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To Educate for the 21st Century

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**EDUCATION IN THE USSR: AS A TOOL OF IDEOLOGY AND
A FACTOR OF NATIONAL RE-AWAKENING**

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(3) M.T

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It has value per se as a part of culture, but serves also as a tool for preparing new generations for life. Education is a stabilizing factor in any society. It has also played such a role in Soviet society. Specifically, I point out its role in spreading the officially declared communist ideology and in the formation of Soviet people. Here I consider education from three perspectives:

- 1) the development of the educational system in the Soviet Union;
- 2) the gains and realities of 70 years of the Soviet system and education;
- 3) the role of education in the radical transformation of society in the post-perestroika period.

This analysis is based on the longitudinal survey "Life Histories of a Generation." The sample for this survey lives in 16 regions of the Soviet Union. The first stage of this survey was carried out in 1983-1986 and embraced about 60,000 high school seniors who were then 17-18 years old (Table 1). The

regions include Siberia, Central Asia (Tadzhikistan), Central Russia (Tula, Tatar USSR, Karaganda region), the Ukraine, the Baltic republics, Byelorussia and Moldavia.

1.1) In 1922 the Soviet Union was formed on the basis of communist ideology in the boundaries of the Russian empire (excluding Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). This new state was officially declared as a union based on the self-determination of all nationalities, and it declared the equality of all nationalities. It was the political desire of nations coming from the "prison of nations" -- Christian Russia -- and it was justified within the context of communist ideology. However, the practice of socialism in the Soviet Union was carried out from the very beginning by means of tyranny. (Most frontier territories were seized with the help of the Red Army). This meant the continuing of imperial traditions. It created from the very beginning a double morality in nationality questions.

The actual practice consisted in founding a totalitarian state that ritually declared the equal rights of all nationalities, while the concealed aim was to create a single Soviet nationality and "homo sovieticus." The concept of a Soviet people was worked out as a supranational structure including all nationalities of the Soviet Union. The practice of nearly 70 years was directed toward eliminating not only the cultural roots of national minorities but also those of the

67 M.T

Russians themselves in order to replace the whole national culture with a new one based on communist ideology. The old elite and most intellectuals were not only ousted from power but mostly physically eliminated as the core of the old cultural tradition. The intention was to form a new loyal intellectual and political elite. The underlying intention was to cut off old traditions and obligations, creating space for new ones based on communist ideology and the concept of the Soviet Union as a totality. Special attention was paid to the church as an ideological enemy.

Ideological arguments for a Soviet people and "Soviet man" in contrast to national consciousness was a central piece of propaganda and education. At first, this role was legitimized through the role of the proletariat in world revolution. After the glorious success of the world mission of the Soviet Union, there would be one communist world birthplace, the U.S.S.R. The second argument followed: the same line was adopted for overcoming divisions on national grounds through internationalization of the whole world. It was also a legitimation of totalitarian Soviet socialist society versus narrow-minded selfish national interests, cultural isolation, etc.

A third grounds for legitimation was created through building a linkage between traditions of enlightenment and

Marxism as the ideological follower of these traditions. In the 1970-1980s this linkage was turned into a science. It was claimed that sovietization policy is not only marxist-leninist but also scientific. To go against it meant being antiscientific, antimarxist, antienlightenment in one's thinking. All this was developed on the level of educational policy, not to mention the general climate in which the educational system was functioning.

Culturally and ideologically, the most fundamental argument against the old world was the glorification of collectivistic society versus individualistic society based on private property. Practically it was negation of any privacy as a base for personal development and existence. A priori, totality (mankind, society, state, institution, group, etc.) had preference before the individual, and dependence on totalities was absolute.

This major ideological argument provided an excuse to eliminate from society any subjectivation and independent activity. Everything was totally organized through the system.

The Soviet Union is a huge country with a population of nearly 300 million, half of whom are Russians and the other half of whom are 14 other main nationalities living in their own republics. Urbanization can be accepted as one of the important social developments. The census data are given in Figure 1.

Main data about nationalities are given in Table 2.

1.2) The new education system was intended to serve these goals completely. Compulsory 4-year education was established in 1930. The system of education also included a 7-grade incomplete secondary education, and a 10-grade (complete) secondary school. A 7-grade compulsory education was established in 1949, and one more grade was added in 1958. In 1970 it was decided that all children should receive a secondary education. The new school system comprised, in addition to general secondary schools, specialized secondary and also vocational secondary schools as a new form of secondary education. All of this occurred in a country in which in 1897 (the time that the last trustworthy census was conducted), the rate of literacy was 28.4 percent in the whole Empire and far lower in the rural areas. At that time, however, illiteracy was rare in Estonia -- only 3 to 4 percent. According to the official figures of the late 1970s, there was almost no difference in educational indicators between different Soviet republics and regions.

Official statistics give the picture that 96 percent of a given age cohort is completing high school. The lowest rate is in the Baltics and European Russia. The census figures also suggest that there are only minor differences in educational attainment: in the age group of 25-29, the difference amounted only to 5 percent. Upon closer examination, the census figures

prove very unreliable, however. For example, the percentage of non-Russians (specifically, the people of Central Asia) speaking Russian as a second language was artificially increased in order to demonstrate the merging of Soviet nationalities. Uzbeks knowing Russian as a second language were 13 percent in 1970, 48 percent in 1979 (peak of russification), and 24 percent in accordance with the census of 1989. These figures cannot be accurate because the lag in the process of increase of language knowledge of this magnitude takes generations. Such manipulations are rather easy in the sphere of education where all indicators are quite relative. For example, quite a lot of secondary schools in Central Asia exist only on paper, providing high school diplomas like other schools. One cannot speak about the similarity of the quality of education in different parts of the country. It is reasonable to estimate that about two-thirds of youth attained a secondary education in the most developed regions while no more than one-third did so in the backward regions.

The figures on higher education are also doubtful as they are at odds with the general educational attainment of the population of different union republics and educational potential in 1920. Moreover, a college or university diploma can be obtained on paper as easily as one from a secondary school. It can be said that in the socioculturally most developed regions, fewer than 10 percent of the generation attain higher education.

It can be concluded that the school systems in various regions of the country do not provide equal opportunities for young people. Historically formed regional differences still remain, although they have diminished to some degree. The attempt to create a uniform society, uniform nationalities, and uniform personalities by means of education succeeded only to a small degree. It is obvious that the regional differences were bigger than the efforts undertaken by the help of education for creating a totally uniform society.

CONCLUSION. Different regions of the Soviet Union set about the transformation of the society with a historically specified potential. Certainly there are big gains in education, especially in backward regions as compared with czarist Russia. Education as a part of culture is comparable in European context. The country has a developed educational system.

1.3) The second basis of educational policy lies in differentiating it in various directions in accordance to the needs of the labor market. In this case, Soviet educational policy copied that of Germany, which considered the training of skilled workers to be the most important. In addition to vocational schools, a system of specialized secondary schools, originally meant to train professionals, has recently started to train mainly skilled workers. Despite various reforms, general

secondary education in its main directions can be regarded as a continuation of the classical high school. In this sense the Soviet educational system has typical international foundation. Ideologically, the aim was to have equal and unifying education: ideally the same in all republics, regions and social strata. The development of the main types of education in various regions proceeded not from ideological considerations but from typical colonial policy. As all of the resources belonged to the institutionally organized branches of the economy, the whole system of vocational education was shaped by them (Figure 2).

As a result, the network of vocational schools was founded chiefly in major industrial centers where these schools embraced 30-50 percent of the younger generation. At the same time, in Central Asia, fewer than 10 percent of young people could attain vocational education, and in the course of rapid industrialization, the labor force had to be imported from other regions.

The distribution of specialized secondary education also depended on regional socioeconomic development. For example, the number of students in the system of specialized secondary education varies from 92 per 10,000 inhabitants in Tadzhikistan, to 177 in Kazakhstan and 181 in Russia. As vocational schools and the institutions of secondary education required 5 to 6 times more resources than general secondary education, very little was

earmarked for Central Asia and the Transcaucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia).

As we see, the general goal of creating a new uniform Soviet nationality in which all individuals had equal rights and opportunities could not be pursued in the building of the educational system. As a rule, there was a mechanism of local cultural and socioeconomic interests in which the center left large provincial areas without resources. In Central Asia, practically all resources were allocated for the development of the capital cities, while the educational needs of the villages, where about two-thirds of the inhabitants live, were totally ignored.

For example, there were almost no rural specialized secondary and vocational schools in Tadzhikistan and Dagestan, and the quality of general secondary education was poor in view of the acute shortage of teachers, study aids, schoolrooms, etc., in the countryside.

CONCLUSION: The uniform structure of the educational system existed only in theory, as a concept; in practice, it was determined by the allocation of resources, which in the case of outlying regions were quite insufficient. The realization of ideological targets by means of the structural build-up of the educational system remained even more modest than the integration

of the next generation into the system of education would have permitted.

2.1) Education forms part of culture and as such should be regarded as a social value per se. On the other hand, it is a means of transmitting other components of culture to the next generation. The content of education is highly significant in this sense. For this reason, one has to recognize the merits of the Soviet school system in educating youth. General cultural values and, in particular, the marxist world-view, predominated in the content of education. The lack of pragmatic direction in solving personal as well as occupational problems were the main shortcomings of education. Ideological direction was considered highly significant in the content of education. On the other hand, the development of all of human culture was reduced to the Soviet period and all efforts were directed toward eliminating the past and the rest of the world from the social memory. At the same time, a number of decrees were enacted to replace national languages with Russian in the domain of culture, business affairs, and even in daily communication. It should be stressed that both trends met with considerable success.

2.2) Below we look at the increasing role of the Russian language in the realm of education (see Table 2). In practice secondary and higher education could be obtained only in Russian, except in the Baltic republics. But in reality the authorities

C3 M.T

could not fully implement this goal. While higher education and the conduct of official business were fully transferred into the Russian language in the Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics, elementary education could still be attained in one's mother tongue. As we can see from Table 2 (as we said before you must be critical of these percentages -- they are greater than the real knowledge of Russian) generally only the Slavic nations are genuinely fluent in Russian. In Central Asia one-fourth of the native population can speak Russian (except Kazakhs having a dubious 60 percent). In the Transcaucasus, one-third of the population has a knowledge of Russian. In the Baltics, Lithuanians and Estonians have the same level of knowledge of the Russian language, and Latvians are substantially better. This real weakness of language skills and the political meaning of Russian is the reason for its rapid decline in these regions under the conditions of perestroika.

The transition to national languages in official business in recent years can be regarded as a reaction to sovietization through the medium of the Russian language. At the same time, this trend enables the local national intellectuals to switch their nations to native languages, thus eroding the base of Soviet society. Social and national interests are supplanting Russian quite rapidly to a position of a foreign tongue in those regions. But Russian as a means of sovietization had done its work in all Slavic union republics, where most people communicate

in Russian even in everyday life. Cultural renaissance is quite problematic, and the political and economic future of those nations (in the Soviet Union or in a national state) will be decisive here. Clearly there is a demand to separate Russian as a tool of sovietization or russification from the function of international communication. Internationalization of life and education via a lingua franca is a basic achievement. To use the advantages of education, erecting possibility to use Russian for this, can be used.

On the whole, the main function of the russification of education was the elimination of national cultural roots. But the actual effects of this process vary in concrete regions. On the one hand, it accelerates the development of culture in the union republics of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus. On the other hand, it assimilated about 30-40 million persons who became Soviet people having no cultural roots and being unable in many cases even to identify their nationality.

2.3) The second major unifying moment in education is grading. Certainly, similarity of evaluation scales is obviously desirable for ideological reasons. It is a tremendous step toward unification.

The rigidity of the grading scale in schools has decisive significance in transmitting the content of education. Our

19 M.T

Figure 3

Variations of Real Proficiency of Youth in Various Regions of the USSR

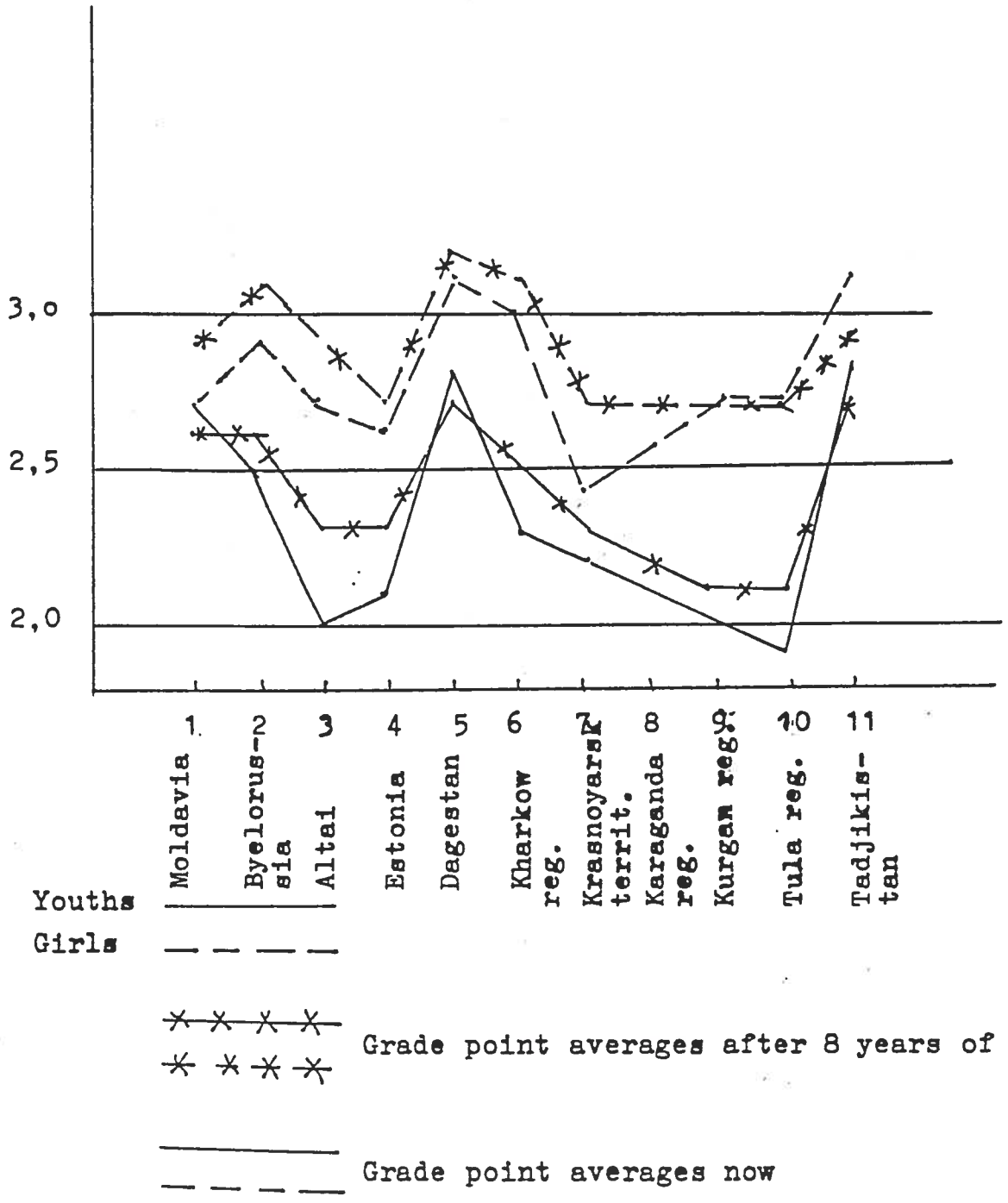


Figure 4

Grade point averages of the certificate of education
 after 8 years of studies of youth from
 different social surroundings.

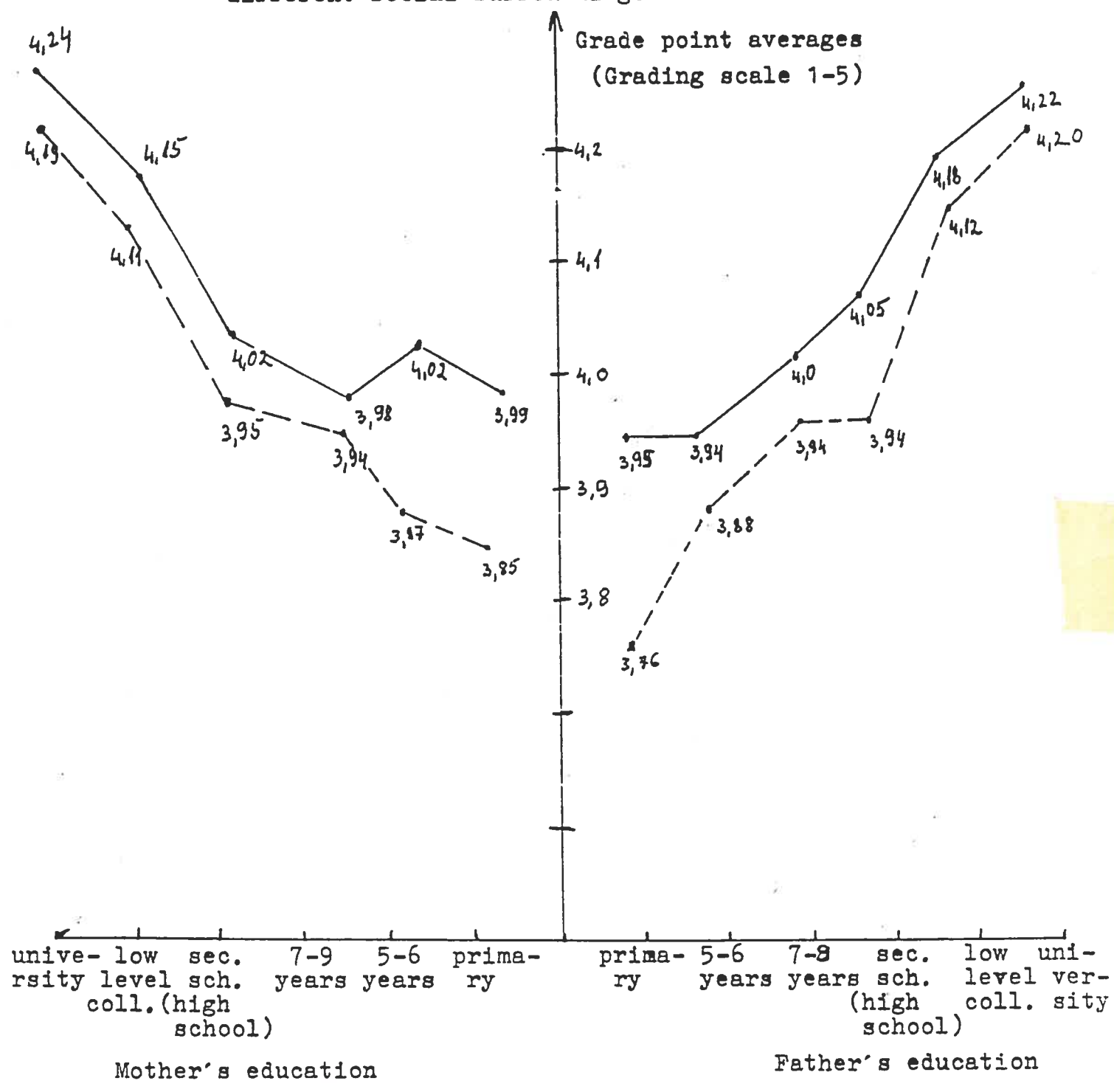
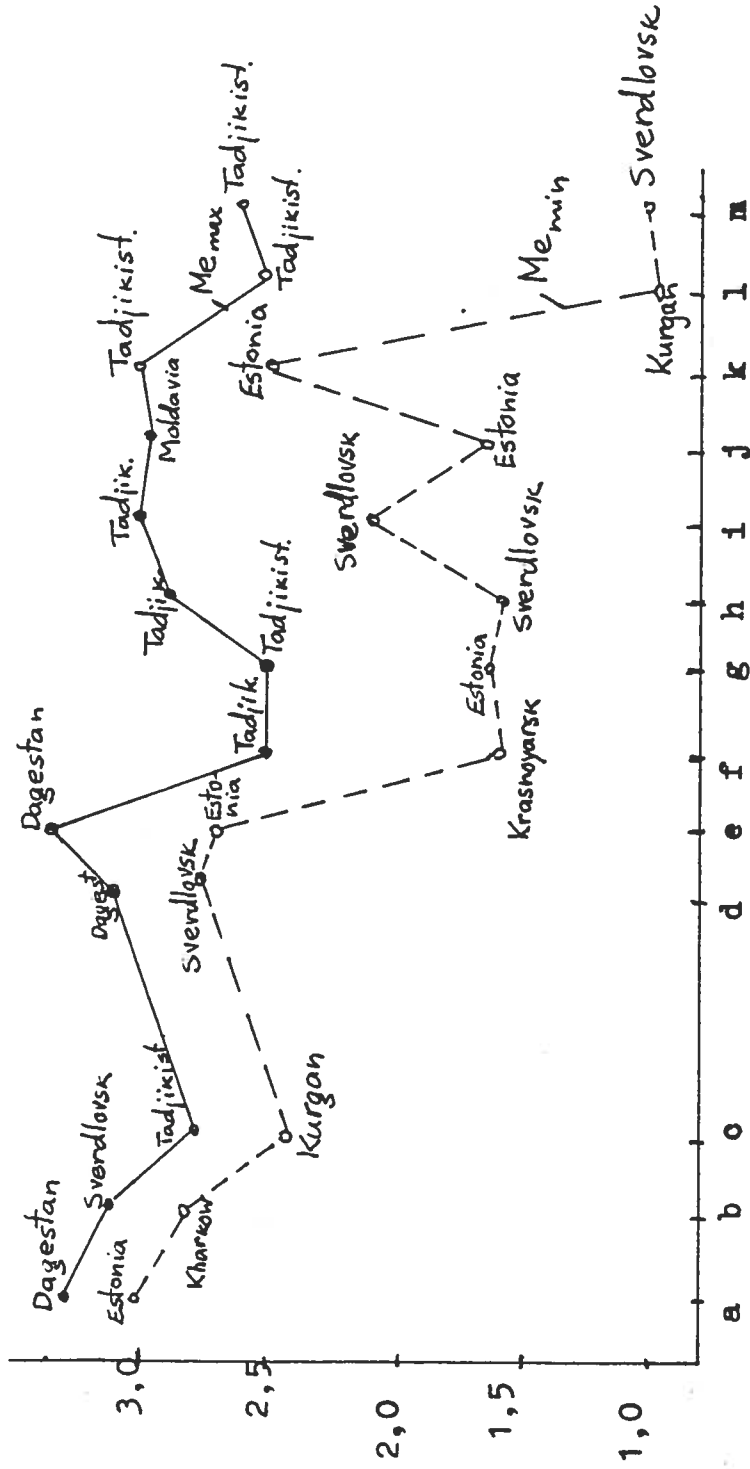


Figure 5



Educational values. (Mean values on 4 point scale). Variation of evaluations - lowest and highest mean value among 16 regions - depending on region (Me).

One must study because:

- a- to become a good specialist
- b- to open his abilities
- c- to learn profoundly taught subjects
- d- to understand life better
- e- to become useful for society
- f- to guarantee himself financially
- g- to gain adequate position in society
- h- prestige in society
- i- to gain respect among friends
- j- to succeed in life
- k- to live among intellectuals
- l- to have clean and easy work
- m- to continue studies

(3. M. T. 28)