The availability of influential friends or parents with their own businesses did not affect the strong willingness to rely only on themselves. The use of connections and friends' contacts were accepted only in the form of advises about which HR agency to go or to which company it might be useful to send a CV.

*"It is better not to work with relatives and friends, because it is hard to separate personal and working relations. You will never know if you achieve success because of your own skills, or because your boss is your friend [M/31 years old, economist]"*.

*"Normally if you have some business with your friend, at the end you do not have neither friend nor business [W/28 years old, economist]"*.

*"I think it is hard to rely on some reference when you take a new person to job. In our country a positive reference means only that the former employer did not have any big conflicts with the person [M/32, lawyer]"*.

Such a strong desire to depend only on the formal ways of finding job and the evidence that shows the ways and results of these strategies lead to the question of whether we can limit the use of connections only to the strategies of university entrance of these former students. Further analysis showed an enormous area for the connections applicability.

The main areas where connections are needed are medical institutions, police, internal revenue services, all kind of governmental agencies. All these areas can be structured according to the descending order.

The most referring area is that of medical services. Almost in every family of our informants there were some situations in which they had to go to the doctor or to be in a hospital. When one had to go to the doctor it was important to go to an acquainted doctor. This specialist can be a friend of the family or a well-known doctor that one of our friends, or a friend of our friends recommended:

*"I will not go to a doctor if nobody recommends him/her, because I want to know that he/she is a good specialist. Now it is hard to find a highly professional doctor [W/30 years old, sociologist]"*.

The existence of a recommendation to a particular doctor does not mean that people will obtain a service for free. Unofficial payment is an evitable part of the visit to the doctor:

*"I pay to the doctor for every visit. It is normal. If there was some official holiday before my visit, I also bring some present as a sign of respect to this doctor. I think she is a good specialist and I depend on her [W, 31 years old, economist]"*.

Now there are many private clinics or paid services within state clinics. In this situation, two strategies are observed. If a person goes to the private clinic, he/she pays to the cash desk the official price of an appointment. If a patient goes to the paid doctor in the state clinic, then he/she, in addition to the official price, gives some money to the doctor unofficially. It happens because the prices in the state clinics are very low and do not reflect the real price, according to the opinion of the respondents:

*"I was operated in the state hospital but in the paid department. The official price was 120 grivnas (12 euros). This is not a real price, it is some kind of a joke. This doctor was my father's friend. I asked him what was the real price I had to pay him. He told me and I paid [M/30 years old, lawyer]"*.

Special attention has to be given to the state hospitals in Ukraine. There you have to pay

for everything: sheets on the bed, all medicaments and for all medical tests; and of course you have to negotiate the price of the operation with the doctor:

*“The first time that my wife was pregnant, we went to the hospital by ambulance and the doctors were very surprised that we did not have any connection in that hospital. That time we paid only to the nurse that was with my wife all the time. However, the second time that my wife expected a baby and had some problems, her sister found some friend whose mother worked in the hospital. When we arrived to the door of the hospital all doctors knew that we were not just from the street, that the head of the department was our friend and that we would pay for all things [M/35 years old, designer]”.*

With the example of the medical service system it can be seen how the majority of problems are solved in Ukraine. If you need to get some certificates or obtain some permissions from some officials, the best strategy is to get to know some of the officials and to pay him/her:

*“If you need to obtain some personal certificates mainly you do not need any reference, just pay money and the problem will be solved [M/31 years old, economist]”.*

*“Nobody asks you to give bribes to officials but this is the only way to get things done. This is only your decision to solve or not to solve the problem [M/30 years old, lawyer]”.*

The ability and the need of using personal connections and networks to obtain some services can be seen as a special feature of the transformational period in Ukraine. However, this phenomenon has its roots in the soviet past. The system of connections and networks was highly spread during Soviet times. Harvard Project interviews conducted with soviet refugees, in Germany and the USA at the beginning of 1950s, showed that widespread deficit of all products, that forced people to look for survival strategies [13, p. 167]. There was a well-known abbreviation “Zis” that meant “znakomstva i svyazi” (acquaintances and connections) [13, p. 168-169] and a lot of folk sayings, the most common of which were “Blat is higher than Stalin” or “You have to have zis” [14, p. 27].

Economy of shortages during Khrushchev’s Thaw led to the formation of a highly spread practice of “nesuny” (carriers), that meant bringing something from workplace [15, p. 132]. It was seen as a matter of pride if something was given to a friend in trouble or need. Furthermore, the important role of informal distribution brought a new type of entrepreneur – blatmeister or a broker [14, p. 114]. These persons knew who could be bribed and which kinds of gifts were needed. The distinctive features of Khrushchev’s Thaw were the spreading of informal networks in different spheres and formation of the complex system of strong and weak ties of connections or “circles” [15, p. 186]. Furthermore, with the Leonid Brezhnev’s government blat flourished most widely. Everybody was involved in diverse informal networks and circles [14].

Therefore, the process of formation of the Soviet society and the actualization of communist ideals were accompanied by the people’s struggle for consumer goods and political freedoms. These circumstances led to the formation of the wide system of informal networks, which was the only way of dealing with “the paradox between ideology of equality and practice of differentiation through privileges, and the closed distribution systems” [15, p. 186].

The use of family and friends’ connections can be observed in both Soviet time and independent time of Ukrainian existence; however, the spheres and ways of use of this system of connection were different. During Soviet times a special type of use of connection

prevailed and was called blat. Blat can be seen in most cases as non-monetary exchange or “favor of access” to variety of goods and services [15, p. 185]. Most often favors of access were associated with friendly relations, nevertheless they were not limited by this type of relations. System of informal networks included circles of acquaintances, where besides strong ties of kinship relation and weak ties of friends, the main role was played by indirect contacts and recommendations. To be rich during soviet times meant to be a person with a huge amount of direct and indirect connections in different spheres. Money did not give the possibility to buy deficit products or to obtain some services.

Following the logic of Ivan Krastev, in post-communist era “blat was replaced by bribery...the economy of favors was replaced by the economy of paid services” [16, p. 333]. It is hard to deny the bribery strategies; nevertheless, it is impossible to reduce the whole system of informal networks to bribery networks.

Based on the information from the interviews with youth adults, it can be shown that the sphere and the ways of applicability of connections changed. The implementation of the market economy in Ukraine removed the deficit and the shortage of goods, however the lack of financing at social institutions and the low level of salaries of officials led to the flourishing of corruption and bribery practices. Yet, it would be wrong to say that the blat vanished. The blat transformed from the non-monetary exchange and access to variety of goods and services to non-monetary exchange of connections.

The way to obtain some services in Ukraine consists of a **two-stage process**. The first stage includes the analysis of which persons can help to get some services, and search for the needed contacts through direct and indirect connections. This stage is the most important because only connections and trust between actors can help to establish relations with the needed person. Connections are the evidence that the person can be trusted and his/her willingness to contact some officials is not a trap. Only by these circumstances, the second stage of getting needed services can take place. On the second stage, the act of bribery is taking place and the required services can be obtained.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, on the bases of the conducted study, some conclusions can be made. First of all, it can be seen that the availability of personal connections is observed as an important resource in getting things done for informants. One of the main areas where young people had the possibility to use their own connections or their relatives' connections was the experience of entering the university. The majority of respondents admitted that they did not believe in the opportunity to enter university only on the basis of their own knowledge. This tendency led to the allocation of several strategies such as reliance on oneself; reliance on the additional preparation techniques and reliance on the bribery. In two of the three strategies, the diverse ways of payments to officials were observed. The payment or bribery was seen as an inevitable part of the entering process, however, negative connotations were not observed at the informants' answers. Yet, it has to be underlined once again, that our conclusions based on the qualitative data and the obtained strategies can be seen as some lines of behavior that were found among others.

The analysis of the weak points of the evaluation system in the universities led to the allocation of the second area, where the use of contacts and money could help to reach some goals. It has been shown that the admission and educational systems in Ukraine do not give

equal opportunities to all students. This may be seen as a cause and effect of the necessity to use connections.

Moreover, the under-funding of medical system and the local councils led to the dissemination of the networking system. Even though our respondents did not live during soviet times and were not involved into the blat connections, they still reproduce the blat system in a transformed form.

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## **РОЛЬ НЕФОРМАЛЬНИХ ЗВ'ЯЗКІВ У ЖИТТІ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ МОЛОДІ**

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Розглядаються мережеві стратегії, що використовуються молодими людьми для досягнення життєвих цілей, зокрема в освітній сфері. Аналізуються механізми та результати трансформації відносин блату в сучасному суспільстві.

*Ключові слова:* зв'язки, корупція, відносини блату, система освіти.

## **РОЛЬ НЕФОРМАЛЬНЫХ СВЯЗЕЙ В ЖИЗНИ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ УКРАИНСКОЙ МОЛОДЕЖИ**

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Рассматриваются сетевые стратегии, которые используются молодыми людьми для достижения различных жизненных целей, в частности в образовательной сфере. Анализируются механизмы и результаты трансформации отношений блату в современном обществе.

*Ключевые слова:* связи, коррупция, отношения блату, система образования.