

THE YOUNG GENERATION'S VALUES ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

THE PAPER INTENDS TO OFFER A PRESENTATION OF THE SOCIAL VALUES, BOTH FROM THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE, HIGHLIGHTING THE VALUES ENCOUNTERED AMONG YOUNG GENERATION.

THE VALUES ARE DEFINED AS AN ABSTRACT SET OF PRINCIPLES WHICH GUIDE THE INDIVIDUAL'S SOCIAL LIFE. THOSE PRINCIPLES CONTAIN THE PURPOSE IN LIFE AND THE BEHAVIOR PATTERNS PREFERRED BY THE INDIVIDUALS UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCE.

THE VALUES ARE REINFORCED BY THE SOCIETY, GIVEN THAT THE SOURCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL VALUES STANDS IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S NATIONAL CULTURE, FAMILY, TEACHERS, FRIENDS AND OTHER FACTORS WHICH CAME ACROSS WITH THE INDIVIDUALS. THE SOCIAL VALUES ARE MANIFESTED THROUGH NORMS AND THIS NORMS REFLECTS THE GROUP'S VALUES.

WE WILL MAKE A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE ANSWERS GIVEN BY THE SUBJECTS FROM URBAN AREA AND THOSE FROM RURAL AREA AND OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO REVEAL THE POSSIBLE OVERLAPPING AND/OR DIFFERENTIATION ALONG THE URBAN-RURAL CATEGORIES. THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS HAD TO CHECK THREE VALUES FROM A LIST OF THIRTY ONE VALUES, VALUES THAT WE'VE ENCOUNTERED IN THE RESEARCHES CARRIED OUT THUS FAR. AFTER ANALYZING THE GRIDS, WE MANAGED TO RANK THE MOST IMPORTANT VALUES, GIVING US THE GROUP VALUES SYSTEM.

KEYWORDS: SOCIAL VALUES, YOUNG GENERATION, URBAN AREA, RURAL AREA, VALUES SYSTEM.

INTRODUCTION

In sociological literature, one of the first definitions of the concept of value, was offered by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, which in the year 1920, under the footnote of their methodological paper "Il contadino polacco in Europa e in America"; the researchers describe social value as a "given" which has "an empirical substance accessible for members of a social group and a reference significance of which it is or can be an object of activity. In this way, a kind of food, an instrument, a currency, or even a scientific theory is or can be social values. The significance of these values becomes explicit when we consider them to be

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connected which human actions¹. Even if the concept of value defined in the way that it is not utilized in this day and age, for the two researchers, the distinction that they have made between values and behaviors, has succeeded in delimiting through it social desideratum which is comprised of values and individual desideratum comprised of behaviors.

With this paper, I have begun with the idea that social groups supply their members with a system of values, information about the world, stereotypes; in other words they supply a conventional reality established on common grounds validated through social acceptance as comforting and convincing.

These are the following premises of which this study is based on:

1. Youths are a part of many groups, and their value system is being developed multidirectional.
2. The values of youths are passed down through their family, and the most important ones are respect/common sense/esteem followed by love/affection.
3. Youths that originate from the rural background are mentioning more often the belief in God as an authentic value in contrast to those in the urban area.

In post-communist Romania, axiological incertitude has multiple causes, up brought by the change in social order, by the formal renouncing of social norms imposed by the former ruling, even by the redefining of good and evil. From a society in which landmarks were clearly represented, the change to a world where you can do the same action in different ways was welcome and quite new. The diversity of values was heavily constrained under the communist role which favored social homogeneity, and after the change, this tendency has lingered because of the social ineptitude to change or lack of predictability. To resist a higher level of axiological incertitude it would require a same level of material security, but in our modern society even this aspect is lacking. The normal reaction to this situation resides in the adoption of conservative values and behaviors, of mitigating existential un-safety. On the other hand, some modern behaviors accompanied by their associating values, are widely spread and hard to alter given the prolonged history of being imposed and dominant. On opposite side, we find postmodern influences brought in by the contact of western cultures.

CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS OF THE TERM VALUE.

Value designates a variety of things, like the denomination of money as the cost to an object, the mathematical unit associated to a physical unit, but especially so in "acquisition of things, facts, ideas, phenomenon's, that correspond with social needs and ideals, generated by them; the sum of the qualities of an object that gives it a price, or significance to a living thing, meaning or valor"².

When we use the concept of *value*, through philosophical inquiry and social sciences, it acquires different meanings. If we were to simplify this discussion, we can say that moral philosophy in question with the concept of value, induces the idea of good, in antithesis with what is bad; in aesthetics value corresponds with the idea of beauty; in cultural anthropology value is taken in consideration when we talk about what it means to be a part of a culture, what is socially accepted, respected and esteemed; in economics, value is the properties that make something desirable, and it requires an effort, a cost if you will to be created, or bought³.

¹ William I Thomas., Florian Znaniecki, *Il contadino polacco in Europa e in America*, (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1968), 26.

² Academia Română, *Dictionarul explicativ al limbii române (Ediția II-a)*, (București:Univers Enciclopedic, 1998).

³ Arnaldo Bagnasco, Marzio Barbagli, Alessandro Cavalli, *Sociologia. I concetti di base*, Ediția aIII-a, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 149-50.

There are a variety of definitions and interpretations given to the concept of values. In socio-humanistic sciences the most accepted notion is that of general principles or abstracts of what is important and precious to life, about how humans must act and behave and appreciate the situations, events, persons, and even social and natural objects. Such principles are: kindness, truthfulness, justice, liberty, cooperation, competition, self-fulfillment.

Values are a product of historic processes which span a long time, and are influenced by social context; Gallidi considered that a social value is "the conception of a condition, about one's self or others, or the conception of one's self in relation to others or objects, including in this sense, nature and supernatural phenomena of which an individual or a collectivity deems it to be desirable and on the basis of which they judge the fairness, the accepted character, efficiency, and dignity of self-actions or other members actions. Even if it would be interesting to analyze sociologically individual values of subjects when we try to explain social actions, the current interest is focused on the values common to a community"⁴. In this moment there can be distinguished three fundamental components of values: affectivity (the domain of actions), which pertains a link between objects, people, actions within the span of an approval/disapproval chain; the cognitive component which pertains to the fact that values appear as a series of enunciations which are argumentative to the social actor; the volition component (of selection) which refers to the capacity of values to orient social action⁵.

In their paper regarding values, Peter B. Smith and Shalom Schwartz have highlighted five major aspects which are important to them.

1. Values are ideas or beliefs which are infused by feelings;
2. They refers to desirable scopes (such as talking about equality or justice) and of ways of good conduct which promote those respective values (correctitude, helpfulness, etc.);
3. Values transcend actions and specific situations: submission is practiced for example, in schools, at the workplace, in family or with friends and strangers;
4. Values serve as standards of selection and evaluation of behaviors of different people or events;
5. Values are ordered both at a societal level and on an individual one by the importance of one against the other, thus forming the system of values (value system).⁶

Regarding the classification devised by Rezsóházi Rudolf in his book "The Sociology of Values", he splits these in four broad categories⁷:

1. Post-Modern values: Individualism, self-fulfillment, liberty, experimentation, relativity, sincerity, tolerance, spontaneity, sexuality, hedonisms, the now, living together, nature, life, and equality.
2. Traditional Values: Religion, authority, moral rigorousness, submission, duty, work, responsibility, fidelity.
3. Central Values: love, family, friendship, honesty, dignity, carrier accomplishment, safety, free time, sciences, progress, democracy, peace.
4. Latent Values: justice, solidarity, fraternity, kindness.

Individual values are formed in the first stage of life. During the whole life of the individual, the behavioral pattern, attitudes and perception are guided and determined by these values. Values are consolidated by society, taking in consideration the fact that the source of

⁴ Luciano Gallin, *Dizionario di Sociologia*, (Torino:Utet, 1993), 716.

⁵ Laura Sciolla (coord.), *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali*, (Roma: Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1998), 751.

⁶ Peter B. Smith, Shalom Schwartz, „Values” *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, VolumulaIII-lea, (Boston: , MA: Allyn & Bacon , 1997), 80.

⁷ Rudolf Rezsóházi, *Sociologia valorilor*, (Iași: Institutul European, 2010),122-23.

the individual's values reside in national culture, family, teachers, friends, or other factors found in close proximity to man.

DURKHEIM AND THE STUDY OF VALUES.

In the midst of Durkheim's sociology, the conceptualization of values form an analytic key of reflection on social relations, and thus, on the processes of integration.

The approach proposed by the french sociologist was found by an interpretive logic of which we can call it today as an functionalist type of logic, in which "the social actor has the tendency to learn the values of the society in which he lives, as long as it favors the survival of the social system, and in consequence the survival of the individual"⁸.

The individualization of a social dimension on a utilitarian level, accredits the idea of, that even in the context of a modern differentiated society, there is a need for a system of common values which regulates the division of work and to promote social solidarity. Following this train of thought, Durkheim's approach in his research answers the need to contextualize existence and the functioning of common values, embedded in the collective conscience of any given community, in the sense of a social reality in which cultural homogeneity is not that often found⁹.

A more systematic perspective on the specificity of values is found in the definition of the french sociologist which he has offered to the concept of "moral fact": "each individual [...], each moral conscience expresses in their own way, a common morality" and thus we can deduce that "no conscience is fully adapted to the morality of the present age, in which it lives ". Ergo this is why sociologic interest for moral reality which is fundamental in its objective aspect to be constituted in an common, impersonal system of reference for the judging of thy own actions and the actions of others.

We can deduce from here on that Durkheim's perspective on values is declining, in principal as analysis of normative institutionalized models and because of this reason, of which they are shared by a collectivity, and by a force that it is being exercised "from the exterior" onto the individual's moral conscience.

Among the distinctive factors of moral fact, Durkheim indicates firstly, that the factor of obligativity, a transformed aspect of Kantian deontological perspective and of which it links it to sacredness and the transcendence of values. Moral rules, citing Durkheim are "invested by an specific authority, in virtue of which they are being listened to, because they are commanded". Their obligative character is enforced by the existence of sanctions and rewards which are derived by the fact that they are not according to the pre-established rules"¹⁰.

THE DYNAMICS OF VALUES

It can be observed that the changing of values is determined and stimulated by the interaction of groups with different values, the change in the economic environment, technical progress, and generations. The change is gradual and it rarely entails the creation of brand new values. As a rule of thumb, values change by the conversion or hybridization of the old ones, initially through small communities, and later through contagion to the masses. The interactions between groups with different values represent an important factor in the changing

⁸ Laura Sciolla, *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali*, 756.

⁹ Massimo Rosati, Alessandro Ferrara, *Affreschi della modernità. Crocevia della teoria sociale*, (Roma: Carocci, 2005), 27.

¹⁰ Bettin Lattes Gianfranco, Raffini Luca, *Manuale di sociologia*, Volumul II, (Milano: Casa Editrice Dott. Antonio Milani, 2011), 911-12.

of values. It is here that we find the role of globalization and migration in accelerating the changing of values¹¹.

Embedding values in value systems and social determination leads to the stabilization of them. Values do not change on a day to day basis, there needs to be a prolonged period for restructuring, any modification affects the reality in which we live our lives. This aspect determines that for the studying the dynamics of values, there is a need for a large time span of intervals between 5 to 10 years, so that the fluctuations could become visible.¹²

In a few cases about disasters, that have been studied, it has been observed a rapid change of values, an increase in the rise of solidarity between individuals during or following the aforementioned disaster. But even so, the problem of determining the time necessary for the change to take place. In the post-disaster period it has been observed that part of the old values re-appear. It seems that in a period of crisis, values evolve and assimilate more rapidly, even faster than educational process.

To produce change in attitudes or values, in the past there have been created artificial crises, even extrapolated racial or international problems or even fake, deceitful events (such as Reichstag Fire's)¹³.

THE ACTUAL RESEARCH OF VALUES

In the analytic proposal elaborated by Ronald Inglehart at the end of the 70's, theoretical analysis and empirical research come together into interpretive paradigm. The analyses that have been carried out by them have the tendency to concentrate the attention on the elements of change of values, leaving unfinished the conception which stands at the base of values and the theme of dynamics in relation to social action¹⁴.

According to Inglehart, evolutions in the process of modernization have determined a series of change at the social system level so as to influence the properties of values and the capacity to stimulate political involvement of individuals. Technical innovation, changes on the occupational structure level, rise in economical welfare and the expansion of trainings are factors that have contributed to the creation of a social context profoundly changed. Even so, creating a significant difference of "experiences characterized by age grouping"¹⁵.

There is an explicit orientation to being critic, to question everything, this reflex being a part of a process of permanent change in the way we define what is important for individuals and society, bending each distinct action for the scope of human existence. Science maintains its positive image, but its effects are questioned, being perceived as new social dangers, ecological claims being common now in-between predominant values. Hierarchies have almost completely lost meaning, leaving space to a more explicit orientation towards equality; postmodern orientations include elements essential to hedonism, self-expression, self-fulfillment and the valuing of knowledge.

There is another postmodernist view on the study of values which imagines societies and cultures such as fluids, unstable, in perpetuum motion, while values do not necessarily derive from socialization but are akin to individuals. This perspective is more specific to philosophy being less pregnant in sociology and practically nullified through empiric validation¹⁶.

¹¹ Lazăr Vlășceanu (coord.), *Sociologie*, (Iași: Polirom, 2011), 285.

¹² Bogdan Voicu, Mălina Voicu, (coord.), *Valori ale românilor: 1993-2006. O perspectivă sociologică*, (Iași: Institutul European, 2007), 10.

¹³ Felick Gross, *Saggi su valori sociali e struttura*, (Roma: Editura Facultății de Științe Demografice și Actuale, Universitatea din Roma, 1966), 101-02.

¹⁴ Michele Roccato, „La rilevazione empirica dei valori” *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1/2008), 48.

¹⁵ Ronald F. Inglehart, *La rivoluzione silenziosa*, (Milano: Rizzoli, 1977), 28.

¹⁶ Lazăr Vlășceanu (coord.), *Sociologie*, 274

CASE STUDY: FROM SOCIAL VALUES TO VALUE SYSTEMS OF THE YOUTH

The study at hand was conducted between 3rd – 11th of December 2014, in the city of Iași, Romania, took place on the grounds of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, thoroughly following the ethics involved, principle of data confidentiality, respect for the participant, free will, and methodical choosing of participants.

The group over which we conducted our research has the following characteristics: 105 students of University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iași (all students of the 1st year of study in the social work domain). The geographical background of our subjects was: rural-50 students (47.61%) and urban-55 students (52.39%); their age is between 18 and 25 (the mean age is 21.5), 75 students had 19 years old (71.42%); 10 students are working (9.52%), (which gives us information on the degree of financial independence). I have chosen the sample on these criteria considering that it is of utmost importance in determining the value system of which these students will progress towards a social assistant type of job. Following with this reasoning, I have applied the instrument of this study to all the students of the specialization.

The comparative analysis was the approach for this research and the ultimate goal was to reveal the possible overlapping and/or differentiation along the urban-rural categories. The major hypothesis of this study is structured on a mix of potent traditional and modern tendencies, associated to pressures and influences postmodern in nature, which as a whole characterizes the Romanian society.

The students had to check 3 values from a list that included 31 social values, of which we have encountered in the research carried out thus far. After analyzing the grids we managed to rank the most important values, giving us the group's value system. The chosen research tool for this study was the evaluation grid. The reasoning behind it was that I have considered this tool to be effective in narrowing down the list of social values, thus identifying the most important values of the sample of test subjects, and in this way having a starting point for future research development in this field. By identifying dominant values, we can build afterwards the other tools of research (questionnaire and interview guide) necessary in thoroughly investigating this field.

Table 1. Values system of the analyzed group

Social Values (urban)	Social Values (rural)
Common sense/Respect/Esteem	Common sense/respect/Esteem
Love/Affection	Love/Affection
Responsibility	Honesty/Sincerity
Honesty/Sincerity	Faith/God
Friendship	Responsibility
Faith/God	Kindness/Generosity/Altruism
Calm/Patience	Moral rightness/Honor

Social Values prevailing in this group are "Common sense/Respect/Esteem" and "Love/Affection", both in the rural and urban environment. Value with the highest frequency is "Common sense/Respect/Esteem", as it was mentioned 66 times. The only value that has not been mentioned by any category it was "Pleasure/Maximizing pleasure/Hedonism", even though this value is representative for Western European youth.

Young people in rural areas have considered the value of "Faith/God" more important than those in urban areas by 15 to 9.

The only value which has not been mentioned by either group was Pleasure/Hedonism, value which is more pregnant among youths in western countries.

Once we identified the value system of the analyzed group, we can extend our research to other groups of youths, with similar characteristics to see if we can rediscover the same social values, and inside of which establish the blueprint of the system of values of the current generation. Leading with this system of values we can build an experiment applied to a much larger sample size which will analyze social values, attitudes, the way individuals relate to social norms, and in relation to pre-established behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS

Values are latent realities, inner to individuals but are also determined socially, sufficiently stable in time, which directs attitudes, behaviors and opinions. Values are formed in consistent systems of values, leaning on one another and determining the choices that people make in any given moment. Values determine the way the society is structured, the way a family is formed and organized, how social relations work in the midst of organizations and institutions. In institutions the rules are no more than a practical transposition of common dominant values of their respective community.

Social groups supply their members with a system of values, information about the world, stereotypes; in other words they supply a conventional reality established on common grounds validated through social acceptance as comforting and convincing. It's because of this reason, following with the theory of reducing uncertainty, that individuals faced with uncertainties about their attitudes, beliefs, roles in society, will try to seek certainties inside the social group of which he or she is a member in.

Traditional societies are characterized by the overwhelming importance of direct knowledge. Inter-human relationships are always direct, the exchange is based on mutual trust, which the parties know each other very well, social control is based on respect built upon countless webs of mutual obligations that passed the test of time. Common actions of human actors are modeled by traditions and by blood, which trump in the face of friendship or the rule of law.

In this paper I have reviewed some theoretical aspects which are very important in understanding social values. An exposition of identified values found in the analyzed groups led me to identify the value system of the youths in question. Following the analysis we have observed that there is a difference between the subjects from the rural background compared to the ones in urban background. The difference is not that noteworthy which in turn tells us that the discrepancy is narrow.

This research is just the first step in analyzing social values of the youths, and the results of this paper may offer a starting point for future research and development of the field of values in sociology.

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