

Article

Communism and Anti-Communist Dissent in Romania as Reflected in Contemporary Textbooks

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Abstract: The structural changes brought about by the collapse of the communist system also included the reconfiguration of social memory, so that future generations have a more objective imagining of the impact of the communist period on the societies from Central and Eastern Europe. In this view, the depoliticization of recent history is a top priority. The present study aims to highlight the way in which the schoolbooks in Romania bring into the memory of the young generation a strictly secret episode in recent (pre-1990) history: anti-communist dissent. Two categories of methods were used: researching the data and information contained in history textbooks and other bibliographic sources on anti-communist dissent in Romania in the overall socio-political context of that era; and assessing—with the help of a set of surveys—the degree of assimilation by young people in Romania of the knowledge about communism conveyed through textbooks. Research points to the conclusion that the Romanian curriculum and textbooks provide an objective picture of the communist period in this country, but young people’s perception of communism in general and of Romanian communism in particular tends to be distorted by poor education, poverty and surrounding mentalities rooted in that period.



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Keywords: anti-communist dissent; recent history; schoolbooks; young generation; Romania

“History makes fools of those who do not know it, by repeating itself.”

Nicolae Iorga
(Romanian Historian, 1871–1940)

1. Introduction

The collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe as a result of political developments in the former Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s created the premises for a rewriting of recent history in the formerly communist countries. In this context, archival documents could be declassified, and some until-recently hidden aspects were discussed, related to the repressions on the side of the authorities from the states politically and ideologically subservient to the former USSR. This contributed to the development of academic debates on the memory of the communist past and to the shaping of an objective memory of the post-war social life in these states. Rethinking the school curricula in accordance with the historical ‘truth’ and implicitly the textbooks for the young generation, was part of this action of objective restitution of the recent past. Of course, all textbooks are written in a context by somebody who has some sort of political opinion that will, in some way, influence what they write [1].

Romania is a representative case for this evolutionary trend. The communist political system was characterized in this country by a high degree of centralization and repressiveness, which prevented large-scale protest movements, such as those in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) or Poland (1956, 1980s). However, with all the “monolithic unity around the Communist Party”, (a slogan intensely promoted by the propaganda system of the communist party in Romania) these actions were not altogether absent, taking on

various forms over time. Among the most representative protest actions in Romania are the miners' strike in the Jiu Valley (1977) and the workers' revolt in Braşov (1987), which are also mentioned in the textbooks analysed [2] (p.101), [3] (p.119), [4] (p.102) etc.

At the same time, however, communism triggered strong economic and social development, which contributed to the improvement in the quality of life for many by providing housing, most often in urban areas, free access to education, and job security. For those who embraced the ideology of the single party, these changes took precedence before the suppression of civil rights and freedoms, the right to free expression, in relation to the retaliation of the communist political system and the suffering of those who dared to think otherwise. Most of the time, obedience and corruption replaced competence, with detrimental psychological consequences that are still found today in the informal education of the young generation.

The economic disintegration that followed the collapse of the communist political-ideological system and centralized economic relations was also transposed socially, through unemployment, emigration, and the rise in the incidence of marginal social phenomena, which, for the mature and older generations, fuelled the lingering belief that "it used to be better", a belief later passed on to the young generation through all kinds of stories and examples, a young generation for whom the perception over the communist society is influenced more so by the subjective stories of their parents and grandparents, than by the objective data and information conveyed through textbooks [1].

The paper aims to highlight how the anti-communist movement is reflected in school textbooks in Romania in the general context of presenting the particularities of the communist system in this country. At the same time, it aims to show the way young people today perceive the social realities of the communist period, an era in history which they did not experience first-hand. The two main goals of the paper are closely connected, since the young generation's perception of the communist past is a direct consequence of the way in which the communist period, as part of Romania's contemporary history, was reflected in school textbooks. They were written in the historical context where Romanian society was still reconciling with its communist past and where there was a diversity of often divergent opinions on how that particular era has influenced Romanian society and the development of Romania, in general.

Historical data and information contained in textbooks are most often conveyed to young people alongside various subjective elements. The memories, the comparisons between the past and the present, the images, the stories about the economic situation of the past etc., are generated by the nostalgic perception of parents and grandparents who experienced both communism itself and the post-communist transition era. The latter is characterized by a downright collapse of the economic and social environment often accompanied by an overall decline in living standards. Thus, the social consequences of the repressive communist political system seem to be offset by the recent subjective memory of the mature and older generation generated by dissatisfaction with the current economic and social situation, a perception which they also relay to the young generation. Based on the insufficient degree of assimilation of data and scientific information contained in school textbooks, the young people tend to take on these subjective pieces of information transmitted by their parents and grandparents, which shape this distorted image of the recent past in their minds and generally deteriorate the moral values upon which the social environment in contemporary Romania is predicated.

The purpose of this paper is to capture and quantify the impact of subjective elements, which lead to the alteration of the post-memory of the young generation in relation to the recent historical past, which their parents and grandparents witnessed. The discussions proposed in this study may contribute to the broadening of scientific debates on the perception of communism in the minds of the young generation in Central and Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Romania.

This paper seeks to analyse the representation of Romanian communism and anti-communist dissent in school textbooks. It examines both the negative aspects of commu-

nism (it used to be worse) and its positive aspects (it used to be better), the latter often framed in terms of industrialization and urbanization which contributed to an improvement in the living standard of the population, aspects described and illustrated in this paper through graphs. However, the authors feel it important to state their positionality in terms of communism. All authors have first-hand experience of living under the communist regime as children and youth between the years 1970 and 1989. They also witnessed the restrictions and difficulties faced by their parents during these years. As such, they view the communist past in predominantly negative terms. This view was strengthened by reading the bibliography that forms the basis of this paper, and also by focusing on the perceptions of communism among young people interviewed in opinion polls. As such, they view it as a matter of concern that some/many young people appear to have a relatively positive perception of communism.

2. Literature

Studying the communist period in Central and Eastern Europe was a hotly debated topic in academic scientific circles, especially after the disappearance of political and ideological constraints and the declassification of archival documents in the late 1990s. However, despite the myriad studies that have approached communism in various ways in this part of the continent, there is little work on the image of communism in the current minds of young people.

Thus, among the *general approaches* meant to contribute to the clarification of controversial aspects pertaining to the post-war history of the space east of the former Iron Curtain is the thematic yearbook published by the governmental body called the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (9 volumes, 2010–2018). This is representative for highlighting the memory of the political repression during the communist period and anti-communist dissent in Europe and, specifically, in Romania. These are joined by the works dedicated to the history of communism in this geographical area [5–7] or the extensive work on the history and comparative memory of Stalinism and Nazism [8], with a distinct section dedicated to Romania [9] (pp. 157–193). Among the representative works for Romania in this sense are those compiled by Ionescu [10], Shafir [11,12], Tismăneanu [13], Deletant [14–16], Troncotă [17], Denize [18], Gherasim [19], Corobca [20], Betea [21] etc.

Given the circumstances, *the works dedicated to the memory of communism among the young generation* occupy pride of place, which is a topic developed mainly after 2010 [22–30]. Communism in Romania was also described for young people also in a broader context, that of “illustrated stories” [31,32], etc. Furthermore, the remembrance of communism is necessary not only for the young generation, but also for tourists in general, who visit memorial museums [33,34].

Our research was based on primary sources and empirical data. The primary sources include monographs, scientific papers, doctoral theses, and reports by various institutions that have studied the communism phenomenon in Romania. Empirical data are economic and demographic data, obtained from Statistical Yearbooks or Population Censuses, which helped us to reconstruct the social overview of the studied period.

3. Conceptual Framework

The subject of this paper spans the area of interference between geography, history, political science, sociology, and psychology, as a series of conceptual clarifications of the main notions used is necessary.

The central concept on which the work focuses, that of *communism*, is defined as a far-left political ideology [35] (p. 84), [36] (p. 46), respectively as a “process of class conflict and revolutionary struggle, which leads to the victory of the proletariat and the establishment of a classless socialist society, in which private property has been abolished and the means of production and subsistence belong to the community” [37] (p. 84). From a sociological point of view, it is related to a “social organization manner based on collective forms of ownership

over the means of production, and on the equal distribution of resources” [38] (p. 126). In turn, *totalitarianism*, a defining feature of extreme political systems, is a “dictatorial form of centralized government, which regulates any and all aspects of state or private behaviour” [36] (p. 467), respectively a “political regime that seeks exert absolute control over all areas of life—political, economic, social, cultural and even private” [36] (p. 284).

In Romania, the young are familiar with these concepts starting in the seventh grade, starting the age of 14 (according to the school curriculum approved by Order No. 3393 issued by the Minister of Education and Research on 28 February 2017), through the antagonism between the characteristics of leftist ideologies represented by socialism (“a political movement that represents the interests of productive categories, especially workers, promotes social protection and egalitarianism”) and right-wing ideologies, represented by liberalism (“a political movement that represents the interests of owners and businessmen—industrialists, traders, bankers”) [39] (p. 40). *Left-wing* ideologies are characterized by social equality and collective rights, by the totally or partially state-controlled economy, the interest towards social protection, internationalism, as leftist doctrines are centred on productive categories (workers and peasants), in contrast to *right-wing* doctrines, which are ownership-centred, characterized by meritocracy (benefits in society, including power, are to be distributed on the basis of individual merits), by state non-intervention in the economy (economic liberalism), a focus on investment and capital development, respect and preservation of traditional religions, and nationalism. In this context, totalitarianism is defined, independent of the political spectrum, as a “political regime in which power belongs entirely to a person or a political party” [39] (pp. 40–41). The existence of the single party is therefore presented as one of the fundamental characteristics of totalitarian political regimes. To this is added the existence of *systems of repression*: “in a totalitarian state, the citizens lose control over the power figure. They can no longer change the leadership by voting because there are *no more free elections*. There is but *one party* (unipartisanship) and one leader who establishes the dictatorship, controls the citizens through censorship and terror and builds *concentration camps* for the disliked or opposing categories” [39] (p. 40). In this situation, *dissent movements* develop, respectively those of attitudes generated by opinions different from those of the majority [40], which trigger actions of counterinsurgency, of opposition in the context of repressive political systems. The 8th grade textbook [3] (p. 118) exposes these aspects to the young generation in Romania, as follows: “established by the Soviets (i.e., in the geopolitical context of the Second World War), the communist regime in Romania was perceived by the population as a foreign one, imposed by outside forces. Groups of peasants, former soldiers, former members of various political parties tried to resist the conversion of Romania into a communist state. Resistance took several forms, ranging from secret meetings, where information broadcast by foreign radio stations was discussed, to armed resistance. In order to destroy any resistance, the communist regime created (1948), based on the Soviet model, an institution of repression, the *Securitate*. Through informants and agents, it supervised the population and eliminated the nuclei of counterinsurgency”.

4. Methodology

Depending on the particularities of the research objectives, we will use two categories of methods:

Researching data and information contained in history textbooks, especially in high school textbooks, on the anti-communist dissent in Romania, in the overall socio-political context that characterized communism in this country and, in particular, the post-war political repression system. In this sense, a representative sample was selected of history textbooks created according to the current curricula in Romania. They were analysed in relation to the available bibliographic sources, focusing on the manner in which the anti-communist dissent is presented to today’s young people in the political, social, and economic context which defined post-war Romania.

Quantifying the degree of assimilation by young people in Romania of the knowledge transmitted through textbooks and the relationship between objective (taken from textbooks and other scientific sources) and subjective information (coming from the emotional memory of previous generations who lived under communism) that underlie the imagination of the young generation about communism. For this purpose, we compared the data and information obtained from various representative surveys on this topic, to which we added the results of our own surveys undertaken with a sample of young students in their first year of university (between 20 and 24 years of age).

The present study's specific focus is the interpretation of school information on communism and anti-communist dissent in an academic context and the quantification of the feedback received from the young generation. Therefore, research was also conducted by using a *representative sample of history textbooks from Romania* (composed of 8 books), developed according to the current school curricula in this country. It describes the educational offer in terms of a certain study subject for a pre-established educational trajectory and is approved, according to the law, by the Ministry of National Education. The school curriculum must be part of the national educational plan, which is the basic tool in promoting educational policies at the national level. The issues that are the subject of this study are studied during the 7th and 11th grades in contemporary history classes, and in the 8th and 12th grades in Romanian history classes. As a basis for our analysis, we have selected: a 7th grade textbook (of 3) (age 13–14 years), two 8th and 11th grade textbooks (of 4 and 6, respectively) (age 14–15 years and 17–18 years respectively), and three 12th grade textbooks (of 9) (age 18–19 years). The selection of the textbooks presented as case studies in this paper was made randomly because all textbooks were developed based on the same curriculum. The number of textbooks in each class was selected based on the total number of textbooks available, as well as the degree of in-depth study of the information on communism in general, and Romanian communism in particular (a degree of in-depth study that increases depending on the grade and, by default, the age of the students involved).

As they are designed on the basis of the same curriculum, there are no major differences between the history textbooks used in the same grade (level of education) in terms of the number of lessons focusing on communism and the share of lessons (number of pages) assigned to this subject. Our analysis leads to the conclusion that these parameters are clearly superior in high school textbooks compared to those in middle school workbooks. Thus, most of the lessons in which aspects related to communism are presented are in the 11th grade textbooks (5 lessons on average, including case studies) with an average allotted share of 23 pages (about 18.5% of the total number of pages in the textbook), followed by 12th grade textbooks with 2 lessons each (including case studies) with a quota of 16 pages (10% of the total number of pages). In middle school (in the 7th and 8th grades, respectively), communism is studied in 2 lessons each, with an average of 4 pages in the 7th grade textbook (4.5% of the number of pages) and 9 pages (6.5% of the textbook's number of pages) in the 8th grade workbook.

Another category of materials used to document our study is *the results of surveys* undertaken with young people in Romania regarding their perception of communism, communist repression and anti-communist dissent and their impact on contemporary society. These data were taken from various online sources and subsequently compared with the results of surveys conducted by the authors.

The surveys were conducted by interviewing statistically representative population segments and aimed to assess the perception of communist ideology in post-revolutionary Romania and in particular, to assess the perception of young people on communism. This survey was an independent phase of research, as the authors believe that the perception of young people (quantified by assessing the answers to questions) is a consequence of the degree of assimilation of the knowledge acquired throughout school, both in middle school and in high school.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. *The Suppression of Public Rights and Freedoms, Censorship and Repression or ... "It Used to Be Worse"*

Communism is presented as a totalitarian political regime even starting with the seventh grade textbooks, in the context of the political doctrines that characterized the inter-war period. The 7th grade curriculum details the Romanian post-war communism in the general framework of Romania's history. After chronologically describing the evolution of communism in Romania branching out from the Soviet model, imposed with the help of the Red Army, to the nationalist form (1965–1989) and its social impact, both analysed textbooks assign important segments to the communist repression system and anti-communist resistance. The latter has known at least two forms: *armed resistance* and *the resistance of the intellectual elites*.

The *anti-communist armed resistance* manifested itself in the early period (1945–1960) of transforming society into what was desired by the single party, when "all sections of the population deemed to be the enemy became the target of the new regime: the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, former politicians, officers, bankers, industrialists, wealthy peasants, peasants who rejected collectivization etc." [3] (p. 116). The deep attachment of the peasants to their properties inherited from their ancestors generated in many cases a strong opposition to the forced collectivization imposed by the communists. Thus, quoting the same 8th grade textbook, "in many villages in Romania there were uprisings against the authorities, suppressed by the army's intervention. Approximately 80,000 peasants were arrested between 1949 and 1962 for opposing collectivization, and 30,000 of them were sent to trial" [3] (p. 116). According to a June 1952 report by *the Securitate*, the textbook states that "at that time, 12,073 people were in prisons or under arrest, for working in or supporting counterinsurgency organizations" [3] (p. 118). Next, the textbook highlights the main groups of anti-communist counterinsurgency that were active especially in the mountainous regions of Bucovina, Făgăraș, Muscelului area, Banat Mountains, Apuseni Mountains, as well as in the Dobrogea or Râmnicu Sărat area. The other eighth grade textbook analysed [4] (p. 104) relays, in this sense, the emotional testimonies of two of the artisans of the anti-communist counterinsurgency: Gavril Vatamaniuc, former officer, a partisan in Bucovina, and Elisabeta Rizea, member of the Arsenescu-Arnăuțoiu counterinsurgency group in Făgăraș.

Communism in Romania is reprised as a subject in history textbooks, when studying the history of Romania, in the last year of high school. Thus, one of these textbooks, dedicates a distinct chapter to post-war Romania [2] (pp. 99–102) under the title "Stalinism, national-communism and anti-communist dissent". After resuming the geopolitical context of the establishment and evolution of the communist political regime, students are presented with the main features of the repression system and anti-communist dissent, including a map of the prisons and extermination centres of anti-communist militants. In another textbook the phenomenon of deportations from Banat is presented to young people against the background of the political-ideological conflict between I.B. Tito and I.V. Stalin: "Amid the escalation of the conflict between Stalin and Tito, the deportations from Banat to the arid areas of the Bărăgan, which had begun in 1951, meant the destruction of many homes, families and destinies. Initially, the deportation to the Bărăgan targeted about 40,000 people, who were not to the liking of the new regime. The deportees were allowed to take only the goods they could carry, the rest of their property being bought by specially set up commissions, which paid much less than they were worth" [41] (p. 104). The same textbook further introduces students to the armed struggle in the mountains as part of the anti-communist counterinsurgency movement: "The organization of the first nuclei of anti-communist struggle took place in the second half of 1945, becoming more and more visible as the influence of the CRP [Communist Party of Romania] increased. The most important armed counterinsurgency groups were the The Hajduks from Muscel, the *Sumanele Negre*, the National Resistance Front, *Haiducii lui Avram Iancu*, *Graiul Sângelui*, etc. In the Muscel area (the groups led by the Arnăuțoiu brothers and Colonel Gheorghe Arse-

nescu), and in the Făgăraş Mountains area (the group led by Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu), there were strong clashes with the *Securitate* troops. Outnumbered and lacking supplies and ammunition, these groups were decimated by the communist forces" [41] (p. 104).

Romania's anti-communist military counterinsurgency dropped considerably after the events in Budapest in 1956 when its main protagonists lost hope of a possible involvement in Romania on the side of the USA and other Western powers against the communist regime. In addition, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution and the avoidance by the communist regime in Bucharest of a revolutionary "contamination" in Romania through the Hungarian communities in Transylvania discouraged these armed counterinsurgency groups, which were almost completely annihilated by 1960. *The resistance of the intellectual elites* is the second basic component of the struggle for freedom, justice, and truth that the post-war generation waged against censorship and the repressive communist political system. The transformation of society according to the model imposed by the single party meant a reversal of the value system in society: the decimation of intellectual elites "with bourgeois roots" and the promotion of low-skilled workers but "of healthy origin" but deeply enslaved to new structures of political power. It is a phenomenon with profound and long-term social and psychological consequences, which are felt to this day through social discrepancies and the alteration of traditional moral values, both among the middle generation and among the young. "Stalinization also spread in culture, where the only accepted value criterion was ideological conformity. The removal of hundreds of authors accused of *nationalism* or *cosmopolitanism*, the removal from exhibitions of all paintings or sculptures deemed decadent, and the banning of composers who did not depict the new life of the country became the norm. Socio-human disciplines—philosophy, history or sociology—were completely restructured, with unanimously recognized scientists being removed from the department, some of them losing their lives after years of hard imprisonment" [42] (p. 81). Both eighth and twelfth grade Romanian history textbooks dedicate ample space to the political repression of intellectual elites through detention and forced labour centres, psychiatric asylums, or deportations (Figure 1).

Thus, in the one of the analyzed textbooks, it is specified: "Authorities arrested more than 100,000 people who opposed the communist regime or who were suspected of opposing it. Some were executed on the spot, but most were sentenced to years' imprisonment in inhumane conditions, where they were frequently interrogated and tortured. From among the many prisons that have become torture centres, where the country's former elites were exterminated, those in Pitești, Sighet, Gherla, Jilava and Aiud stand out. The relatives and friends of those detained did not escape persecution either, and were accused of hostility to the regime, *collaborationism* or even treason. Thousands of people deemed hostile to the regime were deported to the Bărăgan or sentenced to years of forced labour on dangerous construction sites in the country (dams, mountain roads etc.). The largest project in which the forced labour of political detainees was used was the Danube-Black Sea Canal. More than 32,000 people, political dissidents, members of the intelligentsia, students, peasants believed to be enemies of the regime worked to build it between 1949 and 1955. A total 1,300 of them died of hunger, exhaustion or untreated diseases" [3] (p. 119).

The history of the Danube-Black Sea Canal began in the summer of 1948 when, on a visit to Moscow, the former Romanian communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was shown by Stalin a map of Romania on which the latter drew, using his famous red pencil, a line that connected Cernavodă to the Black Sea. The plan of building the Canal therefore belonged to Stalin and the idea that its aim was the shortening of the river route between the Danube and the Black Sea or the irrigation of Dobrogea and the Bărăgan could not be farther from the truth. It was, however, the original idea of a gulag, born after the Soviet leader had quarrelled with Tito, thus being forced to reach out to Gheorghiu-Dej. Given the situation, through the decision of 26 May 1949 made by the Political Bureau of the Romanian Workers' Party, several thousand political prisoners arrived in Dobrogea and began the construction of the future navigable canal. However, the works were to be interrupted in March 1953 almost immediately after Stalin's death and resumed under the

Ceașescu regime. The construction of the Canal was accomplished at the cost of over 30,000 people, mostly political detainees [43].

In this context, many Romanian politicians and cultural figures managed to take refuge abroad ever since the first years of the establishment of the communist political regime. From here, they continued to militate against the regime's abuses by providing correct information to the international public opinion. School textbooks cite writers such as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, journalist Pamfil Șeicaru, actor and singer Jean Moscopol, politicians Ion Rațiu and Radu Câmpeanu, intellectuals such as Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca [3] (p. 118); writer Paul Goma and the *Free Europe* radio station [2] (p. 101), etc.

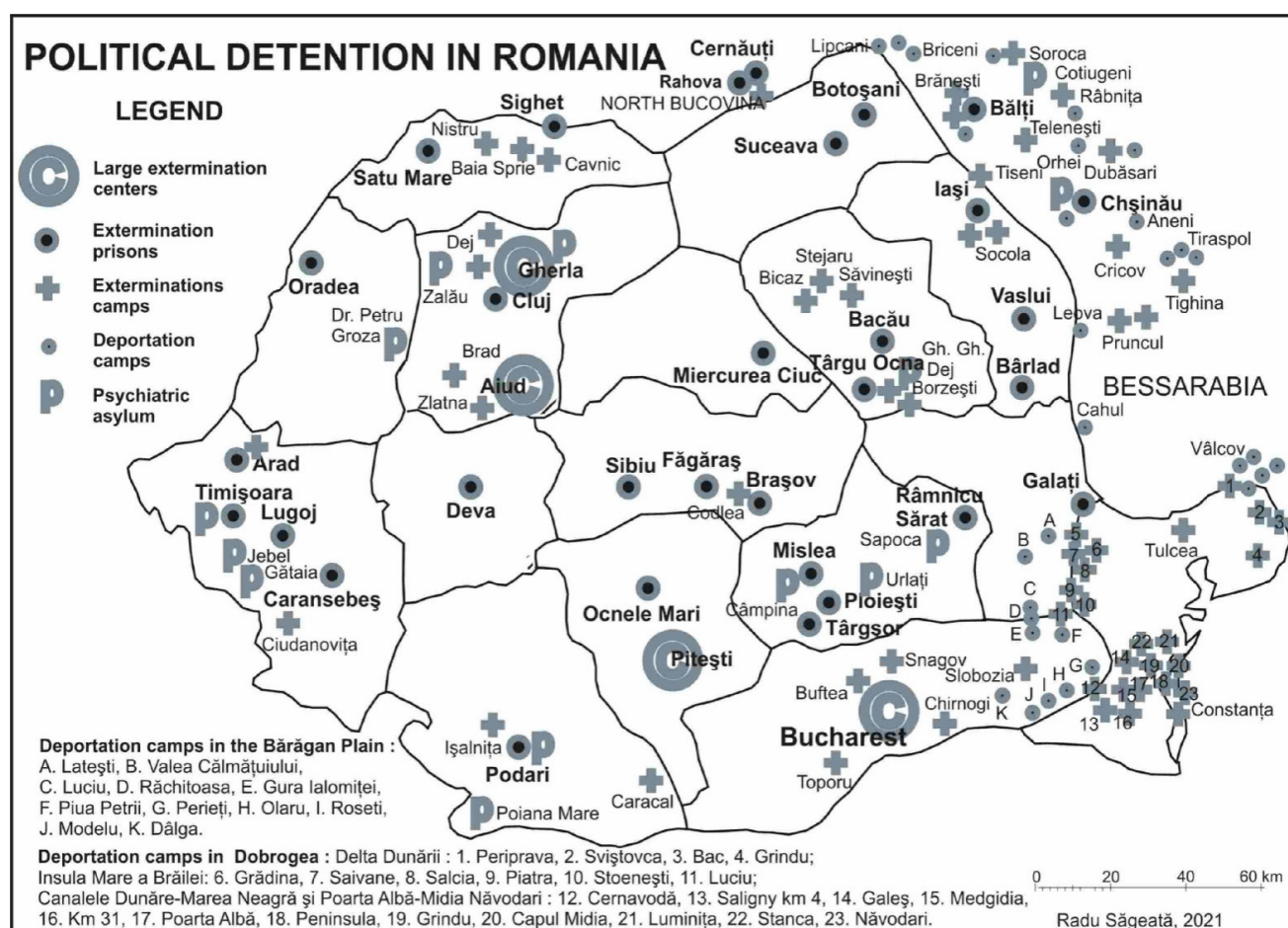


Figure 1. Political detention in Romania. Map designed by Radu Săgeată, 2021, based on data from [10,12].

The withdrawal of the Soviet armies from Romania (1958) together with the eradication of the last outbreaks of anti-communist armed counterinsurgency (1960) and the transition from Soviet communism to its nationalist counterpart, created the premises for the release of political prisoners between 1962 and 1964, who, despite everything, continued to be socially marginalized and kept under the strict supervision of the *Securitate*.

That is why the current generation of young people is able to learn about anti-communist resistance only from textbooks and literature, as parents, and even grandparents (most of them children during that time) are not able to provide them with direct stories and information relevant to the suffering of their ancestors at the hands of communist repression. In addition, when contemplating things more than eight decades later, while some suffered, many others reaped rewards after quickly adopting the ideology of the single party, in many cases without even understanding it, from the desire to benefit from undue material and social advantages, which produced an acute social rift that only deepened after 1990. The collapse of the communist ideology together with that

of the centralized economy and social constraints did not mean a “cultural revolution”, the restoration of healthy moral values, but, in most cases, it meant a continuation of the old customs deeply ingrained in Romanian society [44]. The way of thinking by which rapaciousness was seen as proof of one’s agility and cleverness, seems to have its origin in the plundering regimes subscribed to by the foreign rulers of Wallachia and Moldova (18th and early 19th century). From there, it was internalized by the ruling elite and, later on, by the middle class, who relied on illegal income in the form of bribes [16] (p. 24). The communist system amplified these practices, the material benefits becoming directly proportional to the degree of obedience to the regime.

5.2. *Communism as a Motor Factor of Economic and Social Development or . . . “It Used to Be Better”. From Information in Textbooks to the Emotional Stories of Nostalgic Parents and Grandparents*

5.2.1. Industrialization and Urbanization as a “Response” to the Valev Plan. Nationalist Communism and Its Social Consequences

The distance from Moscow in the geostrategic context of the Cold War was due to a combination of internal, regional, and international factors. The withdrawal of the Red Army (1958), in the context of the disarmament of the two political-military blocs, was based on the reason that Romania was surrounded by other states part of the Warsaw Pact, which reassured the Soviet Union in terms of security. On the other hand, the changes at the top of the USSR leadership (in November 1964 Nikita Khrushchev was succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) could have had consequences on the Romanian political scene as well. In this situation, the communist leadership in Bucharest put pressure on the withdrawal of KGB advisers from Bucharest, which was achieved in December 1964.

In economic terms, the central element that argued this political change was the *Valev Plan* (named for its author, professor of economics, at Moscow University), initiated under N. Khrushchev, which provided for an economic organization of communist states on certain branches of production, with Romania playing the role of predominantly agricultural country. According to this project, the eastern half of Romania, together with part of Bulgaria, southern Ukraine and most of the Republic of Moldova should have been an agricultural “economic interstate complex”. Regarded by the authorities in Bucharest as a “meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign state”, the plan received a hostile response from the communist authorities in Romania, being publicly spurned. In addition, Gheorghiu-Dej had been a staunch admirer of Stalin’s policy of industrialization.

Based on this, and being aware of the lags in terms of the degree of industrialization that made Moscow approach things thus, the communist leader in Bucharest laid the foundations of a policy of oversized industrialization, which would have profound and long-term consequences on the Romanian economy and society in general. In this context, in addition to the industrialization of large cities, the mono-industrial localities also developed considerably, with a negative effect on the young people of that period, who became mature today, in the post-communist period [45,46].

At the same time, there was a change in the field of cultural policy by stimulating national values at the expense of translations into Russian and a decrease in ideological control over the population’s means of entertainment, as well as a weakening of terror by releasing political detainees. In this sense, in the 11th grade textbook it is mentioned that: “the beginning of the 1960s marks a new turning point: following, once more, the political flow of the time, Romanian culture finds itself rerouted towards the national and rural life. The abandonment of the Stalinist theory of class struggle resulted in a relative liberalization of cultural life, a normalization of interpersonal relations and the recovery of some of the inter-war authors whose works could serve the national idea” [47] (p. 18).

All these developments resulted in an increase in the popularity of the political regime in Bucharest both domestically and internationally. To this were added the consequences of the industrialization policy: labour force migration from rural to urban settlements, and the increase of the built-up area in cities (Figure 2A), which led to a modernization of

society and a considerable increase, for many, in the standard of living. The introduction of free compulsory education to ensure the preparation of the labour force for industrial jobs, the electrification of villages to ensure better political and ideological control over the rural population (a population that had been largely reluctant when faced with the policy of forced collectivization), ensuring jobs and a stable income for workers, were all measures that have contributed to an improvement of the living standard of the population. The increase of electricity production in the new thermal and hydropower plants has triggered the increase of consumption and the stimulation of the production and purchase of electronic products and appliances (Figure 2B); the development of the steel industry sparked the development of machine construction, which boosted all branches of the national economy (machine tools and industrial equipment needed for all industries, the commercial and fishing fleet, the mechanization of agriculture, the building of locomotives, wagons, planes, vehicles and cars) (Figure 2A). Thus, Romania became one of the few countries in the former Communist Bloc that managed to ensure its independence in many areas of industry.

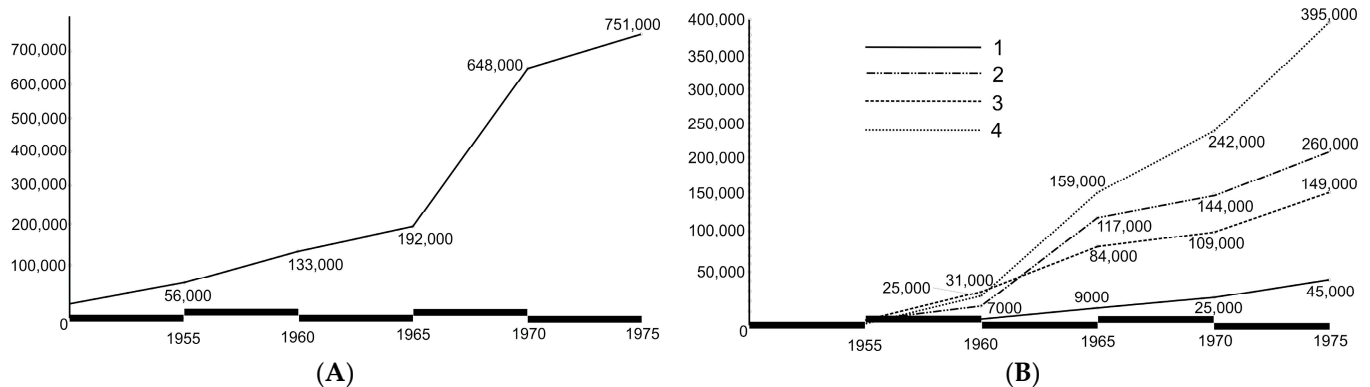


Figure 2. The rise in the standard of living (1955–1975) as reflected in: (A) the construction of new housing, (B) vehicles and consumer goods: 1. “Dacia” cars, 2. refrigerators, 3. washing machines, 4. TVs. Charts designed by Radu Săgeată, 2021, based on data sources from [15].

The textbooks emphasize the consequences of the policy of extensive industrialization, respectively the development of non-performing industrial investments, which were not in accordance with the principle of economic profitability and which attracted an increase in Romania’s external debt, which would have serious economic and social consequences later on 12th grade history [2] (p. 101) mentions that “some of them (i.e., large investments) do not take into account the principle of profitability and lead to the increase in external debt. Given the situation, the regime decided to repay the debt by restricting imports and domestic consumption, which impacted the standard of living. The protests reached a climax in the shape of the strikes in the Jiu Valley in 1977 and the revolt in Braşov in 1987.” An 11th grade textbook states: “Nicolae Ceauşescu’s ambition to repay even the last penny of the external debt that had accumulated over time, led to directing a large part of the agricultural products for export. Thus, an unprecedented crisis in the supply of the internal market was triggered, disguised, without managing to have anyone fooled, in the *Scientific Population Feeding Programme*, adopted by the Great National Assembly in June 1984” [47] (p. 62).

The 1980s were marked by extensive austerity measures, unprecedented in the Communist Bloc: the strict rationalization of food (meat, bread, sugar, flour, milk), taking drastic measures to reduce the consumption of electricity, natural gas, and gasoline, so as to ensure a maximum temperature of 14 °C in offices, limiting the hot water supply and gas pressure in homes, having interruptions in the electricity supply in the main cities. Thus, according to sources in Bucharest hospitals, over 30 new-borns died in the winter of 1984–1985 as a consequence of unannounced power outages that affected the incubators [15] (p. 194).

Food queues became a way of life, and scarcity exacerbated marginal social phenomena such as corruption, bribery, and influence peddling. In the 8th grade, history textbooks dedicate ample room to these aspects (for example, a case study entitled “Everyday Life During the Communist Regime”, pp. 120–121 [3]), and an 11th grade textbook [48] (p. 64) highlights the social inequities during the communist period against the background of generalized scarcity, as follows: “communist society gave birth of a new social category, difficult to define. It is about the group of privileged people (the nomenclature), who, through their positions, had access to a better food supply, to a house in a central area or even to trips abroad”.

5.2.2. Romanian Society under Communist Totalitarianism. Repression Versus Obedience and Adaptation

At the social level, the stated goal of the communist authorities was to create “the new man, the founder of the multilaterally developed socialist society and the advance towards communism”, characterized by lack of personal initiative, docility, and obedience, always acting in the spirit of communist ideology. The eighth grade textbook [3] (p. 122) illustrates for today’s young people the “new man” in the vision of communist propaganda, as follows: “*the new man* was supposed to abhor landowners, the bourgeoisie and kulaks (wealthy peasants), to work hard, not so much for himself as for society, to hate luxury, to not have religious feelings, to be docile and to believe in the party without judging its decisions . . . *the new man* put the state, the party and society above the self, above his family and its interests, always acting in the spirit of the communist ideology”. The atrophying of critical thinking, passivity, obedience, the lack of empathy and responsibility have become the main characteristics of the “new man”, so that, according to the same textbook, “large sections of the population mastered a way of life characterized by docility, convenience, lack of initiative and critical attitude, suspicion. Easy to manipulate and socially passive, these categories have found it more difficult to adapt to democracy and the market economy after the fall of the communist regime.” In the collective memory of those who adopted the model of the “new man” from the view of the Romanian communist authorities, life in communism remains characterized by prosperity and stability, despite periods of widespread shortages, the restriction of individual rights and freedoms, the repression that the communist system has systematically enacted over all those who dared to question any decision taken by the party, any social conduct that was in contradiction with the ideological dogmas promoted by communist propaganda.

The daily routine provided by job security and a stable income ensured by the state even in the situation where formal, unprofitable activities were provided, was for many preferable to the need of a continuous adaptation generated by the restructuring of the industry, which generated unemployment, emigration, and marginal social phenomena. Thus, most of the present day’s parents and grandparents who lived under the communist totalitarianism of the 1970s and 1980s did not directly endure the rigors of the repressive system, but tried to approach the ideal of the “new man” in order to draw as much as possible the advantages offered by the system. Their emotional memory is therefore dominated by nostalgic thoughts of a time when a successful national economy was built based on industry, mechanized agriculture, a competitive fleet, and a modern transport infrastructure for that period. Industrialization has also triggered strong urbanization, which has led to a relative increase in living standards. These are the mental clichés that for many of those nostalgic for communism blur the deeply repressive nature of this system of government.

5.3. The Young Generation’s Perception of Communism between “It Used to Be Worse” and “It Used to Be Better”

5.3.1. The Quality of Education in Romania. How We Begin the Analysis

The quality of education represents the sum of the essential characteristics of an educational system, respectively the value that society assigns to educational services and to education as a whole [49]. An analysis at European level highlighted the fact that

Romania ranks third in Europe in terms of the duration of compulsory education: 11 years. However, the school abandonment rate is among the highest in Europe (18.5% of all students, ranking third). Thus, out of 204,000 students enrolled in first grade 12 years ago, only 152,000 (74.5%) completed high school in 2021 [50]. The rate of functional illiteracy is also particularly revealing in this sense (42% of Romanian students are functionally illiterate, according to the PISA tests).

The result is an inefficiency of Romanian education, the latter being based more on the amount of information conveyed, than on quality, respectively on how this information is reflected in the feedback provided by students. The large number of years spent by children and young people in school compulsorily, for many even forcedly, seems to eventually lead to oversaturation and a decrease in interest in school. This fact seems to be supported by the passing rate of the baccalaureate exam, which is relatively low in Romania: 70% of all students, the average for the 2010–2020 years. In 2021, only 66% of the 12th and 13th grade students in the current class enrolled in the baccalaureate [51]. In this case, the effects of the pandemic overlapped the chronic problems of Romanian education. They can be summarized as follows:

- A lack of adapting to changes in society. In the current technological conditions and the influx of information through various media sources, learning is no longer limited to how much one can assimilate, but to what one assimilates, to how one extracts knowledge from the multitude of information one can obtain. A. Schleicher, director of education of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, believed, in this regard, that “in the 20th century, democracy had to do with the right of being equal to others; in the 21st century, democracy has to do with the right of being different. We must understand that students need to learn differently” (Schleicher, quoted by [52]);
- A lack of equity in Romanian schools. There are very big differences in how students perform in different schools, which stems from unequal development (rural–urban, disadvantaged regions and social environments, areas of endemic poverty, etc.);
- A lack of satisfaction with the educational process, both in the case of students, as well as teachers. Students learn strictly in order to achieve good grades, and teachers teach strictly related to their subject. Romania needs high-calibre teachers, leaders who also constantly learn and collaborate with students. The Romanian educational system, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, under the thumb of communist totalitarianism, has made not enough progress in this regard.
- Chronic underfunding. An analysis at the European level highlights the fact that the Romanian education system is the least funded in the EU, benefitting from just 3.1% of GDP in 2020, a percentage that decreased in 2021 to only 2.5% of GDP, compared to 7.8% of GDP in Denmark or 7.6% in Sweden. In comparison, Bulgaria assigns 4.1% of GDP to education, and Hungary 4.7% [53].

5.3.2. The Young Generation’s Perception of Communism as Reflected in Several Polls

Having the input data, respectively the way the communist period is rendered in the middle school and high school textbooks in Romania, as well as the general context of the educational system in this country, we will try to evaluate the output data, respectively the students’ feedback, their perception regarding a period in recent history in which they have taken part only through what they have read or through the more or less objective accounts by the mature and older generation.

A sociological survey conducted in this regard [54], shows that 38% of high school students believe that things during the communist era were better than in the current one, and 26% of the interviewed subjects state that they have never approached this subject with their teachers, although it is included in the curriculum and textbooks. The results reflect those of another study, conducted by the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile in partnership with the Centre for Marketing and Opinion Research (CSOP) [55] on a representative sample of all

age groups, according to which about half of those surveyed thought things were better before 1989, while only 23% thought things were worse, and 14% thought things were the same. Positive associations are related primarily to job security (10% of respondents) and implicitly to “ensuring tomorrow” (income security) (8%), making a decent living (8%), equality between individuals (5%), with 5% also believing that it was a good system in general, all of these being arguments that we find among the young generation, which shows that they were influenced in their perceptions by their parents and grandparents’ stories, rather than by what they learned in school. On the other hand, negative associations refer to lack of freedom (9%), dictatorship as a political regime (7%), terror and murder (2%), while poverty and food and basic commodities shortages in the 1980s seem to have been forgotten by most respondents, which is the reason for the negative perception of communism expressed by only 2% of them. Therefore, the “nostalgia” for the old political regime in Romania is based on the degradation of the economic situation and the income insecurity associated with the transition period. In addition, only 13% of interviewees thought that people had suffered as a consequence of the communist regime (2013), although many were directly impacted by the crisis triggered by the foreign debt restitution of the 1980s. In a somewhat contradictory manner, the same poll shows that 41% of respondents believe that the communist regime was criminal, and 42% see it as illegitimate, while 37% and 31% respectively believe otherwise, which correlates with the information in the textbooks. Thus, the vast majority of subjects (47%) saw communism as a good idea but poorly implemented, more so in 2013 compared to 2009, 14% that it was a good idea correctly implemented, and 27% believe that it was a bad idea, significantly fewer in 2013 compared to 2009 (Table 1).

Table 1. The perception of communist ideology in post-revolutionary Romania [55].

Year of Reference	The Perception on Communism in Romania (%)		
	Good Idea, Correctly Implemented	Good Idea, Poorly Implemented	Bad Idea
2009	12	41	34
2013	14	47	27

In another survey conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES, 2016), quoted by [56], an over whelming share (52% of respondents) opined that the Romanian Communist Party was better than present-day parties, while only 18% said the opposite (8% thought that things were the same, and 22% were undecided), which shows distrust in the current political class.

Regarding the former Communist Bloc, the collective memory of Romanians on communism was similar to that of 72% of Hungarians who believe that life was better during communism than it currently is, as well as to that of Bulgarians and Ukrainians (both 62%), and Russians (45%), while in countries with a more pronounced anti-communist dissent in the 1980s, where economic reforms have had a decreased social impact, the percentage of those who believe that communism was better is significantly lower (39% in the Czech Republic and 35% in Poland) [57].

However, the survey among the young people who have graduated a form of higher education in Romania has led to significantly different results, their opinion about communism and Nicolae Ceaușescu being generally unfavourable. A structured interview in this regard [58], based on six questions about communism deemed essential, correlates with those contained in textbooks about communist society in Romania, the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu and the December 1989 Revolution. In relation to the specifics of our research we will summarize the answers of the young people interviewed to only four of these questions (Table 2).

Table 2. The young people’s perception of communism [58]. Questions asked: 1. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word “communism”? 2. What do you think was the main issue Romanians were confronted with during the communist era? 3. Why do you think Romania lived under communism for over 40 years? 4. What do you know of Nicolae Ceaușescu?

Subject Data			Answers to Questions				General Opinion
M/W	Age	Occupation	A:Q1	A:Q2	A:Q3	A:Q4	
M	22	Sociology Student	The parents’ experience	The Police, restrictions in place	The international context	Repressive, stupid, but reformative	Unfavourable
W	22	Manager’s Assistant	Hard times, queuing, rationing	The lack of access to information	For fear of the authorities, the citizen’s resignation	He rationed food, developed the economy and infrastructure	Unfavourable
W	18	Highschool Student	Queuing, shortages	The outlawing of abortions	The people’s mentality	He changed the educational system, he passed harsh laws	Unfavourable
W	19	Law Student	Pain, repression	The perversion of values	The lack of unity to effect change	The main representation of all horrors	Unfavourable
M	19	Economics Student	Dark times which impact present-day mentalities	The mentality born during that time	The lack of international involvement	He did both good and bad things	Neutral
W	19	Highschool Graduate	Repression	Unquestionable obedience	The fear	Was not a good president, because he acted against the citizens	Unfavourable
M	19	Sociology Student	Food and electricity shortages	Censorship and the repressive system	In the beginning, the system worked	He was inspired by the cult of personality, he exported everything the country produced	Unfavourable

The research conducted by Soare [56], based on the data from the IRES survey (2016) was unstructured and took into account the perception of young students and higher education graduates on the communist regime and, in particular, on the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu. Thus, the main characteristics of communism in the opinion of the interviewed subjects are shown in Table 3.

In order to validate this information, we conducted an independent survey, addressed to a sample of 50 university students in their first year (20–24 years of age) at a Faculty of the Geography of Tourism. The survey was semi-structured and consisted of short answers to three questions about communism:

1. What are, in your opinion, the three main characteristics of communism?
2. How do you appreciate the influence of communism on contemporary Romanian society?
3. What do you think about communism?

To the first question, 43 students (86% of them) mentioned the shortcomings in the supply of basic food and services; 37 (74%) mentioned censorship and the lack of access to information; 32 (64%) mentioned propaganda and Nicolae Ceaușescu’s cult of personality; 30 (60%) nominated industrialization and urbanization; 27 (54%) job security and salary income, 23 (46%) mentioned fear and terror, and 20 (40%) singled out job promotions based on ideology/obedience to the regime, to the detriment of professional competence. When asked about the influence of communism in contemporary society, 35 of the subjects (70%) answered that it still exists, most of them arguing the system of social values based on

obedience to supervisors to the detriment of professional competence, the lack of social cohesion and the principle of affirmation by denigrating colleagues. In conclusion, most of those who agreed to the interview (41, that is, 82%) stated that they had a bad opinion about communism, 7 had a neutral opinion and only 2 considered that it was better during the communism era than at that particular moment (2017).

Table 3. The young generation's perception of communism [56].

Subject Data			The Main Characteristics of Communism and of Nicolae Ceaușescu according to the Interviewed Subject	General Opinion
M/W	Age	Occupation		
M	20	Law Student	There are no reasons for communism nostalgia. It was a difficult time, of lies and shortcomings. The cities were demolished, history was distorted. The urban physiognomy was destroyed.	Unfavourable
W	19	Psychology Student	The communist regime wished to promote freedom, but the opposite happened. Everything worked on the basis of who-knows-who, which still has consequences in the population's way of thinking.	Unfavourable
M	21	Geography Student	Romania was governed by the Russians, Ceaușescu was a puppet. Young intellectuals were imprisoned and beaten, even imprisoned, and killed in camps. Man must be free, think freely and express himself freely.	Unfavourable
W	23	Coventry University Graduate	They are not nostalgic for communism. There was censorship, TV broadcast was limited and propaganda-based. There were frequent power outages. Everyone had a job, work was mandatory. There were food shortages, queues were a common occurrence.	Unfavourable
M	21	Psychology Student	Ceaușescu was a typical example of the average Romanian: mediocre intellectual abilities, displayed a tendency to assert himself, had ambitions, pride, megalomania, was easily influenced. The communist regime was based on an oversized economy, a chaotic use of resources, fear, all sorts of shortages, stable employment, and services.	Unfavourable

Thus, young graduates of higher and secondary education have an objective image of what communism meant in Romania based on information garnered in school, and in some cases from literature, in contrast to those for whose development as individuals, school did not contribute decisively, and whose mental representations are generally based on the nostalgic stories told by their parents or grandparents, or are created as a result of the frustrations of everyday life. This social fracture is, in turn, a protraction of the rift created in the 1950s between intellectuals, more inclined to think freely and more resistant to political and ideological indoctrination, often perceived as “enemies of the people”, and the poor social category made up of workers and peasants, with a low level of training, but for whom professional and social ascent through the communist propaganda system was an unexpected opportunity.

6. Conclusions

The curriculum and the textbooks in Romania provide young people with a picture of the main political and socio-economic characteristics of the communist era in this country which correlated to that offered by the studies used as the basis for the documentation for this paper. However, they tend to be distorted against the background of poor education, functional illiteracy and, last but not least, due to ignorance and lack of interest in educational pursuits, which is characteristic of a large part of the young and current generation [50,54–56,58]. The causes are found in the particularities of the Romanian educational system, in its resistance to change in relation to the current informational challenges.

The impact of communist mentalities on the current Romanian society is far-reaching and was underlined by most of the young people interviewed using the surveys conducted.

Ideological obedience to the system, to the apparatus of communist repression and propaganda that brought material benefits and well-paid jobs, even if those who occupied them did not have adequate professional training, was replaced, maintaining the same mental adoration, with the hierarchical, subordinate—supervisor, obedience, meant to influence job stability, material, and status benefits. The political-ideological denunciation, as a premise of individual prosperity, is another reminiscence of the communist society that is perpetuated in different forms in contemporary Romanian society. However, so too are corruption and influence peddling, which have their origins in the shortages triggered by the payment of foreign debts in the 1980s.

The common property of communism generated a “common responsibility”, that is, the delegation, ignorance and finally flight from responsibility. It is another phenomenon that especially characterizes the activities of state-owned companies and services of public interest, perceived by many as reminiscent of communism [55].

In this general context, young people’s memory of anti-communist repression and dissent seems to be a secondary issue. Opinion polls have also shown a significant difference between young people who have thoroughly mastered the information received during their school years, who know and have a personal point of view regarding these phenomena and those lacking quality education, who even if they have heard of them by chance, are not able to integrate them into the political and social context of that period, preferring to ignore them.

As previously mentioned throughout this paper, young people’s perception of communism and of recent history in general is the consequence of a cluster of objective and subjective factors. Our study is limited to the analysis of textbooks, but does not take into account other bibliographic sources, media sources and the Internet. Furthermore, the subjective factors (such as the stories told by their parents and grandparents, by friends and colleagues or even some personal experiences) that may influence young people’s perception of communism in Romania are not taken into account.

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