



SOUTH-WEST
UNIVERSITY
'NEOFIT RILSKY'
BLAGOEVGRAD, BULGARIA

VOLUME 5
2007



SCIENTIFIC
Research

ISSN 1312-7535

ELECTRONIC
ISSUE

Values of the society in the information era

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Values are probably the most widely-used and the most frequently re-interpreted concept in the social knowledge. Social life is impossible without values. Every social action, reciprocal action, movement, etc. has an internal condition – some kinds of values¹. Values motivate the members of the society and the social movements and to a great extent define the way for integrating from the individual to the collective. Shared values are in the core of the social integration from the micro-level of the small group to the highest macro-levels of the social life.

Values are relatively stable. Their modifications, as far as they come, are connected with the evolutions of the experience of the individual. They influence on the evaluations and actions and provide an abstract frame of positions needed for organizing the task. Value is a desire, setting up models and means for reaching them or finishing the action. Most of the concepts about values in science literature are united around the idea that values facilitate the individual choice in every particular situation.

Numerous civilizations, cultural periods and social systems are incomparable. Each one has its own values, which sometimes differ from one another; each one has its own idea giving it a particular sense and colour. The exhaustion of this idea defines the end of the epoch /the civilization/. In such cases arises the question: what are the ideas which can be defined as a value of the society entered in the modern informational era.

Modern societies have many common features and they can be compared, to a great extent, in contrast to the traditional ones. Thus, for example, claims Huntington². He bases his statement on two arguments. The first one is the increasing interaction between modern societies which facilitate giving down technologies, inventions and structures from one society to another with a speed and to the extent which were impossible in the past. The second factor is connected with the production way. Traditional societies were based on agricultural production and thus defined their dependence from their geographical location and natural conditions. Modern societies are based on the industrial production in its different points – from heavy and light industry to the new technological productions.

¹ For example Giddes, A. Sociology. S., 2003, p. 3

² Huntington, S. The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order, S., 2002

Which production and to what extent will be developed – this depends on factors which are different from those connected with geography and the main are those that are science achievements and social priorities. Huntington, himself, is ungrounded declined to underestimate the science at the expense of the social management.

In contrast to him, Zbignev Brzezinski provides arguments in favour of the intellectual direction in the development of the society under the influence of the latest electronic innovations, automatics, cybernetics and mass communication. According to him the new /technotronic/ society is a compound and complex society where an intellectual industry is created in order to dissolve the social problems³. Rationalization and its necessary intellect transform them into a value on their own.

In the general meaning of the word “value” there is something which is socially accepted, confirmed and valid for everyone – for instance, murder is an evil deed for all societies. Value is an idea which is common and important for many groups of people not only for a definite person. Even after its realization the value has to continue confirming itself and does not have to lose its qualities.

Another feature of the value is that it has to keep the desire of the whole society for its realization. Only thus the idea can crystallize as a value for the society. “The progress of net-like society ... cannot be understood without giving an account of the interaction between the following two relatively independent one from another tendencies: the development of the new information technologies and the aspiration of the old society to modernize itself.”⁴

From the elements of the widely held and thoroughly discussed the valuable system of the modern society in science literature here will be discussed four values which on one hand are universal for different profiles and on the other hand are significant enough for the whole valuable system.

First: **Freedom and Rights for personal choice.** Virtual space in the Net creates a new kind of freedom – freedom of self-defining, freedom from space restrictions, personal choice of using the kind and the volume of the chosen information /for educational, professional, information-exchangeable, cultural or simply entertaining purposes/.

Modernity signifies the alternative of the existing reality, “it offers an exit from the traditional identity field, an opportunity to escape from your given identity of the family, place and social status.”⁵ The freedom for defining identity and actions applies in full capacity to the users of the Net.

³ Brzezinski, Zb. Out of control. S., 1994

⁴ Castells, M. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. S., 2004, p. 69

⁵ Therborn, G. Ways to/through modernity. coll. “Global modernities”, S., 2004, p. 186

As Bauman claims: “In the world of national countries the identity has often been felt as a burden not as a gift of freedom, it has often come together with its restrictions and oppression.”⁶

In Internet you are not bound together with the geographical place you live in or you are at the moment – you can communicate with people all over the world through e-mail and real time conversation; you can visit museums which are at the opposite side of the globe; you can study in the universities or you can work in a company which are hundreds kilometers away in reality, etc. You have an access to the whole information which is on any server in Internet. “All that moves with a speed close to the electronic signal speed, in practice it is free from restrictions connected with the theory in which arises, to which it is directed or through which it passes on its way.”⁷

There are no restrictions in the Net! But there is an order which is in parallel with unlimited opportunities and in a sense it supports them. “Order and freedom have raised together to become the two poles between which the modern existence is spread, the two edges of the axis around which the modern mentality spins.”⁸

Paraphrasing this we can say: The order in modern society is technological and the freedom is mental! In the world of techniques there are algorithms – consequence of actions where each action has its own definite place and without it the process cannot continue. Keeping the order is a necessary condition for not raising problems in technique’s functioning.

Second: **Social equality**, as a little utopic but long ago preached and chased social ideal.

In Internet you can define yourself as you like – tall or short, thin or fat, blond or black-haired, i.e. a human appearance makes no difference in a virtual communication in contrast to the reality.

Social status makes no difference too – in order to be in the Net the requirements are equal for everyone – it does not depend whether you are a boss of a big flourishing company or you are a regular employee, whether you are an ordinary taxpayer or a member of the political elite writing the world history – it is needed only a computer and a connected Internet line. After that the information and services are equal for everyone and to what extent you are going to use them depends only on your personal choice and skills.

Third: **Effectiveness and time economy**, as an individual and group value.

⁶ Bauman, Z. In searching the one who numbers the centre. coll. “Global modernities”, S., 2004, p. 216

⁷ Bauman, Z. Globalization: The Human Consequences. S., 1999, p. 78

⁸ Bauman, Z. In searching the one who numbers the centre. coll. “Global modernities”, S., 2004, p. 205

In virtual world things are happening here and now, at the moment. “By contrast with the industrial societies, whose typical value is using goods, the informational society rises up **time** as a typical value.”⁹

In the Net it is needed just a few seconds for a person to find his/her necessary information of all kind – from the weather forecast, TV programme, timetables for trains, busses and planes, exchange rates, stock-exchange lists to specific texts, laws, ordinances. Instantly you can receive a check up for your own social insurance and such like without wasting time ac queuing in front of the desks of waiting for the benevolence of the clerk.

This is a world where there are no time restrictions like in reality. If in the real life hours or days are needed to get from one place to the other, here all is at such a distance as it is from you to your keyboard. You move from one site to another and go around the globe. “Mobility rises up to the rank of the highest value among the desired ones and the freedom to move constantly – scarcely and irregularly classified goods – can quickly become the main stratificated factor.”¹⁰ Internet is generally accessible environment for communication services, creating and using the main resource of the society – the information. Giving information with no problems is one of the contributed factors to realizing the mobility in the Net.

Fourth: **Contacts with the cultural achievements.** Fictions are a definite value in every civilized society. A commonly accepted opinion is the statement that the contiguity with fictions and their individual and group learning is a creative process – such as their own creation. Societies, as a rule, admit such an opinion as an indisputable value and exert organized efforts for providing the process. They invest in conditions for accomplishing this process. Libraries, concert halls, art exhibitions, cinema halls, theatres, printing-offices are only a part of the outer expression of the results of these efforts. The inner meaning is in generally desired change of the way of thinking and perceiving the world, the emotional condition and comfort as well as the whole culture of the society members.

In the Net this process facilitates, intensifies and multiplies. In Internet everyone can visit, in a suitable time for him/her, every bigger museum and making an individual film library with movies of his/her own taste is as easy as a childish game. Already, millions of citizens all over the world “download” chosen movies through Internet. The music fund of the Net exceeded a long time ago, in volume and quality, the limitation of the individual interests and possibilities to listen to the music. By paying, without leaving your home or a working place, you can become a regular

⁹ Masuda, Y. The Information Society as Postindustrial Society. W., 1983, p. 123

¹⁰ Bauman, Z. Globalization: The Human Consequences. S., 1999, p. 22

reader of the British and Moscow's libraries or of the American Congress library as having an access to practically all their book-stock.

According to Bzhezhinsky¹¹, in notably complex processes and phenomena of the technotronic society, technology influences directly on spiritual processes. Obviously, the cultural consumption and consequently the cultural socialization and education alters radically in having an access to the contemporary organized virtual space. Technology and electronics become the main factors defining the social explosions, habits variations, social structures as well as values of the society as a whole.

¹¹ Brzezinci, Zb. Out of control. S., 1994