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Perceptions of societal developmental hierarchies in Europe and beyond: A Bulgarian Perspective

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Abstract

We examine how ordinary citizens in Bulgaria view the developmental levels of European countries and certain states outside of Europe. Our research is motivated by the understanding that scholars and policy makers have for centuries used developmental hierarchies to characterize countries and that this perception of differential development has shaped interactions among different groups, countries and regions. We expect that views of such developmental hierarchies and models have great potential for influencing demographic and family behavior and political and cultural identities of ordinary people. Using data from a 2009 survey in Bulgaria we document that developmental hierarchies are widely perceived in Bulgaria, but are distributed differentially by age, education, and degree of urbanization. We also consider internal mechanisms underlying this hierarchical understanding of development and how hierarchical understandings may be related to national identities.

Introduction

This paper examines how people in Bulgaria view the developmental levels of European countries and certain states outside Europe. It analyzes how non-elite (ordinary) Bulgarians scale countries on development and how that scale is related to historical discourses on civilizational and/or developmental hierarchies and to current measurements of development and economic well-being. The paper also assesses how this hierarchical understanding of development can be interwoven with national identities in the Balkans. We also examine how views of the developmental hierarchy vary across subgroups of Bulgarians.

Our data come from a 2009 national survey of adult Bulgarians. Each respondent was asked to rate the development of several countries. We analyze how Bulgarians rate countries on development and consider whether their assessments form a developmental hierarchy. We also compare the assessments of Bulgarians with assessments of development made by the United Nations and with GDP per capita to see how ratings constructed by international organizations and ordinary Bulgarians are related.

Conceptualization and Theory

In many respects the ideas of development and developmental hierarchies have become so established within some people's worldviews that they are believed to be taken-for-granted physical aspects of life. However, development and developmental hierarchies are not physical but are cultural ideas like human rights, justice, and equity in being socially constructed. The social construction nature of development is evident in that direct indicators of development do not exist and development levels can only be inferred through indirect indicators such as income, education, and health. However, income, education, and life expectancy are concrete physical things as they specify the amount of money received, the years of school completed, or the average years of life lived, whereas development is an abstract construct that does not emerge from physical things as such. Thus, development and developmental hierarchies are constructs that provide a framework to evaluate countries, to interpret social change, and to understand how to live in the world. There is no doubt that abstract social constructs such as development can be as powerful or more powerful than more physical aspects of life.

Beliefs in development hierarchies have been widespread among scholars and policy elites since the 18th century. As in 18th and 19th century social theory, it has been generally assumed that countries seen as less developed have been following "leading" countries in their course of advancement (for critical reflections see Böröcz 2009; 39-43; Chakrabarty 2000; 3-16; 27-29; 42-46; Melegh 2006a; 49-96; Thornton 2001, 2005; 13-46; Todorova 1997a, 3-19; 42; 89-139; 140-160; Wallerstein 1997; Wolff 1994 13-15; 356-374). This has been a widely disseminated interpretative framework and discourse created for scholarly and political purposes.

This framework appeared as a discourse linked to colonization and the expansion of West-centered world capitalism. It created a discourse of a "civilizational slope" with the "West" located at the upper positions while eastern and southern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America were at lower levels (Wolff 1994, 13; Melegh 2006a, 19-39). This north/west – south/east slope was gradually applied to the whole world, but with some important exceptions like Australia, later Japan, and Israel.

The idea of developmental hierarchies has been widely disseminated among the world's elites, policy makers, and government and nongovernmental organizations (Latham 2000; Meyer et al. 1997; Nisbet 1980). The existence of a hierarchy is always clear, but there are somewhat different types of hierarchical imaginations in how various elites map the world (Melegh 2006, 106-124). In this respect the United Nations places countries on a continuum from low to high on its Human Development Index (HDI) (UN Development Programme 2007/2008). The World Bank categorizes countries as industrial or developing, and the International Monetary Fund categorizes countries as advanced or emerging and developing (World Bank 2010; International Monetary Fund 2009).

The place of eastern Europe in this developmental social construction is somewhat unique. As Wolff (1994: 13) portrays, eastern Europe "was located not as the antidote of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism". This "descending scale of merit" (Glenny 1992: 236) was viewed not only as a "neutral" way of understanding differential development, but guided decisions in many spheres of life. Among other significant processes affected, was the "eastern" enlargement of the European Union that resulted first in the exclusion of "eastern", ex-socialist countries but led to the inclusion of these countries when criteria were "met" in an asymmetric situation (Böröcz 2000 847-853; Melegh 2006a, 17-18).

Eastern Europe is important for understanding how countries conceptualized as “in-between” high and low levels of development are seen by others and by themselves. People living in “middle” countries may show some of the important characteristics of this system of thinking, because they are the ones in direct contact with both the “upper” and the “lower” countries and thus have the maximum amount of perspective on the system (Wallerstein 1979, 89-96). Also, it has been claimed that actors in these so-called in-between countries sometime try to differentiate themselves from neighboring countries or internal minorities seen to be too close in the hierarchical imagination (Baki -Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997a: 38-61; Melegh 2006a pp. 90-96; 112-124). This developmental frustration is sometimes seen when a group does not see itself on the developmental level it deserves or perceives that the avenue to development is hindered by “less” developed people within or close to them (i.e Romania versus the Roma population, Croatia versus Serbia). These considerations and identity positions might provide a structural explanation for some of the inter and intra regional social, political and ethnic tensions in this region.

These hierarchical understandings of development can have a large impact on individual and collective identities and orientations. Therefore, it is important to study how different actors perceive this scaling and how they locate themselves within the hierarchy. It is also important to understand what differing and conflicting perspectives they formulate to deal with the developmental hierarchy without questioning the hierarchy’s basic elements.

Survey data gathered in 2007 on the elite and non-elite population of Bulgaria and 17 other European countries indicate that there is a lower level of identification with the European Union in eastern European and especially in Balkanic countries like Bulgaria (Lengyel 2011). Moreover, eastern and southern European countries are less enthusiastic about liberal capitalist models of development than western or central European elites, which shows that there may be some distancing by them from the above described hierarchies. Eastern and southern European elites are also more nationalist in a primordial sense and more attached to their own countries (Lengyel 2011, 1035-1046). The qualitative and historical analysis on the Balkans also indicates a clear sense of a changing but hierarchical positioning concerning western Europe, modernity, and civilization since the late 19th century (Todorova 1997b, 2000, Antohi 2000, Vesseva 2008, Brisku, 2011).

Qualitative and historical analysis focusing on intellectual and political elites has been done, but little research has been done on popular cognitive structures concerning development. Also, little research has been conducted concerning “middling” areas like eastern Europe using non-qualitative, non-textual data (Lengyel 2008, 2009). Using survey data one paper has reported how developmental hierarchies are evaluated in several countries, but mostly outside Europe (Thornton et al. 2011). No research has investigated how people within Europe construct developmental hierarchies for all of Europe or how people compare European countries with countries elsewhere.

Our research was designed to fill this important gap. We investigated the ways Bulgarians construct the developmental hierarchy by asking respondents to rate country development within and outside Europe. We also considered what local political and historical considerations the Bulgarian respondents may have integrated into their constructions.

Our research was also designed to evaluate factors influencing the distribution of developmental constructions within Bulgaria. There are reasons to believe that understandings of international developmental hierarchies vary by wealth, sex, education, residence, and age.

Education and wealth are important potential influences as they indicate position in the socioeconomic structure. Education provides ideas and information about the world beyond

a person's community or country. Schools can teach people about developmental hierarchies and where various countries are located on the perceived ladder of development. Also, people with higher socioeconomic status, as indicated by wealth, probably have more knowledge of international developmental hierarchies. Urban living expands communication networks, making knowledge of the world more accessible.

In many areas of the world social systems allocate women secondary positions in the social structure. Women have fewer opportunities to learn about the world, leading them to be less consistent than men with elite views of developmental hierarchies. Nonetheless, gender may lose some of its power when almost universal education exists for both men and women.

We hypothesize that age is related to views of developmental hierarchies, but our hypotheses lead to contradictory empirical expectations. Aging provides learning opportunities, leading to the expectation of a positive correlation between age and knowledge of developmental models. At the same time, aging may diminish cognitive capacities, thereby, decreasing knowledge of international hierarchies, leading to a negative correlation of age with developmental understandings. Another factor that might cause a negative correlation between age and developmental understandings is the expansion of media and information networks that socialized older and newer cohorts differently. This may be especially true in Bulgaria with the demise of state socialism and the opening of the country to international networks.

It is also likely that in many countries, including Bulgaria, the social structure limits differentials in the holding of ideas about developmental hierarchies. Bulgaria has had nearly a half-century of state socialism with its emphasis on social equality and societal homogenization. Efforts were made to minimize rural-urban differences, to homogenize the education experience, to increase gender equality, and to minimize income differences.

Historical Background and National Identity

We now discuss Bulgaria and why it is an especially appropriate setting for this study and highlight things that are important for understanding Bulgarian views of developmental hierarchies. Our research concerning Bulgaria also opens up questions for investigation in other European countries.

Bulgaria is located in the Balkans of southeast Europe. Historically, Bulgaria had close connections with the Ottoman Empire, being ruled by the Ottomans for nearly 500 years from the late 1300s through the late 1800s. Turks also currently comprise nearly 10 percent of the population. Russia has also played a significant role in Bulgarian history, helping to liberate Bulgaria from the Ottomans in the late 1800s. Bulgaria also has extensive cultural links to Russia. The languages of Bulgaria and Russia are Slavic, and the great majority of Bulgarians are of the Orthodox religion.

From the end of World War II until 1989, Bulgaria was closely tied to the block of socialist countries dominated by the Soviet Union whose high international standing was frequently emphasized. Until the 1960s Bulgaria's economy was dominated by agriculture, with relatively little industry, but under state socialism industrialization became a priority. There was a perceived rivalry with the West as an alternative modernity, and this was a central topic of discussion throughout the last half of the twentieth century, with claims that Soviet and east European socialist modernity was superior to the "decadent" West.

After the fall of state socialism in 1989 and the transition to democracy, the significance of eastern European markets declined and global markets now operate. Cultural orientations shifted strongly in favor of western culture whose influence had previously been restricted

or put into a competitive East versus West framework. The acceptance of Bulgaria into European organizations opened boundaries and about one-eighth of the population moved (mainly) to western countries, and prevalent western norms and institutions became accepted by many Bulgarians (Crampton 2000). Bulgaria has historically been among the lowest income European countries. A dominant discourse in Bulgaria is that improvement can be achieved by aiming to reach the levels attained by others. This image appears in Krasteva's comment on Bulgarian identity:

The sense of belonging to the Bulgarian people is combined with long-term discontent with the country's economic and political development ... Discontent with the country's economic and political situation has prompted some people to feel ashamed of being Bulgarian (Krasteva 2000: 505-507).

The popular dictum of the Bulgarian novelist Aleko Konstantinov puts it in terms of qualitative "Europeanness". "We are European but not quite" (cited in Todorova 1997a, 41). This kind of positioning by Bulgarians is reinforced by the country's location in the Balkans, a region that has, since the 19th century, been seen as lagging behind "European development" and as a hotbed of national hatred and rivalries.

Data and Methods

Our data come from face-to-face interviews in January-February 2009 with a nationally representative sample of 1008 Bulgarians aged 18 and older. Each respondent rated fourteen countries on their levels of development using an eleven-point scale from zero to ten. We translated the English word "development" into the Bulgarian word "razvitie". We did not give the respondents a definition of development because we wanted to use the questions to study people's constructions of the concept. We did not ask respondents how they defined development, but more in-depth research in Hungary (unpublished results) and Argentina (Binstock and Thornton 2007) shows that in both these countries economic well-being, education, and science and technology are important elements entering into definitions of development. We expect similar factors to be influencing Bulgarian conceptualizations of development.

The respondents were randomly divided into three roughly equal subsamples, and each subsample rated different sets of fourteen countries (see Table 1). We designed the three lists to have similar countries, and with similar countries located in the same position within the lists. Four countries were rated by all respondents. This approach allowed us to obtain ratings on thirty-four countries. More information about the data is contained in the supplemental material.

For each country rated, we calculated the average rating for all who rated that country. In another analysis, we calculated the percentage who declined to rate a country's development.

Another analysis compared the average country ratings with the country's gross domestic product per capita (PPP-GDP/cap) and score on the UN HDI (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDI2008Tables.xls>; June 2009). GDP is often thought of as a purely economic indicator of development, while HDI provides a broader perspective. The HDI is a composite of three indicators: life expectancy; per capita income; and the combination of adult literacy and school enrollment.

We calculated Pearsonian correlations between the average respondent ratings of countries and the GDP and HDI scores of the same countries. We also calculated for every person in the data set the correlation between the HDI scores and that individual's ratings on

development and the correlation between country GDP and that individual's country ratings. The procedures for calculating these individual correlations are identical to the procedures for calculating the correlations between the average ratings and GDP and HDI.

We estimated regression equations evaluating how the individual country rating correlations differed across subsets of the population defined by wealth, gender, education, residence, age, and ethnicity. One regression equation predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and GDP, and another predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and the HDI.

By definition, a correlation coefficient (R) is a continuous variable bounded from -1 to +1. For our regression analysis, we transformed it into a variable that ranges from minus to plus infinity. We use a complementary log-log regression to transform R as follows:

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

Results

Figure 1 plots three scores for each country rated: GDP, HDI (multiplied by ten), and the average respondent scores. Countries are arranged from high to low according to their average survey ratings.

We begin with the average survey ratings, looking first at the general patterns and later consider exceptions. Figure 1 shows that Bulgarians, in general, put countries of the western half of central Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Austria) as the most developed together with some western and northern European countries (England, France, Norway and Denmark). The next group of countries is from southern Europe (Italy Spain, Portugal), which is then followed by the eastern (previously state socialist) countries of central Europe (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) and then by countries of eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus). Some countries of the western Balkans (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina) are next, followed by India and the Caucasian countries, and then central Asian countries, Albania, Bulgaria, and some African countries.

These data, thus, suggest that, in general, Bulgarians use a hierarchical model of the world that is similar in some key points to historical discursive constructions of an east/west slope used by elites and other social actors since the 18th century. This historical construction claims that there is a gradual decline of civilization from the west toward the east, with the lower end of this slope pointed toward "barbarity" in whatever way it was constructed (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997a, 11-12; Melegh 2006a, 35-36). The logic of this geographic slope was that the "West", including Germany, England and France, was a focal point from which civilization descended in an eastern and southeastern direction¹. This constructed pattern was reversed somewhat by state socialism in eastern and southeastern Europe that claimed for itself a superior modernity (Brisku 2011, 97-140, Böröcz 2009, 111-116; Melegh 2006a, 40-42). Our data indicate that in 2009, almost 20 years after the collapse of state socialism, ordinary (non-elite) Bulgarians seem to follow the older historical construction which has been maintained and even somewhat reinforced by elite groups maneuvering politically and socially during the transition from state socialism and the joining of the EU (Melegh 2006, 189-196). This allows us to speculate that, with some differences, a historically rather resistant and discursively reinforced pattern exists among non-elite Bulgarians².

¹During the last 50 years northern European countries have been incorporated into the notion of the "West"

As one explanation for the persistence of the historical pattern maintained by a complex set of actors and institutions, Figure 1 indicates the country ratings are, in general, quite similar to the country GDP and HDI scores. In addition, all three sets of numbers locate the countries of the Caucasus, central Asia, south Asia, and Africa at the lowest levels, showing that GDP and the UN HDI are very close to the perceptions of Bulgarian respondents and to some elite constructions in the past.

The Pearsonian correlations between the three sets of numbers for the thirty-four countries summarize this correspondence. Those correlations are .91 between the average respondent ratings and GDP and .76 between average respondent ratings and HDI. The correlations are not only exceptionally high but similar to the .80 correlation between HDI and one of its three components, GDP, for these same countries.

As already noted, the average respondent ratings are closer to the GDP of countries than to HDI – correlations of .91 and .76 respectively. This is apparent in Figure 1 where the slope of the HDI scores across countries is much flatter than the slopes of GDP and respondent scores. Furthermore, the slope of respondent scores closely tracks the slope of the GDP figures.

Also, HDI scores in eastern and southern Europe are higher relative to GDP than they are in northwestern Europe, probably showing that state socialism put higher emphasis on fostering things like education and health care. That is, the rate of conversion of HDI into GDP in the southeast is less than elsewhere in Europe. The closer tracking of respondent country ratings to GDP than to HDI may result because Bulgarians have more understanding of income differentials or because they ignore their own relatively good levels of education and life expectancy that mainly resulted from their socialist past (Böröcz 1999).

Figure 2 shows that country development scores are related to how well Bulgarians believe they know a country's score. The only countries Bulgarians rate high on development are ones that large percentages say they know. When a large percentage say they do not know a country's development level, it is more probable that the country is rated low by those who rate it. In other words, knowing about and rating a country as highly developed (with the understandable exception of Bulgaria) occur together. This suggests that Bulgarians are more familiar with developmental levels of countries they perceive above them on the slope than they are of countries considered less advanced.

This captures a crucial element of the hierarchical outlook that is discussed in elite discourses, where there is a fixation on the development of core countries (Chakrabarty 2000, 27-29), while countries seen as less advanced are also seen as less important to know. Thus, visibility and perceived development levels occur together, reminding us of the inbuilt power attributes of the slope.

Despite the slope's congruence with historical and contemporary scales, there are notable exceptions. First is the Netherlands. Bulgarians rate the Netherlands lower than other northwest European countries. Although the low rating of the Netherlands might represent idiosyncrasies in the cognitive map of respondents relative to this country, it is more likely to be the result of many Bulgarians not being familiar with the Netherlands label. It is likely that if we had referred to this country with the more familiar label of Holland, it would have been rated higher. This explanation is consistent with Figure 2 showing that many

²A similar logic was found when the developmental map of the Financial Times was analysed qualitatively for 2001 (Melegh 2006, pp. 108-109).

Bulgarians did not know the rating of the Netherlands. Additional research is needed to evaluate this explanation.

The second exception to the overall pattern is Russia which occupies a rather high position in respondent ratings, as it is evaluated similarly to the southwestern European countries of Italy, Spain, and Portugal, well ahead of the eastern countries of central Europe. Thus, it is perceived to be much higher on the East/West slope than its location in historical East/West discourses and its GDP or HDI scores would suggest.

Another outlier is Turkey which has a respondent score similar to the central European countries of Poland and the Czech Republic. As with Russia, the high rating of Turkey by Bulgarians is not matched by its GDP or HDI score. This is surprising because elite discourses describe Turkey as being the Oriental counterpoint, a stagnant and less developed country (Todorova 1997a; Neumann 1999; Hülse 2000; Brisku 2011). Todorova (1997, 58), for example, stated that among many in the Balkans, Turkey exemplifies the ultimate orientalism.

One commonality between Russia and Turkey is that both have played powerful roles in Bulgaria's history. During the socialist period Russia represented the highest level of socialist modernity and this could be seen in "official" and intellectual discourses (for Albanian and Georgian versions of this discourse, see Brisku 2011). Bulgaria was also occupied by Turkey for more than 500 years and was liberated with Russia's help. Bulgarian perceptions of Turkey's development may also be influenced by Bulgaria being located closer to the wealthier than to the less wealthy areas of Turkey, giving Bulgarians a skewed perception of Turkey. The recent migrations of some Bulgarian Turks to Turkey may also have contributed to evaluations of better Turkish development by Bulgarian residents. In addition, both Russia and Turkey have economic investments in Bulgaria.

The modification of general developmental hierarchies by local histories and politics has been observed in similar surveys in other countries (Thornton et al 2011). For example, Japan's development is rated lower among Chinese respondents than among respondents from other countries. Similarly, Taiwanese respondents "underrate" China compared to ratings of China by other people. In Bulgaria there is an "overrating" of two local powerful countries, Russia and Turkey, even though Bulgaria's historical experience with these two countries has been very different.

The size of a country may also matter and this may explain why Russia, and to a lesser extent, Turkey are rated higher than expected from other considerations. India may also receive a similar push from its large size and visibility. Thus, the mental mapping of ordinary people may actually link size and level of development (see Böröcz 2009, 53-64).

Bulgarians also have low evaluations of their own country's development. In related surveys conducted with similar questions in other countries, respondents sometimes rated their own countries somewhat below what would be expected based on their country's HDI, although people in some countries 'overrated' their own country relative to the HDI (Thornton et al. 2011). However, the "modesty" of Bulgarians is extraordinary. Bulgarians rate their own country as one of the lowest in Europe, and see themselves on the level of Uzbekistan, Central African Republic, and Nigeria. This is striking, since Bulgaria has both GDP and HDI that are considerably higher than these similarly-rated countries.

Interestingly, this line of thinking extends to other countries in the Balkans, including Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina which also received low respondent development ratings. Such low ratings for Balkan countries also appear in a 2006 Albanian survey, where Albanians gave their own country a score of 3.1, equal to their rating of the Central African

Republic and only somewhat higher than their ratings for Nigeria and Pakistan (Thornton et al. 2011). Such low development ratings for the Balkan countries are not supported by their GDP or HDI.

This particularly negative image of Balkan development is only partially shared by people in other countries. Bulgaria was rated on its development level in surveys in the United States in 2007 and Hungary in 2010. In the US survey, people rated Bulgaria relatively low, but higher than Nigeria or the Central African Republic, two countries that Bulgarians rated similarly to Bulgaria (Thornton et al 2011). Also, Hungarians rated Bulgarian development to be low, but not as low as rated by Bulgarians themselves (preliminary unpublished results). Thus, others do not “underrate” Bulgaria as much as Bulgarians “underrate” themselves.

The especially low ratings of development in the Balkans by Albanians and Bulgarians suggest that there may be low self-esteem among people in the Balkans. Todorova has commented on the special frustrations and negative attitudes put on the Balkans and interiorized within the region:

As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the “European” and the “West” has been constructed. With the reemergence of East and orientalism as independent semantic values, the Balkans are left in Europe’s thrall, anticivilization, alter ego, the dark side within (Todorova 1997a: 188).

This may mean that the discourses on the Balkans as being haunted by blood feuds, nationalist and ethnic rivalries, extreme corruption, and stagnant economic circumstances is a special version of the overall negative understanding of the Orient starting at the Balkans itself. This may create frustrations that one’s own country is perceived as being close to the development of countries with lower HDI and GDP values, such as Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Bulgarians may perceive that as “Europeans” in the “Balkans” they live at such a low level compared to Europeans to the west that their level of development can only be linked to other places with considerably lower income levels.

This construction of an extremely negative identity, frustration, and envy (Todorova, 1997a, 57) when there is an extreme sense of being in the middle of a hierarchical system is also captured by Vesseva (2008) when writing about east European and Balkanic identities:

Such a negative identity can be accepted precisely because even a negative identity is better than a partial identity or no identity at all (41–42).

We now shift from the overall aggregate country development ratings to the correlations of the country ratings of individuals with country GDPs and HDIs. The distributions of correlations are summarized in Table 2 by decile, along with the mean correlation. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of correlations excluding countries in Asia and Africa and sets of European countries having large amounts of missing data (see table for exclusions). These exclusions allow examination of correlations based exclusively on European countries with which most respondents believe they have some familiarity.

Table 2 indicates that most of the individual correlations between country ratings and GDP and HDI are positive and large. The medians range from .66 to .73, and the means range from .62 to .67. Furthermore, there are many large correlations, with 30 percent or more being higher than .76, and relatively few small correlations, with 10 percent or fewer being lower than .31. This suggests that the high correlations observed earlier between country ratings and GDP and HDI at the aggregate level are not just the result of compensating errors, but also hold for many individuals.

Table 2 also reveals that the individual correlations tend to be somewhat higher between respondents' ratings and GDP than between respondent ratings and HDI. The median correlation between country ratings and GDP is .73 compared to the median of .66 for the correlation between country ratings and HDI. This lower correlation at the individual level for HDI compared to GDP is consistent with the results reported earlier for the aggregate ratings.

We now turn to regression equations estimating the effects of wealth, sex, education, residence, age, and ethnicity on the individual correlations (with a log-log transformation) between country ratings and GDP and HDI. One equation predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and GDP, and another predicted the correlation between an individual's ratings and HDI. With a desire to minimize the loss of respondents, our dependent variable is the correlations that exclude ratings for Asian and African countries and sets of European countries having large amounts of missing data.

As displayed in Table 3, the coefficients for age, residence, and education are statistically significant. The age effect is curvilinear, with the largest correlations being for those 40–59 and the smallest correlations for people 18–39 and for those 60 and older. The increasing coefficients up through middle age are consistent with our hypothesis that the aging process gives people more opportunities to learn developmental worldviews. At the same time, aging past 60 may diminish cognitive capacities and memories, thereby, decreasing knowledge of international hierarchies. The especially low correlations for those 18–29 suggests that recent expansions of media and information networks have not socialized new cohorts to be particularly aware of international development hierarchies.

There is an almost monotonic decline in both sets of correlations associated with decreasing city size, although the coefficients are only statistically significant for the HDI correlations. This suggests, as expected, that compared to towns-people and villagers, urbanites have more knowledge of the concept of development, have a concept of development closer to that of the UN, have more knowledge of different countries, or are able to use our country development scale more reliably.

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

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

While the coefficients for age, city size, and education are statistically significant, the coefficients for wealth, sex, and ethnic group are not. This suggests that these elements of Bulgarian society do not structure views of development hierarchies in a significant way. We expect that this may be related to Bulgaria's nearly half century of state socialism with its emphasis on social equality and the homogenization of society. The stress on social

equality, including gender equality, may have limited the roles of gender, wealth, and ethnicity in shaping developmental views.

Conclusion

We began this paper with the observation that development and country hierarchies are important concepts that have permeated the belief systems of policy makers and other elites for centuries and have played an important role in public affairs. We were motivated by the hypothesis that these ideas have permeated the thinking of ordinary people in many parts of the world.

We examined this hypothesis for Bulgaria using 2009 survey data and found strong evidence that Bulgarians have perceptions of development and its geographical distribution. The ratings they gave to countries indicate a general gradient of development that is high in western Europe and the western part of central Europe and declines from there toward the east, with the low point being the countries of the Balkans, central Asia, and Africa. Thus, the east-west developmental gradient discussed in the literature on historical and political discourses generally appears in the social constructions of ordinary Bulgarians.

This perceived gradient of development parallels the gradients of GDP and HDI. This suggests that the ideas of developmental hierarchies have a basis, not only in ideas, but in the distribution of income and related factors across Europe. Thus we observe hierarchical imaginations related to hierarchical social and economic structures as they are reconstructed in figures like GDP and HDI. (Todorova 1997a, 42, Wallerstein 1997).

This strong geographical gradient exists at both the aggregate and individual levels. Most individual Bulgarians have an idea of developmental differences across countries, and these ideas are generally in the same direction portrayed by the HDI and GDP. This indicates the extensive permeation of the development concept to ordinary Bulgarians and that this concept is closely related to the development concept held by the UN.

The Bulgarian data also suggest that historical elite discourses are resilient. Despite the fact that Bulgaria is in southeast Europe, respondents were more likely to say that they could rate a western European country on development than they were to say that they could rate some southern or eastern European countries or countries outside Europe. This suggests that people residing in countries perceived to be lower on development are focused more intently on countries above them on the ladder than on countries close to or below them. This provides survey evidence that postcolonial criticism has valid insights into Eurocentric knowledge production, at least among Bulgarians.

Our data also suggest that Bulgarians equate the development levels of southeast European countries to the levels of countries in Africa and central and south Asia. This is true despite the HDI scores and GDP of southeast European countries being considerably higher than those of these other regions. This “underrating” is perhaps most notable in the case of Bulgaria itself. This suggests a notable negative self-perception by Bulgarians that is consistent with the negative Bulgarian national identity we discussed earlier.

We also stress that the overall development gradient from western and central Europe to eastern Europe and outside Europe in the minds of Bulgarians is modified by local history and regional influences. This is evident in that Bulgarians rate both Russia and Turkey higher on development than one would expect from their geographical locations and GDP and HDI. We partially interpret this as reflecting the enormous influence of Russia and Turkey in Bulgarian affairs over the centuries, and there is considerable Russian and Turkish

investment in Bulgaria today. Geopolitical size also matters in popular perceptions of development (Böröcz 2009, 53-64).

The dissemination of ideas about development has not been uniform within Bulgaria. The permeation of development ideas appears to be most widespread in the large cities, among the highly educated, and among the middle-aged. This suggests that both urban living and education spread these ideas, although many villagers and those with less education have also assimilated development ideas. However, these differentials are modest, and observed differentials by wealth, gender, and ethnicity are small and not statistically significant.

We emphasize again that developmental hierarchies are not concrete physical features of individual countries or the world system, but are socially constructed. They do not grow straightforwardly out of the physical world, but are constructed by people to represent the world around them. Our research shows that ordinary Bulgarians make this social construction.

We expect that developmental hierarchies are constructed individually by each person, but they are also constructed from the culture in which individuals are embedded. This culture is transmitted intergenerationally from parents to children and more generally from the older to the younger through a myriad of mechanisms. This transmission of developmental models is much like the transmission of language, religion, and family systems. Thus, there is both continuity and opportunities for changes within and between generations.

This research in Bulgaria joins a growing body of evidence indicating that ideas of development and developmental hierarchies have been widely disseminated internationally, including in settings as disparate as China, Nepal, Egypt, Iran, Argentina, and the United States (Thornton et al 2011). Although these data do not represent all populations of the world, they provide strong reasons to believe that such ideas are widely disseminated and available to influence the behavior of ordinary people throughout the world.

Our data, of course, were collected in only one European country, Bulgaria, and we do not know how ordinary people in other countries map Europe's development. Future research in other European countries will provide important knowledge about perceptions of development in these other places and provide important comparative insights into how constructions of social hierarchies vary across boundaries.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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

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

Table 1

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

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

Table 2

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

Percentiles	Correlations with GDP ⁵	Correlations with HDI ⁵
10 th	.39	.31
20 th	.52	.46
30 th	.61	.55
40 th	.68	.62
50 th	.73	.66
60 th	.77	.71
70 th	.81	.76
80 th	.85	.83
90 th	.90	.87
Mean Correlation	.67	.62
Number of Cases	804	804

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

⁵These correlation calculations exclude countries or sets of countries in Asia, Africa, and in European countries with large amounts of missing data. The countries or sets of countries excluded are the Central African Republic, India, Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan/Tajikistan, Nigeria, Georgia/Armenia/Azerbaijan, and Austria/Netherlands/Switzerland. The number of cases is larger when some countries are excluded than when all countries are included. That is because in order to calculate a correlation for a respondent, he/she has to have good data on every country included in that particular calculation. So, the fewer countries that are included in the calculation, the greater the number of respondents with good data for each.

Table 3

Regression coefficients and corresponding p-values for two models: correlations of respondents' development ratings with (1) GDP and (2) UN HDI in a log-log scale

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

Note: Countries excluded from the correlations are listed in Table 2 (notes).