

**CONSTANTIN SCHIFIRNEȚ, *Modernitatea tendențială*,
București, Editura Tritonic, 2016**

In this book Constantin Schifirneț makes a theoretical contribution to the study of modernity through the introduction of the term “tendential modernity”.

The book itself builds upon the author’s previous publications (journal articles, studies in edited books, books) about the concept of tendential modernity. Initially developed as a description of Romanian modernisation, the book aims to introduce *tendential modernity* as an explicative concept in the analysis of any society, but especially suited for the understanding of the modernisation process in societies with a precarious economy (: 13).

The concept of *tendential modernity* is understood “as a distance between intended modernization and achieved modernization due to the speed differential between the economic (development) side of modernity and the cultural, political and intellectual side” (: 169). Furthermore, tendential modernity “refers to the actions and ideas of modernisation that remain partial and are not finalized; to this extent, modernity remains mostly an aspiration, a goal to be reached but never fully achieved” (: 91, 169); it is a result of objective social change, as an effect of an (ideologically) conscious project of development (: 91).

The concept is built upon the term “tendential”. The author stresses the separate meaning of *tendency* and *tendential*. While tendency refers to a trend, a direction of action or process, which is steady, tendential expresses the non-fulfilment, the incompleteness of the action of process towards the desired goal. To this extent, tendential modernity means an asymptotic modernisation process: it tends towards something or a desired state (modernisation), but it never reaches the requirements or traits of (Western) modernity.

Tendential modernity has several features: it is universal, being present even in developed countries due to regional disparities; it is permanent, common to other time periods, as many non-Western societies deal not only with the transition from one modernity to another (industrial to post-industrial), but also with an incomplete transition from pre-modern to modern; it denotes the survival and resistance to the modernisation process and its effects; appears as an unintended result for the planning of modernisation, unlike the classic, first Western modernity that was not planned; is provoked by elites and states engaged in the modernisation process; it is the opposite of a well-structured modernity – although developed, Western countries with such a modernity also feature tendential modernity in their less developed regions.

Schifirneț sees modernity as “just a tendency and not a process with a clear finality in societies where social development occurs through a swift leap from one social formation to another, and not as a continuation in all society components” (: 104). In countries with tendential modernity, modernisation was a top-down process, initiated and driven by political groups with a modern mentality and traits, but without the necessary economic foundations. Therefore, modernisation did not achieve profound transformations in all the components of social life, and this is why modernity is tendential (: 105). Modernity is also tendential due to the aspirations, mentality, and actions performed by modern minded minority in achieving, with any means, the universal standards of modernity, but opposed by a majority indifferent or hostile to change (: 115, 159).

The main ideas of the book, the concept of tendential modernity, and the overall structure of the book are presented to the reader very clearly from the introduction. The author makes clear that the book is not an analysis of the modernisation process of Romanian society.

The first three chapters of the book deal with the concepts of modernity, modernisation, and types of modernity. This part of the book comes as a necessary step to introduce the concept of tendential modernity in the large and diversified micro-world of literature on modernity, and to make clear its distinctiveness as compared to other concepts presents in the discourse about modernity, such as reflexive modernity, liquid modernity, organized modernity, Asian modernity, Latin American modernity and so on. The structure of the presentation is clear, being informative and useful, especially for social science students or casual readers. The most important part or the core of the book is in chapter four, which deals with the concept of tendential modernity. It begins with a point in terminology regarding the difference between tendency as in trend and tendential as something never really achieved. The concept and its main features are then introduced.

Chapters five to eight explore several issues related to tendential modernity: the role of elites, the space of modern development, the peasantry and the modernisation of the rural social life, and the role of the state. Schifirneț believes that the lack of communication and real solidarity between all the social strata, between elites and the population, is a proof of tendential modernity. The political class and intellectual elites have a modernity oriented discourse, but fail to create a consistent project of development and modernization (: 125). The peculiarities of tendential modernity are revealed by the tendency to evaluate anything through the criteria of comparison with the exterior, especially the West. Developing countries place as strategic objective catching up with the developed countries, based on the premises that all good things come from the West and they must catch up with everything that happens in the West. In fact, according to the author, this is a sisyfic race (: 148). In the logic of its development, the nation state should have protected the classes in the majority, when, in reality, the nation state acted more to create a bourgeoisie, but not to develop sectors and communities, such as agriculture, the village, and the peasantry (: 151). As a result of modernity convergence, Western modernity is no longer the sole development model and, as consequence, the Western dominance over the world is diminished due to growing influence of emergent countries with high pace of growth, particularly China and India, to the detriment of the economic supremacy of Europe and the United States (: 158–159). For Schifirneț, the real question is what happens to modernisation in countries in the periphery. In societies with tendential modernity, elites tend to a strong conformation to decisions taken outside the national stage.

The book by Constantin Schifirneț is a welcomed addition to the theoretical debate about modernity and modernisation. It is particularly useful and recommended for researchers and students in all areas of social science interested in modernity. The concept is a theoretical and methodological instrument in the analysis of contemporary societies, especially those in the periphery or developing countries. We are looking forward to the usage of the concept by the author in the analysis of Romanian society and its modernisation.

Iulian Stănescu