



Social Reality in the Light of Values

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ABSTRACT

In the given work the authors try to give an objective scientific analysis of social reality which is in the focus of many investigators today. The article demonstrates possibility of using the system of values to analyze social systems and social reality. It is in the value system, on the one hand, where internalized values of social objects and phenomena are accumulated, and on the other hand it is the source of social creativity reflecting the process of externalization of accumulated values of social objects and phenomena. Sociological research "Family and Personality" conducted in 2012 is considered. A group of people of different age, gender and educational level took part in it. Secondary analysis of its materials points to opportunity of investigating social systems of macro and micro levels, as well as modeling the social reality of a particular society through the system of values existing in it.

Keywords: Social Reality, System, Values, Value System, Shadow Value

JEL Classifications: C62, O18, P13

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we will try to consider the possibility of objectified scientific analysis of social reality. A number of sociologists are concerned with problems of analyzing social reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Marcuse, 1964). We think this issue to be important, since nowadays the category "social reality" in works of sociologists is often accompanied by such epithets as "new," "transforming" (Klinenberg, 2013). Information aspect as well as innovation aspect in the development of society and social reality are highlighted (Stegniy, 2015). The analysis is usually conducted from the point of view of two methodological positions: At the macro level, e.g. the process of changing the type of society or at the micro level, e.g. changes in social institutions. As a result of these approaches, the social system is split into elementary units and different levels which brings about loss of its emergent properties, and therefore, does not allow to isolate and characterize the objective situation inherent in social reality as a holistic and systemic phenomenon (Bhaskar, 2008). Naturally, the question arises, whether it is possible to analyze the social reality objectively while maintaining

the integrity of the social system and taking into account its emergent properties.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the first place, we need to understand the basic concepts used such as "social reality," "social system" and "system of values."

Secondly, we must decide whether there are connections between the phenomena "social reality," "social system" and "system of values."

In sociological literature, as a rule, the category of "social system" is either related to individuals and mutual acts between them or a set of social communities and social groups, which form integrity through interaction.

We believe that if we start from the concept of the system as an object, which is organized as a whole and integrates naturally arranged and interconnected parts, then neither the first nor the second approaches are not exhaustive. In the society they leave such entities that may also be included in a group of social systems,

but they are not included, e.g., identity, that has no interactions as an independent social system (Barmuta et al., 2015). Therefore, we offer to consider any holistic social phenomenon, which allocates portions arranged relative to each other in a certain way (amenable to finding regularities) and has mutual links to be a social system. In terms of this definition the society as a whole with its social groups, social communities, social institutions as parts of the whole, which not only have a regular arrangement with each other, but also interconnections can be classified as a social system at the macro level. The meso level may be presented by social groups and social institutions, which also have parts either in the form of specific individuals or in the form of certain norms, which also have a regular arrangement and mutual internal relations. At the micro level the social system may be presented, for example, by a person (but not an individual) as a system of internalized social norms, values, and externalized elements, such as ideology. These elements have a regular arrangement and internal interconnections.

The category “social reality” has no exact definition in science. There are two approaches minimum. The first approach understands social reality as the perception of the social world by an individual and as a consequence the alignment of certain interactions on that basis. The second approach proposes to delete the consciousness of individuals and social reality is understood as something external to the individuals and controls their behavior. Once again, we see that these definitions are too narrow, at least, excluding or overlooking two worlds in social reality. For example, the macro level approach, where the individual as the smallest unit is lost when considering the macro-systems and the micro level approach when studying the social interaction of individuals, we lose the macrosocial system from our view as it becomes a social background.

We offer to start with understanding of “social reality” as the matter that permeates and unites social systems of different levels. At the same time, we believe that the consciousness of individuals, which contributes to not only social action, and meaningful and purposeful behavior at the micro level, at the macro level is composed in a truly external to the individual, objective and controlling totality of social facts. This set of social facts is the result of integration of individual consciousnesses that form external social facts, such as social norms and traditions.

The category of “value system” is meant by us as not only natural values located in a certain way, but also their mutual relations. The system of values that is inherent in a particular society, can be found only in their media, that is, in the members of this society. In the value system we distinguish two levels of values for the same social objects and phenomena: Personal – “for oneself” and public – “for the country.” In addition, we will highlight not only positive values, but also values of the “shadow.”

3. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

To analyze the social system and the social reality as an emergent property of this system, we refer to the analysis of the value system. It is there, on the one hand, where internalized values of social objects and phenomena are accumulated, and on the other

hand - it is the source of social creativity reflecting the process of externalization of accumulated values of social objects and phenomena.

So we analyzed the value preferences of the respondents who participated in the study “Family and Personality” conducted in 2012. In the course of the research the following issues were studied:

- Features of the parents’ family of respondents;
- Features of the respondent’s own family;
- Value orientations of the respondent;
- Personal features of the respondent;
- Impact of works of art on the respondent at the age of 6-12.

A group of 77 people took part in the research. There were 55.4% of men and 44.6% of women at the age of 17-52 years old. Different educational levels were presented: Secondary education - 14.6%, secondary vocational - 6.7%, higher education - 20%, students getting secondary vocational education - 2.7%, students of higher educational institutions - 56%. The primary analysis of the results as discussed in the article “Role of the Family in Personal Value Formation” (Topekha, 2013). Later value preferences of the respondents have been studied by the method proposed by Smirnov (2002). This method allows to not only get acquainted with the value orientations of respondents, but also to see the whole system of values. It allows to get information about what the respondent considers to be important “for oneself” and “for the country,” but in addition to the separation of values on a macro and micro level, it highlights positive (significant) values and unacceptable values – the “shadow.”

4. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE SYSTEM OF VALUES

In the analysis of values “for oneself” and “for the country” it seems important to us to compare, firstly, five leaders and five outsiders among the positive and “shadow” values for each level separately. Secondly, we will conduct a comparative analysis of the values of these two levels (Tables 1 and 2).

Analyzing the value system of the person with the character reference “for oneself,” we can note that the majority of value is focused on the microcosm and the immediate social relations with the nearest social environment. The group of outsider values incorporates values that can be represented as separate elements of the social system of the microcosm. For example, family as a social institution as well as a social group implies such elements as partnership, agreement, duty, power, prestige.

As for the “shadow” system of values a person can either have an imprint of antagonism to the ideal, or can be inconsistent with the ideal system of values. In our case, we see a consistent picture. So, among the “shadow” values there appear sources of destruction for the social micro system - identity of the person and his immediate social environment. It is possible to assume that this system is more important for the respondents because the values that can

Table 1: Rank differences for the positive values of social systems of macro (country) and micro (person) levels

The value important	“For oneself”		“For the country”	
	Rank	Percentage	Rank	Percentage
Family	1	74	30-32	5.2
Health	2	68.8	25-27	9.1
Love	3	55.8	33-37	3.9
Friendship	4	51.9	33-37	3.9
Respect for parents	5	49.4	33-37	3.9
Education	6	41.6	9	31.2
Security	7	40.3	1	70.1
Decency	8-10	36.4	13	23.4
Prosperity	8-10	36.4	14-15	20.8
Trust	8-10	36.4	30-32	5.2
Attention to people	11	28.6	5-6	48.1
Stability	12-13	27.3	5-6	48.1
Freedom	12-13	27.3	12	24.7
Justice	14-15	26	7	41.6
Success	14-15	26	25-27	9.1
Development	16	24.7	4	51.9
Professionalism	17	22.1	20-21	14.3
Peace	18-20	20.8	3	59.7
Independence	18-20	20.8	8	37.7
Faith	18-20	20.8	23-24	10.4
Meaning of life	21-22	16.9	33-37	3.9
Creativity	21-22	16.9	38	2.6
Labor	23-24	15.6	16-18	19.5
Hope	23-24	15.6	29	6.5
Pleasure	25	13	33-37	3.9
Charity	26	11.7	23-24	10.4
Equality	27-28	9.1	14-15	20.8
Relaxation	27-28	9.1	25-27	9.1
Law	29-30	7.8	2	64.9
Motherland	29-30	7.8	16-18	19.5
Power	31-33	6.5	10	27.3
Nature	31-33	6.5	16-18	19.5
Fame	31-33	6.5	30-32	5.2
Duty	34-35	5.2	20-21	14.3
Beliefs	34-35	5.2	28	7.8
Agreement	36	3.9	19	15.6
Strength	37	2.6	11	26
Cooperation	38	1.3	22	11.7

be directly linked to social stability threats of the macro system are represented by outsider values.

From this perspective, we can say that within a person as a social microsystem there prevail internal consistency and harmony. We can talk about absence of conflicts within the person not just as an individual, but as a small social system.

Considering the system of values “for the country,” we once again witness a harmonious and stable (interconnected) social system, but this time it is a macrocosm. However, it does not act as an identity to the social system of the microcosm, and retains its identity as a global system which logically and perfectly includes a personality as a small system.

This conclusion is confirmed by comparing the value leaders and value outsiders among those important “for the country” (Chuev et al., 2016). The values forming the basis for stability of the macro-system seem to be more significant. On the contrary, the value outsiders refer to the microcosm and only indirectly affect the macrosocial system.

Table 2: Rank differences of “shadow” values for the social systems of the macro (country) and micro (person) levels

The “shadow” value	“For oneself”		“For the country”	
	Rank	Percentage	Rank	Percentage
Drug and alcohol abuse	1	66.2	1	62.3
Cruelty	2-3	55.8	19-21	14.3
Meanness	2-3	55.8	28	5.2
Aggression	4	50.6	11	26
Illegality	5	48.1	2	58.4
War	6	42.9	3	55.8
Irresponsibility	7	39	19-21	14.3
Boorishness	8-9	37.7	22-24	11.7
Envy	8-9	37.7	26	9.1
Cheat	10-11	33.8	15	19.5
Disease	10-11	33.8	16-17	16.9
Lechery	12	31.2	9	29.9
Inspirituality	13-15	27.3	10	28.6
Laziness	13-15	27.3	18	15.6
Revenge	13-15	27.3	27	6.5
Stupidity	16	26	25	10.4
Enslavement	17	23.4	7-8	40.3
Poverty	18-20	20.8	5-6	45.5
Profit	18-20	20.8	22-24	11.7
Loneliness	18-20	20.8	30	1.3
Bribe	21	19.5	4	51.9
Callousness	22	16.9	22-24	11.7
Unemployment	23	14.3	5-6	45.5
Pollution	24-25	13	7-8	40.3
Non-professionalism	24-25	13	12	22.1
Weakness	26-27	10.4	16-17	16.9
Sacrilege	26-27	10.4	19-21	14.3
Isolation	28-29	5.2	13-14	20.8
Failure	28-29	5.2	29	2.6
Degeneration	30	3.9	13-14	20.8

The same situation is with what the respondents consider unacceptable “for the country.” We see confirmation of significant values and exclusion of all that concerns the individual, i.e., microsocial level from the scope of public interest.

Thus, we saw from our example that separately comparing for each level value leaders and value outsiders in the group of standard and unacceptable values it is possible to describe each of these systems. In our case these systems are not only harmonious and stable, but also balanced in terms of macro and micro social systems. None of them goes beyond its borders being shaped distinctly enough.

In addition to the analysis of individual levels of social systems with this technique we can analyze a social system as a whole, since it is a complex phenomenon involving different levels of social systems. However, it is not as a simple sum but an inseparable integrity. Therefore, analyzing it we can describe its basic parameters and current status.

So, in our case, an integrated social system is represented as harmonious and coherent, as it is not only the sum of macro and micro social systems, but their mirror reflection and continuation. A micro social system, as already mentioned, is focused on the immediate environment. It is not “social atomization” and is aimed at maintaining and preserving social relationships and systems. This contributes to the stability of the social system in general,

and not only at the micro level. No less logical is social reality in the model of the macro system that, in the value coordinate system of the respondents, should create the macro conditions for balance and stability of micro social systems. We see a symmetrical reflection in the picture of “shadow” values. If we look at the direction vector of the social system including the respondents, we can say with certainty that they are aimed at preserving the system stability at all its levels, without isolating any of the levels but in their harmonious unity.

5. CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the system of values obtained by the method of Smirnov, we confirmed the possibility of objectified scientific analysis of society as an integral phenomenon in its static and dynamic aspects.

Considering sets of values on two levels we can describe the features of macro and micro social systems: Society (the country) and personality with its immediate environment.

Through the comparative analysis of two levels of values, we can describe social reality, which actually is an integrated set of members of its elementary (small and large) social systems,

as well as characterize the vector of directed motion of these social systems. With this toolkit, we can talk about the nature and direction of an integrated social system.

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