

**Constantin Schifirneț, *Tendential modernity*, Chișinău:
Lambert, 2021, ISBN 978-620-4-72546-8, 368 pages**

Review by Gabriela GOUDENHOFT

Modernity and modernization, the national public space versus the European public space, a recurring theme is the main topic of the book. Mass media reflections of the social actors, both -people and institutions - actioning in this space, religion and education are relevant phenomenon in approaching this topic, but especially for finding a model, a specific pattern of the dynamic of the public space.

Analysing Romanian society, Constantin Schifirneț uses the concept of *tendential modernity* as a conflate expression of a weak economy in a society eager to achieve a European profile aiming a modernisation which remain always in progress but not really finalised (p.9). The issue of modernity as an aspiration, as an intention never fully accomplished has many explanations and is hard to fit any Western or Northern countries as a development paradigm.

The issue of mass communication and media metamorphoses contextualized by the evolution of the economic and social dimension is one of the most addressed topics in this book, and the way the author presents the problems of modernity in Romanian society makes the volume in question a theoretical tool necessary for understanding the very idea of building the Romanian national identity and the possibility of achieving or asserting a European identity. The concept of tendential modernity, an original idea and also an useful explanatory mechanism in the study of societies in transition, is one of the essential reading keys of this book and contributes in structuring the integrative vision of Romanian society.

Romanian's elites, vacillating "between cosmopolitanism and localism" (p. 32) play a captious role in edifying special structures very alike and sometimes precise as governance network, adopting European values. Parts of those elites, especially the intellectuals are advocating for a new beginning, denying any tradition in order to surpass the communist's legacy disregarding the weak capitalist foundation and the precarious democratic development in Romania after the fall of the communism. The lack of a theoretical vision of the Romanian society

development and the very fast building of an institutional system similarly to the Western countries imprinted the modernisation process as a tendential one, with many stops and rhythm changes and speed alterations.

Although tendential modernity is not a unique but a universal phenomenon (p. 38) it is successfully applied as an instrument of studying various stages of Romanian History: the emergence of national state, the Interwar period, the communist period and the post-communist one (from late 18th century until today) it is used by the author in order to explore Romanian society particularities.

First section of the book comprises several meanings of tendential modernity from mainly two perspectives: a Eurocentric one, representing “a way of emancipation through reason” (p.42) and as a provincial, regional or peripheral concept. Industrial Revolution, economic development associated with social and values changes, including cultural and religious traditions and legacy have shaped modernity in various paradigms and patterns.

Second section observes types of modernity as an inlaid concept: classical modernity, reflexive modernity, liquid modernity, late modernity, and multiple modernity. A prominent role it is been played by those types of modernity accompanied by the idea of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, as reflexive and liquid modernity. Nevertheless, multiple or alternative modernity highlights the non-uniform essence of very modernity itself, because one cannot speak about one face of modernity but of alternate versions of it.

In a third section, the author tackles modernity as a tendential state of affairs in critical societies.

The fourth section describes causes and premises of tendential modernity with a special focus on the Romanian case where, despite almost 200 years of preparation for modernity – creating the settlement for political and judicial institution – “modernity has not reached the profound Romanian society, in all components of the social life” (p.46). An imported modernity succeeded to be not a reality well founded but a “*tendency*” with a not enough real force of action of a fragile civil society, keeping in mind that civil participation and civil solidarity are prerequisite conditions for modernising the society. A “form without substance” has been for a long time the characteristic of the Romanian society resulted from a “transplantation of capitalist institutions within a patriarchal, rural, internal context” (p.48), from the “democratic deficit” and the lack of civic participation, from the permanent need for an external referent and the constant spirit to follow Western



models and to get others' validation.

Societies with tendential modernity have specific features: values in transition from traditional to modern, a strong rural civilisation, the lack of a uniform development in territory including infrastructure, tensions between civilisation models and difficulty in implementing the European one, social issues like poverty and migration, an agricultural economy but with low productivity and commercial benefits for farmers' production. Briefly Romania is a society more eager to modernise political and institutional settlement, triggered mainly by the need of building the nation-state, but not the appropriate economic framework. Even the nation has been functioning alike the entire Eastern space as a "fictive superfamily, whose members put a great price on their origins and genealogy" (p.55).

With respect to Romanian identity facing modernisation and Europeanisation, Constantin Schifirneț is making a review of the most compelling theories paying a special attention on the idea of fluidity, because identity is an ambiguous, fluid, constantly negotiated term and tries to present the concept in the light of two combined theories: essentialism and constructivism. Collective and national identity are challenging forms to describe; they are strong forms of identity, expressing attitudes, mentalities, collective behavior questioning both ethnicity and globalization as opposite but not exclusive trends. The author came to the conclusion that national identity "is defined by its own (we say unique) features of a nation, - such as language, culture, religion, - but, also by respecting the traditions and the customs specific to the national community" (p.91).

European identity, on the other hand, implies transnational processes, a manifest orientation to supranational. But are Europeans perceiving themselves as Europeans or rather they are still perceiving themselves as subjects of nation-state they belong to. One can say they are aware of the European economic and legal space, where they benefit from several freedoms, but are they really committed to the idea of being Europeans? Even European identity has lately increased, national loyalties are not required because between the two citizenships and identities, European and national one there is no adversity but complementarity. A scarce European solidarity is although still observed whereas the national sentiment is still strong. Romanians are struggling with several identities and avatars: Euro Commuters, post-modern consumers, members of "deep" Romania etc. These different types of individuals of a multifaced Romania reflect a society defined by tendential modernity, with a heterogeneous development, a mainly middle-class a

bourgeois mentality, a “balance between idealism and fear, between attitudes of bravery and cowardice, between initiations of big projects and self-imposition of limits” (p.96). The fear of losing ethnic identity through modernization is one of the factors of failing to achieve a modern foundation of the state and explains the “duality of thought and action”.

Asserting modernity is mirroring on public space also. Constantin Schifirnet proves to be a clear thinker of the Romanian society showing that modern Romania was constituted based on an establishment of political and legal institutions not enough evolved similarly to real situation from Romania, resulting in an “incoherent legislative system”, “a kind of ostrich-camel. Meaning a joint between Romania law and European law”, “a national space evolved as a place where values, ideas, myths, beliefs, theories, mentalities, and symbols circulate (p.101), but with gaps, or subordination to a dragging, conservatory national culture. Adhering to the European space, Romania faces the integration not only of rules and institutional framework, but the axiological dimension too. European public space derives from European institutions, from European identity, a post-national, a supranational one. The Europeanisation is not an easy step to make for Romania since a “national public spirit was built”, a two hundred years of national identity affirmed and structured as a specific way of think and act.

Romania’s integration into European Union increased the population mobility and affected social landscape, young generation specially, with bad effects on children situation, plastically expressed by the author: “from the generation ‘with the key to the neck’ to the generation ‘gone abroad’” (p.111). Left alone by busy working parents, the generation ‘with the key to the neck’ grown up more alone, learning on the go, without much attention from parents, this generation is the one who left for work abroad after 1990, leaving behind another generation of children forced to grow up without parents, only in the care of their grandparents. Effects on socialization are to be seen long time from now. An important part of Romanians adopted the European way for a better living condition, meaning, working abroad for better wages, scarifying family relations, endangering social solidarity, even migration it is admitted to be a strong factor of modernization.

In the end Romanianism and Europeanism remain as two forms of identity whether Europeanisation is, for Romanian people at least a difficult and abiding process. Maybe the innovation, the transfer of capital, technology and know-how from Europe to Romanian society would be a step forward in the modernization of

a tendential society, but for sure not enough one. There are internal conditions interfering with globalization and Europeanisation. One of the important ones is the religion, the Orthodoxy and its influence on national identity. For Romania church was an institution “embedded in the process of modern change” derived and deriving ambiguities and ambivalences like the dynamic state/church, nation/religion etc. The author thesis is that “the specific nature of contemporary Romanian society and culture cannot be understood without analyzing the historical context, namely the way in which national identity and religious identity have conditioned modern social and cultural changes” (p.128). For the Romanian public sphere religion is an important and quasi permanent occurrence, persisting in the same time with modernization as a life style or a philosophy of life, even Orthodoxy has not been part of Western modernity as other denominations of Christianity were. Tendential modernity supported the role of Orthodoxy in a quasi-agrarian society and the church is not essentially separated from the state, disclosing an imprecise secularization. Nevertheless, Romanian people perceive religion and church, and the thesis is well documented by author’s research, determinants of preservation of tradition. Social and spiritual life in Romania is dominated by religion as a priority and as an expression of traditional value, “an organic component of the Romanian national identity” (p.166).

The Romanian status, a “society in transition”, doesn’t mean necessary that will place this society at the periphery of Europe. There is a possibility of development in terms of participation in the structures of the European Union and not an undesirable “Westernization”. The author noticed a certain de-synchronisation between the democratization process and the evolution of society, including the dynamic and requirements of the market economy in post-communist societies from the Eastern Europe. The Romanian situation has its own specificity due to the fact that a number of modernization steps were not finished yet, many objectives were not accomplished and the stakeholders and leaders prioritised national construction at the expense of the economic development and social issues of a society in transition. A tendential modernity is characteristic for Romania while Western developed countries have had a different path: modernisation followed by second modernisation or postmodernism. Also, a lack of cosmopolitanism at elites’ level didn’t help in term of communication in a public space where elites play a prominent role in Europeanisation. A troubled bureaucracy, a low visibility of reforms and reformers, the permanence of the rural civilisation and culture in a

society full of gaps, contradictions and discrepancies made the effort of Europeanisation and endless endeavour. Romania has now, through the adherence to the European Union the chance to accomplish the purposes of transitions and to leverage its values and national characteristics not through a mimetic process of obeying Brussels rules, adopting directives (p.222) but making efforts of changing mentalities and behaviours of Romanian people according to the ideal of European citizenship. These values and norms aren't promoted enough by intellectuals and mass media. In fact, an important part of mass media in Romania serves political and economic groups, manipulating information and misinforming citizens (p.261). Mass media, in particular televisions, should take more serious its role in promoting European integration and modernity. The studies reveal that "the national media are European to the extent that European issues are part of their editorial policy" (p.278). Elites are more flexible and able to express EU requirements and to communicate on EU strategies and politics. The public have to read between the lines and to understand and to interpret beyond manipulation what happens in their society. Public opinion plays a captious role in communication and in the social development.