

APPROACHES TO THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF SLOVAKIA

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The social changes taking place in Slovakia since 1989 have had a number of consequences for the everyday life of its inhabitants. A new nation-state with a democratic political regime has been formed, a market economy has been restored, human values, human aspirations, and models of behaviour, the way of life has also changed. Democracy and the market mechanism create a new milieu which provides new possibilities and simultaneously limits other earlier habituated modes of satisfying demands. The consequences of democracy and the market mechanism in economic life have changed the way of life of the people.

The exploration of the transformation towards democracy and the market economy usually centres on the social macrolevel and the functioning of new institutions. However, the changes also proceed at the social microlevel, in the way of life of different social groups. Hugues de Jouvenel wrote ten years ago (*Evolution of values and ways of life in Western Europe*, 1986, *Futures* No. 2, pp. 274-291), “the way of life can be defined as an evolutionary compromise in interactions and adaptations which is created between individuals and society”. The development and the future of society depend on the forms of this adaptation. Such forms of adaptations between society and individuals which result in a more effective use of various capabilities of individuals and better possibilities of satisfying their needs, is commonly understood as the modernization of society. While transformation builds up a new macrosocial system framework, social modernization is a result of specific adaptation between this framework and individual behaviour. Social modernization is an outcome of a new compromise between corporate social actors and social norms on the one hand and individual actors with their values, aspirations, and habitual forms of behaviour on the other hand. (See also James S. Coleman: *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge & London 1990, Chapters 1, 2). It is a peculiarity of social modernization in post-communist countries that it proceeds in parallel with the dynamic changes within the whole macrolevel and not only in some institutionalized segments as in stable democracies.

The exploration of the connections between the changes at social macrolevel and microlevel requires acceptance of a particular conceptual presupposition for the formulation of hypotheses. Our assumption is that the fundamental interaction between the changes at social macro- and microlevels takes place by means of individual aspirations and values which in day-to-day actions take the form of the goals of individual actors. Corporate actors react at macrolevel to the actions of individuals by rectifying social norms which regulate the functioning of institutions. Joint adaptation is formed between individual aspirations and norms – possibilities, which society creates in a particular period. The changes after 1989 caused that all groups of the population were faced with the necessity of making new decisions on the basis of their personal aspirations. The majority of people see their aspirations as goals which they want to implement or reach, they are able to formulate them and willing to declare them.

We based our preparation of the research “Transformation and modernization” on this hypothesis. The research was carried out in 1995, five years after the launching of exclusive social changes. In a national representative survey of a sample of 950 persons aged between 20 and 60, the respondents were asked which goals they would like to reach on their own or together with their families in the near future. Aspirations declared by the respondents in the form of goals in their responses can be divided into several types:

1. Money – 4.8% of aspirations (higher earnings, extra work income, pay the debts, win the lottery, financial independence, bettering of financial situation, ensure family financially, financial security).

2. Investment – 6% of aspirations (invest in business, own house or flat, repair and maintenance of the house or flat, modernization of dwelling, buy a chalet or another housing, ensure housing for children).

3. Consumption – 17% of aspirations (raise the standard of living, be well off, improve the household equipment, buy a car, ensure the existence for children, be able to afford recreation, holiday, sports, travel a lot, enjoy cultural life, have social and life security).

4. Social promotion – 2.7% of aspirations (to finish studies or foreign language study, improved the position at work, ensure good education for children, provide children with a good level of education, with life opportunities).

5. Employment – 5.0% of aspirations (find a job, be sure of having a job, find a better job, achieve job satisfaction, be successful at work, find jobs for children).

6. Personal ambitions – 10.3% of aspirations (good personal health, good health of family members, love and friendship, to found a family, have children, achieve welfare and satisfaction in life, have a satisfactory future, good family relationships, guaranteed health care).

7. Material aspirations – 16.6% (combined orientation towards money, investments and consumption).

8. Career – 5.9% (combined orientation toward social promotion and job in connection with some material goal).

9. Balanced mixed aspirations – 24.4% (combined orientations toward a wide spectrum of goals, including both material and personal aims as well as the orientation toward job or social promotion).

10. Unfound aspirations – 7.5% (unknown orientations or orientations that cannot be categorized, of respondents who did not declare any aim or were unable to make decision).

The most realistic and most probably attainable aspirations are considered to be those whose implementation mainly depends on people's own efforts. From among our types they are career, social promotion, investment, personal aims, and balanced combined life ambitions. A significantly lower probability of success is assigned to such aims like money making, consumption increase, satisfaction of material ambitions and aims connected with work.

As basic analysis shows, all the declared types of aspirations are markedly socially conditioned and are affected primarily by gender, age, highest level of education, size of habitation and level of income.

Age and gender of respondents with various aspirations

Aspirations	Age (mean)		
	Male	Female	All
Money	40.9	46.4	42.8
Investment	40.0	35.5	38.0
Consumption	38.5	41.1	39.7
Promotion	41.7	37.2	39.7
Employment	39.2	34.9	37.6
Personal	42.7	45.5	44.3
Material	39.0	38.3	38.6
Career	37.3	34.5	35.5
Balanced	39.9	38.9	39.4
Unfound	44.6	44.5	44.5
Table Total	40.1	39.9	40.0

Significance = 0.01

The aspirations of the young people are mostly focused on the career, job, social promotion, investment and combined material aims, while the older people incline more to personal goals and more often do not want to declare any aims.

Level of education of people with various aspirations

Aspirations	Level of education			
	Primary	Vocational	Secondary	University
Money	28.6%	42.9%	28.6%	-
Investment	7.4%	42.6%	33.3%	16.7%
Consumption	11.0%	44.2%	37.7%	7.1%
Promotion	12.5%	16.7%	37.5%	33.3%
Employment	22.7%	31.8%	40.9%	4.5%
Personal	12.9%	37.6%	41.9%	7.5%
Material	16.0%	32.7%	38.7%	12.7%
Career	7.4%	16.7%	61.1%	14.8%
Balanced	14.0%	34.8%	37.1%	14.0%
Table Total	14.8%	35.2%	38.6%	11.4%

Significance = 0.00

In social transformation the opportunities were clearly differentiated for persons with higher and lower levels of education. More new opportunities for social promotion and careers opened to the people with higher education, a large proportion of people with lower education were faced with greater existential problems associated with the maintenance of their standard of living and finding a job.

This tendency is also corroborated by the distribution of aspirations according to the size of habitation where the respondents live. In large cities the orientation towards career, social promotion, balanced mixed and personal aims prevails, whereas in smaller towns and villages, the orientation towards finding a job, ensuring incomes, and a standard of living with a high proportion of consumption and material aspirations dominates. In small towns and in villages, there is also the orientation towards investment, especially in housing. The same direction of social differentiation is also confirmed by the distribution of individual types of aspirations according to personal incomes and incomes per capita in households.

Aspirations, which people pursue on a daily basis, thus represent a primary link between the social macrolevel and microlevel. "Households with a shortage of resources for satisfying their needs daily face the question of how to gain them." (Z. Kusá and B. Valentšíková: *Sociálna identita dlhodobo nezamestnaných*. Sociológia 28, 1996, No. 6). Households where the basic existential resources are ensured, pay more attention to the issues of the development of their members. Individual and family strategies are built on social microlevels according to the way people interpret their particular situation. These strategies serve as replies to the extant social conditions. An individual and family strategy is not only a simple answer, pure reaction to the external macrosocial stimulus but it is based on various modes of its

individual interpretation and is influenced by value orientation and other individual gifts. In this dialogue and in the search for a compromise between macrosocial conditions, their interpretation and individual competences for actions a special national way of life is being created. One of the conspicuous social phenomena which emerged in Slovakia after 1990 is the fall in birth rates, at first a decline and then stagnation in demographic growth. People currently decide to have less children and postpone their birth. It is very popular to explain the fall in the birth rates by general deterioration of social conditions and particularly the worsening of existential conditions for young people with an important issue of the dramatic decline in housing policy after 1990, price increase and the decline in the standard of living. This leads to popular arguments that it is a luxury to have a child in the current situation.

If, however, we take into account the aspirations of people in our investigation of demographic behaviour, we see that the relationship between macrosocially created social conditions and individual demographic behaviour is much more complicated. Young people, whose aspiration is social promotion and career, show a remarkable tendency to put off marriage. The age of males and females considered by them as ideal for getting married, highly exceeds the statistically most frequent age of partners getting married in Slovakia, namely 20-24 years. The increase in the age of the young people getting married is also affected by the balanced and mixed personal aspirations. The people, who aspire to careers, mostly prefer families with one child.

Ideal age for getting married of men – three age groups of respondents with various aspirations

Aspirations	Ideal age for getting married of men			
	20-29 years age group	30-44 years age group	45-59 years age group	All age groups
Money	23.0	24.4	24.9	24.5
Investment	24.9	25.8	25.1	25.3
Consumption	25.4	25.6	25.5	25.5
Promotion	29.0	25.9	26.2	26.9
Employment	24.0	26.7	24.7	25.3
Personal	26.3	26.5	25.9	26.1
Material	25.5	25.8	25.6	25.7
Career	27.7	26.1	25.3	26.4
Balanced	26.2	26.1	25.6	26.0
Unfound	27.6	24.2	25.2	25.2
Table Total	25.9	25.8	25.5	25.7

Ideal age for getting married of women – three age groups of respondents with various aspirations

Aspirations	Ideal age for getting married of women			
	20-29 years age group	30-44 years age group	45-59 years age group	All age groups
Money	20.8	20.4	21.4	20.9
Investment	21.9	22.4	21.5	22.0
Consumption	21.9	21.9	21.9	21.9
Promotion	25.7	22.5	22.6	23.4
Employment	21.5	22.7	21.3	21.9
Personal	22.6	22.7	21.9	22.2
Material	22.4	21.9	21.8	22.0
Career	24.6	22.3	22.9	23.0
Balanced	22.7	22.5	21.5	22.2
Unfound	22.9	20.6	21.6	21.5
Table Total	22.6	22.1	21.7	22.1

The relation between macrosocial conditions and demographic behaviour points to the intervening actions of the aims which represent the more demanding aspirations of individuals and families with ensured existential resources for which macrosocial transformations represent the opening up of new opportunities. In contrast to them, the idea of the ideal age for getting married has not changed significantly in individuals and families with aspirations to find a better job and better resources to satisfy their needs. If we take aspirations focused on social promotion, career and balanced mixed aspirations as modernizing types of individual orientations, the decline in birth rates in Slovakia is caused by social modernization, the need to look for a compromise between macrosocial conditions and individual aspirations. If this assumption is correct, the continuing modernization in the future will cover a greater number of people and further affect the decline in the birth rate. The increased effect of the factor in the mid-1990s follows from a rapid advent of new life aspirations activated by social transformation.

Aspirations conditioned by the social situation of individuals and families are closely connected not only with demographic behaviour but also with the choice of individual strategies for achieving success. In modern society an opinion predominates that the primary necessity to achieve success in life and the fulfilment of personal aspirations is the required qualification and entry into the labour market with a good professional background. The idea of the value of human capital has been widely accepted also in Slovakia. The only statistically significant exemption is represented by individuals whose dominant aspiration is to find a job. As much as 60%

of people with such an orientation think that the condition for a successful life is to earn money as soon as possible. Only individuals whose aspiration is associated with employment, prefer to make money, which means they prefer to enter the labour market before obtaining qualifications. For those people, the relation between professional qualification and moneymaking is an evident conflict of values, in which they prefer income or moneymaking.

A conflict of values emerges in deciding which is the better pathway towards successful life, whether to be an employee or an entrepreneur. The majority of Slovak citizens prefer the former strategy. The individuals whose aspirations are focused on gaining money and on material aims, incline in a statistically significant measure to the entrepreneurial life strategy. After 50 years of a planned economy individual enterprise is an activity negatively valued by the public and only people whose aspirations are moneymaking or achieving a better material standard of living are able to accept it. At this level, the orientations of people and families whose problems are associated with the gaining of means to satisfy their needs have come closer to those who focus on material aims.

Another overlap between the aspirations and value orientations of distant social groups is encountered in making decisions about which strategy is better for the achievement of success in life, whether the long-lasting preservation of own expertise or a life strategy of profitable enterprise beyond one's professional background. In decision-making about preference for one of these life strategies, the value orientations of the people who have problems with ensuring the existential means and those with high incomes, overlap. Poor people see in "profitable enterprise in all areas" an attractive opportunity for obtaining money. For people with high incomes such a strategy corresponds to their aspirations for social promotion. This strategy has thus been accepted by individuals from various social strata for whom the social transformation at macrolevel created entirely different conditions.

Another value polarity is found in evaluating a modest and sparing life as a means for success in life. This is the value followed in Slovakia primarily by people whose life aspiration is to invest. Their counterpoint are people with consumer-like aspirations and individuals focused on social promotion and career. It should be noted that in Slovakia social promotion and career are part of the city life style while investment aspirations are typical of the inhabitants of smaller towns and villages. The growth in the plurality of lifestyles and individual modernizing strategies leads to greater differences between the city population and the people living in small towns or in the country.

The type of individual aspiration is also statistically significant in the decision-making about the fact whether people want to succeed in life through better assertion in their own country or abroad. The assertion abroad as life strategy is primarily preferred by people whose aspirations are associated with jobs and finding jobs. Again they are people from poorer families living in the country and in smaller towns. Their orientation towards working abroad is evoked by economic

pressure, and shortage of job opportunities in the place where they live. The orientation towards success abroad among people living in cities is closest to people whose aspiration is career satisfaction.

The existence of extensive overlap between the aspirations and value orientations of people from different social surroundings points out that there is at present no significant social or class boundary between people living in Slovakia. The social or class differences between workers, farmers and highly qualified professionals which existed in the fifties were dissolved and society stopped perceiving them as important. The differences between people were transferred to the level of differences between life styles and aspirations and the value orientations associated with them. There is no dominant social actor of modernization in Slovakia identifiable within certain social or socio-economic limits. The dynamics of social modernization is more than ever determined by joint adaptation of the society and individuals at the level of life style. Impulses for the development of a society come today from interactions and conflicts among institutionalized actors who control the social macrolevel and the individuals integrated through aspirations, recognized values, and the implemented life styles.

As there is no significant social border between the bearers of different aspirations and values in Slovakia, there is no political cleavage between large social groups either. This fact is again well documented by the overlapping of different aspirations of the people and their political orientation. The year 1995 witnessed the sharpening of the conflict between the supporters of the coalition government (Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), Slovak National Party (SNS), and Association of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS)) on the one hand and the Slovak President and the opposition parties on the other. In spite of the fact that the conflict significantly polarized Slovak society, the bearers of these political orientations cannot be identified with any social or social-class limited groups.

The political cleavage within society is hindered precisely by an increased plurality of life aspirations and preferred strategies for the achievement of life success. The supporters of pro-government orientation are in a statistically significant measure people whose aspirations are directed towards investments, consumption, job and career. The opposition supporters are people whose aspirations include making money to satisfy their needs, people aspiring to social promotion, and people with combined material aspirations. The analysis of the social background of these political orientations shows that in both polarized groups of individuals there are people from entirely different milieu. Both the coalition government and the opposition have proponents in cities and in villages, among poor and rich, and among people with both higher and lower levels of education, they attract people with different life styles.

The individual types of aspirations interfere naturally with the attitudes to social transformation and the appraisal of its outcomes. There is a significant difference between the opinions on whether the life in Slovakia was better before 1989 or it is

better today according to the height of monthly per capita income in the household. The people with lower incomes argue that their life was better under the conditions of real socialism, while the people with higher incomes consider their current life as better. The only exception from this general tendency are people whose aspiration is to gain money and resources to satisfy their needs.

Family per capita monthly income and evaluation of social transformation by respondents with various aspirations

Aspirations	Family income (mean in Slovak crowns)		
	Better life before 1989	Better life now	Mean
Money	3,619	3,400	3,562
Investment	2,874	3,853	3,200
Consumption	3,188	3,614	3,275
Promotion	5,223	5,524	5,011
Employment	3,030	4,080	3,150
Personal	3,134	5,378	3,843
Material	2,869	4,293	3,169
Career	2,947	4,522	3,441
Balanced	2,894	3,818	3,132
Unfound	4,113	6,344	4,474
Table Total	3,140	4,327	3,409

Significance = 0.00

The differences between the incomes of the people with particular types of aspirations are remarkable. The results of transformation are more positively evaluated by individuals with aspirations for social promotion or with social aspirations at the evidently higher level of monthly incomes than individuals with other aspirations. The total difference between those who evaluate the social transformation after 1989 positively and those who value it negatively was in 1995 approximately one third of the average monthly per capita income in a household. In this context attention should be paid to the level of absolute differences between the average incomes in each group (group mean) and between the average incomes of those who regard life as better before 1989 or today. The individuals who declare different types of goals or life aspirations are distinguished by economic, income demands of their life styles. Economically most demanding is to obtain a positive evaluation of the result of social transformation among people with unfound aspirations, among people with personal aspirations and those whose goal is career satisfaction.

The attitudes towards social transformation and the way of evaluating its contribution asset to everyday life show that lively interactions between the development at the macro- and microlevels of the society are proceeding in Slovakia. The satisfaction of the people with the social changes, and their evaluation of the society, in which they live, depend on the profit brought by changes and by macrosocial dynamics. Their life style and personal aspirations decide how successful they will be and whether they evaluate the social changes and the development of society positively. Looking for a compromise between the individuals and the society, people require development, and their demands increase. In the process of macrosocial transformation and after the fall of the communist regime aspirations have grown and differentiated. People will always require more from society, the question is, what will they want more of. Economic, material aspirations dominate in Slovakia today. The analysis of the individual types of aspirations and their significance in an interaction between the social macro- and microlevels points to a highly dynamic development of various life styles and to a more subtle differentiation between different forms of profit, required by people from the development of the society. This development is undoubtedly evidence of the intensively proceeding social modernization of Slovakia.