

L i u d m y l a K h o r u z h a  
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine

# The Values of Modern Ukrainian Students

Wartości współczesnych  
ukraińskich studentów

## ABSTRACT

In the past two years, Ukrainian society has experienced deep transformational processes in all of its spheres: political, socio-economic and spiritual. The youth of today operate in extreme conditions: conducting military operations on the territory of Ukraine, the transition to European values. Moreover, the lack of financial stability in the country means that the crisis has led to a re-evaluation amongst of youth. Students are particularly sensitive in this regard and perfectly reflect the new priorities in the system of values, interests and social norms. They are a group in which these changes are the most vivid, a group corresponding to the new trends in fashion, literature, cinema and music, as well as the first group which tends to exhibit an extreme sensitivity to something new, which in turn is reflected in their value orientations. The study described in this article allows an analysis of the causes and nature of social change. Presented in this text are statistics on students' interests and their values in different aspects—social, recreational, cultural or personal. The results of the study can be helpful in identifying some of the trends emerging in the life strategies of contemporary student youth in Ukraine.

## KEY WORDS

transformational changes in society, values of students, liminality, trends, social changes

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

zmiany transformacyjne w społeczeństwie, wartości uczniów, liminalności, trendy, zmiany społeczne

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## ABSTRAKT

W ciągu ostatnich dwóch lat społeczeństwo ukraińskie doświadczyło głębokich procesów transformacji we wszystkich jego sferach: politycznych, społeczno-ekonomicznych i duchowych. Dzisiejsza młodzież funkcjonuje w ekstremalnych warunkach: prowadzenia operacji wojskowych na terytorium Ukrainy, przechodzenia do wartości europejskich. Ponadto brak stabilności finansowej w kraju determinuje kryzys procesu przewartościowania wśród młodzieży. Młodzież studencka jest szczególnie wrażliwa w tym zakresie. Studenci doskonale odzwierciedlają nowe priorytety w systemie wartości, interesów i norm społecznych. To w grupie studentów widać te zmiany w sposób najbardziej obrazowy. To oni zawsze odpowiadają na nowe trendy w modzie, literaturze, kinie i muzyce, a także są pierwszą grupą wykazującą ekstremalną wrażliwość na coś nowego, co z kolei przejawia się w orientacjach na wartości. Badanie opisywane w tym artykule pozwala na analizę przyczyn i charakteru zmian społecznych. W tekście są prezentowane dane statystyczne na temat zainteresowań studentów, ich wartości w różnych obszarach – społecznych, rekreacyjnych i kulturalnych czy osobistych. Wyniki badań mogą zidentyfikować pojawiające się pewne trendy w strategiach życiowych współczesnej młodzieży studenckiej na Ukrainie.

Over the past two years, Ukrainian society has undergone profound transformation processes in all its spheres: political, socio-economic, and spiritual. Today's Ukrainian youth find themselves in extreme conditions: military operations on the territory of Ukraine, the shift to European values, and financial instability in the country determine certain crisis processes in the value consciousness of the youth. Among the various age groups of the Ukrainian population, students reflect those changes in a most vivid way. They are always the first to respond to the new trends in fashion, literature, cinematography, and music, as well as to show extreme sensitivity to something new, which, in its turn, manifests itself in value orientations.

Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist, philosopher and social theorist, while studying intergenerational problems, considered the youth as an object of social updates and dissent.<sup>1</sup> In this

<sup>1</sup> Т. Парсонс, *Система современных обществ*, transl. Л.А. Седова, А.Д. Ковалева, ed. М.С. Ковалевой, Москва 1998, p. 132–133.

context, exploring students as a social and age category, the researchers determined one of its major characteristics, namely “liminality”. This particular fundamental property affects the formation of values. Liminality makes students the most dynamic group of the society that responds to the slightest changes in its structure, its political and economic transformations, and immediately captures new trends in culture. Thus, value orientations in general, and those of the students in particular, represent a personal system, associated with the development of self-awareness and awareness of the position of one’s personal “I” in the system of social relations.

Value orientations are one of the most important components of personality structure; they define a relatively stable, selective relation of a man to a range of material and spiritual values and ideals, which are seen as objects, purpose or tools of satisfying the needs of human life. Value orientations seem to accumulate our life experience, which is gained in the process of individual human development. It defines our relations to other people, as well as to ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Being a dynamic category, value orientations are an object of constant research (by educators, psychologists, sociologists). Among Ukrainian and Polish researchers, the issue has been studied by I. Beh, V. Kremen, Y. Peleh, O. Savchenko L. Dyczewski, T. Lewowicki, E. Ogrodzkiej-Mazur, W. Stróżewski, W. Zdaniewicz, A. Tchorzewski, etc. The above mentioned researchers refer to the category of “value” as to a methodological landmark in research practice, as well as in solving social and educational problems. There are different approaches to determining the structure of values. For example, Tadeusz Levovytsky distinguishes universal values (right to life and freedom, civil liberties, democratic pluralism, life, family, etc.); V. Strozhevski defines the following groups of values: vital, cultural, moral, and religious; there are also values that are combined into the groups of general and specific values.<sup>3</sup>

T. Parsons’ theory of social system and theory of action need to be mentioned, as well in this regard. According to these theories, value orientation of human action occurs on the level of personal, cultural

<sup>2</sup> *Енциклопедія освіти*, ed. В.Г. Кремень, Київ 2008, р. 991–992.

<sup>3</sup> T. Lewowicki, E. Ogrodzka-Mazur, A. Gajdzica, *Świat wartości i edukacja międzykulturowa*, Cieszyn – Warszawa 2003, s. 355.



and social components of the system. Besides, successful functioning of the system requires the following functions, balanced with each other: adaptation to the environment; achieving goals; internal coordination and integration; achieving the hallmarks that help to achieve the chosen direction. These functions enable the system to maintain stability and balance, as well as to adapt to the changing historical conditions.

In the course of our own research, in the context of the above approaches and based on T. Parsons' theory of social system and theory of action, a number of the most important spheres of students' life have been defined in which their values manifest themselves; namely: society, future profession, free time, ideals, specific values.

A survey, conducted on the students in the field of study "social pedagogy" (III and IV years of study) at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University in 2015–2016, contribute to determining peculiarities of value orientations of the students. Each of the groups of values will be discussed separately.

## Society

The students' attitude to the country and the society was defined with the help of their answers to the question "How do the youth see their future?". 62% of the students see their future lives in Ukraine; 17.6% of the students would like to emigrate from the country, and, finally, the rest 17.6% of the students want to move to another region of the country. To the question "What unites you with the Ukrainian people?" 59% of the students answered that it is the national language and culture; while 33% focused their attention on the same territory of residence and shared history. Religion and creed are not value priorities for the students and do not affect their attitude towards social life.

## Conclusion

The civic values of the students, respect for the country and its culture, play the most important role in formation of intelligentsia of the nation. After all, especially in terms of the current circumstances, Ukraine needs a renewal of the intellectual elite that is able to determine

the strategies of development of the state and has a high social value. Given the fact that students play an important role in social and political life of the country, one can focus on the dominant role of the youth in building their state and forming a national idea.

### Future profession

Professional self-determination of the students in terms of their future professions was defined by their answers to the question “Your choice of professional strategy after graduation.” While 68% of the students stated that they will look for an interesting and, at the same time, well-paid job, 26% are looking forward to find a job where they will be able to fully implement their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, 59% of the students dream of a job in a private enterprise, and only 15% want to be involved in the sphere of education; the rest of the students decided to get a job in some public organization.

### Conclusion

During their studies at university the students form a primary program for their lives, which determines the goal and the objectives, related to its further implementation. However, under current circumstances, students experience a serious value crisis and are in dire need of a new social orientation and a clear understanding of the causes of what is happening, as well as the prospects for the future. The crisis, difficult challenges of life and uncertainty encourage the students to define for themselves material values, rather than spiritual. The material aspect, unfortunately, dominates the desire to fulfill themselves in their professions. Devaluated pedagogical status in Ukraine and low wages lower the students’ interest in the profession of a teacher.

### Free time

The values of personal free time are extremely important for studying one’s inner world, the disclosure of one’s interests and needs. When the students were asked the question “What TV programs



do you prefer in your free time?”, 56% of them answered they were interested in entertaining programs, 21%—in informational and political programs, 18%—in scientific programs. These figures are complemented by the statistics on the students’ preferences in television genres. While 61% of the students prefer comedies, only 15% of the students watch documentaries. In their free time, almost 50% of the students like communicating with their friends, 35% of the students spend their free time on studying, self-improvement, and preparation for their classes at the University. A disappointing number, only 9% of the students, are involved in sports.

### Conclusion

Current social conditions form a system of coordinates that defines the controversial process of the socialization of young people. On the one hand, the information saturation in the society is one of the reasons why the students seek for some opportunities to take a break from important information. But, on the other hand, domination of the material over the spiritual in the youth’s consciousness makes their value choice easier. The spiritual realm of young people is less developed, leading to limited values and undeveloped spiritual needs. It should also be noted that the excessive overload of the students with information and their addiction to social networks encourage them to balance their inner condition and no longer seek for virtual reality, but for real live communication with peers and friends.

### Ideals

The desire of young people to assert themselves and find their place in the society is often associated with finding some ideal, which can be taken as a role model to follow. In order to research this valuable aspect, the students were asked the question “Who is a role model for you?”. It turned out that 38% of the students take their parents as a role model, and the same percentage (38%) of the students do not have a role model at all; for 14% of the students, some historical figure is an icon, and for the rest of them—a successful entrepreneur.

## Conclusion

In a society, which experiences a decline in public morality, there are no clearly defined social value orientations; for this reason, young people look for the value orientations by themselves. The moral world of the young generation that only begins its life path is characterized by contradictions, or even chaos of competing values. Sociological surveys of value orientations of the student youth in the last decade suggest that a new personality type is currently emerging; this is a type of personality that, first and foremost, values himself/herself and considers that his/her activities and success in life depend solely on himself/herself. However, even though parents continue to be a role model to the young people, the nature of the relationships between the older and the younger generations has changed. Based on theoretical considerations of an American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, concerning different types of culture, one can distinguish the following types of relationships between the younger and the older generations: first—when young people learn from the older generation; second—when they consider the experience of the current generation and peers as dominant in the formation of value orientations; third—is typical for the accelerated pace of modern society, when the older generation learns from the young people who develop new values and determine the pace of social development.<sup>4</sup> The latter type of culture prevails in modern society.

## Specific values

Specific values characterize the students more clearly, help to determine the actual lifestyle of the young people, their priorities. A wide range of responses have been collected from their answers to the question “What is the value of life?”. Almost 30% of the students prefer traditional family values, as they would like to find love and start a family; 15% of the students dream of fulfilling their personal ambition in their profession, and almost as many would like to achieve material prosperity. Some of the students (8%) have a hedonistic desire “to live in their own pleasure”. Health is not

<sup>4</sup> М. Мид, *Культура и мир детства. Избранные произведения*, Москва 1988.



considered to be a value of great importance for the students, as only 6% of the respondents made this particular choice. The students were asked one more inductive question: “What are the issues of concern to you?”. Five of the most common answers included “lack of interaction with parents” (21%), “material wealth” (18%); “personal life and professional aspect” (15%); “search for the meaning of life” (12%); “health” (10%), etc.

### Conclusion

Studying the students’ specific values is a characteristic feature of an individual worldview, life choices of young people. The results showed the fundamental needs of modern students: family, love, professional activity, and health. Under the circumstances of value ambiguity in the society, the youth’s adherence to the traditional, basic values is some sort of “talisman” or “life compass”.

All in all, the leading trend in modern Ukrainian society is a drastic change in the development paradigm. The military operations on the territory of Ukraine, the worsening of socio-economic problems, and the decline of public morality change the world of individual values of the youth, as a reflection of the new reality. The objective laws of the development of the Ukrainian nation have called into question the rationality of many orientations that were previously considered as the prioritized areas of development. However, the students’ value preferences are still rooted in traditional values. The Ukrainian society is considered to be more traditional than postmodern, and one of its major characteristics is the sense of human unity with the past, the history of the Ukrainian people. This particular value has been determined by the Ukrainian students that were brought up in an already independent country. Furthermore, the students’ value choice demonstrates some sort of harmony between the traditional world and the world of rapid changes. In this context, it is worth mentioning T. Parson’s argument that the society copes with crises better, if its value-regulatory structure—namely, its traditional values—has been retained.



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## ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Liudmyla Khoruzha  
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine  
ludhor@list.ru