

CULTURAL CHANGES AND SOCIAL TRENDS IN TRANSFORMING COUNTRIES: A CASE OF SLOVAKIA.

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Abstract: The article deals with social and cultural changes expected in Slovakia (as they are expressed in the Western countries) in the coming information and post-industrial society (new rising superparadigm, problems of identification and lack of commonly shared idea, polarization and social stratification, changing lifestyles, minorities and so on) in the conditions of polarized Slovak society (traditional and modern society).

Key words: cultural and social changes, traditional society, modernization, post-industrial society, polarization of society.

1. INTRODUCTION

A goal of my contribution is to outline developmental trends of Slovak society in the future post-industrial society in the sense of changing cultural and social trends. The development is - after most of authors - cyclical in its character. Charles van Doren, as cited in the Miloslav Petrušek's catchword "Social change" (Velký sociologický slovník, 1996) introduces 6 groups of authors:

1. progress exists (St. Augustine, F. Bacon, B. Pascal, G. W. Leibniz, I. Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, A. Comte, K. Marx, J. Maritain, T. de Chardin);
2. development has a cyclical character (Plato, Epicures, C. T. Lucretius, G. B. Vico, F. Nietzsche, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, P. Sorokin);
3. regressive development (J. J. Rousseau, H. Marcuse);
4. refusing existence of any pattern (K. Jaspers);

5.refusing knowability of the pattern (B. Croce, R. G. Collingwood, K. Popper);

6.refusing validity of pattern's value judgement (A. J. Ayer).

The textbook of sociology with a subheading "Understanding society" (Rose, Glazer, Glazer, 1984) divides theories of change to evolutionary (A. Comte, H. Spencer), conflict (K. Marx, R. Dahrendorf) and functionalist (T. Parsons). Authors - as well as me - are interested in *systemic* changes of the society. Most of the theories accept an importance of balance, stability of the system. However, systemic changes happen with important position of institutions and other actors. Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein, 1984) in this connection writes about anti-systemic movements (national and social), last goal of his reasoning - the socialist world-government - seems to be unreal.

An American sociologist Talcott Parsons (Mouzelis, 1999) identifies 4 components of the evolutionary development of modern societies: differentiation; adaptive upgrading (more effective operating of the units on the basis of wider range of resources and limiting restrictions); inclusion (of differentiated units into a bigger whole); value generalization (in the conditions of both different social units and very complex social structures and situations must be value pattern more generalized to ensure social stability).

The central concept in the sense of cultural changes is modernization. Talcott Parsons' ideas are concerned with 4 levels of modernization process: capitalist productivity (and competition); political democracy; social solidarity; cultural autonomy and responsibility. These ideas indicate that modernization process is connected with changes in *all* 4 spheres: economy; policy; society (or, more exactly social sphere) and culture. In my contribution I direct the attention at last two of them - first of all at the culture and then at some of societal trends (mainly the culturally conditioned social trends as well as trends originated in the Western culture and then diffused into other areas). Culture is defined as a set of individual and group values, attitudes and morals, realizing through spirituality and transcendence, arts, ethics, rationality and emotionality, aspirations, time and space relations and identity. There is a need to pay a distinctive attention to changing consciousness in conditions of changing society (post-industrial society).

2. CHANGING TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

National mentality of contemporary dual Slovak society is a result of its historical development, people's relations to the nature, economically conditioned social relations, geographical diversity, long-term rural character of population and so on. Results are urban-rural duality, social modernization difficulties as well as problems of political transformation, spiritual reconstruction and economic restructuralization.

Peasant-type society was in Slovakia the most important till 20th century and up to the present day is still prevailing in the rural areas mentality. Ties to the land, natural laws of cyclical rhythms, temporality (and dependence on time), geomorphological diversity conditioned sense for (natural as well as social) laws, spirituality, irrationality, intuitivity, fantasy, emotionality and sensitivity, but also fatalism, strong conservatism and mistrust to novelties and innovations, phlegmatic temperament and preferring stability. Community feelings, local environment, community as a basic unit of identification and strong sociability were (and are) expressed in solidarity, sense for others, communicativity and hospitality. However, there were also negative effects as excessive modesty and respectability and lack of self-confidence.

Autonomous and closed societies opened during the "first modernization process" as a result of growing mobility: emigrations and migrations to growing cities and emerging industrial areas. The new social organization includes nuclear families, changing functions of women and families, new "artificial" authorities, institutions, bureaucracies and hierarchies, urban-rural dichotomy, spirituality and participation weakening. Following communist practice deepened materialism and consumerism, uniformity and lack of common identity and black-and-white reality perception and distinction. "Real socialism" was connected also with loss of developmental continuity - diffusion of Protestant ethics and individualism, rationalism, democracy, tolerance, responsibility, consumerism (and countercultures of the 60's), diversity and multiple choice.

3. POSTMODERN MODERNIZATION

The newly emerged postmodern (and maybe also post-industrial as opposite to industrial society) society brings up a challenge of the "second (or postmodern) modernization". It is not within the meaning of change traditional society, but as changing consciousness, ideas, norms, values, identity, substitute worlds and cultural segmentation and in the social area changing lifestyles, position of marginal groups and minorities defined on the access-to-power basis, disintegration of the society and changes in social stratification and so on.

Perhaps the most important expected turn is in the consciousness' sphere. The new "ecological" one challenges the old mechanistic Cartesian-Newtonian worldview. The rising new "superparadigm" is ecological in the broader sense, ecology as a relation not only to natural environment, but also to society (other individuals, social groups, institutions and so on) and to inner self. The new superparadigm is holistic, spiritual and not only rational. Mechanistic worldview preferred logic, analytical thinking, belief in progress and unlimited possibilities of human knowledge and activity. Economism, consumerism, materialism as results are recently challenged by rising idealism, feelings of others, participation and responsibility. Progress and (material) satisfaction is not definite, emphasis is put on balance and general responsibility. Additional are new views

on basic philosophical categories - matter, time, space. In Slovakian perspective there is an advantage of lesser rationality, closer interpersonal ties, deeper inner spirituality and less rooted rationality.

In Slovakia, as in many other post-communist countries, is but lack of general shared idea and common accepted goal. There are differences in feelings of visions of the future, different visions of future position of single groups - social, age, (sub)cultural or minority groups. All of them similarly have different norms of behaviour, societal rules, attitudes and value norms. Everlasting generation conflict is very known to us, too, subcultures are in Slovakia "underdeveloped", problems of social stratification are sufficiently medialized and similarly it is in the case of ethnic differences (with exception of unsolved problems, above all those of Romany integration into the society), and thus I aim my attention primarily at on-the-access-to-power defined minorities.

As I mentioned above, cultural segmentation is in Slovak conditions "underdeveloped". Cultural (and social) segmentation - above all in the U. S. A. - is expressed as different interest and lifestyle (beatniks and hippies, artists and kitschers, surfers and bodybuilders, virtual surfers and cyberpunks) professional, cultural,... orientations. Modernization brings through mediated patterns of behaviour, lifestyles and identifications new patterns of society's fragmentation. In Slovakia, thus we must be prepared for value- and attitude diversification (as opposite to contemporary polarization of society) as well as for an activity of marginalized groups (including crime).

Among the most important problems of the contemporary society is (also in the above mentioned ideational sense) problem of identity. The identification of Slovak society was in the last decades changed. The original local-and-community rooted identity of traditional society was challenged by the modernization. Requirements included in the first modernization phase (second and third quarter of the 20. century) were "industrial" in their nature. Nuclear ones substituted extended families, declined role of the church, pub, local shop, neighbourhood and professional ties. Contemporary second phase of modernization process is characterized by breaking of nuclear families, ongoing process of secularization of the society, social alienation, growing individualism (non-typical of the Slovak society) and above all loss of certainties in the conditions of growing unemployment and social stress (and the whole process of social and economic transformation), millenium age and the coming information and post-industrial society. There is a cause of "new identification" forms: fundamentalist religions (fundamentalist Islam, baptism - see Naisbitt, Aburdene, 1992), new religions and sects (New Age as well as different meditations, healing- and career success/wealth methods and so on), artificial and substitute worlds (including nostalgia of other historical time and other geographical space) and virtual reality, drugs, regionalism and nationalism. An exceptional role in the human society has religion. It provides for (see Bell, 1976) human spirituality, need for transcendence, morality, shared ideas and in the same time it is base for social identity and realization in social groups and particular collective behaviour and very important is its role in the sense of voluntary cooperation and charity. "New religion" in the conditions of loss of common idea, loss of identity, efforts to spiritual reconstruction, excessive individualism (as opposite to participation)

and moral decadence is an "appropriate medium" to solve different problems of the society. Religion in Slovakia is deeply rooted in the people's consciousness and it may play in the future an important role as a (w)holistic pattern of identification; the religious base, however, must be more open, more tolerant, more altruistic, more spiritual, and more "commercial".

There are many social trends and changes in the Western world to be followed in the postcommunist countries. Practice of "real socialism" excluded tolerance from the real life and social and interpersonal interactions. Class- and social groups' conflicts are deepened in the following practice of economic ("wild privatization") and social (rise of the splashed society) transformation. Lack of the middle strata is as problem as differences between rich (wo)men and poor (wo)men and poverty of the lower strata.

Rising tolerance in the advanced democracies refers to first of all different minorities. Ethnic minorities (firstly Romanies, but also Hungarians) as well as marginal groups (elderly people and young families, handicapped, homeless and the poorest strata) are but only part of the minorities. Minorities I analyse are those on the access-to-power based. Some of them are thus very numerous, women are prevailing. Traditional Slovak society is not so distinctly patriarchal as Western societies as a result of an exceptional position of women in both economy and society in the past. This position was changed in the twentieth century in favour of their male counterpart, women's realization in profession or in the society is thus inadequate. The future society is perceived as female/feminine (i. e. more emotional and sensitive, irrational, intuitive, creative and aesthetic) and this may be further comparative advantage of Slovakia. One of the possible future alternative developments of minority problem (as in the sense of other minorities) is positive discrimination (in the case of Romanies almost inevitable way of solution). An inadequate and insufficient share on the power (i. e. real possibilities in the society to decide, to influence and to have) is typical not only for women, ethnic and racial minorities. Western societies are farther in the position of marginal groups - healthy and mental handicapped, young families, children and youth, elderly people, sexual minorities (gay and lesbian, transsexual, etc.), as well as many different social groups and subcultures (on the basis of common shared ideas and ideals, attitudes, norms and values, interests or professions). An important and influencing textbook of American history written at the beginning of 1990's closed every of its chapters by the position of women at a given historical time (it is similar to our past practice to incorporate in every chapter position of working class). Similarly, there are strong pressures on the position of sexual minorities in the society, resulting in Clinton's election programme at the beginning of 1990's. Attitude towards minorities must be politically correct (in words of Webster dictionary: "conforming to a belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities [as in matters of sex or race] should be eliminated"). Our society remains in this sense distinctly behind advanced democracies, our typical characteristic feature is lack of elementary decency and tolerance, disrespect towards others. Black-and-white seeing and reality judgement as well as our tendency to divide the society to "us" and "them" must be substituted by the tolerance towards other opinions, attitudes, values, behaviour, feelings and towards other racial, ethnic, religious, sexual base. The future information/post-industrial society

is in the sense of social stratification more even than previous industrial society. Power and wealth are in every era defined on different base (see Toffler, 1985). In Toffler's words in the first wave (pre-industrial society) a power medium is ownership of the land, in the industrial society (second wave) it is access to and ownership of capital (which can be - as opposite to ownership of the land - changed during one generation). Success in the post-industrial third wave is contingent on the access to information, "ownership of knowledge", which is almost totally even. The role of the state and its institutions in the process of consciousness' change as well as in the knowledge development is indisputable.

Some of the social-science theories, first of all Wallerstein's world-system theory (Wallerstein, 1984 and his other works) provide with concept "hegemony" or "dominance" in the world-system. The contemporary period is characteristic by the American dominance. From the 1890's is American economy the strongest in the world. Dominance in the world production is followed by the dominance in the world financial system (Bretton-wood agreements) and in the world political system. This is similar as in the previous British dominance, differences are in the socio-cultural sphere. American hegemony is thus - not similarly as British hegemony - characterized by the leadership in social trends and cultural change. Californian environment provides to other world with new lifestyle, cultural identification and other social and cultural changes: healthy lifestyle - vegetarianism, drugs, alcohol and cigarettes refusing as well as physical health - jogging, skating and also bodybuilding and adrenaline sports as expression of both exceptional lifestyle and social identification. Many of the trends already are in postcommunist countries and Slovakia, many of them are not desired. In Europe are widely refused some expressions of American culture as an alien culture of Americanisation or coca-colonization. Europe is recently searching its identity and roots. Origins of the European culture are in Jewish - Christian tradition, in the contemporary postmodern era, characterised by growing irrationality, intuitivity, creativity, emotionality and mysticism, are as one of the roots of the European civilization mentioned also Celtic and Slavic traditions. This may be a possible Slovak investment in the future common "European house".

Position of Slovakia in the future information and post-industrial society is thus contradictory and is connected with its geography. In the socio-cultural sense in Slovakia is not developed clear geographical pattern. Differences are between Western (which is *definitely* a part of the Western culture) and Eastern Slovakia, decisive regional differences but are those between traditional and modern society. First of them is prevailing in rural Slovakia, but, as a result of late urbanization of the country, it is distinctly represented also in the towns and cities. An optimal development will be directed towards use of advantages of both parts of the society. A combination of simplicity and chastity, sensitivity and irrationality of the traditional society with tolerance, knowledge and self-confidence of the modern urban society may be a good starting point towards on information based (post)modern post-industrial society. Slovak society, however, must solve a problem of polarization of the society. For postmodern society are characteristic plurality as realized in Western societies by disintegration, segmentation, fragmentation of the society, reality in Slovakia is, but, deeply rooted

polarization and social stratification of the society. This is other task for the society, to transform polarization (of political attitudes) to fragmentation (of opinions, values, interests, lifestyles and so on).

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Resume

Kultúrne zmeny a sociálne trendy v transformujúcich sa krajinách: príklad Slovenska

Slovenská spoločnosť je charakteristická svojou rozpoltenosťou, vyplývajúcou z historického vývoja. Vidiecke oblasti (a ako dôsledok neskorej urbanizácie aj veľká časť mestského obyvateľstva) sú z veľkej miery ovplyvnené tradičnou spoločnosťou. "Prvá modernizácia", ktorá prebiehala postupne od polovice 19. storočia a bola spätá s industrializáciou a najmä s urbanizáciou, čiastočne odstránila tradičnú uzavretosť časti obyvateľstva, viedla však k vytvoreniu duálnej štruktúry obyvateľstva. Nasledujúca prax reálneho socializmu ešte viac prehĺbila uzavretosť slovenskej spoločnosti, jej izolovanosť od trendov, prebiehajúcich v západných krajinách. Článok iba stručne poukazuje na trendy v sociálnej a kultúrnej sfére, ktoré prebiehajú vo vyspelých krajinách, a ktoré s veľkou pravdepodobnosťou neobídu ani Slovensko a ostatné postkomunistické krajiny. V období postmodernej (pluralitnej a "virtuálnej"), informačnej (nová úloha vedenia a vedomostí a väčšia sociálna rovnosť) a postindustriálnej spoločnosti a v období konca milénia, kedy sa rúcajú staré istoty, je nevyhnutné hľadať nové bázy identifikácie, pomáhať formovať nové vedomie a nový životný štýl, uľahčiť postavenie menšín (definovaných na základe ich prístupu k moci, rozhodovaniu a bohatstvu, ktorým už dnes nie je iba kapitál, ale aj vedomosti a informácie) a prekonať dualitu a uzavretosť spoločnosti.