

# *Modernization as a Conceptual Tool for Research in Comparative Ethnohistory of Eastern Europe and Latin America.*

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*To honour Tadeusz Lepkowski's memory*

## *Introduction.*

At the level of popular consciousness, the notion of modernization simply carries with it a set of desirable values. In the second half of the 20th century, modernization has been commonly associated with development in the domain of production and services and, consequently, with the style of consumption, in a broad sense of the word, in the most highly industrialized countries of the North. This state of popular consciousness is especially typical of societies removed from the aforementioned group of countries, societies living on the peripheries of the world system rather than in its centre. A similar state of consciousness can also be found in societies that live altogether outside that system.

At the same time, however, the notion of modernization is part of the *methodological tools* of many professional students of society and in that case we are dealing with a *different type of social consciousness*. The very notion of modernization functions differently at that level. There are a great many definitions of modernization. It is usually conceived in such a broad sense that there is sometimes talk of theories of modernization. For reasons I presented elsewhere, I prefer to apply the notion of the model of modernization to the existing conceptions and in some instances it will be most appropriate to speak about the doctrine of modernization in all its different guises.

All these models and doctrines of modernization have already been a target of criticism. I used to reject modernization as a cognitive category myself. I must ask myself, however, whether this criticism was not the proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bathwater?

I will now go back to the starting point, to the notion of social consciousness. I suppose that the notion of modernization will continue to function in it. Despite all the criticism, new variations of the old model will appear and that conception, variously defined as it is, will remain alive *in research, not only in popular consciousness*. Therefore the deliberations about that conception do make sense, even if there were no better reason than that, although in my

opinion this is not the case. I believe that a potential for inspiration can be found in the very etymology of the word "modernization." *Namely, I can see a purpose in tying the notion of modernization to the notion of innovation and in defining modernization as a historical process.* (By innovation I define—as Rogers did—any idea perceived by an individual as new). *Let modernization be a teleologically oriented process of creating (also borrowing) and implementing innovative ideas, carried out in a given society.* A thus defined notion of modernization may be useful for ethnohistorical studies into the peripheral societies of Latin America and Eastern Europe.

### ***Problems for Research.***

- 1) Modernization occurs in a social group. For the purpose of this discussion, that group will be a tribe, a nationality, a nation or an otherwise defined ethnos. By tying the notion of modernization to some specific group, we can also take into account its specific form of political organization. We can also accurately define the subject communicating with one another in the process of diffusion of innovation (borrowings!), both in terms of ethnos and in political and territorial terms. We can define the ethnic and supra-ethnic components of the process of modernization and vice versa, we can demonstrate the general historic process of modernization as a function of ethnic structures.
- 2) Modernization is a process. It can therefore be examined both in the long term (transformation of an ethnos as a function of modernization) and the short term (a definite form of an ethnos). It is, incidentally, useful to use the notion of an ethnohistorical process. I wish to point out that the commonly used notion of the process of national formation does not make it possible to formulate properly (fully) the problem of disintegration of national bonds because it implies ethnocentrically that the nation is the ultimate or supreme form of ethnos. One example of a narrower subject of study can be the question whether (and how) the pace of modernization processes is related to the appearance of the phenomenon of economic dependence on a regional (global) scale and what consequences follow from it for the dependent nations.
- 3) Modernization is a teleologically oriented process. Therefore the subject of the study shall be the deliberate action of a group or individual, defined in terms of an ethnos. Special instances of modernization activity will be action aimed at a) the development of a given form of ethnos as such and b) the development of a social group (conceived in terms of strata or classes) in the name of the interests or needs of a community belonging to that ethnos. A classic example of a fragmentary research subject will be the search for a junction between modernization and nationalism. Or another example: what will be the relationship between the type of political and institutional

innovations borrowed from outside by the ruling élite and the type of social relations desired by the majority of the people who make up that nation. Finally, there is the obvious question about the mutual relationship between the goals of modernization pursued inside individual groups, with enormous potential for comparative studies and analysis in the long term.

- 4) Modernization implies the creation and borrowing of innovations. Such a differentiation makes it possible to examine to what extent a given modernization process is tied to original creativity in a given ethnos and to what extent we are dealing with non-original innovations, *i.e.*, a) imitations (reception plus possible modification) or b) quasi-original or independent but secondary (*i.e.*, discoveries delayed in relation to original foreign ones but made independently of them). One could, for example, examine the degree of openness of a given ethnos to innovations born outside that ethnos or look for a relationship between the creative potential of an ethnos and the symbolism and mythology of the given group (ethnos and its ethos in the modernization process). Many questions come to mind in the context of internal differentiation of an ethnos depending on the attitude of individual groups, social movements, *etc.*, to the process of assimilation.
- 5) Modernization implies the implementation of innovations. This brings us to the extremely important problem of efficiency of the economic and political system of a given ethnos and the problem of what Pietrasiniski termed as general innovative competence. One could therefore examine the problem of optimization of relations accompanying modernizations, the relations shaping up at the point where the domains of culture and politics converge, *etc.*
- 6) My redefining of the notion of modernization is part of something that could most generally be termed as the conception of social development. However, the question arises: what development? In my opinion, the conception of modernization can be useful for various methodological and philosophical orientations. This can be demonstrated using the example of two social doctrines: Catholicism and Marxism, and searching for their connection with the notion of modernization. The smallest common denominator found in this way contains three elements: a) the unidirectional nature of the historical process, which does not clash with the teleological nature of the modernization process; b) the adoption of work, scientific study and inventions as premises of the wise use of the act of creation (Catholicism) or the development of productive forces (Marxism); c) the recognition of education and industrialization as premises of social development that is not confined to economic growth and is termed as social progress (Marxism) or human progress (Catholicism).