
FUNCTIONAL PECULIARITIES OF SOCIAL MEMORY IN TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

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The problem of "social memory" was comprehensively analyzed in professional literature; however there is a necessity to interpret it newly in the context of radical socio-cultural transformations. We need to point out that system transformations not only relate to the renewal and modernization of the culture of life structuration, but also shape the socio-economic conditions and the new social structure within which a social memory operation becomes problematic.

First of all, the concept of "social memory" is used to cover all the information within a society. Social memory involves the means by which information is transmitted from generation to generation by individuals and groups in the way that these processes can be both conscious, and unconscious: individuals transfer their behavior and attitudes to others at various levels, including emotional and practical ties and relations between generations. The entire system of social memory can be considered a unique frequency wave through which people pass on information to each other, regardless of whether they are aware of their role in this process¹. In such a context social information implements various functions: it not only bears some content, but also reflects those aspects of social life which draw public attention. It reflects opinions on the most pressing social issues, involves assessments of disturbing questions of social reality given by different subjects of society.

Within the frame of questions discussed above, social information can be defined as a "stamped" history of the past as well as a project of the future, an ensemble of social development programs and a natural ability to maintain and replicate past experience and future projections². The determinants for the future development of the social system often depend on the past conditions when the future is potentially embedded in the past.

Here arises a theoretical problem: is it possible to find a specific social analogy of biological genes, which will be the information program of society construction, or is it possible to distinguish the cluster of information which will operate as "inner command" of social self-organization?

Such decoding of information program would enable to determine the bases of any development of the human society. However, in contrast to the human gene, the "information program" of the social development is not determined by biological

¹ See **Crumley C.** Exploring Venues of Social Memory, in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, Altamira Press 2002, p. 39-40.

² **Василенко Л., Рыбакова И.** Информационная культура в контексте глобальных изменений. В сборнике Российской академии государственной службы при президенте РФ "Глобализация: Синергетический подход" // <http://spkurdyumov.narod.ru/D48VasilinkoRybako va.htm> 12.06.2014.

nature. On the other hand, continuing human gene analogy, the information about a past activity of the human society includes a general description of the whole potential of the society. Moreover, the social potential is never fully realised in a human society, because the specific information program of social development, as well as the information in genes, is always accumulated with some "leftover". Within the society the efficiency of such an "excess" utilization depends on the information perception ability, which, in turn, is determined by several factors, among which can be distinguished the following:

- educational system which determines the overall level of human intellectual development and the content of his spiritual and material needs. Any person, dealing with the public information field, uses such information which he can include in his personal "information system". Therefore, the deeper the human knowledge is, the higher the level of his use of information will be. The education system designs an approach, according to which, some information may seem a lot more important than other.

- public information infrastructure, which determines people's ability to get, transfer, and use information.

- democratization of society, which determines the availability of information, media development, as well as legal safeguards of the ability to have alternative sources of information

- the development of the country's economy, which counts on people's material capabilities to get necessary education, as well as the ability to use modern media³.

Information perception skills are important in the sense that, as history shows, any innovation in the society is effective when it is organically incorporated into the cultural layer, and becomes an integral part of its inner life and memory. Social memory, therefore, can be considered a criterion, which gives an opportunity to understand the anthropological characteristics of socio-cultural processes; anthropological in the sense that social memory is fixed in certain arrangements aimed at organizing the whole human community life (traditions shaped in the past and changing in the present, religious background, ideology, development perspectives, policies, etc.)⁴.

The logical continuation of the above mentioned is the fact that social memory is highlighted both as materialization of "human sex memory", which is related to the consolidation of human collectives and the processing of cultural universalities, and as a reproductive, constructive and reconstructive memory, which creates an opportunity for generations' heritage⁵.

As social memory fixes, maintains and systemizes the collective human experience of gained during the development of science, art and philosophy by means of special institutes and technologies realized by the society, it may be regarded as an indispensable part of the spiritual life of the society, the materialization of the

³ See **Коллин К.** Фундаментальные основы информатики. Социальная информатика. М., 2000, p. 166-167.

⁴ See **Танатова Д.** Антропологический подход в социологии. М., 2004, p. 153.

⁵ See **Бранский В.** Социальная синергетика и теории наций. Основы этнологической акмеологии. СПб., 2000, p. 106.

social consciousness in the form of knowledge. In this case, social memory is viewed as a social practice, the reflection of all social phenomena, processes and development patterns that allows the public to form a specific socio-cultural type, as a result of its historical development.

Any complex system has a remarkable informational content in addition to the material one. That information can not arise out of nothing, i.e. any complex system should have its story line of the previous systems, where the structural information is gathered. For this reason any evolution is a heritage of a system increasingly sophisticated organization⁶. Moreover, not only the general complexity is accumulated, but also the useful complexity contributing to the maintenance of the system in the external environment (i.e., social memory is related not only to the social life, but also to its hidden potential).

Proceeding from the above mentioned provisions, social transformation can be viewed as a transition from one branch of evolution to another, or otherwise said, a change in the development branch, which implies a shift to another branch of development which is for some reasons more efficient. Such transition is related to the structural changes taking place in all levels of the society. It is remarkable that such a transition is much more effective in case of the transforming society, if there is an experience of the social evolutionary branches preferable for some reason. Therefore, as it is extremely difficult to directly affect public relations, social transformation first demands a targeted impact on the people's consciousness, which occurs through the transmission of information. Continuing with the same logic, one could affirm that the social transformation is the change of social consciousness, the structure of the social information system, and the form of its organization. In the transforming society the elements of the system remain the former. The system of the relations between people, the structure and the modes of their interaction change (as a result of changes in human nature)⁷. After all, the structure of a particular society is "fixed" through the public consciousness, as well as through a stable system of public institutions, as the economic, social, political, legal and cultural development patterns are conditioned by the actions of public institutions, and their orientation. During social transformations not only the public consciousness and behavior models change, but also the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of public institutions. Otherwise said, the inherent feature of radical transformation of social systems is also the overcoming of institution barriers (first and foremost, economic and political), which contradict social development⁸.

Therefore, in the transformational society, informational impact should be directed to.

- a/ the change of social roles and the role behavior strategy,
- b/ the change of the place and the role of social institutes.

⁶ See **Сухарев М.** Эволюция социальных систем // <http://suharev.narod.ru/Documents/Systems.htm> 12.05.20014.

⁷ See **Сухарев М.** Социальная трансформация с точки зрения кибернетики. Мониторинг социально-экономических процессов в Республике Карелия. Петрозаводск, 2000 // <http://worldcrisis.ru/crisis/90778> 12.05.2014.

⁸ See **Мартьянов А.** Системная трансформация и реалии постсоциалистического мира. М., 2004, p. 41.

In this thesis a convincing argument for the truthfulness is the technological rapid modernization experience in the Soviet Union, which was carried out in the '80s, during the so -called "perestroyka" period. It was doomed to failure because of the lack of institution mechanisms providing the effective inclusion and dissemination of new technologies. That is to say, the introduction of new technologies on a large-scale led to disastrous consequences in a country with no appropriate grounds. From the informational point of view, the Soviet Union was undoubtedly a closed society. The formation of totalitarianism passed through unique informative stages, when the free flow of information in the society was finally banned, and when the modeling of information ideology, appropriate to the human consciousness, was widely spread by the society.

In the societies lacking ideological and political alternatives, informational closure can act as both a stabilizing and destabilizing factor. The restriction of the free flow of social information makes it easy to control and protect the society from the innovations which can be disastrous for the traditional stability of the closed social system, whereas in the societies formed on the basis of open information and innovation, such kind of informational closure can lead to the political backwardness and, ultimately, to the destruction of the system. In particular, the collapse of the Soviet system was due to the fact that the system was unable to make the transition from an industrial society to an informational one⁹.

Informational isolation of the system or its monotonous organization leads to a gradual decline, to the reduction of diversity and to the disorganisation. Today it is clear that insufficient change of information in the public consciousness leads to the fact that the principles in other societies can work quite differently. In other words, parallel to the consideration of socio -economic, political and legal issues, it is necessary to analyze the occurring shifts in the system of social values, in the social conscience, and in the range of psychology. Often a huge amount of money is spent to support economic reforms, and little is spent on the separation of the necessary information and its contributions to the society. In this case the change in the public consciousness is largely overlooked. For example, in Armenia today the average citizen does not have adequate ideas of freedom and democracy, attributions of power and civil society. For the majority of the population political life, the idea of civil society, the value of personal freedom are still alien concepts. The West-loan forms of modern social life organization (market economy, democracy, legal state, etc.) are still neutral cultural and psychological realities in transforming societies. Such situations can be avoided as far as possible, and the effectiveness of social transformations can be much more enhanced, if the clarification of new social structure, the allocation and the investment of relevant information into the society precede practical transformations.

The process of strengthening the informational impact on a society is one of the important preconditions for the adoption of liberalism, market economy, democracy and similar socio-cultural values, because the efficiency of social transformations, ultimately, depends on how they receive the public support, which

⁹ See **Кастельс М.** Информационная эпоха: экономика, общество и культура. М., 2000, p. 438.

is directly related to the formation of public opinion relevant to social transformations¹⁰. Due to the complexity of modern social systems the process of social transformations presupposes a huge transfer and investment of information in the transforming society. Of course, one could argue that with trueness of general statements, it is rather vague what "social information" we are talking about, what part of this information is possessed by the society and what volumes should be transferred during transformation. At first sight, this is, indeed, true, but the problem can be divided into parts, where it is possible to assess the quantity of the appropriate information. For example, information needed in legislation can be relatively easily evaluated; it is also possible to evaluate the new information volumes in higher educational institutions. The necessary information, determining the structure of non-governmental institutions, can also be approximately evaluated.

It should be noted, however, that the introduction of the new information into the society is not a simple and univocal process of gathering information. Particularly, the functional analysis of this phenomenon will not be complete without discussing its necessary and important aspect, such as social amnesia (loss of memory)¹¹. Generally, the disappearance of certain facts from memory is a normal process. Nevertheless, the withdrawal of amnesia from certain levels of social norms can lead the human to the state of social "sickness". The loss of social memory occurs, first, because of metaphysical denial of the past, then, when the connection between the present and the past is artificially cut off. As a result, exacerbations of the problem of personal identity often occurs during transformational processes as individual identity is formed on the basis of social identity. In other words, a person identifies himself as separate "me" by perceiving commonality with this or that groups or society. Therefore weakening of the traditional group ties, which assumes some cohesion and operational obligations, is often fraught with the threat of psychological alienation. It is no coincidence that the social memory is the theoretical principle, by which many historians examine the connection between the historic-cultural memory and social identity. For example, as Halbwachs insists "It is in the society that people normally acquire their memories. So, in the society they can recall, recognize, and localize their memories"¹². Therefore, the individual will not be able to have a stable and consistent memory outside of the group existence context. It is group co-existence that shapes memory material and incites individuals to remember or forget certain events. The society may even create memories for individuals that a person has never lived literally.

When the social memory does not activate the "traces of the past", the person just adjusts to the new reality, in some cases, working solely to alleviate the critical situation despite the imperatives of human existence. Neither ideology, nor the institutional change of social system does autonomically lead to the abolition of former culture and basics of social life organization and creation of new ones. For

¹⁰ See **Уэбстер Ф.** Теории информационного общества. М., 2004, p. 261.

¹¹ See **Бакиева Г.** Социальная амнезия // <http://www.ecsocman.edu.ru/db/msg/9230.html> 12. 05.2014.

¹² **Halbwachs M.** On Collective Memory. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992, p. 38.

example, the realization of functions of state "sponsorship" and insurance of the minimal well-being in the post-Soviet memory was vital for encouraging the transformation of societies with Soviet past. But the transition from the status of "state citizen" to "free citizen", the withdrawal of state institutions from economic and social life has led to the condition where the moods of total inutility and depression become dominant.¹³ So, the public institutions can withstand the external environment, ensure their integrity and reproduction only in the combination with appropriate social memory. This problem is very important in the context of social transformations because of the fact that being determined with social memory, institutional structures, on the other hand, act as specific informational filters of social memory¹⁴. Namely, public institutions represent themselves also as a selection mediated levels, by which behavioral stereotypes and basic strategies, the bases of social life organization and system of economic and political laws are shaped.

As the transformation experience of post-Soviet and developing countries shows, in general, the formation of a new system of values is the slowest one. Moreover, the field of values does not only define the concrete social system, but it is also a specific parameter of new dimension of social life organization during the transition process. The greater is the commonness between the values of former value systems and the new ones, proposed by social transformations, the greater is the likelihood of establishing a new system in a certain society.

In this sense, the fundamental core of the culture, the determiner of its originality is the unique public process in which the best social samples are selected. Thanks to the social memory, the selection of the information, necessary for the development of the society, is carried out, first of all by keeping the valuable experience of the previous generations, as well as their spiritual and material achievements obtained in the aspects of science, technology, and art. As a result, the implant and the emulation of the innovations inconsistent with their own mental peculiarities can be stalled, but, of course, any initiative can also assume a public recognition if there is a value or psychological compatibility. Generally, no external effect is subject to the direct projection in the personal consciousness. Such effects necessarily pass through the collective experience, the network of the spiritual environment of the society and only then are evaluated accordingly¹⁵.

In the conditions of transforming society, qualitative changes occur in the field of national and international emotions; unexpected and huge changes in the national-social mood become obvious. All this is not only due to the ongoing economic and political reforms, but also to the fact that the former experience, accumulated by humans and human societies, and the value system, based on that, stop being useful and lose the determinative role.

Meanwhile, it is the value system of the society that ensures the sense of unity

¹³ See **Է. Հարությունյան**, Անցումային հասարակությունը որպես տրանսֆորմացիոն գործունեության համակարգ, Yerevan, 2000, p. 150.

¹⁴ See **Martin de Jong**, Survival of the institutionally fittest concepts. - Journal of Memetics V 3, 1999. http://jom-emit.cfpn.org/1999/vol3/de_jong_m.html 12.05.2014.

¹⁵ See **Хальбвакс М.** Коллективная и историческая память // "Неприкосновенный запас", 2005, № 2-3(40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/ha2.html>

and integrity, and the corresponding response to the external influences in the society. Underlying the basis of mentality and motivation system, the system of values defines the dominant ethnic, ideological, religious preference and the preferences of this or that social belonging. This determines the relationships of people in families, culture, production, and socio-political life.

It could be concluded that the choice of the future of the transforming society is determined by the fact how ready its citizens are to "make revolution" within themselves.

Key words: *social memory, informational program, transforming society, historical memory, informational isolation, post-soviet memory, social institutions, democracy, system of values*

ԱՐՄԱՆ ՂԱՐԱԳՈՒԼՅԱՆ – Սոցիալական հիշողության գործառական առանձնահատկությունները փոխակերպվող հասարակությունում – Սոցիալական հիշողությունը՝ որպես հասարակության կոլեկտիվ փորձի պահպանման և փոխանցման համակարգ, փոխակերպվող հասարակության պայմաններում ձեռք է բերում առանձնահատուկ նշանակություն: Այս համատեքստում սոցիալական հիշողությունը նաև համակարգի զարգացման ծրագրերի ամբողջությունն է, որի մեջ ամրագրված տեղեկատվության համապատասխանությունից և ընկալման ունակությունից է նաև կախված՝ արդյոք հասարակական բարեփոխումները կհասնե՞ն նախանշված նպատակին, թե՞ կձախողվեն: Ըստ այդմ, հողվածում կարևորվում է փոխակերպվող հասարակությունում տեղեկատվական ներգործության ուղղությունների և հնարավոր հիմնախնդիրների վերլուծությունը:

Բանալի բառեր – *սոցիալական հիշողություն, տեղեկատվական ծրագիր, փոխակերպվող հասարակություն, պատմական հիշողություն, տեղեկատվական մեկուսացում, հետխորհրդային հիշողություն, հասարակական ինստիտուտներ, ժողովրդավարություն, արժեհամակարգ*

АРМАН КАРАГУЛЯН – Функциональные особенности социальной памяти в трансформационном обществе. – Социальная память как система сохранения и передачи коллективного опыта приобретает особое значение в условиях социальной трансформации. Помимо всего прочего, она являет собой совокупность программ развития общества. Успех или неудача общественных реформ отчасти зависит от соответствия зафиксированной в социальной памяти информации качеству его восприятия. В переходном обществе крайне важен адекватный анализ направлений и возможных проблем информационного воздействия.

Ключевые слова: *социальная память, информационная программа, трансформационное общество, историческая память, информационная изоляция, постсоветская память, общественные институты, демократия, система ценностей*