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Consumption patterns and middles strata:

Bulgaria and Japan

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Abstract

The goal of the dissertation is by studying consumption patterns, to establish the general and specific characteristics and trends of Bulgarian and Japanese society, the place and role of their middle strata in these two consumer societies.

Consumption is accepted as a key to understanding our day societies and their social structures, peculiarities and transformations. Despite the obvious differences, there are also important common points between Bulgaria and Japan. There have been processes of "late" and "state-conducted" modernizations similar in nature, orientation, and objectives, in the third quarter of the 19th century and again after 1945. Also similar are the trends in social structuring during these historical periods and the models of recruitment and development of the different social strata. Japanese consumption patterns are exemplary for postmodern lifestyle and Bulgarian consumption patterns are very descriptive for post-communist socio-structural changes.

In the text use is made of a new and specific methodological approach to the consumption patterns, which lies in the research field of social stratification theories. Consumption patterns are seen as leading indicator of social status and position of different social groups and strata in contemporary societies. They are used as a research tool for comparative study of contemporary societies situated at various stages of development. Middle classes, due to their particular position and importance in contemporary world, have asserted themselves as social groups formation that perform an innovative, active, and stabilizing role in contemporary societies with respect to the lifestyle.

The study traces the Bulgarian and Japanese socio-structural changes after WWII, focusing on post-communist and postmodern consumption and lifestyle peculiarities. Consumption patterns of various social groups, categories and strata in Bulgaria and Japan are investigated, paying special attention to middle strata and to their lifestyle.

The dissertation ends with conclusion that in post-communist Bulgaria, like in postmodern Japan, consumption patterns are becoming an increasingly important indicator of social stratification. The Bulgarian middle classes are clearly becoming the main bearers of trends that draw us closer to lifestyle in Japan with their orientation to information technologies, leisure, communication and a healthy way of life.

The rich statistical information, as well as the results of numerous empirical sociological surveys conducted in Bulgaria and Japan, some of them by the author, have been analyzed in the work. The data are presented in various figures, tables and

graphs.

Keywords

Consumption, Consumption Patterns, Middle Strata, Lifestyle, Postmodern society, Bulgaria, Japan.

Introduction

Consumption plays a leading and decisive role in today's global world: by their very nature, developed societies are consumer societies. After a certain level of material and economic prosperity is attained, and with the transition from modern to postmodern, societies enter a new historical era, in which new dependencies prevail: among these, consumption plays a significant role for "economic freedom", for growth, and for our understanding of the nature of the society. That is why the new importance attached to the factor of consumption is linked to the birth of postmodern society. Since consumption did not play this structure-determining role before the emergence of this new type of society, it should be stressed that it now has a new social significance that it did not, and could not, previously have. Among the leading structure-determining characteristics of postmodern society are its large middle strata, firmly present in society, which are emblematic and specially important for modern consumption. Without their active, innovative role as consumers, no consumer society would be possible. Moreover, the birth and development of this society are linked to the growth and stabilization of the middle strata.

But what is the role of consumption in post-communist Bulgarian society, what is its significance here, where the phenomenon we are discussing has not yet acquired the typical characteristics it possesses in highly developed societies, and where the middle strata have not attained breadth and stability? Are the trends observable since the late 1960s in developed market societies, in force in Bulgaria as well? After 1989 Bulgaria underwent major changes. The country became a member of NATO in 2004 and of the European Union in 2007, and it is becoming increasingly global and open to the world. Consumption in Bulgaria is obviously marked by restrictions and poverty, by wide social inequalities and difference. But other trends are present that are identical to those in the most developed societies. For instance, information technologies are coming in strong, digitalization is spreading, and environmentalist values and lifestyle are slowly but perceptibly winning a place in society. The middle strata consumers are increasingly visible in public space – and these are the social groups among which the above-mentioned consumer trends are most clearly evident. The consumer centers[1] of the leisure class[2] can also be seen appearing here, and certain social groups explicitly

1 Such as luxury hotels or spa complexes, gated neighborhoods, luxury cars, boutiques of world designer firms, malls, luxury goods exhibits, etc.

2 Thorstein Veblen, 1899/1994.

profess consumer values and maintain a lifestyle dominated by those values. Hence the challenge to social scientists is to ask, and seek to answer, the question as to how similar consumption in present-day Bulgarian society is to consumption in developed postmodern societies. Reasoning on this question would draw attention to the integrative role of consumption in the world of today. It not only differentiates individuals, groups, strata, and societies, but is also an indicator of certain general similarities between them, especially in the context of globalization.

The distinctive characteristics of Bulgarian society become most visible and recognizable when we view them outside the regional context of typical Balkan contrasts and lag, and seek their place in the modern world at large. Are there some general similarities between postmodern societies and Bulgarian society, which started out on the road to democracy and market relations hardly more than two decades ago? In the course of my research on issues of consumption, it became increasingly clear to me that the study of consumption patterns was a very good basis – both in the factual and methodological aspect – for comparing the social structures of various contemporary societies. Thus, in proceeding from consumption, in using consumption to explain the on-going structural processes, in examining the middle strata and there consumption patterns, it is possible to find answers to certain questions: what is the nature of present-day Bulgarian society, what are its similarities and differences compared with other contemporary societies?

Consumption patterns are used as a research tool for comparative study of contemporary societies situated at various stages of development. In the sphere of consumption, globalization is much more rapid, more encompassing, and more penetrating than it is in other spheres of social life, and similarities, differences and inequalities with respect to consumption are directly observable and clear. Because the middle strata are of key importance and play a crucial role in contemporary societies[3], their characteristic features and the trends in their consumption patterns are central to this study.

The goal of the dissertation is: by studying consumption patterns, to establish the general and specific characteristics and trends of Bulgarian and Japanese society, the place and role of their middle strata in these two consumer societies. This goal is specified in the following basic tasks:

1. To define the concept of “consumption patterns” and how this concept is related to the concepts of “leisure”, “leisure patterns” and “lifestyle”.

2. To characterize consumption patterns as an important indicator of the social group status of people in postmodern society.

3. To trace the importance of the middle strata in modern consumption.

4. To identify the particularities of Bulgarian and Japanese consumption patterns,

3 This well-established thesis in stratification theory is developed in detail and argued in: Mike Featherstone, 1987, 1991; Roger Burrows and Catherine Marsh, 1992; Tom Butler and Mike Savage, 1995; Rosemary Crompton, 1992, 1993, 1996; John Goldthorpe, 1982, 1987; M. S. Hickox, 1995; Scott Lash and John Urry, 1987, 1994; Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, 1996; Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 1998, 2002, p. 137-332.

and the main trends of development of each of these societies, leading to conclusions about their general similarities and differences.

5. To reveal the particularities of the consumer behavior, consumer status, and consumer culture of the middle strata as compared with those of other social-structural formations in the two societies.

6. To draw conclusions and formulate recommendations of a practical-applied kind regarding the causes that have brought about the outlined particularities of consumption in Bulgaria and Japan, and to indicate the measures that could be undertaken in order to achieve the desired parameters in our society.

7. The object of the study are consumption patterns, which tend to “stratify” society; those of the middle strata are especially important, defining to a great degree the character of contemporary consumer societies.

The hypotheses of this work are the following:

1. It is assumed that in Bulgarian society, which is still not very developed economically, consumption patterns play, in principle, the same structure-determining role as in Japanese society and in the developed postmodern societies in general.

2. It is assumed that the middle strata in Bulgaria, although much weaker in their social-economic, cultural, power, etc., resources than the Japanese middle strata, have a fundamentally similar role and importance for defining the overall character of the consumption patterns of their respective society.

3. The thesis of the dissertation is: consumption patterns are a significant indicator of the social-status position occupied by people in contemporary societies, and the middle strata in particular are carriers of the most important, symptomatic, and emblematic trends and changes in contemporary consumption.

The analysis of the Japanese and Bulgarian consumption patterns goes beyond the field of regional studies. It is not limited only to conclusions on their similarities and differences, but, on the basis of these conclusions, attains a more comprehensive understanding of the very concept of consumption patterns, of its characteristics and manifestations in various contemporary societies. The study of consumption patterns allows making conclusions about the common and the specific in the development and social structuring of Bulgarian and Japanese societies, and about contemporary societies in general. Similarities and differences are traits of trends toward growing similarity or difference, toward convergence or divergence, not only in consumption patterns but also between separate societies and their social-structure formations.

The comparative study of post-communist East European Bulgarian society and of postmodern East Asian Japanese society makes it possible for sociological knowledge to go beyond the Western, more specifically the European, context. This approach contributes to deepening out understanding of the nature of various contemporary Eastern societies and their experience in postmodernization, democratization, transition to a market society, globalization, etc. In this sense, the dissertation proposes answers

to questions such as: what is the nature of East Asian postmodernization and what are the social-structural particularities of East Asian postmodernity - in this case, of Japanese society? Can we rightfully refer to "postmodern" processes and trends in a post-communist society such as the Bulgarian one? Is the use of the term nonsensical here or is this a reality? What are the social-structural particularities of contemporary Eastern societies, both developed and developing ones? Of course, the text does not oppose East and West – this would be unjustified and not sensible, especially in today's global world. The realities in these two parts of the world are rather different types, variants, of postmodern development, different kinds of social experience, and understanding them would lead to a fuller comprehension of all contemporary societies in their concrete features and variety.

In the text use is made of a new and specific methodological approach to the surveyed phenomenon. Consumption is not viewed in opposition to production or as an alternative to relations of production, but is taken as the point of departure for stratification analysis. Consumption patterns are regarded here as a concept that characterizes consumption in the stratification aspect. The author shares the view that the processes of social structuring cannot be explained and analyzed adequately without reference to consumption patterns.

Consumption patterns, as a sociological concept and as a social phenomenon, are defined and studied beyond the methodological traditions of Sociology of Consumption and Sociology of Culture. The approach applied to them lies in the research field of Social Stratification Theories. The author bases her discussion on the neo-Weberian tradition in the field of theories of classes and of social stratification, elaborated by British sociologists[4] and by Bulgarian colleagues[5].

In this study, I have used the results of representative sociological surveys, such as: the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), European Social Survey (ESS), Generations and Gender Survey (GGS, Young People – Partnership, Marriage, Children, Japanese Social Stratification and Mobility Survey (SSM), Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities in Japan, a number of representative surveys ordered by the Japanese government, by various Japanese ministries and government agencies, surveys by the Nomura Research Institute[6] (NRI), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and others. I have also analyzed the results from five surveys I myself conducted in Japan in the period 1994-2005. Data have been used from studies by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (NSI) and Japan Statistics Bureau (JSB), EUROSTAT, and others. This rich empirical information has made it possible to study in a comparative perspective not only Bulgarian and Japanese societies, but to situate the two in a wider world context by comparing trends in developed European countries as well.

4 John Goldthorpe, 1982; Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, 1992; Tom Butler and Mike Savage, 1995.

5 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 2002.

6 Nomura Research Institute is one of Japan's leading NGO think-tanks; it has offices in various parts of the world, including Western Europe, North America, and Asia, http://www.nri.co.jp/english/index.html

Here and elsewhere in the dissertation the comparison made is between separate social structures, processes, and phenomena in Japanese and Bulgarian societies, but without entering the territory of those comparative investigations that use specific statistical methods, analyses and verification of statistical hypotheses. That is why reference is often made to "juxtaposition", in order to stress that the methods of comparative empirical sociological studies are not being applied here.

The comparative approach chosen here places in a comparative context with Japan, not only Bulgarian society but – through it – other European societies as well; the above-mentioned global perspective is directed not only to the consumption patterns of Bulgarian society, but of European societies as well.

From the very start of my study of Japanese society, which began in 1994, I was impressed by the leading position held by modern Japan in the world with respect to consumption and lifestyle. Observation of Japanese consumption society shows very clearly the importance of consumption in today's global world, and the need for using the concept of "consumption patterns". Japanese society is a rewarding object for the study of these patterns: due to the exceptionally great significance of social-group status in Japan, consumption models there are distinctly and quite visibly status-oriented. The social position of persons defines the particularities of the linguistic forms they use, their manner of dressing, conduct, communication, etc.[7] Status is something that can be plainly observed there, and it leaves its distinct mark on individuals and groups as present in all spheres of public life. In Japan, due to the great variety of consumer opportunities, it is much easier to distinguish the differences in consumption models of separate social groups, categories, and strata. The country is known for all sort of extravagance, of bizarre whims, in consumption; Japan is a leader in avant-garde consumption; but which are the social groups and categories that embody these trends, who are the adherents of specific fashionable tendencies, movements, phenomena, for which Japan has become proverbial[8]?

In the context of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, Bulgarian society - naturally – tends to compare itself foremost with other European societies, and looks for similarities and differences with the old and new EU member states. But as paradoxical as this might seem, the comparison of Bulgaria with countries like Japan might permit our better self-knowledge as Europeans and support our being classified as part of European civilization (including through the familiar psychological mechanism of self-identification through comparison with those "others" that are qualitatively different). As for Japan, in the course of its modernization it has consistently sought inspiration in the example of the developed Western countries, including the West European ones, and continues to learn from the leading patterns there in all spheres of life – which is a tendency that our country has followed as well. As a developed postmodern society, Japan has consumption patterns similar to those of the old EU member states, while Bulgaria strives to attain those models. For the Japanese, Bulgarians are unquestionably

7 Maya Keliyan, 1999, p. 117.

8 For instance, whether all Japanese women use women's designer handbags Louis Vuitton, and which social groups are consumers of such highly prestigious brands.

Europeans: in us they see worthy representatives of European and Western civilization[9].

Consumption patterns do not exist simply in general, in themselves: apart from theoretical constructs, abstractions, and generalizations, these patterns are always linked to concrete societies, exist at a specific stage of development, are tied to specific social-stratification structures and formations. The aim of this work is definitely not to limit itself to outlining the "particularities of the geography of consumption and the network of cultural differences"[10] , but to compare these in order to reach a fuller understanding of the concept under study.

The choice of topic made here is not coincidental; it has been influenced by the following considerations:

The first (but not most important) is personal: I have had many years (more than 18) of research experience with Japanese society.

Secondly, despite the obvious differences of civilization, culture, economy and geography between the two societies, there are also more than a few important common points between them. More precisely:

- In Japan and Bulgaria there have been processes of modernization similar in nature, orientation, and objective, and they occurred simultaneously in the two countries in the third quarter of the 19th century and again after 1945. In their development one observes certain features common to late modernizations: state policy and state priorities prove a particularly important factor of the direction of social development, of the achievement of preset goals, and of the final result of changes. Japanese and Bulgarian experience proves the importance, in periods of great social-economic transformations, of the specific morals of the political, economic and cultural elite; the importance of the elite's capacity to merge its personal interests with the overall goals of society; its willingness to assume moral responsibility.

- Also similar are the trend in social structuring during their first (from the third quarter of 19th century) and second (after the WWII) modernizations historical periods and the patterns of recruitment and development of the middle strata, especially of the new middle strata in the 1950s and 1960s. Also similar in the two countries were the new middle strata patterns of recruitment and growth during the 1950s and 1960s. After WWII, in Bulgaria and Japan alike, small-scale farmers made up the major part of the population. During the two country's post-war modernization and industrialization, the agricultural sector was the main yielder of material and human resources for the development of the industrial branches. The proportion of the working class and of the new middle strata grew at the expense of the decreasing share of people occupied in the agrarian sector. The analysis of the middle strata in Japan and Bulgaria shows that in both cases state policy has had a decisive impact on their status characteristics and the recruitment patterns of these strata. The chosen aims and directions of post-war modernization have also defined the development trends of the working class on one

9 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., p. 43-47

10 David B. Clarke, 2003, p. 11.

hand, and of the place of the new middle strata on the other, in the changing system of social stratification.

- Identical processes have gone on in agriculture and similar moral values and norms have been shared by the rural communities and farmers in these two societies. In Japan and Bulgaria alike, land property is small-scale in structure, the average age of people occupied in agriculture has grown, and the agrarian sector relies foremost on female labor force and on people around and above retirement age. Most Japanese farmers are partially occupied in agriculture, and the same economic strategy is widespread in Bulgaria as well. The economic resources of farmers in Japan and of agricultural producers in our country are mostly resources of the households than of the separate individuals. Both in Bulgarian and in Japan, a life in agriculture is assessed not only in terms of economic profit and as a business undertaking, but is also linked to traditions and the values of rural communities. In both countries, people occupied in agriculture help out with their farm produce their friends and relatives in cities, and, respectively, rely on the help of the latter in the seasons of intense farm work[11].

Thirdly, in the global world of today, there are growing trends of convergence, of basic similarity between corresponding social structures[12] in societies that are otherwise at different stages of development. Of course, the significant differences between these societies remain, but there is a general similarity in the mechanisms of social structuring and in certain characteristics of the social status of corresponding social categories, groups, and strata.

The fourth reason for undertaking the comparative study of these two societies is the role of consumption in the contemporary world. The question is whether consumption plays the same important structure-defining social role in present-day Bulgarian society as it does in the developed postmodern societies?

Bulgaria is a post-communist and developing society whose stratification structure is still in a phase of "incompletion", "not established", and in course of "crystallization"[13]. But along with this, being part of the global postmodern world, here too there are on-going processes of social structuring, identical with those in Japan and other developed countries.

The study of consumption patterns of social strata in these two types of societies serves as a basis for conclusions as to the similarities and differences in their social structuring.

Fifth, Japan has a developed postmodern society, and is a leader in modern-style consumption. Its consumption patterns are exemplary for postmodern lifestyle in an age of growing globalization. Ever since its opening to the world in 1868, Japan has looked to the West as a model to be emulated in all respects. Today, as concerns the sphere of consumption, the Japanese have succeeded in surpassing their teachers in

11 For this kind of argumentation in support of the above-mentioned similarities between Bulgarian and Japanese societies, see Maya Keliyan, op. cit., p. 107-191.

12 This thesis is argued in detail in Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., p. 262-332.

13 See Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit.; Nikolai Tilkidjiev and Martin Dimov, 2003.

some respects. Just as developments in US society in the first half of the 20th century were indicative of changes to come in the rest of the world, the case of Japan can now suggest the trends in consumption models that may be expected to come about in other societies, including our own.

Sixth, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a widely popular myth in Japan that it was a "middle class society"[14]; this belief started to wither in the second half of the 1990s. But as for consumption, it is plain to see that Japanese consumption patterns are distinctly stratified and status-oriented. In this respect, Japan is the case that illustrates the new, structure-defining and differentiating role of consumption in postmodern society.

Seventh, the rapid development, expansion, and stabilization of the middle strata in Japan after WWII, especially the new middle strata, was a factor that contributed to the country' economic success. These are the active and innovative postmodern consumers, and a model for the study of the role of the middle strata as an important social-structural formation in modern consumption. To compare the Bulgarian middle strata precisely with their Japanese counterparts enables us to assess the proximity (or distance) of the Bulgarian middle with respect to the corresponding position, role, and importance of its counterpart in the developed consumer societies.

Eight, Japan and Bulgaria share certain common traditional consumer values, such as thrift and self-restriction. The two society's traditional moral systems condemn conspicuous consumption, assessing it to be something "disgraceful" and even "immoral". In both societies egalitarian values and attitudes are important and strongly influential. In separate periods of their development, the two societies have followed the leading trends in consumption and lifestyle associated with the developed Western, particularly European, models. The latter have been the object of imitation above all of the high[15] and middle strata, which thereby strive to assimilate themselves to what are considered to be the world models of emulation as regards consumption and lifestyle.

Ninth, in my years of comparative study of Japanese and Bulgarian society, I have constantly wondered about the causes of the Japanese success in the post-war years, and why Bulgarian society has not managed to repeat it? In the third quarter of the 19th century and later, in the middle of the 20th, the countries began to modernize from a similar starting point, at approximately the same level of development, but the results achieved have proven very different. Since the 1990s, Japan and the rest of the world have undergone periodical recessions, economic and financial crises. The fast-developing China has displaced Japan from second to third position as regards nominal GDP; on March 21, 2011 the country was afflicted with a destructive earthquake, tidal wave, and nuclear power plant crisis. In the last few decades the political parties of Japan have proved incapable of forming stable governments or of dealing with the issue of corruption and the arising scandals. The society is quickly aging and the future seems increasingly insecure. Japan no longer perceives itself as a successful society, but rather as an "ailing" one. But from a Bulgarian perspective, Japanese society appears quite differently. Despite the difficulties, Japan is continuing to seek solutions to its problems, and is still among the most developed countries in the world. Hence, Bulgaria can safely follow the successful Japanese social practices, which have proven their efficacy.

The Japanese experience in the last two decades demonstrates well that in the contemporary, postmodern world a society cannot be looked upon as "successful" in the same way this was possible in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Today's postmodern societies do not assess themselves as "successful", and "success" is rather looked upon as an illusive dream typical of the second half of the 20th century. In the world of today it is more appropriate to say that certain practices and experiences have proven their efficacy and can be followed and relied on for positive results.

What are the characteristics of the social structures, and what are the mechanisms of social structuring that underlie the very different results of Bulgarian and Japanese social development? The answers will be sought in the framework of the indicated parameters and within the set limits of this study: in reference to the consumption patterns, the social-stratification structure of the two societies, and the place of the middle strata in them. These answers will define the practical purpose and meaning of this work.

14 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., p. 97-103; Maya Keliyan, 2012

15 They are still called "upper" strata, elite, or elites, and classified under them are people with considerable resources – economic, power, cultural, and of other kinds.

Chapter one: consuption patterns and social stratification

1. Consumption patterns: a new postmodern "key" for understanding contemporary societies

In 1999, the Model-T Ford was chosen as the "automobile of the 20th century", and its creator, Henry Ford, was declared the "businessman of the century"[16]. This car was selected as being the "most influential product" and the "most significant symbol" of its century, because:

- It was the first car sold at an accessible price;[17]
- It "revolutionized" transport and "put America on wheels".
- Ford was chosen as the "businessman of the century"[18] because:
- He created the conveyer belt, which served as the basis for the appearance and growth of mass production, the mass market, and mass consumption;
- He stimulated the consumption of the workers employed in his factories by paying them wages[19] that were proportional to the value of the automobile they manufactured.

Thus, ironically, three generations after the publication of the Communist Manifesto, the proletarians working in the Ford factories could afford to buy the fruit of their labor, which was until then considered "luxury toys" for the capitalist class[20]. But as regards their consumption patterns, we may well ask whether Ford's workers were the same proletarians referred to in the Communist Manifesto? In other words, were the social-class characteristics of Ford's employees identical with those of their counterparts in the past, who possessed "nothing but their chains"? Just how reliable is the diagnosis and prognosis made in the Manifesto?

The age of mass production and mass consumption, also known as Fordism, began in the 1950s[21]. The fact that the automobile turned from a luxury commodity

16 See the journal Fortune of Nov. 1, 1999.

17 In the year it was created, it cost 825 USD, but after that its price has decreased with each year.

18 Bill Gates was placed in second place; the arguments in support of his selection were that he had done for computers what Ford had done for cars: he had created conditions for their massification.

19 Their daily wages in 1914 reached 5 USD.

20 Gordon Mathews and Tailok Lui, 2001, p. 3.

21 Robert Bocock, 1993.

into a mass means of transportation in the US is considered to be the precondition for the appearance of the American phenomenon called middle-class blue collars"[22]. These are skilled workers and technicians that have an "intermediate" status with respect to certain stratification characteristics and according to separate criteria can be classified either as middle or working class. At the beginning of the 20th century, under the impact of the above-mentioned changes in the organization of production, and changes in consumption, some of the blue collar workers, who had until then been typical representatives of the working class, passed from the low[23] to the middle strata[24]. The designation of "middle class blue collars" points, in particular, to the qualitative changes in their consumption, which has moved away from that of workers and drawn increasingly closer to what is typical of the middle strata.

The changes in consumption are such that they have made a decisive impact on the mechanisms of social structuring of American society. During the first decades of the 20th century, the US began gradually to become a society with a "developed consumer culture"[25], and in the following years, between the two world wars and during the Depression, it was followed in this by other Western societies that began to resemble it in this respect. This process gained speed after the WWII. The growing mass production in the US led to an increasingly large-scale mass consumption and to a growing proportion of the middle class. Mass consumption is centered on the family as a key element of consumption, and this fact defines the crucial role and responsibility of women[26] as regards the particularities of family consumption patterns.

Consumption is constantly stimulated so that it may impact in turn on production and additionally stimulate the labor activity and labor performance. It becomes an important source of pleasure and dreams[27], and is represented in advertisements as a solution to personal and social problems. It induces the conviction that material well-being and spiritual equilibrium are a result of possessing and consuming certain commodities. In this way false needs are created, which can be satisfied in the sphere of conspicuous consumption[28].

A number of authors have tried to characterize the major social changes using

22 Robert Reich, 1992.

23 They are called lower middle class or lower middle strata. Included in this social stratum are groups of people with rather limited financial resources and a secondary education level, such as qualified workers, clerks, tradesmen, and other non-manual workers, small businesspersons, farmers, etc. (Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 2002, p. 223). The first distinctions between lower and upper middle class were made by W. Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt, 1941.

24 Hence they may be called "grey collars", i.e. people situated between blue collars (the working class) and white collars (the middle class). In the last decade the term "pink collars" has appeared, under which are classified people in middle-qualified positions in the growing sector of social services, such as nurses, social workers, etc. They have an intermediate stratification status.

25 Richard W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, 1983.

26 David Bell and Joanne Hollows, 2005, p. 3.

27 Mike Featherston, 1990.

28 Thorstein Veblen, 1899/1994.

various concepts and terms, such as: technocratic era[29]; service class society[30]; technocratic era personal service society[31]; post-scarcity society[32]; post-economy society[33]; knowledge society[34]; postmodern society[35], etc. These various concepts have been created to reflect the same social processes, and they express similar ideas, whereby researchers attempt to conceptualize the on-going changes. The most significant concept was that offered by Daniel Bell, who also made the best and most comprehensive study of it[36]. His analysis[37] is focused on two basic social changes:

- The first is that related to the growing role of knowledge, technology, and education;
- The second, to the fact that services become a leading economic branch.

These factors bring about corresponding changes in the structure of the labor force within the system of occupations. The white collar positions have increase in number, including administrators, clerks, employees in the state bureaucracy, in healthcare and social services. The share of women holding jobs has also grown. The growth of incomes leads to increased demand for new products and services, which, in turn, brings about the expansion of the service sector, a growing number of people occupied in it, and ultimately to significant changes in the economic and social structure of society. High social prestige is enjoyed by professions related to expert knowledge and professionalism. Increasingly topical become issues such as the quality of life, environmental protection, and the social cost of economic growth. The processes in question impact on people's values, and a different moral system is formed from that of the past. "Cultural contradictions" arise increasingly in society between the values of self-restriction and relentless work, prevalent until then, and consumer attitudes, engendered by mass production and mass consumption.

Post-industrial (in Bell's terminology) society is a consumer society by nature. The trends described justified the definition that the US had entered the "age of mass consumption"[38]. This situation was perceived as the basic goal of economic growth in general, as it ensures universal well-being to the members of society. Gradually, the "key" to understanding contemporary societies and the particularities of their social structure shifted from the sphere of production to that of consumption. Consumption comes to hold an increasingly important place in the overall structure of social inequality. While

29 Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1970.
30 Ralf Dahrendorf, 1967.
31 Paul Halmos, 1970.
32 Murray Bookchin, 1971.
33 Hermann Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, 1967.
34 Peter Drucker, 1969.
35 Amitai Etzioni, 1968.
36 See Krishan Kumar, 1995.
37 Daniel Bell, 1973/1974, 1976.
38 Walt Whitman Rostow, 1960.

in industrial society the working class is considered to be one of the "pillars of society", in post-industrial society this role is played by the middle strata. The key importance of consumption for understanding modern societies is linked with the birth of a "new type of society", the postmodern, and with the special importance that the middle strata have within the latter. These changes are brought about in all cases by the same processes – by the changes in the system of production, in labor, employment, education, etc., as mentioned above. The emergence and development of postmodern society, in which consumption plays this new, structure-defining role, occurs in parallel with the growing proportion of the middle class, with its stabilization, and with the firm establishment of its active role in consumption. In postmodern society, the importance of education and high qualification increases, becoming a significant social-group resource of the middle strata, especially the new middle strata. This enhances the latter's prestige, and society increasingly relies on these strata for its general development. The status characteristics of the working class changes and intermediate status groups become increasingly important. The latter are those working class groups that stand closer to the middle strata in terms of their qualification features and educational characteristics, and in some classifications are even classified as lower middle strata. By its increased capacity for consumption, the working class in developed societies draws closer to the lower middle strata. Middle strata are active and innovative consumers in the postmodern lifestyle: they are the first to set certain norms, which are then followed by the lower status social-group formations. Postmodern society relies on the middle strata to supply initiative, enterprise, and civic activity, and to play a stabilizing role.

In a global aspect, observable changes are occurring as a result of which the status differences between people and groups are determined to an increasing degree by their lifestyle and consumption patterns. It becomes ever clearer that "the world of commodities and the principle of their structuring are central to understanding modern society"[39]. Consumption comes to be understood not only as consumption of the use-value of goods, of their utility, but also of the symbols they embody[40]. Baudrillard's concept of the domination of the "sign-commodity" has led other neo-Marxists as well to the conclusion that culture plays a determining role for the reproduction of "late capitalism" [41].

The term "postmodern" was first mentioned in 1951 by Charles Wright Mills[42], who wrote that "the modern age is followed by a postmodern period", when the values of rationalism and political freedoms are put in question, and when society is concerned much more about mass consumption and lifestyle than by revolutionary ideas. Postmodernism initially arose as a current in art among the artistic circles of New York in the 1960s, and in the 1970s the concept began to be used by European theorists as well. According to a number of authors, postmodernism is the culture of

39 Mike Featherstone, 1987, p. 57.
40 Jean Baudrillard, 1970, 1975, 1981, 2003.
41 Fredric Jameson, 1981, p. 131, 1991.
42 Charles Wright Mills, 1951, p. 166.

post-industrial society[43]. Postmodern society has very developed technologies and communications; by its nature it is an information and consumption society. Mass consumption of goods and information technologies work to erase the boundaries between reality and its imitation; they destroy the previously dominant hierarchy of tastes and lower the standards of the public in this respect. At the end of the 1970s Jean-François Lyotard declared that "there is no longer a meaning, but only meanings", that it is no longer possible to use universal categories and these should be replaced by categories situated within a concrete historical context. He sees the postmodern as a substitution of narrative knowledge by a multiplicity of language games, and of universalism by localism. In the postmodern age the "grand narrative" disappears, which until then had united separate knowledge into an integral system. The social whole is broken down into multiple differing "micro narratives" or into diversified cultural communities; and the previous "universalism" is substituted by "localism".

Jean Baudrillard draws attention to one other aspect of the postmodern: in it, the distinction between original and copy, between real and imaginary, disappears, and everything becomes an imitation[44]. According to him the new information technologies underlie the transition from a social order based on production to one based on reproduction. This society "draws away from the standardized functionalism and enthusiasm engendered by faith in science and economic growth predominant in industrial society in the age of shortage, and attaches greater weight to esthetics and to human relations as elements of the past incorporated in a new context"[45]. But its most important feature is that, as Featherstone points out, the postmodern is a qualitatively different, new type of society compared with the modern, and not just a new stage of the latter's development.

By its nature the new society represents "an epoch-making change or a break with the modern: it expresses the appearance of a new social totality with organizational principles of its own"[46]. Its "defining feature" is "freedom of choice", which "paradoxically has turned into a strict necessity"[47] to such a degree that "we have no choice but to choose"[48]. Moreover, this type of society is based on the "freedom" of the consumer[49]. According to Inglehart[50] the great transition from modern to postmodern consists in a change of emphasis - from that on economic security and growth to that on post-materialistic values, among which the leading ones are those related to quality of life, full self-expression of the individual, free choice of lifestyle, and other such, which bring about significant changes at societal level.

Postmodern society essentially expresses the change not only in values and

43 Jean-François Lyotard, 1979; Scott Lash, 1990; Fredric Jameson, 1991; Ernest E. Mandel, 1978.

44 Jean Baudrillard, 1970, 1975, 1981, 1983.

45 Ronald Inglehart, 1997, p. 12.

46 Mike Featherstone, 1988, p. 198.

47 David Clarke, op. cit., p. 145.

48 Anthony Giddens, 1994, p. 75

49 Jean Baudrillard, 1981, p. 82-83.

50 Ronald Inglehart, op. cit., p. 325.

cultural practices, but also in the mechanisms of social structuring. By the beginning of the 1990s, "postmodern" was understood as referring to[51]:

1. Specific cultural forms;
2. The designation used by intellectuals with regard to commercialized cultural forms and practices, which they consider unrefined and vulgar.
3. The inclusion of various groups from the new middle strata in the increasingly diversified cultural practices.

Most generally and provisionally, the various social theories that attempt to explain, systematize, and conceptualize the changes in modern societies may be divided into two large groups. According to the authors who adhere to the first of these, the on-going significant changes are a manifestation of the "second" modernity, which by nature is a "late" and "reflective" modernity[52]. According to other authors, falling in the second group, it would be more exact to call this a "liquid modernity"[53]. Also raised in this connection is the important topic regarding the appearance of new, different social problems, and a new type of risk, which justify the use of the term "risk society"[54], etc. What the views classified under this conceptual group have in common is that, according to these authors, the changes taking place in society, though significant, do not lead to a new type of society, but to a change of the already existing modern societies. According to the authors that I have provisionally separated into this second group, the important social changes are not simply a continuation of modernity, but are a manifestation of a new type of society that has appeared. Some of these authors call this society "post-industrial"[55], others call it "postmodern"[56], still others hold that "late capitalism" has reached a phase of postmodernism[57], while another group believes society has attained a "post-material" stage[58].

Without going into details, I will point out that the concept I use is "postmodern society"[59], though I accept the ideas of Mike Featherstone expressed in a number of his works[60], as well as those of Jean-François Lyotard[61], Mike Savage, James Barlow,

51 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

52 Ulrick Beck, 1992; Anthony Giddens, 1991; Scott Lash, op. cit.; Ulrick Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, 1994.

53 Zygmunt Bauman, 2000.

54 Ulrick Beck, op. cit.; Anthony Giddens, 1990, 1999.

55 Daniel Bell, 1974/1973.

56 Jean-François Lyotard, 1979; Jean Baudrillard, 1970, 1975, 1981, 1983; Mike Featherstone, op. cit., 1991.

57 Fredric Jameson, op.cit.

58 Ronald Inglehart, op. cit.

59 Maya Keliyan, 2008, 2010.

60 Mike Featherstone, 1987, 1988, 1991.

61 Jean-François Lyotard, op. cit.

and Tony Fielding[62]. Considering these conceptions and those of other authors cited above, I have reached the conclusion that: postmodern society is based on a new type of social structuring, in which consumption and lifestyle play an essential and definitive role, while the middle strata are emblematic for the particularities and trends of this society.

Owing to these characteristics, postmodern society is qualitatively different from modern society, and its emergence is brought about by important changes in the social organization of production and labor, by the development of science, education, information and communication technologies, mass production and mass consumption. The process of important social-economic, structural, cultural, political and value changes through which society passes to its postmodern stage, is designated by the term 'postmodernization'. The latter took place in the developed Western societies and Japan in the 1970s, while in Bulgaria and the other societies of Central and Eastern Europe, it has become evident since the mid 1990s.

Its qualitative differences compared with the preceding "modern society" lie precisely in the mechanisms of social structuring and in the presence, place and importance of the middle strata. The justification for using the term "postmodernization" is in the qualitative difference of postmodern society from the preceding modern one, in the postmodern change of direction of development of contemporary society[63].

Since the 1990s, the postmodern trends described above have increased: there is a distinct process of transition from consumption of mass products and services to such as express group and individual particularities and preferences of consumers. This leads to even greater variety in the consumption patterns of the different social strata and groups, and increasingly differentiated consumer sub-groups emerge.

Since the last decade of the 20th century, under the impact of globalization, national and regional differences in consumption tend increasingly to disappear. The traditions of consumer culture in various contemporary societies are losing their previous importance. Both in the developed and in the developing parts of the world, the selfsame global tendencies are winning ground: for instance the penetration of information technologies in all spheres of consumption, the presence of similar eating and dressing patterns, of a similar housing environment in the large cities, etc. The global economy creates products and services that are without national specificity: in the various stages of their production they are manufactured in different countries and even different continents. These global goods are not created for a specific national market: they are the object of global consumption that is indifferent to the local conditions.

In parallel with this, since the second half of the 1990s processes are taking place and expanding in the opposite direction to that of mass and global consumption. Gaining in popularity are the alternative consumption patterns to those of mass consumption[64];

62 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

63 Ronald Inglehart, op. cit., p.11.

64 These trends began in the 1960s, but since the 1990s they have become particularly topical and are now characteristic not only for rebellious youth groups adhering to the protest sub-culture, but to wider social

the ideologies of anti-modernism and anti-globalism have a strong influence on these patterns. Their political basis is an appeal to "return to the roots", and the growing importance of regionalism, the search for religious, racial, and ethnic identity.

Especially popular in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century in Europe, the US, and Japan, is the so-called "environmentally and morally responsible consumption". The values it endorses are oriented to protecting the natural environment and maintaining ecological balance, and to boycotting the produce and services of enterprises that have not shown themselves to be socially and ecologically responsible. Another popular trend in recent years is "sustainable consumption", the supporters of which advocate reusing, recycling, and repairing used goods in order to prolong their usefulness and economize on resources. Since the 1990s the "green" consumption has also become popular, which demands thrifty use of energy and water, and recycling of waste. Increasingly in demand are bio-foods produced in a way that is mindful of the natural environment. The movements that began back in the 1960s and 1980s in opposition to the "McDonaldization" of society[65] have become specially active, striving to preserve traditional, regional high-quality foods.

One expression of anti-globalist trends are the slow food chains, as opposed to the fast food ones; another is the campaign for "anti-Disneyfication", "anti-Disneyization"[66], or the movement for the creation of thematic parks. The development of information technologies, of communications, and especially of the Internet in the last decade has led to new possibilities and horizons for consumption, such as online shopping, online reading of books, articles, and newspapers, search for work or a marital partner, temple attendance, praying, participation in marriage or burial ceremonies, and all sorts of activities. Information activities are bringing about radical changes in the consumption patterns both of whole societies and of separate social strata and categories. The enumerated trends in consumption are typical for, and indicative of, the changes in consumer tastes but also of the modifications that consumer identity is undergoing.

Contemporary societies, both less developed ones (such as the Bulgarian) and world economic leaders (such as the Japanese society) are drawing increasingly close to one another, as they take part in the same global trends of consumption and lifestyle. On the other hand, the processes are refracted through the specificity of their respective social structures. In the dissertation, the term consumption is used as a key to the study of identical processes in different contemporary societies; thus, the distinguishing features of these societies' respective social strata are identified, the central focus here being on their middle strata.

strata as well.

65 George Ritzer, 1995.

66 Sharon Zukin, 1996; Alan Bryman, 2004.

2. Consumption: the Development and Typology of Methods and Approaches to the Study of Consumption

In keeping with our thesis, in this book we will seek to define consumption not in general, but in the context of social structuring and stratification. According to Robert Bocock "consumption is a socially constructed, historically changing process"[67]. Consumption is invariably linked in one way or another with the prevailing forms of social inequality typical for a given society, with the socially important differences between people and groups with respect to their resources – the access to, the ways and forms of exchange, distribution, use of, resources. Consumption in sociology is not reducible to acts of purchase, to the quantity and quality of consumed goods and services, a view that would fully satisfy economists but not sociologists. The study of consumption answers the question as to why and how individuals, groups, strata consume goods and services; in this case consumption is understood to mean "selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair, and disposal" of these goods and services[68]. The analysis of consumption in the perspective of stratification reveals the role of consumption with respect to the unequal social positions occupied and reproduced by individuals, groups, and communities. Since the end of the 1960s, with the emergence and development of postmodern society, consumption is no longer understood simply as "passive appropriation" but also as an "active way of connecting not only with objects but with society and with the world"[69]. That is why in postmodern society consumption has turned into "an activity for systematic manipulation of signs"[70], so that both the commodity and its sign become a product that is a "sign-commodity"[71]. Postmodern consumers are "physically passive, but mentally very engaged", their consumer behavior is connected foremost with "what goes on in consciousness and thought", because consumption has long since ceased to be a process of satisfying only biological needs[72]. I support the view that in postmodern society people and groups occupy different hierarchic positions in the stratification system of society precisely because, among other things, they have different forms and ways of expressing their consumer activity, of choosing, buying, using, maintaining, repairing, and disposing of the commodities with which they satisfy their needs, and different ways in which all this goes on in their consciousness and thinking, and is assessed by them. This important particularity of consumption has been in the focus of researchers' attention since the end of the

67 Robert Bocock, op. cit., p. 45.

68 Colin Campbell, 1995, p. 102

69 See Jean Baudrillard, 1970, Robert Bocock, op. cit.

70 Jean Baudrillard, 2003, pp. 194-5.

71 Jean Baudrillard, 1970.

72 Robert Bocock, op. cit., p. 51.

1960s, and in recent years it has become increasingly topical. Thus, the evolution of the social role and significance of consumption is reflected in the change of emphasis in the study of consumption.

It would not be exaggerated to say that there is hardly any sociological or non-sociological science for which consumption has no relevance in one way or another. The problems of consumption have always been a research area that has proven to be a focal point of interdisciplinary methods and approaches of philosophical, sociological, historical, economic, psychological and a number of other social sciences and the humanities, of so many disciplines, that it is hard to list them all.

The approaches to the study of consumption can be broadly divided into two large groups: those outside of sociology and those within various sociological sciences and disciplines.

- In the first category are approaches used in the humanities, social and technical sciences and disciplines, including philosophy, economics, political science, cultural anthropology, psychology; they ranges across ecology and all the way to geography and architecture (I am not making an exhaustive listing here).

- In the second group are the separate sociological sciences and disciplines that will be mentioned further on. Due to its specific connection and interdependence with concepts such as labor, production, status, lifestyle, values, and culture, the concept of consumption pattern is part of the terminology of sociology of work and sociology of economics, class and stratification theories, urban sociology, sociology of culture, sociology of consumption, political studies, feminist studies; gender theory, post-communist studies, etc.

In modern social sciences the economic approach has long since been surmounted, the approach that views consumption only as a process in which "rational individuals buy commodities in order to achieve maximal satisfaction" through their purchase[73]

In Keynesian economics, consumption is reduced to the ways in which the income of the household or of the individuals is spent, the stress being on the selection, adoption, use, disposal, and recycling of goods and services, as opposed to their design, production, and marketing. In economics, in environmentalism, and in stratification theories alike, consumption is connected with the problems of resources, with the ways of their use, and with their impact on social relationships and on society.

Early on in the history of sociology, the problems of stratification, consumption and lifestyles provoked the interest of the classical thinkers. Certainly the major contributions would appear those of: Thornstein Veblen on conspicuous consumption and leisure class lifestyle; Georg Simmel on fashion and money; Karl Marx on commodity fetishism, use and exchange value; Werner Sombart on luxury; Max Weber on status group and the Protestant ethic; Broneslaw Malinowski on the kula; Marcel Mauss on the gift[74].

73 Mike Featherstone, 1995, p. 17.

74 See Thornstein Veblen, op. cit.; Georg Simmel, 1904/1971, 1978; Werner Sombart, 1913/1967; Max Weber, 1904-5/1992, 1978; Broneslaw Malinowski, 1922; Marcel Mauss, 1976.

Max Weber and Torstein Veblen, the classical authors who contributed the most to our understanding of the social nature of consumption, differ significantly in their view on social status, but the important similarity between them is the importance they both attach to consumption as a trait that defines social status.

Probably the most important contemporary theorist of consumption is Pierre Bourdieu[75] with his theory of symbolic and cultural capital, habitus, and the way in which this can be put to use to display taste. Bourdieu[76] shows how consumption demonstrates cultural capital and affiliation to a specific social class.

The interest of social science in consumption increased in the late 1950s, at which time the discussions were connected to the development of industrial sociology.

The 1960s were the first post-war stage of development of theories on consumption. That is also when postmodern society originated, with the new structure-determining role of consumption in it. It was typical for the conceptions of that period to focus research on mass consumption and, as linked to it, on affluence. The particularities of consumption were perceived as important traits of developed modern societies. Walt Witman Rostow declared socialism and communism "a disease of society" that was bound to disappear, for they were incapable of providing the kind of mass consumption and economic growth that Western consumer society was able to achieve[77]. The quoted author characterized consumer society as "an age of highly-developed mass consumption"; the ideal type of this was the US, and other countries would follow the American model. The future world is that of convergence between capitalism and socialism. According to the concept of "affluent society"[78] the latter is also defined by the level and quality of consumption: it ensures constant economic growth and plentiful consumption.

The second post-war period of evolving views on consumption was that of the 1970s. They developed chiefly in the framework of the theories of post-industrial society and the affluent society. These theories emphasized the change of values: the predominant role played by labor gradually came to be substituted by leisure and consumption. By analogy with the "Protestant ethic" that promotes the development of the "spirit of capitalism"[79], the appearance and development of modern consumption is linked by theorists with the "culture of anti-Puritanism", a culture that is essentially

75 Pierre Bourdieu, 1984.

76 Perhaps because of their popularity (among other reasons), his ideas are among the most disputed, as we will find further on in this text. They have been criticized for their "excessive focus" on the French case and difficult applicability to other societies (See Mike Savage, James Barlow, Roger Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., p. 100-102; Michèle Lamont, 1992; David Chaney, 1996, p. 66; Gordon Mathews and Tailok Lui, op. cit., pp: 7-9, Simon Gunn, 2005). Other authors even find they have "somewhat lost their topicality" compared with contemporary trends in social and especially stratification analysis (Rosemary Crompton, 1996, p. 118). Scholars have pointed out that Pierre Bourdieu stresses consumption as a criterion delimiting and even opposing the separate classes, which makes it difficult and almost impossible to explain the mechanisms of social integration (Stanley Lieberson, 1985). Others find his views on the culture of the working class to be "patronizing and egalitarian" (Richard Jenkins, 1989; Bridget Fowler, 1994).

77 Wolt Witman Rostow, op. cit.

78 John Kenneth Galbraith, 1958.

79 Max Weber, 1904-5/1992.

'Romantic', and it is precisely the 'Romantic ethic' that promotes consumerism"[80]. The "Romantic ethic" that generates and encourages consumer culture "is identified as the 'natural enemy' of Puritanism" (ibid.).

The third post-war stage in the evolution of consumption theories was in the 1980s. That was the time in which the important changes that were taking place in consumption and in the latter's social role, stimulated the appearance and development of a wide range of ideas and concepts. Feminism, gender studies, household studies, contributed to establishing the new methods and approaches to the study of consumption. Since then, the problem area concerning the correlation between consumption and contemporary culture; consumption and identity; changes in consumer culture, has grown increasingly important and topical. This was the time when the sociology of consumption first appeared and gained ground, and when some of the most influential theories about the connection between postmodernity and consumption appeared and were developed.

In the 1980s feminism introduced a stronger materialistic current[81] in consumer studies. Some of the most innovative and challenging social analysis of consumption and consumption-production relationships during the same period have been from a feminist viewpoint[82]; and from critical perspectives[83].

Consumption has a marked gender character and through its study we can clearly trace the social inequality between genders; hence they are a popular topic of gender studies. According to the criterion 'position of consumption in the hierarchy of social activities', usually women, specially wives are more occupied with consumption activities; according to the criterion 'display of consumption as important for production of dominant status', husbands are much more associated with such a status. Wives are much more associated with the former consumption practices and husbands with the later ones.

Consumption cannot be reduced only to separate individuals and their choice, because even the daily act of shopping is a result not only of an individual agency, but a matter of a household's strategy. Consumption to a great degree is a product of a "market policy" of the household and even a matter of its prevailing values and attitudes, all of which some authors call the "moral economy"[84]. It is no coincidence that in the study of consumption the units of study in most cases are the households, not the individuals. When studying sharing of available income or consumption in social and economic sciences, the unit of the study is usually rather the household than the individual. This approach assumes that the incomes of the household are shared evenly and all members of the household reach the same standard of living.

80 Colin Campbell, 1987, pp. 5-6.

81 As Jan Pahl, 1989, called it.

82 Susan McIntosh, 1981; Erica Wimbush and Margaret Talbot, 1988.

83 Chris Rojek, 1989.

84 Daniel Miller, 1995, p. 31.

However, for instance Jan Pahl[85] has suggested that sharing resources is not always equal in families and because of this, living standards of family members can vary. It is challenging to study the economic power relations and decision-making processes concerning consumption inside the family[86]; that is crucially important aspect of every "satisfactory" analysis dedicated to the topic.

In the field of culture theory, in the 1970s and 1980s new perspectives came to prevail in the study of "consumer culture", "mass culture" and the various subcultures, perspectives in which the consumer came to be viewed not only as a passive and easily manipulated creature, but also as an active, critically minded and creative personality.

These ideas remained influential in the next two decades as well, and consumption came to be viewed as linked not only with the economy but also with the culture of modern societies. It was seen as related to choice, exchange, purchase and use not only of commodities but of meanings and symbols as well[87]. Every act of consumption is linked in some degree with the construction and maintenance of identity , whether it be individual, group, class, cultural, etc., identity[88]. In this sense, "shopping is not reducible to obtainment of commodities alone, it is also a purchase of identity" and has "symbolic… economic, class, and gender aspects..."[89]. By analogy with Bourdieu's theory of "cultural capital", created in the 1980s, a decade later the concept of "sub-cultural capital" was introduced to characterize the youth sub-cultures, the social groups formed on their basis[90], and the specific consumption of these groups. Daniel Miller[91] attempts to rethink the idea of culture in terms of consumption. Consumption is viewed not only as an acquirement of objects but also of symbols; it is related to the construction of meaning and identity. Mike Featherstone distinguishes three competing perspectives on consumer culture: the first focuses on production of consumption; the second studies various consumption practices; the third stresses consumption as a source of dreams, pleasures, and models to be imitated[92].

According to Robert Mayer generalization "the study of consumption is a useful setting for the testing and expansion of sociological theory"[93]. In 1988 Peter Saunders concluded that a new sociological discipline should be elaborated, which he proposed calling sociology of consumption. He set himself the task of overcoming the Marxist notion of classes and class conflict as related to property over the means of production, as well as to break with assigning crucial importance to production over consumption.

85 Op. cit.

86 Alan Warde, 1992 p. : 16

87 See Robert Bocock, op. cit., Daniel Miller, op. cit., Mike Featherstone, 1991, Steven Miles, 1998, Thorstein Veblen, op. cit., Georg Simmel, op. cit.

88 Gordon Mathews, 2001, p. 288.

89 John Clammer, 1992, pp. 195-197.

90 Sarah Thornton, 1995.

91 Op. cit.

92 Mike Featherstone, 1990.

93 Robert Mayer, 1978, p. 600.

This provoked new debates as to the validity of traditional concepts of classes[94].

Due to the specific course of creation and development of the sociology of consumption, two rather different approaches have had a significant influence on this sociological discipline and on the sociological approaches to consumption. These are: the "economic –materialistic" approach, connected with urban sociology and the sociology of work[95]; and the "psychological-cultural" approach, introduced by critical theory, cultural studies, and postmodernism[96]. We must not forget the strong influences of other disciplines and their respective approaches, particularly those of social anthropology, history, psychology, and consumer studies.

This dissertation proceeds from a methodological basis of stratification analysis, not of sociology of consumption. But what is important for my study is the fact that sociology of consumption, which was conceived and developed as a discipline very different from stratification theories, from the very start highlighted the problem of the new role that consumption has in modern society as regards the criteria for distinguishing the different social-structural formations. According to Peter Saunders, another important aim of the sociology of consumption is to question the leading place, until then assumed to be self-evident, of production rather than consumption.

Consumption is crucial in the debate on the conditions and culture of postmodernity[97], where postmodern society is increasingly associated with consumer society. The connection between postmodernity and consumption was first articulated by Frederick Jameson (1983), though he did this using a "somewhat idiosyncratic terminology"[98]. Zygmunt Bauman was the first author in English-language literature to demonstrate their mutual connection[99]. For Baudrillard[100] the new forms of technology and information underlie the transition from a social order based on production to one based on consumption. His works from the late 1960s actually investigate the connection between the postmodern and consumption[101].

The fourth stage of the evolution of consumption theories began in the mid 1990s. There are two main tendencies characteristic for the ideas developed in this period:

- Consumption is not merely viewed as connected with politics but is used as an explanatory tool for what happens in politics and for the assessment of politics at the level of everyday understanding.

- The study of the consumption of middle strata becomes increasingly topical.

The consumption has been understood as a crossing point of political, social, and

94 Peter Saunders, 1981, 1988.

95 Robert Dubin, 1955, Stanley Parker, 1971, 1976, Ken Roberts, 1970, etc.

96 Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, 1993/1975, Richard Gruneau, 1983, Scott Lash, op.cit.

97 Jean-François Lyotard, op. cit., Fredric Jameson, op. cit.

98 David Clarke, 2003, p. 196.

99 Zygmunt Bauman, 1987.

100 Jean Baudrillard, 1983.

101 David Clarke, op. cit., p. 196.

economic; some thing more, consumption practices are merging with the personal and life history. The social changes are seen in everyday life as changes in consumption, perceived as changes of way of life. In social stratification self-identification term people consider themselves in terms of consumption, rather than of their relation to production. The question of consumption is of key importance in contemporary politics, according to Daniel Miller's statement "… elections are now fought increasingly over the issue of who can most efficiently manage the economy, in short who can provide the resources to households to buy and in turn 'deliver the goods'". According to the same author, the causes of the collapse of totalitarian socialism, apart from the political ones, are related to the imposed system of consumption patterns, described "as a culture of shortage that laid bare the arrogance of an idealized economic system"[102]. The social changes usually are described with politically oriented rhetoric, combined with the rhetoric of one's personal experience of consumption. Social changes are associated with various elements of consumption and that association "can be interpreted as one of the most natural ways of appropriation and/or rejection of the societal changes and the discursive regime in which these changes are enveloped"[103]. Changes in consumption are seen to be the most important indicator of political change - for example the communist and post-communist societies are associated with the dominant elements of consumption of the time[104].

The evolution of various methods and approaches to consumption shows that, despite their variety, they are united by the understanding that since the late 1960s consumption has increasingly been the key to understanding and explaining contemporary societies. These approaches also acknowledge the considerable change that took place in the developed societies during that period: postmodern society emerged. Different authors designate this society by different names, but they concur in the understanding that it is a qualitatively new stage of the social-economic, cultural, etc., development of advanced societies. These big changes also reflect significantly on the social nature and role of consumption.

The third common point between these different views is the understanding of the enhanced social significance of consumption, whether the stress be placed on its new defining role for modern culture, or on its impact on identity, or on its importance for the social structuring of contemporary societies.

Stratification approach

Among the various approaches and methods used to study consumption, the class and stratification approach is particularly significant for this dissertation. It was chosen here because it permits the most comprehensive characterization of the new, important role of consumption as an indicator of social structuring in the modern world. Awareness of the importance of this approach as a methodological tool for the

102 Daniel Miller, op. cit. p. 16.

103 Sergey Oushakine, 2000, p. 101.

104 Sergey Oushakine, op. cit., p. 114.

study of consumption grew in the early 1980s. At that time, the changes, provoked by postmodern social developments, in the social importance and role of consumption began to be observed with growing clarity. Hence it is not coincidental that this was the time of the emergence of the sociology of consumption; the argument in support of the need for such a new sociological discipline was based on the perspective of class and stratification analysis[105].

During late 1980s, Mike Featherstone proceeds from Pierre Bourdieu's ideas, uses certain elements of Frankfurt School Marxism and of the early Jean Baudrillard, and develops three significant aspects[106] of consumer culture.

- Firstly, people are not passive consumers; they actively participate in consumption practices.

- Secondly, as consumers, they are not part of an "undifferentiated mass"; their consumer behavior is linked to their class position.

- Thirdly, the concept of "lifestyle" is exceptionally important for understanding the dynamics of various consumer cultures[107].

- This line of analysis was followed up by Scott Lash and John Urry toward the study of the mutual connection between types of consumer culture and social differences, classes, and stratification[108].

On one hand, consumption and lifestyle differentiate and stratify people and social groups, and are the basis of social differentiation. But on the other hand, in postmodern societies these factors are also linked with the mechanisms of social integration in society as a whole and in separate communities. "The cultural boundaries" between separate social classes and strata are not drawn clearly and with precision and have a different meaning and importance in the different developed societies of today[109]. Since the mid 1990s – apart from the issue of how consumption and lifestyle differentiate people and groups – the question is also being raised as to which of their features, particularities and activities unite them, and how[110]. These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, for certain consumer practices and lifestyles "lose their symbolic significance while others continue to play the role of recognizable social markers"[111].

Since the appearance of postmodern society, consumption has ceased to

105 Peter Saunders, op. cit., 1988.

106 For more detailed description on Mike Featherstone's contribution see Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., p. 278-279.

107 See Mike Featherstone, 1987.

108 Scott Lash and John Urry, 1987, Scott Lash, 1990.

109 For instance in defining moral, social-economic and cultural status, American men belonging to the upper middle class attach greater importance to assessments of moral qualities (such as good will, honesty, and cooperation) and to social-economic estimates, while Frenchmen pay greater attention to cultural superiority and sophistication. It seems that cultural differences in the USA are perceived as a relatively weaker criterion of status inequality than in France (Michèle Lamont, op. cit.).

110 Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., pp. 288-296.

111 Alan Warde, Lydia Martens and Wendy Olsen, 1999, p. 125.

be perceived only "as the distributive side to social class"; moreover, "analysis of consumption and classes is and will remain among the central themes of sociological analysis"[112].

In stratification theories consumption patterns are perceived as an important indicator of the way in which the representatives of the separate social strata use their status resources; they are also a sort of measure of these resources. Particularly important is the role of consumption patterns for identity[113] making and social status self-identification.

At the end of the 20th century "much of the debate relating to consumption has focused upon the question of whatever individual identities are shaped by 'consumption' or 'employment-related' (class) practices"[114]. The results of a number of sociological surveys have confirmed the hypothesis that identity is ever more closely connected not only with class, as defined according to the position in the occupation system, but "with the growth of consumption, both as a source of employment, and as a focus of new customer-oriented management practices"[115].

According to Rosemarie Crompton, class analysis is related to consumption primarily in two respects[116]:

- First, consumer practices are connected in some ways with the formation of classes.

- Second, the growth of the service sector and of professions related to consumption transforms labor experience as such, labor relations, and the conditions of the formation of class consciousness and identity.

All this leads to changes in the system of employment that are closely related to consumption; it leads to labor market growth and to the emergence of new labor practices.

The discussion above confirms that the thesis argued in the dissertation is based on views accepted in stratification theories since the early 1980s regarding the role of consumption for the social structuring of postmodern societies. The thesis supported in this work also acknowledges the special place of the middle strata in the stratification structure of postmodern societies. A number of studies dating from the early 1990s devoted to the "middle classes" examine how lifestyle and consumption serve as criteria for distinguishing social grouping[117]. For people from the middle classes during this period it became increasingly important to find not only what differentiated them from other social groups and strata, but also what united them with others in these respects

112 Roger Burrows and Catherine Marsh, op. cit., pp. 1-14.

113 More on identity and on cultural identity see Tanya Nedelcheva, 2003, 2004.

114 Rosemary Crompton, 1996, p. 128.

115 Rosemary Crompton, op. cit., p. 126.

116 Rosemary Crompton, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

117 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Roger Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

[118]. Moreover, the middle classes are the socio-structural formation that most clearly confirms the role of consumption in present-day societies as both a differentiating and an integrating factor.

Featherstone, Lash, and Urry emphasize the "emergence of new types of consumer culture which might entail the breaking down of traditional cultural hierarchies, and in particular considering the significance of different types of 'new middle classes'"[119]. The new forms of "consumerism" are "related to the strategies of upwardly mobile professional groups". This refers to the "service class of professionals and administrators" and to the "post-industrial middle classes, involved in the manipulation of images"[120]. In a number of British and American surveys, consumer practices are ever more often being seen "as ways by which occupational groups reproduced and challenged class power"[121]. Since the middle of the 1990s attention is drawn to "class heterogeneity" of the middle class, and the differences between separate groups within this class are being studied with regard to consumption and lifestyle[122].

Authors have distinguished three different middle class cultures, based on particularities in the consumption of different professional groups belonging to them[123].

- The first of these is designated as esthetic culture, shared primarily by public sector professionals.

- The second is defined as postmodern culture, which combines elements of high culture marked by hedonistic opulence, and is typical for the private sector professionals.

- The third is the conventional and mediocre middle class culture, observed most often in the socio-professional group of managers.

The heterogeneity in middle class consumption and lifestyle is studied with respect to concrete consumption activities such as eating. In the last decade there have been observable important differences in the eating patterns of the different groups of the new middle strata. The most noticeable differences prove to be between people employed in the private sector and in the budget sector, and they have been increasing since the early 1990s: this is a trend that British sociologists have been studying for years[124]. For instance free-lance professionals, who are among the most prosperous members of the new middle class, spend more on food than their colleagues from the

118 "Perhaps a particularity of modern status competition is to claim respect for the populist ethics of equality between cultural preferences while still relying on cultural sophistication and superiority in tacitly marking certain genres as exceptionally valuable" (Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., p. 123).

119 Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., p. 279.

120 Scott Lash and John Urry, op. cit., Scott Lash, op. cit.

121 Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., p. 280.

122 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Roger Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Tom Butler and Mike Savage, 1995.

123 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Roger Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

124 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Roger Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Tom Butler and Mike Savage, op. cit., Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., Alan Warde, Lydia Martens, and Wendy Olsen, op. cit., etc.

public sector. Their eating is both healthy and conspicuous[125].

In the last few years in various sciences and disciplines which are studying consumption patterns through a variety of approaches and theoretical tools, there has been a debate as to the need for creating and maintaining a new attitude to consumption, one that would include not only the act of purchasing and using objects, but also consciousness about the results of that consumption, about the "after consumption". This refers to the formation of an "educated middle class consumer" that is well informed about environmental and social issues, and whose consumption pattern is environmentally, socially, and community oriented. This new social type of consumer, the specific social stratum to which he belongs, the factors influencing the formation and development of such a consumer and his stratum, his impact on other social strata and their respective consumption patterns, are important theoretical problems, which are among these discussed in the following pages.

3. Consumption and Lifestyle : Consumption patterns

Since the emergence of postmodern society, consumption has been of key importance for contemporary societies. It is an important indicator of social-group status: this important role it plays is designated most clearly and plainly by the concept "consumption patterns". Nevertheless, in the abundant literature on the topic it is hard - indeed, it is impossible- to find a definition of this widely used key term.

Consumption patterns are most generally understood as being a significant element of the lifestyle of various social strata and communities, while consumer behavior is seen as an important aspect of culture in the broadest sense[126]. In connection with consumption, various social-group interests arise, and between the carriers of these interests considerable social and cultural inequalities appear[127], consumption patterns being connected with these trends. According to Bourdieu, "perhaps nothing is so difficult to bear as the 'bad' taste of others", and "revulsion from differing lifestyles is probably one of the most insurmountable class barriers"[128]; these barriers are expressed through consumption patterns. Relations between individuals and groups in connection with consumption is used as a basis for the distinction between "class" and "stratification"; here the reference is to the different ways and forms in which commodities are consumed, and to the attitudes and values linked to them. In Bulgarian society after 1989, social inequalities have appeared in a most visible and drastic form, as consumption patterns proper to the different social strata. The self-assessment and self-identification of these strata depend to a great degree on the quality and quantity

125 See Alan Ward, 1997, p. 194.

126 Jean Baudrillard, 2003, pp. 194-5.

127 Mike Featherstone, op. cit.

128 Pierre Bourdieu,1995, p. 104.

of their consumption, on their lifestyle.

Consumption patterns are a product of economic, social, political, and cultural environment; they are influenced by geographic localization, historical development, traditions, values, and aesthetic tastes. Through consumption patterns, certain social inequalities are reproduced, and different forms of authority are strengthened. In social stratification self-identification term people consider themselves in terms of consumption, rather than of their relation to production[129].

After Bourdieu consumption has come to be perceived as the main mechanism of social differentiation; thus, people with similar income may have different consumption, and the latter then becomes the area of symbolic competition between people for status and prestige.

In the broadest sense, the connection between consumption patterns and social stratification can be understood in two different ways[130]. From a Marxist viewpoint stratification in consumption reflects the stratification that already exists and has been determined by other factors – the consumption of the working class is radically different from that of the capitalists. Proceeding from this view, it is hard to explain what mechanisms create and maintain the striving to possess certain commodities, and what makes people willing to pay for them. Inequality with respect to income may lead to difference in quality and content of the commodities being used, but not to a difference in what is being consumed.

According to the second view, there are other factors as well that determine the consumption patterns of various groups, classes, and strata – for instance, cultural attitudes. These factors may enhance or decrease the differences between the consumer culture and practices of different social group formations. This view "sees consumption as an essential, inseparable part of the process of class structuring"[131]. It does more than differentiate groups, classes, and strata: the latter may pursue their material and other interests by creating and following consumer models of their own. When these classes, strata and groups have sufficient resources, they can establish and impose the ways and forms, attitudes and values of their consumption upon other categories of people, thereby increasing their own power, prestige, and influence.

In keeping with the methodological approach chosen in this work, the concept of "consumption patterns" is defined within the framework of stratification analysis. According to the author's standpoint, consumption patterns are most generally connected with: property status and income status, the position a person holds, profession, employment, cultural status, education, prestige and power resources. The following have a strong influence on consumption patterns: gender, age, marital status, children in the family and their age, ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation, which, for their part, are important factors that shape the various segments within the separate social groups of consumers.

I believe that consumption patterns express not only the attitudes of people to the

129 Mike Featherstone, 1995.

130 Ben Fine, 1995, p. 139.

131 Ben Fine, op. cit., p. 139.

commodities and services that society offers, but also their attitude to other people, to social institutions and organizations; they are indicative of their value systems and social positions. It is on consumption patterns that internal stratum divisions are based; within a stratum there might be different consumer sub-strata, groups and categories.

The consumption patterns are significant structure-determining characteristics of social subjects; to a great degree they define their status position in society, their belonging to a specific social group, category, or stratum. In defining the concept of "consumption patterns" I assume they are a key indicator of social-group status. Hence it is the concept that characterizes consumption in its stratification aspect, i.e. not in general and in itself, but as a mark of status.

While the concept of "consumption" expresses the act itself, that of "consumption patterns" characterizes the way, forms in which the various social-group formations effectuate consumption. This function of the concept is made possible thanks to the above-mentioned changes that have taken place in developed societies after WWII and the emergence of postmodern society.

What are the indicators through which the concept is studied in this work? At the first level of analysis of the concept of "consumption patterns" it is necessary to define the consumer behavior, consumer status, and consumer culture that are included in it; at the following level of analysis, I examine the concepts that compose them, until I finally achieve an indicator model of the concept. Here, at this stage, I will present only the basic indicators to which the concept of consumption patterns is decomposed. This level is sufficient to demonstrate the thesis I support, and the more detailed discussion of the indicator model is left as a task for the future.

Consumer behavior represents the choice, purchase, possession, use, maintenance, repair, accommodation, recycling, and disposal of resources, products, and services. The household is the community with which all these activities are largely connected. An important factor of consumer behavior is who is the subject performing the activities listed above, for this fact characterizes certain power relationships, administration of resources, etc. The subject in question is the person who chooses, purchases, possesses, uses, maintains, repairs, accommodates, disposes of, the commodities.

Consumer status is related to the micro economy of individuals and their households, and to the structure of their expenditure. Important aspects of status are the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of consumption, the time, place, and periodicity of use of certain resources, commodities, and services, which, taken as a whole, characterize consumer standards.

Consumer culture includes:

- The tastes, attitudes, and values that determine the preferences and choice of products and services, and the reasons for following certain consumer strategies;
- The relations between the various sides and participants in consumption (on one hand the consumers, on the other, the individuals, organizations, and institutions that offer the commodities, and also the controlling organs);

- The degree to which people are informed about the laws and regulations relevant to consumers' rights;
- The civic activity of consumers, their actions, organizations, and associations for the protection of their rights.

Also falling under the category of consumption patterns are their specific manifestations: the attitudes, assessments, expectations, satisfaction regarding consumer behavior, consumer status, and consumer culture, as well as their desire for possibly changing these.

The consumption patterns that predominate during given periods of social development, with their typical and distinguishing consumer behavior, status, culture, and the corresponding attitudes, assessments and satisfaction, define the respective type of consumer society. This fundamental concept is borrowed from Walt Whitman Rostow, but I attach to it a broader meaning, which is linked to the thesis I am arguing. Rostow has in mind a certain stage of social development when a high level of prosperity has been achieved. Following the thesis of this work, by this concept I refer to the specific ways and forms in which people consume goods, resources, products, services, values in a concrete society. In this sense we may refer to the Bulgarian or Japanese consumer society, characterized by the typical, distinctive, and characteristic consumption patterns in Bulgaria or Japan during a given stage of their development.

The full and detailed definition of the concept of "consumption patterns" would require showing its interconnection with two other concepts to which it is closely linked: "leisure" and "lifestyle". "Consumption patterns" is co-subordinate to the more general concept of "lifestyle", under which it is equal in degree of generality with "leisure", which is the other essential element of "lifestyle".

Leisure patterns

The tradition of joining the concept of leisure into a pair with the concept of labor dates back to Ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, leisure is in direct connection with work, a conception that the great philosopher generalized in the sentence: "We conduct business in order to have leisure". According to this view leisure is the ideal state of existence that a citizen could strive for. Etymologically, the word leisure stems from the Latin verb licere, meaning to permit oneself, to allow oneself. The word has a common root with license and includes in its meaning both the concept of freedom and that of control; both individual activeness and restriction; i.e. it carries the meanings that modern sociological theories associate with leisure[132]. Some authors consider that in the English language, since the 14th century, this concept has tended to mean "opportunity for free time"[133]. The correlations between labor and leisure have changed parallel to the development of the process of modernization and industrialization in various societies. In a narrow sense, the correlation between them is directly dependent on

132 Alan Tomlinson, 1994.

133 Raymond Williams, 1976.

the organization of labor. Some authors refer to a "marginalization of traditional forms of recreation", which is among the prerequisites for establishing a "new industrial order"[134]. The "new organization of labor" involves a "new lifestyle", and "new", different from the previous, activities in leisure. In the framework of the correlation labor-leisure, labor is defined in the narrow sense as "paid time", as "measured" and "hired labor", while leisure is understood as being the activities carried out apart from work duties.

At the end of the 19th century, Thornstein Veblen introduced the concept of leisure society, leisure class and the related notion of conspicuous consumption[135]. A "leisure society" is one in which labor has lost its traditional central place and importance. "Leisured" are those who consume certain commodities and services not for their utility and not out of need, but for the ostentation of consumption itself, whereby these consumers demonstrate their privileged status.

Work-leisure relationship is pivotal for number of contemporary studies[136], which focus on necessity to achieve the "desired balance between work, family and leisure[137]. In postmodern societies, leisure is increasingly becoming the decisive criterion of social structuring[138]. The leisure patterns of different social groups and social strata are an important criterion for their stratification position in the overall social structure as well as for undergoing social transformations. Debates about postmodernism and globalization also focus on leisure[139].

Since the late 1980s the social importance of leisure time, which has come to be valued as much as work, has been established and generally recognized by modern sociology, so that the two categories are perceived as being of equal standing. Previously, society was considered to be more or less subordinated to work, whereas in postmodern society, due to the changes that have taken place in the organization of production and labor, in the social structure, in the role of education, science, and technology, there is a corresponding change in the importance of leisure. Since the 1990s there has been an evident trend at global level that leisure becomes more important, significant, and valued than labor by certain social groups[140].

Leisure can be defined as the time and activities outside paid labor; leisure activities are performed by choice, they are other than duties and necessities. Examples of activities outside leisure are housework, the time spent in sleep, eating, etc. Of course, the question arises: to what extent is the time allotted to sleeping, eating and other physiological needs, or to housekeeping, a matter of choice – we must have in mind the cases when these activities are "chosen" as a leisure pastime (for instance, sleeping

134 Edward Palmer Thompson, 1967.

135 Thornstein Veblen, op. cit.

136 Stanley Parker, 1976, Ken Roberts, op. cit.

137 Gilles Pronovost, 1989, p. 57.

138 Maya Keliyan, 2008, pp. 49-51

139 Chris Rojek, 1989, 1990; John Urry, op. cit.; Alan Tomlinson, 1990, 1991; Alan Warde, op. cit.; Alan Warde and Alan Tomlinson, 1995; Alan Warde and Lydia Martens, op. cit.

140 Roland Inglehard, op. cit.

and eating beyond physiological needs; doing excessive housework, etc.). Cooking can be a necessity, but it can also be a hobby, and eating can be a form of socializing with friends and colleagues. The dividing line is the act of choosing, i.e. whether the activity is chosen as a way of leisure pastime or is meant to satisfy physiological needs or fulfill obligations.

According to my view, the new significance of leisure as a methodological tool in the study of social-group position in contemporary societies requires introducing the concept of "leisure patterns". Leisure patterns are the characteristic, typical and distinctive activities chosen as leisure pastimes by a given social category, group or stratum. This concept characterizes leisure in the stratification aspect, i.e. not what leisure is in general, but how it differs for different social subjects.

Leisure patterns are the characteristic, typical, distinctive activities, fixed by the social-groups in certain social categories, groups, and strata, which the latter choose to perform outside paid labor and outside the activities they do by necessity or by obligation (for instance housekeeping, care for the family and household, care for their outward appearance, hygiene, nutrition, sleep, and other such). This is a term that characterizes leisure in the stratification aspect, i.e. not as what it represents in itself but by its structure-defining particularities for different social groups.

Leisure patterns are of crucial importance for delineating the status position of the followers of those patterns in contemporary society. This new function and role they have as a leading indicator of social-group status emerges with the appearance and development of postmodern society, where the choice of the individual who is "free of material-economic coercion" plays an increasingly central role.

Theoretically, in postmodern societies, opportunities for leisure and for the choice of ways and forms of spending it, grow greater: the social subjects have greater possibilities to choose what they will do in their leisure, to choose their consumer behavior, to shape their consumer status and consumer culture, to be active and enterprising in their spare time and as consumers. The more developed a society is, the greater the freedom of its members (all other things being equal) to form their consumption and leisure patterns. Ultimately, the possibility of choice of leisure activities, of the forms and means in which that choice is fulfilled, are also an important indicator of social-group status: the greater this ability to choose, the higher the status position the individual holds.

But in the developed societies there are also evident trends of decreasing leisure time among certain socio-professional groups, as proven by a number of studies[141]. The people affected by this trend are consequently postponing some of their consumer and leisure practices for a time when they hope to have more free time. It seems that in postmodern society people from the middle and upper strata, due to the choice they have made regarding their career and professional development, are forced to decrease their free time to a point where they practically have none, and to even restrict their consumption of certain items, goods, and services. But these are voluntary restrictions, a matter, once again, of choice.

141 Oriel Sullivan and Jonathan Gershuny, 2004, Oriel Sullivan, 2008.

I also consider as relevant to the leisure patterns the specific attitudes, evaluations, expectations, and degree of satisfaction regarding the patterns one is following, as well as the desire eventually to change them.

In analyzing the concept, we see that leisure patterns include: the amount of leisure time that social groups have, the typical ways in which they use it, the typical activities they fill it with, and the attitudes, values, and satisfaction regarding the listed aspects.

In some cases leisure may be devoted to consumption; in others, consumption might occur outside leisure activities. The inclusion of consumption within leisure depends on whether it is done as a freely chosen activity or is a necessary one, is part of domestic work and family obligations. The relations between consumption patterns and leisure patterns are similar. In some cases the two may coincide depending on the nature of the activity carried out. For instance, eating in a restaurant in order to satisfy one's hunger may be related to the consumption patterns of the social groups for whom this is a typical activity. But if this is a characteristic form of social contact and recreation, then it falls in the framework of leisure. In the latter case the consumption pattern and leisure pattern coincides. Of course, as in many such cases, it is not possible to draw a strict dividing line between social phenomena so proximate.

In connection with the reduction trend in leisure time among the high and middle strata since the beginning of the 21st century, we may distinguish a new, inconspicuous consumption[142]. In the latter, as in conspicuous consumption, expensive commodities are bought for pleasure, but for lack of time, they remain not shown to others and even not used. Their demonstration and even their use are postponed for an indefinite future, when more free time will be available. That is why the representatives of the high and middle strata have been described as "income-rich, time-poor"[143]. In the case of the consumption and leisure patterns described above, the consumers derive satisfaction from the thought that they possess a certain item and from the hope it will be used in the imagined and indefinite future, when they will enjoy greater leisure. This is different from the "modest" forms of ordinary consumption[144], aimed at "ordinary" products and services that are far from indicating affluence and high status.

At the end of the 20th century much of the debate relating to leisure has focused upon the question of whatever individual identities are shaped by leisure or employment-related practices.

Lifestyle

The complete clarification of the interrelations between the concepts of "consumption", "leisure", "consumption patterns", and "leisure patterns" leads to a more general concept of "lifestyle".

Since the 1960s, when societies began to enter their postmodern stage of development, the concept of "lifestyle" has increasingly come to be used not only by sociologists: it has taken a prominent place in public space, in the vocabulary of the media, and in everyday conversation. Featherstone rightly says it has become fashionable. But its wide use has not helped make it clearer and more specific; far from this, in the early 1980s a point was reached where it "included everything and meant nothing"[145].

This concept attracted the interest of the classics of sociology, but they mention it in passing rather than put it in the focus of their research. Without having focused on lifestyle as such, Karl Marx discussed "commodity fetishism" and "bourgeois decadence". In the Marxist tradition, lifestyle depends above all on the objective position of individuals in the production process, a position that ultimately determines the values, attitudes, and general life experience. Lifestyle is full of teleological meaning inasmuch as the objective of the communist revolution is a society in which individuals develop their abilities once they are freed from capitalist coercion; under communism, the difference between labor and leisure is erased.

Max Weber introduces the concept of lifestyle in connection with his study of the concepts of class, status and power. The class position of a person structures his/her lifestyle inasmuch as "it creates specific life opportunities"[146]. But class position is only a preliminary condition for lifestyle and does not in itself ensure affiliation to a status group possessing a definite status prestige and lifestyle. Since prestige derives from group affiliation, and since status groups require their members to share a specific lifestyle, through their lifestyle they express, manifest their group affiliation and status. Weber generalized that, putting it simply, classes may be said to be stratified according to their attitude to the production and obtainment of commodities; while "status groups" are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of commodities represented in the specific 'lifestyles'"[147]. In his view, lifestyle is interesting above all as a means of expressing the distinction between status and class. This specification is important, for social strata (not classes) are status groups as Weber understands them. They are constituted by the statuses of their carriers, and lifestyle plays a decisive role for distinguishing them.

On the basis of Weber's discussion, the following generalizations can be made:

- First, class position does not automatically posit lifestyle; i.e. the latter does not follow from the former.
- Second, lifestyle unites the members of a status group insofar as they share a lifestyle specific to that group;
- Third, lifestyle significantly distinguishes status groups from one another.
- Fourth, considering the points listed above, we may conclude that: lifestyle has a system-forming function and role with respect to social-group status; it is an indicator of group affiliation and status.

142 Oriel Sullivan and Jonathan Gershuny, op. cit., Oriel Sullivan, op. cit.

143 Oriel Sullivan and Jonathan Gershuny, op. cit., Oriel Sullivan, op. cit.

144 Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde, op. cit.

145 Michael Sobel, 1981, p. 83; p. 1.

146 Max Weber, 1978/1922, pp. 180-196.

147 Max Weber, op. cit., pp. 180-196.

Thorstein Veblen believed that in modern societies, wealth was the main mark of success and, therefore, of prestige, but possessing the former cannot in itself evoke the latter if it is not accompanied by some visible manifestation. Lifestyle, in this case, transforms wealth into a socially observable symbol. The demonstration of "pseudo-scientific and pseudo-artistic achievements and knowledge about processes and cases that are not directly related to the advance of human existence"[148] is aimed at achieving prestige. Since the latter is created by acknowledgement of certain virtues, the rich are inclined to turn money into symbols visible to the ordinary observer. These symbols correspond to the hierarchy of their values and tastes.

Although Weber and Veblen differed on their view of the notion of lifestyle, for both of these classical authors the concept was a system-forming one. According to them, lifestyle defines appurtenance to a specific status group; it also delimits in a significant way the social-group formations from one another.

The symbolic approach, whose adherents are primarily interested in measuring social-economic status[149] also use lifestyle as an indicator of the position occupied in the stratification system. Other research approaches, working within the fields of urban sociology, ethno sociology, social psychology, gender studies, etc., emphasize the diversification of lifestyles, their delimitation according to affiliation to separate subcultures, according to differences between urban and rural, between city and suburbs, between ethnic groups, races, genders, age groups, etc. In a broader sense the term includes "the series of clearly distinguishable behavior patterns, including institutional patterns, such as family styles, value orientations towards the world in general and the patterns of inter-personal and inter-group behavior"[150].

In my opinion, these standpoints show that this is an indicator for distinguishing the separate social-structural formations that are divided on the basis of their distinctive lifestyle, different from those of others. Other authors have followed up this line of research: this term is perceived by them not only as an indicator of the position held in the structure of society but as expressing the essence of social class. According to them, "the construction of social class is actually only a sub-series of indicators of lifestyle"[151].

Lifestyle acquires these characteristics at a certain stage of social-historical development: lifestyle is "a distinctive form of social grouping" in postmodern society, based on the social organization of consumption[152]. Traits such as gender, age, marital status, children in the family (including their ages and number), racial, ethnic and religious affiliation, health status, etc., which underlie the horizontal social inequalities, exert a certain influence on lifestyle in determining the basic differences between the members of a given social stratum. Modern marketing focuses special attention on consumer behavior and the tastes of women, due to their leading role in patterns

148 Thorstein Veblen, op. cit., p. 40.

149 F. Stuart Chapin, 1935, Bernard Barber, 1957, W.H. Sewell, 1940.

150 Melvin Marvin Tumin, 1970, p. 179.

151 James H. Myers and Jonathan Gutman, 1974, p. 236.

152 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 14.

of purchasing for the household and their greater engagement in domestic labor. Women are "among the vanguard of innovations in lifestyle", so through them it is possible to observe characteristic "gender differences in lifestyle within the same social stratum"[153]. In developed societies, as it will be mentioned further on with respect to the Japanese case, special attention is given to the lifestyle of retired persons. The latter are a social group oriented to leisure activities, civic activeness, and volunteer work in local communities, and to a healthy way of life.

Lifestyle is closely connected with identity and it characterizes a person's class, status group or subculture[154]. Groups and community identities are formed through lifestyle-related practices[155]. Hence, lifestyle has an "identification value"[156], because it connects people in specific ways with their significant "others" and maintains social ties between them. The lifestyle shared within a local community strengthens ties between members, emphasizes the importance of belonging to the community, and plays the role of a cohesive factor, even a "welding" force, for community identity. Lifestyle is a significant indicator of the ways in which social ties are formed and in which solidarity appears in the group and community[157]. This important function is one of the reasons why "lifestyle" is so widely used and is also an important theoretical instrument for the study of social-group status in modern theories of social stratification.

Starting from the late 1960s, it was believed that the concept of lifestyle permitted explaining the new social importance that consumption had acquired at that time as one of the important indicators of social-group status[158]. This idea of the new social role of consumption could never have crystallized in social theory without the concept of lifestyle, because the latter makes it possible to clarify how social ties are formed between people within social-group formations, ties that enable attaching a specific social status to these people[159]. A phenomenon like lifestyle, and the concept that seeks to explain it, play a particular, important role, revealing the mechanisms that unite people and groups and ascribe certain statuses to them. McCracken compares the importance of lifestyle to that of what he calls the "Diderot effect" and "Diderot unity". The 18th century French philosopher investigated the changes brought about in his life when he acquired an elegant new silk robe. In changing his old robe for the new one, Diderot found himself in a situation in which he gradually substituted various other items with new ones so they would match the fashionable robe that was gently imposing its dictate on him. Thus the old writing desk and even all the furniture had to be changed for new ones; the atmosphere in his study became different – gradually the room became elegant and tidy, but lost the atmosphere and spirit of the previous

153 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 21-22.

154 Benjamin Zablocki, and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, 1976, p. 271.

155 Rosemary Crompton, 1992, p. 128.

156 Alan Warde, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

157 Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit., pp. 228, 295.

158 William Lazer, 1963, Sidney J. Levy, 1963, David G. Moore, 1963, J.T. Plummer, 1971.

159 Grant David McCracken, 2001/1988, pp. 124-125.

modest room[160]. This phenomenon is seen as illustrating the mechanisms (the effect) that create and maintain the systemic integrity (unity) in consumption patterns, and explain the system-forming function of lifestyle as a social phenomenon[161].

Some authors define lifestyle too generally as "a set of attitudes, values, ways of behavior, tastes with respect to everything from music, art and television to gardening and home furnishing"[162]. But such a view is too broad, amorphous, not centered, hence does not enable distinguishing the differentia specifica of the concept under study.

Proceeding from his theory on various kinds of capital, Bourdieu follows his class scheme and defines the lifestyles specific to different classes. Cultural consumption is "predestined to fulfill the social function of legitimating social differences"[163]. The firmest and most insurmountable barriers between classes are raised through non-acceptance, even detestation, with regard to those who differ from one's own lifestyle[164]. The dominant class, in which he includes professors and high-ranking state officials, has a greater cultural than economic capital, and its lifestyle is characterized by "ascetic aristocratism". The representatives of liberal professions and industrialists are famed for their love of luxury, while the "petty bourgeoisie" has a lifestyle of "self-restriction and pretentiousness"[165]. What he calls the "broad strata" follow "mass models of behavior", respectively of consumption, and they are obliged to make "the choice of the necessary", i.e. functional adaptation to social needs is imposed on them by economic and social necessity.

Mike Featherstone specifies that if lifestyle is understood as primarily connected with income, it would be impossible to attain a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms of its formation. Taste cannot be explained only through income, for cultural capital has "its own value structure… logic and currency, as well as its own exchange rate of conversion into economic capital"[166]. Important for lifestyle is not only the correlation between economic, cultural, and symbolic capital but also their socially established "mutual exchange rate". The relations between the separate social classes greatly depend on the "convertibility" of the different kinds of capital that they dispose of.

As regards the carrier of lifestyle, this may be an individual, a group, a social category, a community, an institution, society, even a whole culture. Style, as a "system of coordinated ways or patterns of doing certain things"[167] underlies the characteristics that delimit separate civilizations and cultures, which, for their part, express specific styles. The activities included under lifestyle are significant in a specific social, historical, cultural, etc., context.

160 Denis Diderot, 1964, p. 311.
161 Grant David McCracken, op. cit., pp. 120-121.
162 Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Brian S. Turner, 1984, p. 344.
163 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit. p.7.
164 Pierre Bourdieu, 1995, p. 104.
165 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., pp. 2-7
166 Mike Featherstone, 1987, p. 62.
167 Arthur Kroeber, 1963, p. 66.

In some cases lifestyle is defined as "way of life", but with the specification that, despite the proximity between the two concepts, lifestyle is not synonymous with way of life. Lifestyle is defined as "a characteristic, distinct, hence recognizable, different from the others, way of life"[168]. Unlike "way of life", in the case of lifestyle what is foremost is the possible activeness of the proponent of lifestyle.

The author argues that, despite the close proximity between the concepts of lifestyle and way of life, the two are not synonymous. Unlike 'way of life', 'lifestyle' emphasizes the activeness of the agent and the choices he/she makes among the various options at his/her disposal. Lifestyle is a characteristic and distinctive way of life. Since social-group formations are active in their lifestyle and can choose it, lifestyle is a significant indicator of their status. In modern societies it is a result of their activity; through it they delimit themselves from some social-structure formations and draw closer to others. The way of life, unlike lifestyle, is determined by the social-group status of individuals and groups, and is a result of that status.

There is another significant difference between the two concepts. Way of life, unlike lifestyle, is defined by a profession, employment, a person's position in the system of social labor, in brief, by the occupied social-group status of individuals and groups, it comes as a result of the latter. That is why, unlike "way of life", lifestyle is said to be a "chosen", "modeled", "structured", way of life[169], which, for its part, determines status.

According to above quoted author, specially important for lifestyle is "free choice", while other sociologists question this view[170]. The latter believe that more important for lifestyle than "free choice" are the "forces, mechanisms, and institutional order"[171], which limit the possibility of choice. Whether it refers to "free choice" or to structures, mechanisms and institutions that restrict it, making it not so free, lifestyle is invariably connected with the dimensions of choice. It is important to take into account the obvious and important difference between choice and the activeness of the persons who choose. The latter may be active even when they perform inevitable, necessary activities for themselves or the groups they belong to – this is so because they plan, organize, realize, position, rank in a hierarchy, assess, etc., these activities.

The concept of "lifestyle", unlike "leisure", does not include only the activities chosen by the people who lead it. Lifestyle is also connected with the behavior, activity, way of thought, which, although they are an expression of the activeness of people displaying them, might not be the object of choice but a matter of necessity. Such are the activities, as mentioned above, related to maintaining and reproducing human life (sleep, eating, maintaining outward appearance and hygiene, dressing, rest, etc.), domestic chores (shopping, cooking, house cleaning, care for family and household), etc. The particular thing is that the social-group actors choose when and how to perform these activities, and they plan them, organize, position, experience, evaluate them in their own distinctive, characteristic ways, which they have chosen and preferred. In

168 Michael E. Sobel, op. cit., p. 28.
169 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 99.
170 David Bell and Joanne Hollows, 2006, p. 2.
171 Alan Warde and Lydia Martens, op. cit., p. 129.

other words, although carrying out such activities and practices is not a question of choice (they are imposed and made necessary by various circumstance and factors), the activeness of actors becomes evident in the way and time of carrying them out, in how actors arrange them in a hierarchy, how they evaluate and experience them. Determinant in lifestyle are activeness, initiative, enterprise, which put a distinctive stamp even on activities in which outward circumstances must be taken into account and "institutional order" is unavoidable. In such cases, certain social-group actors "choose" to be active, while others "follow the current" of things and let themselves be dependent in some way on the environment. In other words, activities falling under the category of lifestyle are not always "chosen", but the people performing these activities decide whether to perform them and when, how to perform them; this activeness of theirs distinguishes them from others. The people belonging to one and the same stratum or status group, carry out unavoidable, necessary activities in a way that is similar in type, shared by all others in the group.

Another reason for their inclusion in the structure of lifestyle is the fact that the latter differ in nature, proportion, and amount in the different social groups, categories, strata, and are an indicator of stratification position of these groups. The proportion between the chosen activities and the ones imposed by necessity, and the character and amount of the latter, is connected not only by vertical inequalities according to economic situation, power resources, education, etc. The proportion depends no less on other factors, engendering horizontal inequalities, as mentioned above. In this sense, the particularities, size, types, and frequency, and ways of carrying out, the "unavoidable activities", and the related attitudes, values, and satisfaction, are marks of social-group status. They are an important component of lifestyle, together with leisure patterns and consumption patterns.

In postmodern society, according to Mike Featherstone, "the new heroes of consumer culture turn lifestyle into a life project and express their individuality and understanding of style by the specific set of commodities, clothing, practices, experience, outward appearance that they create as their own lifestyle"[172]. The greater economic freedom and higher living standard people enjoy in this type of society, all other things being equal, create greater opportunities for free choice and activeness in lifestyle for different social groups and strata.

According to my own view, some of the phenomena pertaining to lifestyle are: the complete set of typical and distinctive particularities and characteristics of activities other than paid labor, activities that can be freely chosen or done out of necessity but in ways specific to the individual or group, as well as all the subjective assessments, attitudes and feelings of satisfaction related to those activities[173]. Lifestyle, although at first glance a product of individual choice, goes beyond individual distinctiveness; through it individuals can express themselves and their preferences, but it remains, nevertheless, something pertaining to the social-group and is a form of collective

172 Mike Featherstone, 1991, p. 86.

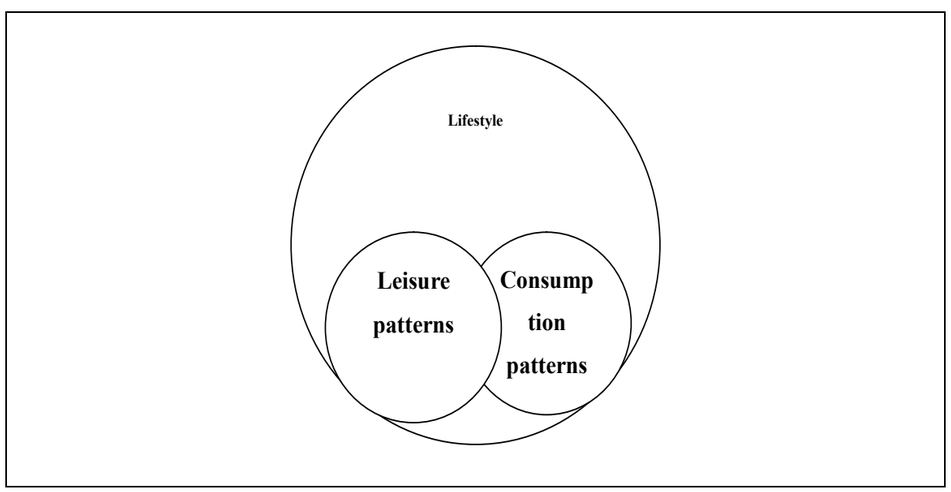
173 Maya Keliyan, 2010, p. 24-26.

identity[174]. Lifestyle creates social bonds between people and significantly delimits, distinguishes social-formations from one another[175].

The correlation between the concepts of "lifestyle", "leisure patterns" and "consumption patterns" are schematically presented in the following figure:

Figure 1

Structure of the concept of "lifestyle"



On the basis of the above analysis and the adopted stratification approach, I define the concept under study in the following way:

Lifestyle is defined as a synthesis, a unity stabilized through the social-group, a unity of specific, typical and distinguishable consumption patterns, leisure patterns of individuals, of various distinctive activities, apart from paid labor, as well as the evaluations, attitudes and satisfaction related to them. Lifestyle (similar in this respect to consumption patterns and leisure patterns) is structure-defining for social subjects and is among the key indicators of social-group status in postmodern society.

It is only in postmodern society that we may refer to lifestyle, for in it the possibilities of choice increase considerably; under the new conditions, "way of life turns into a lifestyle"[176] and, as such, becomes an important indicator of occupied position in the stratification system of society.

It is very important not only to point out but also to stress one decisive fact: in this dissertation, the new social role of consumption, the changes in consumption patterns, and the importance of lifestyle, are examined not as positive or negative but as value neutral. It is true that with the entry of developed societies into the postmodern stage

174 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 11, 31, Michel Maffesoli, 1996 .

175 Mike Featherstone, 1991, p. 13.

176 Benjamin Zablocki and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, op. cit., p. 280, David Chaney, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

we observe a number of tendencies in consumer culture and in lifestyle that may be evaluated negatively in their moral aspect – for instance consumerism, globalization of consumer models, trends that destroy local particularities and traditions, that vulgarize and commercialize culture[177], etc. What is important for this study is how the mechanisms of social structuring of contemporary societies change, what creates and strengthens the social ties between people in groups, and distinguishes one social-structural formation from others.

The essential changes taking place in consumption bring about corresponding changes in lifestyle as well; among these the most important is the "birth" itself of lifestyle, linked to the transition from "way of life" to "lifestyle". Lifestyle is a concept that is "relevant to a certain social reality": to postmodern society, and as "a social phenomenon, it represents an integral characteristic of development" of that society[178]. That is why it is believed that the concept under study reflects a significant form of social association in postmodern society and its study is an important aspect of the study of the structure and forms of the latter.

4. The middle strata and contemporary consumption

The middle strata: definitions, composition, peculiarities

In stratification theories, the middle strata have been studied in great detail, analyzed, and precisely defined; hence it will not be necessary to again discuss their nature, which is very familiar to the scientific community in this field[179]. In order not to stray from the direction of the dissertation, I will not enter into the details of the various views.

The notion of "middle class" is incompatible with Karl Marx's class dichotomy, but is close to Max Weber's understanding of "status groups". I am following the neo-Weberian tradition in the theories of classes and social stratification, elaborated by British sociologists and by our Bulgarian colleagues[180]. According to the proponents of this view, the middle class is defined on the basis of an aggregate of criteria. They include not only ownership of the means of production, income and assets, but also the type of employment, the work situation, profession, occupation, education, prestige, power resources, cultural status, lifestyle, consumption patterns, values system, political views and behavior, etc. The middle class holds an intermediate place in the stratification

177 For more details, see Maya Keliyan, 2008, pp. 190-215, pp. 263-293.

178 David Chaney, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

179 For more details see Alvin W. Gouldner, 1979, John Goldthorpe, 1982, 1987, 2000, Rosemary Crompton, 1993, M. S. Hickox, op. cit., Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Tom Butler and Mike Savage, op. cit., Mike Savage 2000, 2001, etc.

180 See John Goldthorpe 1982, Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Tom Butler and Mike Savage, op. cit., Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 2002, Maya Keliyan, op. cit.

ladder, in the so-called stratification middle[181]. Due to the heterogeneous nature of this class, it would be more appropriate to speak, not of a single middle class, but of middle classes in the plural, or more precisely of middle strata. The middle strata are an "explanatory mechanism for the processes and changes in contemporary societies"[182].

In studying the middle strata, it is important to have in mind the following[183]:

1. The social-economic situation of a group, although it is of foremost importance in determining the stratification boundaries of the middle strata, is not a sufficient or unique criterion for distinguishing these strata. Social-economic status, for its part, is not reducible only to financial status, to the incomes and assets, but depends on the work situation and type of employment and occupation, on profession, market situation, job position, and institutional power resources.

2. The middle strata have an achieved social-economic status, based on education and qualification, on organizational skills, property; they rely mainly on their own labor and enjoy autonomy in their labor activity, carried out legally.

3. Three basic middle strata can be distinguished:

- Those including the private entrepreneurs in small and middle business, who mostly use their economic resources, such as real estate, financial means and property;
- Administrators, who rely mainly on their organizational resource;
- Professionals, known in some former communist countries as the "intelligentsia", who have their cultural resource consisting in education, knowledge and qualification.

4. The middle strata are enterprising social actors; they share post-materialistic values[184] and have a corresponding lifestyle and consumption patterns.

The middle strata as postmodern consumers

Consumer practices affirm and reproduce social hierarchies, and this function of theirs appears with various degrees of force in different social groups and strata and in different types of society. "Maintenance of consumer practices" largely depends on one's place in the social structure and "on economic and class position"[185]. Among the various patterns of consumer behavior of the middle strata, two basic types may be distinguished[186]. One type of consumers are defined as traditionalists and conformists; the other, as radical innovators, adherents of new, vanguard consumption patterns. Until the late 1960s, or until the features of the emerging postmodern society became distinct, the middle strata were perceived primarily as conformists, for most of them

181 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit.

182 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., p. 20.

183 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp.137-261.

184 In a sense Roland Inglehart, op. cit., used the term.

185 Rosemary Crompton, 1996, p. 118.

186 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., p. 99.

followed conservative consumption patterns[187]. But in the 1970s and 80s, a radical change came about in their consumer culture. At that time their relative share in the population grew appreciably and the new middle strata[188] came to the fore, as expressers of "progressive social and cultural views"[189]. Their growing numbers and importance are related to the particularities and requirements of postmodern society, which increasingly needs, and invests in, developed sectors of services, science, education, information technologies, media communications, etc. The new middles have been defined as the social carrier of post-materialistic values[190], and are considered to be the social basis of postmodern culture[191].

In postmodern society, consumption becomes the foundation for "the construction of a lifestyle", and the "consumption patterns of the middle class are perceived as the norm"[192] and "standardized ideal" that all others strive to achieve. Commodities are no longer produced for anonymous and undifferentiated masses of consumers but are aimed at concrete social strata, the most important of which are the middle strata. In parallel with the development of postmodern society, we witness a transition to mass production and consumption[193], to increasingly active search for market niches, flexible production, and rapid change of current consumer trends. There are growing possibilities for choice, it becomes increasingly important to show and emphasize not the similarities to, but the differences from, others. It is no longer important to "catch up with the others" and "achieve their standard", but to "discover the difference in comparison with them"[194].

This "marks the end of traditional social structures and divisions, based foremost on production" and clearly demonstrates the importance of consumption and of lifestyle in distinguishing them[195]. The ever expanding middle strata are most actively included in the creation of a postmodern lifestyle, in the "production and dissemination of its values"[196].

Possibilities of choice increase, but some social categories, groups, and strata have greater resources than others to use the freedom available to them. Another significant distinction is that between forms and ways in which the separate social-structural formations act (whether these formations be enterprising or restrict themselves to satisfying their needs within the boundaries of the familiar and well-established,

187 Charles Wright Mills, 1951, William H. Whyte, 1957.

188 By new middle class we mean all the social strata that have been created in modern times. These are people connected with large social organizations, institutions, etc., and include managers, specialists, professionals, experts, technicians, civil servants, etc.

189 Alwin W. Gouldner, op. cit.

190 Roland Inglehart, 1977, 1997.

191 Scott Lash and John Urry, op. cit.

192 David Bell and Joanne Hollows, 2006, p. 3.

193 This transition is also known as a transition from Fordist to post-Fordist methods of production.

194 David Bell and Joanne Hollows, 2005, p. 4.

195 Mike Featherstone, 1991, p. 83.

196 Mike Featherstone, 1987, p. 56.

following in the beaten path). These processes are related, on one hand, to the large size and stability of the middle strata in the stratification structure of postmodern society, and on the other to their social group characteristics. Starting from the 1960s, the new middles have come to the fore. These social-professional groups have the needed social-group resource that allows them to utilize the available opportunities for individual self-expression and initiative, and to choose in matters of consumption and lifestyle. This makes the new middle the "new trendsetters in matters of taste"; they are people who invest in consumption and in the "art of living"[197]. Some of them even "take their lifestyle more seriously than they do their professional career"[198] and strive to "educate themselves in the art of lifestyle"[199]. The work positions that they occupy permit them to have "some cultural authority as creators of taste and disseminators of new consumer values"[200]. On the basis of all this, Pierre Bourdieu defines the members of the "new bourgeoisie" and "new petty bourgeoisie" (as they are delimited according to this class scheme) as "cultural mediators", who ensure symbolic commodities and services[201]. Also, these new middle strata have a growing share and importance in society by their "upward trajectory in social space". They invest in education and in their cultural capital, and in pursuing "expressive and emancipated lifestyles"[202], they strive in every way possible to distinguish themselves both from the old middle[203] strata[204], and from the working class. In striving to legitimate themselves as "new intellectuals", they "invest in the art of living"[205]. They identify with the "intellectual lifestyle" and play the role of a transmission and intermediaries between "intellectual ideas" and the broader public. All this makes them "consumers by nature" and the chief characters in the "process of creating the perfect consumer"[206]. They are "cultural entrepreneurs" who try to legitimize the intellectualization of practices located far from "high taste" and belonging to mass culture.

The postmodern lifestyle is defined in literature as directly linked to the middle strata; various authors differ only as regards the relative importance they attach to specific groups within the middle strata[207]. According to Scott Lash and John Urry[208] the "top-rank white collars" belonging to the "service class" play a leading role for

197 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., pp. 310, 366.

198 Sam Binkley, op. cit. p. 72.

199 Beverley Skeggs, op. cit., p. 136.

200 Sean Nixon and Paul Du Gay, 2002.

201 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., pp. 359-371.

202 Mike Featherstone, op. cit., p. 64

203 The old middle class encompasses all the strata whose existence as social groups is derived from the pre-industrial and pre-modern society. These are predominantly the small artisans, traders, farmers, and people exercising independent professions, such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc.

204 Bourdieu calls them the "old petty bourgeoisie".

205 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 370.

206 Mike Featherstone, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

207 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

208 Scott Lash and John Urry, 1987.

creating postmodern forms of culture. In striving to clarify the nature of these groups, some authors have pointed out the importance of highly-educated employees in large corporations[209]. Others believe the leading group are the professionals in advertising, because they "produce symbols"[210].

In the 1990s a distinction was reached between three clearly different types of lifestyle among the middle strata. These were: the ascetic, typical for professionals from the budget sector; the postmodern, current among professionals and specialists from the private sector, and the ordinary, also designated as the inconspicuous or even dull lifestyle, typical for managers and state officials[211]. According to the cited authors, in contemporary postmodern society professionals from the private sector play a key role for determining the leading lifestyle trends, especially professionals from the sphere of finance, advertising, real estate market, and personnel management. This importance is determined by the fact that in the early 1990s they were the dominant social group in the cultural, social, and economic aspect[212]. In the front ranks of this lifestyle were the young professionals from the private sector, who are prepared to easily part with the consumption patterns inherited from their ancestors and turn to new patterns. Given that contemporary postmodern lifestyle involves a "valuation and transformation of a commodity into cultural patterns", these groups of the middle strata have the greatest chances of taking part in this process. The postmodern, which is overall associated with the commercialization of culture and the massification of "high culture", moves on a different track from the strivings of highly-cultivated intellectuals who cannot be the leaders of such a lifestyle but can only comment on it[213].

In the social structure of postmodern society, the "service class"[214] has a special place[215]. Although understood in different ways by different authors[216], depending on their class schemas, its place and importance in contemporary consumption patters and lifestyle is undisputed. Certain social groups in the quickly developing "service class" use the postmodern tastes and lifestyle they have assimilated in order to ascribe to themselves the highly desired "intellectual" public image[217]. Playing the role of postmodern consumers, they are an "avant-garde" of the "disorganization of capitalism"[218]. According to Rosemary Crompton[219] the growing proportion of such

209 Fred Pfeil, 1988.

210 Scott Lash, 1990.

211 For instance, a young man living in London and working in the field of advertising will undoubtedly follow a postmodern lifestyle and will be a yuppie. See Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

212 The reference is to Great Britain, but similar trends are observable in other contemporary societies.

213 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

214 Various authors include under this category different socio-professional groups, but most generally it comprises professionals, experts, administrators, and managers.

215 John H.Goldthorpe, Catriona Llevellyn and Clive Payne, 1987.

216 John Goldthorpe, 1982, Scott Lash and John Urry, op. cit.

217 Scott Lash and John Urry, 1994.

218 Scott Lash and John Urry, 1987.

219 Rosemary Crompton, 1992.

people and their increasing heterogeneity as a group, lead to great differences in their class consciousness and in their consumption patterns and lifestyles. These differences could play both an "organizing" (according to John Goldthorpe) and "disorganizing" (according to Scott Lash and John Urry) role in postmodern society.

A number of British sociologists accept Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that the various middle strata oppose one another in order to affirm their separate identity, social position and importance[220]. But they disagree with him that "the concretization of the mentioned contradictions corresponds to the empirical reality outside France"[221]. According to some authors when studying the lifestyle of the new middle strata within Bourdieu's schema, there is no place left for certain representatives of the "service class", such as the so-called organization man[222]. This type of official follows the line of inconspicuous consumption, instead of conspicuous as we might expect according to Bourdieu's schema. According to the cited authors, Bourdieu has not sufficiently taken into account the impact not only of organizational capital, but that of the household, age, and gender, upon the specific ways in which cultural capital is used. Thus, the role of some important factors remains underestimated – factors such as institutional affiliation, the characteristics of the household, marital status, gender and age, which also influence the consumption patterns and lifestyle of various middle strata[223].

Other authors also feel that Bourdieu's concept is valid mostly for French society, in which "class structures are particularly stable and high culture is greatly valued"[224]. When this concept is applied to other societies difficulties arise – for instance in the case of Hong Kong, where high culture has never been as highly regarded as in France. In the Hong Kong of colonial and post-colonial times, money has been the significant social value, equal in importance to high culture in France. The upper social strata in this "pragmatic, materialistic, and earthly" megapolis have never been and never tried to be "cultural aristocrats". Their cultural capital in the colonial period up to 1997 (when sovereignty was transferred to the People's Republic of China) was limited, and much greater social value was attached to economic capital. A high level of education is perceived as a means for obtaining well-paid work. The quickly developing new middle strata and the service class strive to obtain social recognition through wealth, not through cultural achievements. Criteria such as taste and cultural capital are not decisive for inclusion in the higher classes. A privileged social position in Hong Kong is proven through conspicuous consumption and through generous donations to charity. Unlike the French society that Bourdieu studied, knowledge and taste in art unsupported by money are not a source of social prestige in Hong Kong.

The attention paid to Hong Kong in this study on Bulgaria and Japan is not a deviation from the topic. The processes that impact on the formation of the consumption patterns and lifestyle of new middle strata in Hong Kong can be a basis for thinking about the

220 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., p. 100.

221 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 66, p. 102.

222 In the terms of William H. Whyte, op. cit.

223 Simon Gunn, op. cit.

224 Gordon Mathews and Tailok Lui, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

similarity of trends in Bulgaria and Japan. Are the cases of Bulgaria and Japan closer to that of Hong Kong or to France as described by Bourdieu? I will give a preliminary answer to this question, purposely anticipating the discussion. Both in Bulgaria, a society belonging to European civilization and culture, and in Japan, high culture and taste are an important value, similar to their position in France and unlike that in Hong Kong. Starting from the dawn of the history of the Bulgarian state, the Bulgarian aristocracy strove to imitate the high cultural models of the Byzantine Empire. Since the national Revival in the 19th century, West European culture has been a model here and the ideal that Bulgaria has aspired to attain. But unlike France, in our country no class had the historical opportunity to be consistently associated with high culture over several generations and to reproduce a distinguished standard of taste in the next generations. Our social structure is far from having the stability of its French counterparts. In Japan high culture has always been respected, and by means of general education, wide social strata have been taught to appreciate its values. Unlike the French case, the demonstration of good taste in Japan is important not only for the high strata. Since the third quarter of the 19th century, when the country opened to the world, Japan has learned from the West and followed Western high cultural models. In this respect there is a certain similarity between the Bulgarian and Japanese perception of and attitude towards the West, specifically towards European culture. Both for Bulgarians and Japanese, high culture is invariable connected with the prestige of consumption patterns and lifestyle.

Since the 1990s the opposite tendencies have been observed in the lifestyle of the middle strata. A number of authors maintain that increasingly important in the self-identification of class position is not the distinctiveness of the consumption patterns and lifestyle of a person but rather the non-distinctive difference between strata in this respect[225]. These authors assume that consumption and lifestyle are not based only on abundant wealth; they are not related only to the desire to demonstrate symbolic difference in status. Increasingly important, according to them, is for people to show they are following ordinary consumption and lifestyle practices. The middle strata follow ordinary lifestyles and define themselves as the middle mass of ordinary people. They want to be "like the others", "like most people", and not to differ from them in their consumption patterns. After decades of highlighting great differences in the ways and forms of consumption, in consumer values, attitudes, tastes, and lifestyle, now the members of the middle strata feel comfortable when "merging with the mass"[226].

With regard to ordinary consumption patterns and lifestyles of the middle strata, it is important to specify that this trend is observed in developed European societies.

According to the thesis of this dissertation, ordinariness is a clear demonstration of the following tendencies:

- First, in contemporary developed West European societies the predominant

225 Alan Warde, 1997, 2002, Daniel Miller, op. cit., Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., David Bell and Joan Hollows, 2005, 2006, and others.

226 Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit.

trends are towards similarity, convergence of the consumption patterns and lifestyles of different social groups and strata.

- Second, people are following ordinary consumption patterns and lifestyles, yet this is not just any ordinariness but that specific to the middle strata, i.e. a middle class ordinariness. The consumption patterns of the lower strata[227] have not become a standard for the middle strata, but the latter do not identify with trends among the higher strata either. Instead, they seek the average, the ordinary.

- Thirdly, consumption is connected not only with distinction between, but also with the mechanisms of social integration between, different social formations[228]. Cultural boundaries in present-day postmodern societies are exceptionally dynamic. Similarities in consumption patterns are an indicator of a certain similarity between the social-group characteristics of the different strata and statuses.

On the basis of these conclusions we may generalize that: consumption patterns and lifestyles of the middle strata have become ordinary instead of distinctive, and as such, they are mass patterns and lifestyle, a model followed by the greater part of society. This trend is connected with the growing proportion of the middle strata in contemporary societies and the increasing self-identification of people with these strata[229]. The ordinariness of their consumption patterns and lifestyle does not mean these have ceased to be an indicator of social-group status. Only some of their characteristics have changed. Social-group differences and inequalities remain, but within the frame of ordinariness, not of affluence and extravagance. Neither would it be correct to say an end is coming to "class identity"; what we see is an emphasized importance of consumption as based on choice of lifestyle – in this case, of an ordinary lifestyle[230].

In postmodern society cyclic recurrence and repetitiveness are evident not only in fashion trends but also in the consumption patterns and lifestyle of the vanguard strata of consumption, the middle strata. In the 1950s they typically displayed "dull conformism and mass consumption"[231]; then, between the 1960s and 90s, there was increased variety and diversity, connected with their striving for distinction. Since the 1990s the emphasis has gone back to similarity to, rather than difference from, the other social strata. A kind of spiral movement can be traced, the latest trend being a sort of repetition at a higher level of the starting position.

In connection with the discussion on the tendency of leisure to decrease among the higher and middle strata since the start of the 21st century, we mentioned the inconspicuous consumption that has become emblematic for certain socio-professional

227 The lower-middle class includes groups with more limited financial capacity, with a secondary education, such as skilled workers, civil servants, traders, and other non-manual workers, small businesspersons, small farmers, etc.

228 Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, op. cit.

229 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp. 278-332

230 David Bell and Joanne Hollows, 2006, p. 2

231 Mike Featherstone, 1991, p. 83.

groups.

Starting from the late 1990s, among the upper strata and upper middle strata in developed countries there became popular consumption patterns demonstrating poverty. The lifestyle of these groups is a sort of combination of the counter-culture of the 1960s and the ambitious success culture of the 1980s. These are highly educated people who stand "with one foot in the world of artistic bohemianism and with the other in the bourgeois realm of ambitions and the desire for success"[232]. People belonging to the upper and upper middle strata in the IT age have a lifestyle that is simultaneously bourgeois and bohemian. Combining the first syllables of these words, David Brook has coined the ironic sounding designation bobo. In the age of highly developed information technologies, the upper and upper middle strata leading this lifestyle exert a very strong influence on contemporary culture. Despite their high social-economic stratus and prestige, they display a disregard for luxury in the traditional sense of the world. They prefer to demonstrate decadent taste through the ways and forms of their consumption, through the commodities they choose (for instance, they drive old run-down cars and wear shabby old clothes[233]), but they pay luxury prices for the "poverty" they display.

Middle strata consumption patterns, as the conducted analysis has shown, have changed very dynamically since the middle of the 20th century. The following generalization about their essential characteristics could be made:

1. Due to the social-group characteristics, size, and importance of the middle strata, ever since the beginning of postmodern society their consumption patterns have become emblematic and symptomatic for contemporary societies. These patterns are a symbol and model of a society's characteristic and distinctive consumer status, consumer behavior and culture; in other words, they are the visible face of contemporary consumer society.

2. In middle strata consumption patterns we can observe the latest and most topical consumer trends. These patterns indicate the changes and novelties in consumption; in postmodern society these changes are connected foremost with the growing use of information technologies and knowledge. The middle strata personify the changes and novelties in consumption, because they have the necessary resources (educational, cultural, economic) needed to discover, assimilate, and implement the innovations.

3. In this dissertation mention is made of the existence of different middle strata, including old and new; low, middle and upper middle. In the respective parts of the work I have pointed out the meaning of these long-used and much-used designations in stratification theory. Due to their heterogeneity, the middle strata are linked to different trends in consumption, represented by different groups following these trends. At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that postmodern society by its very nature lacks homogeneity, and it is not coincidental that precisely a heterogeneous social

232 David Brook, 2000.

233 In other words, they are related to the grunge style in fashion.

group formation like the middle strata should be emblematic for the social structure of postmodern society and hence for that society's consumption patterns and lifestyle.

4. In any modern society, the relative share of people identifying themselves as middle strata is greater than of people who really fall under this category by objective indicators; in other words, the so-called "subjective" middle class is always bigger than the objective one. This particular tendency will be traced in Bulgaria and Japan in the respective sections of the following two chapters. This phenomenon will be explained there, but here it is important to note the fact that one of the leading causes for the wider self-identification with the middle strata is their emblematic role for consumption patterns and lifestyle in contemporary societies. People belonging by objective criteria to other social strata strive to assume these consumption patterns and lifestyle as their own, strive to imitate them and thus to ascribe to themselves the social-group characteristics of the carriers of these patterns. Middle strata consumption patterns and lifestyle are so desirable and socially attractive because they are seen as symbols of all that is modern and significant in today's global world.

5. The nature of the new postmodern type of interconnection: "Consumption patterns" – "Social structuring of Society"

The social-group position occupied by people in postmodern society is a result not only of the place of individuals and groups in the system of social production: the specific features of their consumption and lifestyle also define it. What and how they consume, their leisure activities, and their lifestyle – all these contribute to determining their position within social structures and relations.

On one hand, consumption tends to efface class differences: mass consumption is marked by a high degree of standardization of commodities; consumer society is a mass society, and people from different social groups may have similar ways and forms of consumption and similar consumer values. On the other hand, class differences may grow stronger due to the variations in lifestyle and "taste" in Pierre Bourdieu's meaning of the word, where cultural taste is a marker of one's class[234]. The different classes and groups compete to impose their respective taste as legitimate and recognized by society[235]. Thus, consumption turns into an "arena of class struggle", if we may use the familiar phrase[236]. The globalized production and consumption leads to the appearance (in addition to the obvious differences) of certain similarities in the status characteristics and lifestyle of corresponding social strata in different societies. The similarities lie above all in their values and self-identification, while their biggest difference lies in their income levels and consumer standards[237].

234 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit.

235 Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., Mike Featherstone, 1987.

236 Norbert Boltz has sought this association in his book entitled The Consumerist Manifesto, 2004/2002, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

237 See Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 67-105.

Consumption has “a broader compass than social structures of production”[238]: consumers are not only people occupied in the work system, but also those who, for various reasons, are outside the system - for instance those too young to work, the retired, the unemployed, and housewives. Postmodern society is, by its nature, a consumer society[239], in which consumption plays not only an “organic” but also a “systemic” role[240].

Postmodern society is defined as a consumer society not only because people consume more and more, there is increasing variety of commodities, and most of these commodities are widespread and accessible to ever wider social strata of consumers – it is not in these alone that the large social changes taking place in postmodern society consist; this society is different from modern society not only because of this abundance, these mass characteristics, and the ubiquitous information technologies in it. The difference is not limited to the quality and quantity of consumption, it also concerns the deeper levels: the social function and role of postmodern consumption is essentially different from those in modern society.

The social function and role of postmodern consumption are different from what they were for modern society. The distinguishing features of postmodern society are its mechanisms of social structuring, in which, in addition to position within the system of social production, consumption patterns and lifestyle also play an important role. While in modern society consumption patterns usually are a consequence of the social stratification positions, in postmodern society they begin to determine them to a great degree. They become a significant and inseparable part of the process of reproduction, distribution and redistribution of economic, cultural, and power resources.

The concept that denotes the stratifying postmodern nature of consumption is ‘consumption patterns’. That is the heuristic function of the term: since consumption is stratified in character, the notion denoting it must characterize this stratification. It is distinctive and characteristic for postmodern society that the stratified consumption patterns are now among the important indicators of the social-stratification characteristics of this society. This function and role of consumption expresses the nature of the new postmodern type of interconnection, i.e. “consumption patterns” – “social structuring” of society.

But what is the situation in Bulgarian society after 1989? To what extent are these particularities of postmodern society valid for contemporary Bulgaria, which is not yet a developed country and has relatively recently adopted market principles and democracy? Would it be true to say that Bulgarian society has similar mechanisms to the postmodern ones with regard to social structuring, or that the ways and forms, values, tastes, attitudes related to consumption “stratify” people in our country as well, and that these are important indicators of occupied status? These questions can be answered by examining the consumption patterns and social-group characteristics of

238 David Chaney, op. cit., p. 15

239 Jean Baudrillard, 1970.

240 David Clarke, op. cit., p. 10

the middle strata in our country.

The role of consumption in the general structure of social inequality in Bulgaria and Japan is the topic of the following chapters, in which we will seek answers to the above questions.

Chapter two: consumption patterns, social - structural

Transformations, and middle strata patterns of development in Bulgaria

The specific features of modern consumption patterns in Bulgaria and Japan are undoubtedly marked by the past and by traditions. The aim of the dissertation is not to study the history of consumption in the two societies. But here, in keeping with the logic of the discussion, it is necessary to throw a glance at the recent past. The study of consumption patterns in the two societies and the importance of the middle strata ones in particular, requires tracing the ways and forms of consuming and the consumer values after the WWII, with a special focus on the middle strata, on their consumer status, behavior and culture. This period is exceptionally important because that is when the preconditions for postmodern society were created, and for the qualitatively new structure-defining role of consumption, and the emblematic role of the middle strata in contemporary lifestyle. The basic task of this part of our study[241] is to find the causes of the particularities of modern consumption patterns and specifically those of the middle strata.

Since it is only in postmodern society that consumption became one of the essential indicators of social-group status, it cannot possibly be claimed that consumption patterns served to stratify social groups prior to the emergence of this society. The patterns are determined by the occupied position in the social hierarchy, in the social division of labor, in power relations, etc. Hence in the previous historical stages – in Japan, before it became the world economic power, and in Bulgaria, before the transition to democracy and market economy, we should refer to "proto-consumption patterns". For the sake of brevity, this limiting designation is not always used in this text.

Knowledge of the "proto-forms" is an important stage of the study of contemporary consumption patterns. These proto-forms are part of the heritage of the recent past, gifts – as it were – received from the past[242]. The past leaves its formative mark on the features of contemporary consumer societies through past consumer behavior, consumer status, and consumer culture.

241 Respectively, in the first paragraphs of this and the following chapter.

242 Bert F. Hoselitz, 1966, p. 276.

What are the gifts from the past for the consumer models of the middle strata in present-day Bulgaria? How does the heritage of the "proto-forms" continue to influence present-day consumption, to determine and stratify it? What is the starting position in the movement towards contemporary consumption and social structuring?

1. Consumption and social structuring in bulgaria during communism

"Privileged" consumption in the context of deficit

The period after WWII, as mentioned in the Introduction, was extremely important for the modern state of consumption: that is when the "new" society – the postmodern one – emerged, which is a consumer society by nature. What transpired with the consumption of social groups and strata in Bulgaria at that time, while postmodern and consumer society was emerging in the more advanced countries to the west and to the east of Bulgaria? I will use the term "communist society" for this period of our country's history, without going into a discussion as to which term expresses most precisely the characteristics – social-economic, political, cultural, ideological – of that time (whether that period should be called one of "totalitarianism", "socialism", "plan economy", etc.). Though it is important in itself, this discussion would make us stray from the tasks of this dissertation.

Up to the end of the 1980s Bulgarian society developed in conditions of state ownership of the means of production and centralized planned economy. These conditions were political in nature; market relations and institutions had been abolished[243]. Despite the dominating ideological dogma that society had "overcome social-class inequality", in reality considerable differences could be observed between the separate social strata with regard to power resources, job and professional status, cultural status, property, income levels, consumption, etc. Due to the political character of society, the positions in the hierarchic structure of the ruling communist party determined not only the power resources, but were the basic source of social and economic inequality, as well as for inequality in consumption.

The authors whose major concepts on postmodern consumption were analyzed in Chapter One, point out that, together with the significant changes brought about in social structuring by consumption, it has led to negative changes as well, such as vulgarization of taste, loss of moral virtues and meaning in life, the rise of new social problems stemming from abundance, consumerism, avidity, conspicuous consumption, etc[244]. These aspects certainly exist and exert a strong influence on contemporary

243 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., p. 85.

244 For more details on these views, see Jean Baudrillard, 1970, 1975, 1981, 2003, Daniel Bell, op. cit., 1976, Mike Featherstone, 1987, 1990, 1995, Jean-François Lyotard, 1979, Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit. 1995, Fredric Jameson, op. cit., Roger Burrows and Catherine Marsh, op. cit., Daniel Miller, op. cit., Alan Warde, op. cit., etc.

societies and culture. In our country, however, during that time, when the positive, constructive aspect of postmodern consumption were disregarded, the official moral emphasis was that such consumption was something negative, damaging. There was an understandable reason for this emphasis: the economy of communist society was unable to provide such plenty for consumers. This fact had its "good" side as well: society generally remained unaffected by the consumer lifestyle – it was as if the latter had been overcome before its destructive force was ever felt[245].

The communist economy is redistributive by its very nature[246], and the redistribution of public resources depends on the position occupied by people in the political and administrative hierarchy. Under communism, the privileged elite of the Party, the nomenklatura,[247] is entitled to redistribute revenues, highly paid and prestigious positions, and other goods according to the loyalty to the Party demonstrated by people. This principle of redistribution was the supporting pillar of this type of society[248].

The position occupied in the power structures is an essential factor determining the economic, social and all other resources of individuals and groups. In the conditions of state ownership of the means of production and the total state regulation of the economy, the positions of separate individuals and groups in the structure of power were an important resource defining their economic condition; the importance of this factor is determined not only and not so much by the size of the salary as by privileges attached to power, providing access to material goods that are unavailable to people outside power structures. Data on the income of the ruling social stratum in Bulgaria, the so-called party, economic, and administrative nomenklatura, were classified information and were not mentioned in statistical sources. A great part of its income the nomenklatura received not in the form of salary but through various funds and privileges, such as those of obtaining food, cars, dwellings, hard currency, the use of vacation homes, etc. at much lower prices than the other strata of the population, in some cases even free-of-charge[249].

Under communism many of the important commodities were distributed through administrative channels: from the institutions in which people worked or through

245 Socialist society was strictly controlled in all spheres of life, and the dominant ideological principles played the role of official moral norms. That is why opulent conspicuous consumption was absent from public space, though some people in the high ranks of authority were able to lead opulent lifestyles. In the 1980s, however, there were cases of conspicuous consumption by some family members in such families which became known to the public. These were especially the children of top communist leaders, who displayed extravagance comparable with that of Western millionaires at that time. Among the representatives of the "affluent idle class" were also people connected in some way with the informal economy and some socio-professional groups in the service sphere. They were the target, in those years, of serious social criticism in various works of literature, drama and cinema, and some true masterpieces were created in their portrayal.

246 Ivan Szelenyi, 1978.

247 More on nomenklatura see Milovan Djilas, 1983/1957.

248 Andrew G. Walder, 1995.

249 According to the memoirs of a famous Bulgarian historian – Nikolai Genchev during the International Festival of Youth and The Students held in Sofia in 1968 on the ground of University of Sofia it was opened even a free of charge nightclub for the participants of the Festival and for "special gests". The nightclub was opened 24 hours and was managed from the Intelligent Services officials for the purpose of spying the clients after providing them free drinks which during that time where unavailable for ordinary Bulgarians (Nikolai Genchev, 2005).

various state and local institutions controlled by the communist party[250]. This was true, for instance, for the distribution of homes, of country houses and land for country houses, the use of summer resort homes, etc. This feature of communist society made consumption, to a great extent, a regulated activity. It made the consumer status of the various social strata and groups regulated and prescribed- to a certain extent and within certain limits. The basic inequality was that between the nomenklatura's consumption and that of other people. These differed in a qualitative aspect: the consumption of those in power exceeded the mass level consumption of other social groups and strata. The ways and forms of consumption under communism, due to the political character of that society, were determined to a great extent by the positions people occupied in the system of political power.

The consumption of the various social strata in the communist Bulgarian society varied with regard to access to commodities and services. During that period there was a shortage of goods and services: some were in permanent deficit and others were in shortage for occasional period[251]. This typical communist phenomenon was generated by the specific features of the economy, by disregard for the demands of the market, and by attempts to resolve the deficit and control it through the state plan and the centralized plan economy.

The persistent shortage of goods at that time led to a "dictatorship of needs" and was a means of "political regulation" of needs[252]. Typical for communism was that, in addition to the economic, legal, and cultural regulation of needs and consumption that we see in every society, there was also political control.

According to Emile Durkheim anomic labor division, which amounts to a violation of the rules of the market and of social relations, ultimately leads to breakdown of solidarity and to economic and social crisis. "The government cannot constantly regulate the conditions of the various economic markets, fix prices of commodities and services, distribute produce according to the needs of the population, etc."[253]. Under communism, due to centralized planning of the economy and the mechanism of artificially maintained low prices, the production and consumption was in fact regulated in some degree or another. This led to the emergence of informal networks for provision of deficit goods. There were stores of a "special" status, offering "special goods for special people", i.e. for the nomenklatura, whose representatives shopped at specially fixed lower prices, of which "ordinary" people could not even dream. The

250 Caroline Humphrey, 2001, Andrew Walder, op. cit.

251 Contemporaries of the communist past can remember the long waiting lines for various deficit commodities: ranging from the well-known "waiting lines for olives" to waiting lists for buying a color TV set, tiles, bath tubs, heaters, and what not. For some goods it was necessary for buyers to spend the night in front of the stores, keeping their place in the line, and checking periodically whether the people on the written waiting lists were actually present in the line: the absent ones were stricken off the list. The purchase of a car was also a long, complicated procedure demanding long, patient waiting. Those willing to put their names on the special waiting lists after depositing approximately one fifth of the price of the car received a registration number. About five years were needed for their turn to come. As a rule only cars produced in the former socialist countries were offered – especially Soviet cars, as well as the popular Trabant of the former GDR.

252 Breda Luthar, 2006.

253 Emile Durkheim, 2002/1893, p. 310.

various ranks of the nomenklatura were given corresponding privileges in consumption according to their status[254].

While various levels of the nomenklatura used their privileged status and enjoyed a corresponding lifestyle and consumption patterns, the other social strata found their own channels for solving the deficit problem. Thus an unofficial stratum of representatives of the informal economy grew strong; it occupied the niche for providing lacking market commodities and services. Some of these people enlarged their business after the changes, using in a rational way the previous experience and resources they had accumulated- both financial and social resources, such as contacts, information, etc.

The specific characteristic of consumption in our country during this period was not the growth of mass consumption typical for developed countries or the trends of diversification of lifestyle, but monotony, uniformity, deficit.

According to questioned Bulgarian entrepreneurs[255], the equalization resulting from the chronic deficit and from the imposed public requirements and norms during the communist period became characteristic for the consumption of most Bulgarians at that time. The respondents remarked that the prevalent idea at that time was that "we are all equal"; "this might not have been quite true" but we were "all brought up" to believe in this idea and "we did believe". It was common knowledge then that inequality of consumption existed under communism, but the issue was not openly discussed, due to ideological considerations and fear of punishment by the authorities. Consumption involving commodities of equal standards was imposed on the majority of the population; there was uniformity in consumption as a result of the lack of variety of opportunities on the market and democracy in society.

The entrepreneurs added that "all the same" there were social differences in the past, but they were not so visible in everyday life, were "concealed" from view. The respondents indicated membership in the Communist Party not only as a necessary condition of success at that time, but also as fundamental social resource. Those in high-ranking position in the Communist Party structures had access to goods and services unimaginable for "common people": their consumption of that time could be characterized as "privileged consumption in condition of shortage".

In communist consumption there was one other distinct specific feature: the somewhat privileged position of the social categories that had some kind of "access"

254 This practice has not been abandoned even today. The mass media abound in examples of privileged consumption of goods and services among the "privileged power elite" at various levels (Nikolai Tilkidjiev and Martin Dimov, op. cit.). This is not only a Bulgarian phenomenon; the political elites enjoy such privileges in many countries. Negative attitudes among Bulgarians are provoked by the drastic difference between the low-priced luxuries with which the people in government are benefited and the income and consumption of those who voted for these privileged people. In Bulgarian society the mechanism, inherited from the past, whereby political power is used as a source of economic, financial, and social capital, is still operating. This creates a social attitude among the public that all people in government use their positions above all for personal gain and that no politicians really care about the good of society; thus the legitimacy of the entire elite in the eye of society is questioned.

255 The quoted results are from a focus group discussion conducted in October 2006 in the framework of the Well-being and Identity module of the ESS. The team included: Nikolai Tilkidjiev, head, and the members Tanya Nedelcheva, Valentina Zlatanova, Maya Keliyan, and Ekaterina Markova. Maya Keliyan was moderator of this focus group discussion. The Well-being and Identity module is part of the ESS Bulgaria, headed by Lilia Dimova. For more details see Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 2010, pp. 5-12.

to foreign countries and to foreign currency. They could use the latter to buy "luxury commodities" and to afford "unavailable" for "common people" goods and services that were missing on the market.

The development of the proto-middle strata

After WWII, thanks to the changes in economy, education, organization of production and work (as explained in the first paragraph of Chapter One), the proportion of white collar workers, of non-manual professions, and of the middle strata grew on a global scale. During that time in Bulgaria, there was a similar structural trend, which led to changes in the social structure of society. We know that some representatives of the middle strata, such as entrepreneurs, cannot exist without the existence of private property and the possibility for economic personal initiative, which is why under communism this category was practically abolished as a socio-professional group. The middle strata, as shown above, are characterized by a specific lifestyle, political views and behavior that are impossible in a society in which personal and political freedoms have been abolished. These enterprising social actors rely on their personal initiative, while under communism power positions are determined according to political affiliation and loyalty to the communist party. Together with this there were certain social strata in our country that, by their characteristics, were similar to the middle strata in developed societies. The resemblance was related to such important features of social-group status as: the character and contents of labor, the features of the profession and employment, education, prestige, cultural status, certain elements of lifestyle, values, consumption, and income. They occupied an intermediate position between the high and low strata and were located in the imaginary middle of society. Due to all these differences from and similarities to the middle strata in developed societies, it would be more exact to view these social-structural formations as proto-middle strata[256], a large part of which in our country were called "intelligentsia".

Major influence on the formation of the stratification structure of the post-war Bulgarian society was brought to bear by the changes in the socio-political system, and the "socialist" industrialization.

As a result of the economic model chosen by the communist authorities, the development of heavy industry was stimulated, and the resources for this were taken from agriculture. Cities grew and labor force streamed into them from the villages, even though the proper infrastructure had not been created for these new conditions. While in 1946 the share of the urban population was 25% of the total in Bulgaria, in 1985 it had grown to 65%[257]. In answer to the needs of growing industry, the proportion grew of professionals, of specialists with a higher education, of engineer and technical cadres, of administrative staff and intelligentsia: society in the course of modernization

256 An analysis of the social-structural changes going on at that time and a detailed argumentation for the use of the term "proto-stratification" are presented in Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 1998, pp. 113-115. "Proto-middle strata" is a term analogous to "proto-stratification".

257 This and following data are quoted from Statistical Yearbook of Republic of Bulgaria for 1997, 1998, p. 5.

in those years needed the capital of expert knowledge.

In line with the adopted ideological norm, the working class plays the leading role in the communist society. The share of workers grew from 41.1% in 1960 to 68.5% in 1985, with men prevailing. Those working in agriculture, prevailed by women, decreased, and in 1986 they were twice less than workers in other sectors of the economy.

In 1986, about two third of Bulgarians were low- and average-skilled workers in industry, agriculture and forestry. High-skilled workers in agriculture and forestry, and industrial sectors accounted for more than 7%. If these are added to the low-skilled office workers engaged in routine services, usually with secondary education (3.5%), the share of lower middle strata in 1986 was about 11%. White-collar workers, including people and groups with different social status, ranging from local administrative personnel and office employees to ministers, have increased their relative share through the years, and in 1986 the share of skilled workers was more than 14%.

The extensive development of "socialist" industrialization led to a sizable dominance of the new proto-middle strata by engineering and technical staff, and by administrative and bureaucratic personnel servicing the needs of the state and the central-planned economy. The growth of the managerial stratum of the new middle strata is due mainly to two reasons. First, the totalitarian society is centralized by its structure and functions and its existence necessitates an extensive managerial personnel. Second, industrialization in all societies leads to an increase of both bureaucratic and managerial strata.

The 1985 intelligentsia comprised 7.5% of Bulgarians, including people engaged in elaborate creative and intellectual work, and with higher education.

A typical feature of both Bulgarian intellectuals and of highly skilled employees is their state of status inconsistency born by the specifics of the totalitarian regime. Under socialism the nomenclature has privileges which bring it a high economic capital, unlimited power resources and social capital, thus allowing it to control society at all institutional levels. The totalitarian regime paid lip service to the working class, and those engaged in leading sectors of heavy industry had incomes and social benefits incomparable to those of the remaining strata, nomenclature excluded. That is why these working strata, though with a low cultural and social capital and lacking power resources, had a contradicting status from the viewpoint of their social prestige. The intelligentsia and skilled employees have the biggest cultural capital compared to other groups and strata, but have low incomes and low economic capital, respectively. Their social capital is restricted by their weak economic position, but they still have certain abilities to exercise some structure power within the framework of their institutional position. The symbol capital of these middle strata, insofar as it is linked to social prestige, is quite vague and "divided" between the value of education, the status of creative work and profession, but deprived of adequate economic position and low power resources, restricted by the nomenklatura's control.

The analysis of separate social strata during the communist period leads to the following generalizations regarding the social structure of society at that time. At the top

was a thin layer of nomenklatura possessing political and economic power, privileges and a high social status. The low-status positions were occupied by low-skilled and low-educated strata of industrial and agricultural workers, who were paid in accordance with ideological and political considerations, and which were very heterogeneous in their pay and prestige. In the conventional social middle were ranked the skilled workers, various categories of service people, the intelligentsia and specialists, and these were also quite diverse in their status characteristics. These strata were the new proto-middle under communism, who, due to the particularities of socialist society, were considerably different from their counterparts in developed societies. Starting from the 1970s they had increasing opportunities (but always within the limits strictly controlled by the nomenklatura) to have some influence on the economic and cultural life of society. Unlike the new middle class in developed countries, the "new socialist middle class" had much less professional autonomy, due to the centralized control exercised by the Party-State[258]. Its personal freedom and civic role was restricted within a centrally regulated framework. Due to the lack of a labor market, of market institutions and relations in general, the new middle strata under communism had a much lower standard of living, a less favorable position on the labor market, and were different in their consumer status from their counterparts in Japan and in other developed countries.

The qualified new proto-middle class under socialism was placed in an ambivalent situation[259], divided between the need to fulfill unconditionally the directives of the communist state and party on one hand, and its striving for personal autonomy, typical for people with a high level of education, qualification, and professionalism. This "new socialist middle class"[260], just like its Western counterpart, attached importance to the prestige of its profession and workplace, home and interior, and general lifestyle. Hence it could be said that, despite the obvious differences between these strata in communist Bulgarian society and in Japanese society, there were many similar features observable in their general ethos and value systems.

According to the opinion of the above mentioned interviewed entrepreneurs, during the times of communism, similar to the present day, the professionals working in the sphere of the state budget, despite their high education level and high qualification, were not among the "successful people". They had comparatively low income, and this inevitably left a mark on their consumption and lifestyle, which were drastically different from those of certain "privileged" categories of workers in the leading industrial branches.

In the words of one of interviewees:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat played a bad joke on the intelligentsia… it marginalized us as persons, it destroyed our authority to a great degree."

This influenced not only on professionals' consumption, but also on their self-

258 Agnes Utasi, 1998, p. 179.

259 Agnes Utasi, op. cit., pp. 175-180.

260 According to the terminology of Agnes Utasi.

esteem and self-confidence, as well had an effect on their authority and prestige in community and society.

Unfortunately, after 1989 the social and hence consumer status of the intelligentsia from the budget sphere did not improve with respect to income, consumption level and social prestige. Here the scientist continues to be a "scientific worker", and is obviously not a "successful" person in Bulgarian society with regard to income and hence consumption standards. In Bulgaria this category will continue to be counted among the "unsuccessful", at least as long as the people in government do not realize that the cultural resource of professionals from the budget sphere is a national capital, and that their adequate valuation and stimulation is indisputably necessary for social progress.

Communist society, due to the particularities of its economic and political system, is not able to ensure mass production and, respectively, mass consumption of the type that exist in developed countries. It does not attain the economic development and level of economic freedom at which production comes to depend upon and be determined by consumption. Ultimately, consumption here does not become an important indicator of social-group status.

Despite these conclusions, it cannot be said that the growth of the economy and of production – though not leading to abundance of goods as in postmodern societies – did not, nevertheless, bring about changes in the social structure whereby the proto-middle strata became increasingly important. On one hand they were social-structural formations whose development was most stimulated by advances in education, science, technology. On the other hand, modern economy, technology and society were in need of the skills, qualification, expertise, and knowledge of the middle strata – no modern society could conceivably exist and develop without these. The proto-middle strata under communism, due to the above-mentioned particularities of their society, had not yet attained some of the characteristics that made their counterparts in developed countries leaders in postmodern consumer culture and lifestyle. They were still at a "proto" stage and did not have the economic and political freedom characteristic for this social-structural formation and essential to its social-group status. But similar to their counterparts in more advanced societies, their educational and qualification resources grew more important and necessary for the country's development, even though the social-economic status of some professional groups of the intelligentsia were far from adequate to their cultural level. In fact, there was a serious discrepancy between the two, and the intelligentsia was in a situation that Gerhard Lenski defines as status inconsistency[261]. This was by no means accidental: it stemmed from their status as "proto" middle strata. But nevertheless, they shared values close to those of their counterparts in developed countries, the new middle, which was a logical consequence of their education level and qualification, their greater autonomy in work, and their other social-group characteristics. But their ways and forms of consumption, their tastes, values and attitudes related to consumption, and their lifestyle, remained within

261 Gerhard Lenski, 1966.

the framework set by the social-political system and its economy, with all their specific particularities.

2. Consumption patterns in post-communist Bulgaria and the importance of the middle strata as consumers

Changes in consumer status and culture; the middle strata as bearers of the latest trends

The transformations towards democracy and market economy taking place in Bulgarian society since 1989 have brought about significant changes in the ways and forms in which various social-group actors consume. Thanks to the penetration of market structures and relations into society, and to the new democratic institutions, the possibilities for consumption generally expand and become more varied, which has a defining impact on the lifestyle of different social categories and strata. The shortage of goods, so familiar in the times of communism, is now a thing of the past: a variety of products and services are now in supply such as was unknown then on the Bulgarian market, and assortment is growing even greater. But do the market mechanisms really enhance the "economic liberty" of society and of consumers as social actors? Have sufficient social-economic prerequisites and suitable conditions been established in order for consumption patterns in our country to become a significant indicator of the most important, symptomatic tends in lifestyle, as they have been in developed societies since the late 1960s?

Commodity prices, the ratio between them and income, the structure of consumer expenditures, are important indicators, which describe not only the general social-economic situation in our country, but also permit characterizing the forms and ways in which people here consume, the proximity (or distance) of these ways from the trends observed in other societies. In view of the goal and tasks of this book, the most important elements are the consumer status, behavior, and culture of the middle strata. But the latter's consumption patterns are linked to and determined by the particularities of present-day Bulgarian consumer society: that is why it is necessary to at least briefly describe the processes observed in the consumption of households. This would not be a departure from the goal, but will allow examining the consumer environment, behavior, and culture in their integrity; for the consumption patterns of the middle strata are shaped in this framework.

An important impact on the consumption of Bulgarian households comes from their low income levels, an indicator by which Bulgaria is in last position among all EU member states[262]. The real incomes of households in 2006 did not exceed 95%

262 I am referring to the EQLS, conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. It is a representative survey including 28 EU member states and Turkey. For more details see First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of Life in Bulgaria and Romania, 2006, p. 9.

of incomes in 1995[263], while during the same period consumer prices grew by nearly 48 times[264]. Under the impact of the economic crisis the real incomes of Bulgarian households in 2007, 2008, and 2009 were even lower than those in 2006[265], which indicates that their level of 1995 has not yet been attained.

Since 2001 there has been likewise an observable trend of gradually increasing differentiation and polarization of households on the basis of their incomes. In 2006 the per capita incomes of the wealthiest decile group of households was slightly more than 8 times higher than those of the poorest decile group[266], while in 2010 the difference was 8,4 times higher[267].

The indices of consumer prices enable us to estimate the economic situation of consumers in our country compared with Japan. In Bulgaria the general index of consumer prices measured by the NSI[268], shows that, assuming the value for 1995 is 100, in March 2012 the index of food prices was 5 393, of non-food goods prices, nearly 5 898, of housing, repairs and maintenance, water, electricity and heating 13391, of clothes and shoes – 3 050, of healthcare expenditure – 9 626, of education – 14 877, and of services prices – 10 913.

Japan is the only member state of the OEDC in which prices remained stable over the period under study, and even tended to decrease. Counting the level in the year 2000 as 100, in 2002 the consumer price index was 98,4, in 2003 and 2004 it was 98,1, in 2005 – 97,8[269]. Counting the level in 2005 as 100, in 2010 the index was 99,6, in 2011 it was 99,3, and in the first months of 2012 the levels remained at 99,3[270].

The growth of prices of food, fuels, and energy in the last 20 years in Bulgaria has caused severe restrictions and negative changes in the consumption of these necessities. This has impacted significantly on the ways and forms of consumption of the other products and services as well, and on consumer status, behavior and culture, on the lifestyle of large parts of Bulgarian society. The relative share of household expenditures[271] for various item categories of household budgets are indicative of the particularities of the households' consumption patterns and their quality of life and well-being. What are the immanent characteristics of consumption of Bulgarian households, and do they come close to those observed in the developed countries?

In the following Graph 1 are presented the consumer expenditure structures of Bulgarian and Japanese households.

263 Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2006, 2007, p. 13.

264 Statistical Handbook of Republic of Bulgaria for 2006, 2007, p. 91.

265 Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2010, 2011, p. 9.

266 Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2006, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

267 Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2010, op. cit., p. 136.

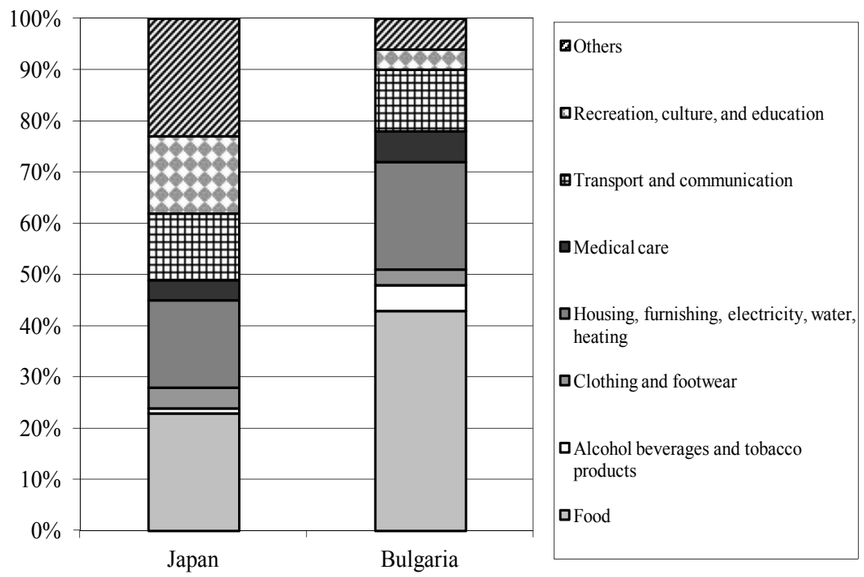
268 See http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=14&a1=177&a2=178#cont

269 Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2006, 2007, pp. 243-244.

270 The data are cited from information supplied by the OEDC website - http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MEI_PRICES and are calculated by the JSB in the framework of their annual representative studies of the consumer price index.

271 NSI observes the income and expenditure of randomly chosen households over a term of one year. The sample since 2002 amounts to 3000 households.

Graph 1[272]
Households' expenditure structure in Bulgaria and Japan in 2010 (%)



What conclusions may we draw from the characteristics of consumption in our country, as regards consumer behavior here, status and culture?

1. A particularly important characteristic of consumer standards, behavior and culture (important components of consumption patterns in any society), are the so-called basic expenditures. They include the relative shares of expenditures for food and housing, water, fuel, heating, and light. The ratio between these expenditures and those for education, healthcare, recreation, and culture, are an important criterion for a society's level of development. An important indicator that society has passed into the post-industrial stage[273] is the decrease of the relative share of expenditure for basic necessities and the increased portion of expenditure for education, healthcare, recreation, and culture. This trend has been evident in Japan since the end of 1960s, when the country gradually turned into a postmodern society. But in the consumption

272 The graph is constructed using data cited in Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2011, 2012, p. 149, in Japan Statistical Yearbook in 2011 - http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/index.htm, and using information from NSI, presented in Household Budgets of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2010, op. cit., pp. 13-15. I have recalculated the relative shares of expenditure of Bulgarian households as the share of their total consumer expenditure. Consumer expenditure is obtained when from the total expenditure are subtracted taxes, insurance, social security payments, and other non-consumption expenditures. I have made this recalculation so as to match the way the shares of household expenditures are calculated by the national statistical institutions of Japan and other developed countries. If they are calculated as part of the total expenditure, their real proportion in the family budget remains concealed, and the trends are shown in a more favorable light than is real. For instance, the relative share of expenditure for food of Bulgarian households in 2010 according to the calculations of NSI was 37%. But calculated in relation to the total consumer expenditure – which is the method I apply here – it is 43%. For a detailed argumentation on this problem, see Maya Keliyan, op. cit., pp. 358-360.

273 In the terminology of Daniel Bell, op. cit.

patterns of Bulgarian households in the 1990s, the reverse processes were noticeable. According to international criteria for defining existence minimums, the households with a relative share of food expenditure of over 40% are considered to fall below the social minimum. In Bulgaria, this proportion in 2010 was 43% of the total consumer expenditure[274]. This figure is also confirmed by the results of the sample survey "Young People: Partnership, Marriage, Children"[275], conducted in 2005. The majority of respondents indicated that about half of their monthly household income was spent on food. The quoted figures are incomparably higher than the average for the EU. The relative share of expenditure for food in the last 20 years in the EU has varied around 14-15% for countries like Belgium and been up to 26% for Ireland. The respective value for Japan in that period, and in 2010, was 23%[276] , being equal to the average for the old EU member states.

2. A similar tendency is evident in the comparison of the relative share of expenditure on housing, water, electricity, and fuels of Bulgarian and Japanese households. Bulgarian consumer expenditure for these items is higher by nearly one fifth than the values in Japan. The difference is equal to the relative share of expenditure on recreation, culture, and education. The greater part of the population in our country is in a situation where people's greatest concern is to satisfy basic needs – food, housing, home maintenance. This reflects on consumption patterns and lifestyle as a whole.

3. The low relative share of expenditure of Bulgarian households for recreation, culture, and education – which is 3,75 times lower than in Japan (Graph 1) – is an indicator of the essential differences between the structure of consumption in Bulgaria and in the developed societies. This specific share of expenditure is lower here than that for alcohol and cigarettes. The relative share of expenditure of Bulgarian households for transport and communications is three times greater than for recreation, culture, and education, while that for housing, electricity, heating, and water is 5,2 times higher. In Japan the difference between the relative share of expenditure for recreation, culture, and education and that for housing, electricity, heating and water is only 2% more for the second group of items, while in Bulgaria it is 17% more. For Japanese households recreation, culture, and education are a set of items that is in third place in size of the relative share of expenditure for them: first is food, second is housing, electricity, heating and water. For Bulgarian households this respective expenditure is in next-to-last place, amounting to a little more than expenditure for clothes and shoes. This position is a clear indicator of quality of life in our country. The ratio between expenditure for recreation, culture, education, healthcare on one hand, and for food, housing, maintenance, heating and water on the other, signals a fundamental difference in consumption structure between postmodern society and Bulgarian

274 *Household Budgets in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2010*, op. cit., pp. 13-15.

275 Conducted by the Coordinating Scientific Council for Social Development and Social European Integration at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), NSI and Max-Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany. The scientific leader of the study for Bulgaria was Atanas Atanasov. It was funded by the Max-Planck Institute.

276 See the data given on the official site of JSB http://www.stat.go.jp

society. In Japan the relative household expenditure for the so-called basic needs is 40%, while in our country it is higher than this by nearly one fourth, amounting to 64%. This indicates that nearly two thirds of the expenditure of Bulgarians is for food, housing, maintenance of the home, furnishing, housing, electricity, heating, and water, taken as a whole. The relative share of Japanese household expenditure for recreation, culture, education, and for healthcare, all taken together, is less than one fifth (19%) of all their expenditure. It is nearly twice as great as the respective share of expenditure of Bulgarian households, which is only 10%. The relative share of expenditure for basic necessities in Bulgaria differs drastically from that in developed contemporary societies, which shows that in this respect consumption in our country is still far from the stage of "economic freedom", where the basic level of satisfaction of basic needs has been ensured for large strata of the population.

4. With the entry of a society into its postmodern stage the importance of healthy consumption patterns and lifestyles grows. The structure of household budgets by items shows that no such tendency can yet be observed in Bulgaria. The expenditure of Bulgarian households for alcohol and cigarettes is five times higher than in Japan. Japanese statistics do not even bother to calculate this expenditure item in the household budgets, as it is negligible[277].

5. Together with these tendencies, which show that the consumption of Bulgarian households is still far from what is typical for developed societies, other trends are evident that testify to positive changes in consumption structure. In the last 20 years the share of expenditure for transport and communications has grown (during the period 1965–2010 it has grown more than 4 times[278]) – this is a trend similar to that in developed countries. On one hand this growth is due to the rising prices of these commodities, but it is also related to their growing importance for the consumption and lifestyle of Bulgarian households.

6. The data presented in Table 1 allow tracing the consumer status of Bulgarian households today by place of residence. Considerable differences are evident between households living in cities and those living in villages with respect of their consumption patterns. This testifies to unequal development of cities and villages, with villages being at a disadvantage; such inequality is characteristic for poorer societies and is a marker of the disadvantaged position in which village residents are placed. This situation is not only unacceptable, it is incongruous for a member-state of the EU at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

277 I have calculated the share using data from the *Japan Statistical Yearbook for 2011*- http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/index.htm on consumption of various goods by Japanese households.

278 For more detailed information on the changes in expenditure for transport and communication and for cars, see Maya Keliyan, op. cit., pp. 400-406.

Table 1 [279]

Share of Bulgarian households, possessing durables by type of residence in 2010 (%)

Share of households, possessing different items:	Total	In Cities	In Villages
TV set	99	99	97
DVD System	32	36	21
Personal Computer	38	45	19
Internet Connection	36	43	16
Washing Machine	81	88	64
Dishwasher	5	6	3
Refrigerator	97	98	96
Mobile Phone	81	85	72
Fixed phone	68	70	62
Air Conditioner	20	24	10
Car	45	47	38

The TV set and refrigerator have become mass commodities both in cities and villages, but this is not true as concerns the washing machine, which is a mass commodity only in cities – less than two thirds of rural residents possess one. In comparison, in Japan in 2009 there were 865 plasma TVs, LCDs, or organic EL per 1000 households. Also, per 1000 households in Japan there were 1 235 refrigerators and 1 092 washing machines[280]. In recent years telephones, especially mobile ones, are becoming increasingly widespread; in Bulgaria, as in Japan and the developed European countries, there is a decreasing share of fixed phones and a growing one of mobile. In Japan the percentage of households with fixed phones has fallen to 27%, while in Bulgaria the share is still over two thirds of the households. In Japan in 2010 97% of households owned mobile phones while in Bulgaria the percentage was 81%: here the percentage of rural households possessing mobile phones is lower by 13 % than of urban ones.

The automobile has become a necessity in Bulgaria, just as it is in developed countries, even though cars here are mostly old or second-hand ones and the state of the roads is relatively poor. Whereas in Bulgaria in 2010, 45% of households possessed

279 Source: Households budgets in The Republic of Bulgaria for 2010, op. cit., p. 20.

280 The quoted data on durables possessed by Japanese households are taken from Japan Statistical Yearbook for 2011 - http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/index.htm

cars, in Japan in 2009 there were 1 414 cars per 1000 households.

Nearly one third of Bulgarian households have a DVD system – specifically for rural households the share is a little over one fifth, while in Japan per 1000 households there are 1 135 DVD system sets. Air conditioning is rapidly gaining ground in Bulgarian households; nearly one fourth of urban residents and one tenth of rural ones have this appliance. In Japan it is a widespread item, and per 1000 households there are 2 478 air conditioning systems. Dishwashers are still comparatively rare in the consumption patterns of Bulgarian and Japanese households alike. In Bulgaria only 5% of households possess dishwashers, while in Japan there are 271 of them per 1000 households.

An important indicator of similarities in consumption patterns and lifestyle in our country and in developed societies is digitalization.

Digitalization is a socio-cultural phenomenon consisting in the wide use of digital appliances in all spheres of life in the modern world. This concept has long since gone beyond its narrow technical meaning of a process in which electronic signals from analog transmitters are transformed into digital ones: for instance digitalization of the telephone network, of television broadcasting, etc. Digitalization is a process with a growing impact on the electronic media and its most important aspect is the pervasive influence of the Internet.

Digital culture is exceptionally dynamic, as evident in the rapid changes of lifestyle in our country, in which information technologies are increasingly important, becoming a part of our everyday lives. Bulgaria in recent years is becoming increasingly "digitalized", as evidenced by the proportion of Internet users. But the difference between this trend in our country as compared with the developed countries is in the price, the quality, the variety of products and services, and their accessibility for the mass consumer.

In 2011 45% of the households in Bulgaria had Internet access, including 43% of urban and 16% of rural households. Broadband connection was used by 40% of Bulgarians in 2011; the corresponding figure in Japan in 2009 was 60%. According to NSI data (cited in Table 1) 38% of Bulgarian households possessed a computer – these were 45% urban and 19% rural households. At the same time, 46% of Bulgarians never used the Internet in 2011.

Bulgarian villages still lag considerably behind the digitalization of lifestyle in our country. The cause for this large lag in digitalization of Bulgarian villages may be looked for in a number of circumstances: the ageing population; the outflow of the younger and better educated rural residents in search of better work and realization in the cities; the lower incomes and lower living standard in villages; the less developed infrastructure there, which makes access to a number of services more difficult, etc. Digitalization is a trend that accelerates globalization processes and turns the modern world into a "global village". But due to the particularities of digitalization in Bulgarian villages and the considerable inequalities between urban and rural lifestyles, villages are practically excluded from the process. They are facing a number of serious problems, starting with the difficulties of farmers to keep up farm production in the context of a world crisis and strong competition, and including poverty, bad infrastructure, and

practically no healthcare. Under these conditions lifestyle inequalities between cities and villages, and especially digitalization inequalities, may seem like minor, insignificant issues. But at present, when our world is becoming increasingly globalized and digitalized, access to, and use of, the Internet are no longer luxuries. In the present-day postmodern world, lifestyle is among the important indicators of social group status. The differences of lifestyle between city and village are important inequalities, which indicate their unequal position in Bulgarian society and the disadvantageous conditions in which the Bulgarian village is placed. The lag with regard to digitalization in today's increasingly digitalized world deprives village dwellers of the opportunities provided by the trend: more and better information, professional realization, education, leisure, communication, etc. Digitalization, and the Internet in particular, may also provoke a number of negative phenomena, which are not topics of discussion in this work, such as alienation, addiction, an environment for committing various crimes, etc. I nowise overlook this "dark side" of digitalization, nor do I believe digitalization is in itself the "ideal" solution to rural problems. I perceive it as a means and an opportunity, which, if used properly in the pursuit of goals, can help overcome the existing inequalities between city and village.

In Japan, as in other developed countries, no statistically important differences can be registered between digitalization in cities and in rural regions. In 2010 78% of the population over 6 years of age regularly used the Internet, and specifically among those aged between 10 and 40, 90% regularly surfed in the Internet[281]. In Japan in 2009, there were 1 157 computers per 1000 households, and in 2010 83% of households possessed a computer. Nation-wide sample surveys by the Japanese government[282], and surveys by the NRI[283] have shown that since 2002 the share of households with computers has grown each year by only 1% approximately. The computer has already become a mass commodity and the market cannot rely on any further expansion of this product. The strategy of producers and merchants since then has been to invest in innovations, in quality, and in diversification of services[284].

In Bulgaria, 4% of the population is connected to the Internet through a mobile device, while in Japan the corresponding figure is 84%. In Japan, 99% of enterprises are connected to the Internet, while in Bulgaria the percentage is 87%. In our country, only 26% of employed persons use a computer, and 21% use the Internet, which demonstrates a low level of computer literacy. At the start of the second decade of the 20th century, such a low level of digital skills of the labor force indicates the latter is of questionable quality and capacity to meet the requirements of the fast-expanding information and communication technologies. Bulgarian enterprises still do not sufficiently use in their activities the opportunities offered by the global network: in 2011, according to NSI data, only 12% of enterprises bought goods and services

281 Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2011, op. cit., p. 96.

282 Conducted by the Institute of Economic and Social Studies at the Council of Ministers.

283 These are the national representative panel surveys Cyber Life Observation, conducted once every six months since 1997.

284 Ryoji Kashiwagi, 2004, p. 4.

online, and only 7% received orders from clients online. In comparison, in 2010 98,8% of Japanese enterprises regularly used the Internet in their work[285]. The reasons why Internet use is so low in Bulgaria are the low digital literacy of employed person and the mistrust in online partners, the risk of Internet frauds, the low detection rates for such crimes, and the fact that they go practically unpunished.

In Bulgaria and Japan alike, there are no significant gender differences with regard to Internet use: users in our country are 47,5 men and 45% women. The data of the NSI about computer skills of Bulgarians indicate that skills are correlated with age, education, and qualification, i.e. digital culture is evidently stratified. As could be expected, the younger age groups are more active Internet users. In the age groups of 16 to 24 years, 80% are users; for 25-34 the figure is 68%; for 35-44 the percentage is 58%; for 45-54 it is 46%; for 55-64 it is 26%; for 65-74 the users are 6%. Students use Internet on a wide scale – 94% of them is regular users; they are the category with the most developed digital culture.

People with a tertiary education are the education category[286] that regularly uses the Internet – 82% of them do so. The same is true for 48% of people with secondary education and 17% of Bulgarians with primary or lower education.

By professional characteristics, the high and middle strata are the most active and regular Internet users: 89% of state employees are users; 87% of the administration; 85% of specialists in engineering and technology; 64% of the socio-professional group of people working in the field of services. Unquestionably, the leader in this respect is the group of professionals - 94% of them are regular Internet users. Going down the scale of social strata, the level of digital culture decreases correspondingly: Internet users are over 40% of qualified workers and craftsmen, 19% of unskilled laborers, and 13% of farmers.

Electronic purchases of goods and services for personal use were made by 14% of Bulgarians in 2011; the goods most often bought were clothes, sports commodities (amounting to 52% of all electronically purchased products), reservations for travel and hotels (30%), books, magazines and newspapers (21%). But this kind of commerce is still not very popular and developed in our country, and is not a stable part of the consumer patterns of Bulgarians[287].

Bulgaria is becoming increasingly "digitalized", but the process here differs from that in developed countries by its rates, the cost, the quality and variety of products and services offered, and their accessibility for the mass consumer. Nevertheless, the very fact that the trend is present is a mark of general similarity of trends in the consumption patterns and lifestyle in our country and in advanced countries.

The trends in the consumption structure of Bulgarian households indicate that there are parallel processes going in opposite directions in consumption patterns in this country. On one hand, there are serious financial limitations hampering the satisfaction

285 Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2011, op. cit., p. 97.

286 More on educational inequalities in Bulgaria see Valentina Milenkova, 2009.

287 On the development of electronic trade in Japan and the high levels of inter-firm electronic trade there, see Maya Keliyan, op. cit., pp. 117-120.

of basic needs among large parts of the population. On the other hand, information technologies are noticeably penetrating society, and the use of IT products has become part of everyday life. These processes are related to different social strata to different degrees: consumption of IT products is visibly stratified. As regards certain social-group formations the prevalent characteristic is economic deprivation; these people find it hard to meet their basic needs and consumption for them is marked by necessity. They are the lowest paid social strata, people with lower education, qualification, social-economic status, also, the categories of pensioners, unemployed, rural residents. Among other social-group formations, the prevalent trends are the changes brought about by IT and digitalization: these groups are predominantly people from the middle strata, young people, people with higher qualification and better education, and urban residents.

The contradictory features of consumption patterns - "Orientalization", unfair trade, "Westernization", globalization, consumerism, and the role of the middle strata

The term "Orientalization" by no means implies a negative meaning. Scholars do not believe that modernization can be successful only in Western countries, or that the imitation of "Western models" is the only means for attaining social prosperity[288]. The experience of Japan and other non-Western countries has proven the contrary. "Orientalization" is the term that indicates with greater precision certain trends in present-day consumption in Bulgaria. By its nature the latter is a "proto-consumption", in other words, it is still at the stage of "apprenticeship in consumption"[289], in this case, "apprenticeship" of postmodern consumption. Society is still learning, assimilating the chief characteristics of postmodern consumption. The insufficient development of market relations and the effect of pseudo-market mechanisms make the market environment a pseudo-market one; consumption has not yet "grown up", not yet attained "maturity". All this creates favorable conditions for its "Orientalization".

In the early 1990s, the consumer environment in our country became widely and rapidly "Orientalized": the existing markets and flea-markets expanded and many new ones were established. The streets were filled with market stalls, and new "mini-markets" or even "supermarkets" appeared in backyards, cellars, garages. Street and garage trade became the pseudo-market face of the transition, and a manifestation of the liberated "entrepreneurial spirit", of "free initiative"[290]. At the beginning of the 1990s the markets gained ground as centers of mass consumption and lifestyle. Everything could be bought there, ranging from every kind of food stuff to clothing, shoes, household appliances, various services, and all imaginable commodities.

288 Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 19-67.

289 Janell Watson, 1998, p.131.

290 Street and garage trade is run chiefly in the framework of small and family enterprises. In the course of accession to the EU, it is gradually diminishing and disappearing; only the most competitive stores can survive under the growing pressure of the quickly expanding supermarket chains.

They were surrounded by numerous cafes, restaurants, and taverns in various price categories. They became lively centers of urban life, a place not only for shopping but for social contacts of the lower and part of the middle strata. "Orientalization" of consumption during the transition was caused by the insufficient development of trade and by the general market conditions. This trend expresses the distance, and even incompatibility, of ways and forms of consumption in our country with those in developed countries. The process described as "Orientalization" is, paradoxically, this society's "road to Europe" and to the Western models of consumption. In other words, Orientalization has proven to be Bulgaria's road to Westernization. It is a specific sign of the poverty and underdevelopment of the market, for its typical features, as it occurs in our country, are absent from developed societies.

Markers of this trend are fake commodities, popularly known as "fakes". These might be:

- Imitations that pretend to be originals of certain brand names, producers, from a certain country, etc...
- Low-quality and/or bad-quality goods that are offered as goods of high or at least good quality.
- Low-quality goods that do not meet existing health requirements; some of them prove harmful and dangerous for the health and life of consumers. There is a noticeable difference between the actual contents of the product and what is declared on its label, if there is a label at all.

Fake goods exist everywhere in the world, but as a rule they are offered in specific places and at lower prices than the originals. What is specific to the pseudo-market of the transition years in our country is that there are no rules safeguarding the consumer against such a fraud. The sale of fake goods is not concentrated only in certain market spaces allotted for this purpose, and their prices are not always low: they may be found in "prestigious" shopping centers as well, and sometimes at the price of the genuine products.

The growth of store chains and the establishment of large supermarket chains offering abundant products has changed the features of fake goods sale. They no longer try to imitate well-known brands, but are simply of inferior quality. This phenomenon could not possibly exist and expand without the right conditions for it. Traders and, through them, producers are good at lobbying for their own interests, and in some cases these interests are not only economic but interwoven with the interests of their political patrons. Formally, the laws and regulations are not formally being violated; as for the consumers, they do not have the means, energy, desire, or experience for joint action to defend their rights and change the situation. Those with high income can afford to buy quality goods, and they go to the shopping malls, which offer quality at high prices.

In the last 23 years, it has become unusual to talk about "following the rules"

in matters of purchase and sale, in other words, “fair trade” has become a rarity. It is the rules of dishonest trade that seem to be the common practice in our consumer society, and dishonesty is another essential aspect of the “Orientalization” of consumer culture. I have introduced this term for I believe it is of is a key concept for characterizing present-day Bulgarian consumer society. In defining the term, I proceed from some of the arguments of Nitobe[291] and from the normative documents of the European Fair Trade Association- EFTA.

In order to further clarify the concept, I will refer to the Japanese case. Since the late 1960s, Japan has come to symbolize quality and honesty in trade. But during the 1950s Japanese goods were known throughout the world for their low prices and low quality, oftentimes being fake imitations of well-known Western brands. At the start of Japanese modernization in the third quarter of the 19th century, Japanese traders had an unenviable reputation for dishonesty. The well-known Japanese educator, diplomat and humanist Inazo Nitobe explained to the Western reader this “shameful fact” by referring to the distance separating the merchant class from the moral principles of the samurai class. According to Nitobe, “the ethics of Bushido are incompatible with the moral principles of the samurai” and “the path to riches does not coincide with the path of honor”[292]. In 1900 the quoted author expressed the hope that Japanese merchants would attain the virtue of fairness, which “with the development of industrialization, would prove not only the easiest, but likewise the most profitable…” In support of his expectations, he recalled the case of Germany, a country that in 1880 had similar problems with “fairness in commerce”. The author cited the circular letter sent by Bismarck to all professional guilds in Germany in connection with “the lamentable lack of reliability with respect to the quality and quantity of German goods…” Nitobe concluded that “in the course of about twenty years the Germans learned this lesson – that in the final account honesty is profitable”. It remains to be seen when the Bulgarian traders will learn it.

In fair trade sellers and consumers establish relations that enable the respect for the rights and protection of interests of both sides within the limits of the law. The goods offered are of the expected quality, as defined by the laws and standards; they are in the declared quantity, and their contents and value are as indicated on the label. Fair trade requires quality goods and decent relations between traders and buyers. In order for fair trade to become a permanent characteristic of a society, there must be a certain degree of development of production and of market relations, as well as of moral virtues; it then becomes possible for producers and traders to see that “being honest is profitable”. As Norbert Boltz writes, it is important “to argue in support of morality not in ethical terms but in economic…The more complex the economic system, the more your success depends on the success of the other person”[293].

In the world of today, fair trade does not admit goods produced under conditions of exploitation and economic inequality. As defined by the EFTA, fair trade is a trading

291 Inazo Nitobe, 2005.

292 Inazo Nitobe, op. cit., pp. 80-83.

293 Norbert Boltz, op. cit., p. 15.

partnership based on dialogue between producers, consumers, and their organizations, which seeks greater equity in international trade. It offers better trading conditions for, and secures the rights of, marginalised producers and workers. It is guided not only by commercial but also by ethical considerations, and consumption goes beyond its quality of an act of consuming, and acquires an ethical dimension[294].

The Bulgarian consumer society of today is still far from the above-mentioned European and world norms of fair trade. Among the main causes of this situation is the lack of a genuine market; instead, there are pseudo-market institutions and mechanisms. The relation between supply and demand, and competition have not yet become the kind of principal mechanisms for regulating prices and the market that they are said to be in textbooks on economics. All this, combined with the corruption existing at various institutional levels, is the cause of:

The market being monopolized by traders who one-sidedly impose their demands on the consumers; the latter do not have the right to choose or the means to react against the violation of their rights.

The incomplete or ineffective legal regulations for the defense of consumers’ rights.

Clumsy or passive controlling organs, their unwillingness and inability to fulfill their functions effectively..

Under conditions of an underdeveloped market and “pseudo-consumption”, the existence of fake goods and unfair trade is not due only to dishonesty and the lack of ethical virtues. They are above all social-economic, and not only moral, problems, for they are related to economic interests. The market remains in a state of “underdevelopment” for in this way it ensures more suitable conditions for the enrichment of certain social groups and the preservation of their power resources. Corruption of institutions not only facilitates these groups but ensures impunity and preserves the status quo for them. The seeming irrationality in the economy, the waste of public resources due to unfair trade and fake goods, are an expression of a different kind of “rationality”. In keeping Bulgarian consumer society in a state of “Orientalization”, these social groups provide for themselves the economic, political, and social resources they need for their own prosperity.

The examples of Japan and Germany clearly show that unfair trade is a phenomenon observed in societies that have taken the road of the market, but still have underdeveloped market institutions, structures, and relations. With the development and establishment of the latter, in passing from the stage of “apprenticeship” to a real market society and consumption, unfair trade ceases to be a typical feature for a consumer society. Moreover, the stable, large middle strata are the bearers of a consumer culture that is very different from unfair trading relations.

Some modern and postmodern trends in consumption and lifestyle can be observed

294 Alex Nicholls and Charlotte Opal, 2004.

in our country despite the existing "Orientalization" and unfair trade; these trends follow a "Western model" and introduce "Western standards". In general "Westernization" of consumption patterns means penetration and dissemination of Western- European or American – models. In this sense, "Westernization" is simultaneously "Europeanization", "Americanization", and globalization of consumer culture, behavior, leisure patterns and lifestyles. The more Bulgarians become "Westernized" and globalized, the closer they come to the lifestyle in developed countries, including Japan. Thus, in a sense, by "approaching the West", we reach the postmodern Far East.

Here we must make a very important clarification: the described processes can nowise be considered to have only positive sides, nor are we evaluating them on a moral scale. With the penetration of these trends in Bulgaria, in Japan, and in other societies, the serious issue arises of the preservation of national uniqueness and local traditions of consumption and lifestyle – but their preservation is getting harder under the conditions of a competitive environment; also, the changes in consumer values are far from being all positive. In Chapter One we discussed some of these negative processes accompanying the emergence and development of postmodern society and consumption; they have been the focus of serious attention from leading researchers in this field[295]. Here, in pursuing the goals and tasks of this study, the discussion of these important issues remains aside from our main research interest.

Also related to "Westernization" is the appearance of new centers of trade, consumption, and lifestyle. Since the late 1990s, the trade network in Bulgaria quickly changed as a result of investments made by large foreign companies. At that time, the first supermarket chains appeared, along with branches of well-known foreign companies or local firms. In parallel with foreign ones, Bulgarian supermarket chains also developed, trying to follow the "Western model" in their operation. The neighborhood stores have been losing ground to the supermarkets and hypermarkets, a trend that is still continuing with the growing penetration of foreign store chains. In recent years, the market of electronics and domestic appliances is growing, supplied by an increasing variety of large store chains. Connected to this trend is the appearance of specialized supermarkets in our country. The first large trade parks have also appeared, which combine several kinds of hypermarkets for various kinds of goods. Despite this abundance, the assortment is increasing in the range of products and services of middle and lower quality, usually coming from producers who offer them at reduced prices. The high-quality products of the leading world brands are still missing, mostly due to the limited financial resources of Bulgarian consumers and to the underdeveloped market.

In recent years store chains selling in the high price range are also penetrating the market, offering brand and luxury commodities. A specific characteristic of the foreign and Bulgarian firms is that their appearance on the market would not have been possible without the malls. The importance of malls for the consumer culture and environment is a growing trend. The first Bulgarian mall appeared with the refurnishing

295 Such as Jean Baudrillard, 1970, 1975, 1981, 2003, Daniell Bell, op. cit., Mike Featherstone, 1987, 1990, 1995, Lyotard, 1979, Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., 1995, Fredric Jameson, op. cit., Roger Burrows and Catherine Marsh, op. cit., Daniel Miller, op. cit., Alan Warde, op. cit., etc.

of the Central Universal Store in 1999; since 2006 malls have found a permanent place in urban culture here. At the end of 2011 there were a total of 34 functioning malls in Sofia, the large cities, the regional centers, resort settlements, and in small cities; the building of 21 new malls is projected. But this trend is only one aspect of the changes in lifestyle in our country. The number of malls is growing but some of them[296] have turned into "ghost malls", with empty or practically non-operating stores, with people strolling up and down without buying.

In developed countries, malls are commercial and recreational centers for daily consumption, a feature by which they differ from the department stores that offer prestigious brands of goods in the higher price range. The brand goods sold in Bulgarian malls, even though they are of "middle price range" are still too expensive in the local context. It is only the supermarkets within the malls that prices are appropriate for mass consumers in this country, and they are also the first stores in our country to offer food products with certificates of quality and safety. They strive to build and maintain an image of sellers of high-quality, ecological and bio foods, ethnic cuisine from various parts of the world, exotic products, etc. They offer their clients not only the same kind of goods "as in the developed countries" but in addition, a "philosophy of healthy lifestyle". The prices there are higher than those in the low-price chains, but these stores aim at the high and high middle strata, which can afford to buy their products and, thereby, to assimilate the avant-garde image, to follow the norms of "fashionable" Western ecologically-conscious consumption.

Many foreign firms offer brand goods in our country, but they are not leaders in their branch, and some of the well-known producers offer only part of their assortment of goods. These two features are a result of the restriction and underdevelopment of the Bulgarian market, which is far from being a leading market in the region or in Europe.

Together with this, Bulgaria has the lowest per capita of modern trade surface area in Europe: at the end of 2010 the average was 105 sq. m per capita, while the average for the European countries is 200 sq. m.

The middle strata are a social group that has the marks and features of Westernization of Bulgarian consumption patterns. It is on their resources, standards, choice, behavior and culture (even though less developed than those of their counterparts in developed countries) that the above-mentioned trends in consumer society are relying. The more the middle strata stabilize themselves within the stratification systems of society and approach the characteristics of the more advanced countries, the nearer our consumer society will come to the postmodern one.

Since 1994 various chains of eating establishments appeared, including fast food, coffee shops and other restaurants, sweet shop chains, and they have "MacDonaldized"[297] the sphere of consumption. MacDonaldization is increasing and many Bulgarian eating places have lost all national and local specificity. This trend raises

296 For instance the old store TsUM (Central Universal Store, established in 1957) which was once the "pride" and showcase of Bulgarian trade in the time of communism.

297 Regarding "MacDonaldization" of society, see George Ritzer, op. cit.

the question of how healthy the food in these establishments is, a problem that has long been on the agenda of developed societies.

In recent years in our country centers for luxury recreation and tourism have appeared, including spa centers, wellness tourism places, luxury hotel complexes. Bulgarians with large financial resources have begun to construct an urban space of their own: gated neighborhoods. These are consumer and lifestyle centers for wealthy Bulgarians and foreigners. Such recreation and tourism has become part of social status consumption, a means for demonstrating affluence and prosperity[298].

The place, shopping patterns, and shopping environment of Bulgarian consumers develop dynamically; significant changes take place in them, which tend to globalize them and bring them closer to what is typical for developed societies. This process advances in parallel with the increasingly evident presence of the middle strata, with its distinctive consumption patterns and lifestyle. There remains the issue that, despite obvious Westernization and globalization, the three basic problems still remain: quality, variety and accessibility to the products and services offered. Here we mean not variety in general, which has already been achieved, but a variety comparable with that on the markets of other EU countries and developed societies throughout the world. This difference is related to the comparatively more limited resources of the middle strata in our country, a question we shall come back to further on.

EUROSTAT studies[299] have shown that at present the purchasing capacity of Bulgarians amounts to 44% of the EU average. This predetermines to a great extent the possibilities for development of the trade networks and consumer and lifestyle centers in our country. The appearance of malls and luxury boutiques is a fact, and their number tends to grow in a geometrical progression. But can their presence by itself be enough to change consumer culture and bring it closer to that of developed countries? Does visible Westernization and globalization in consumption patterns bring these closer to those in developed countries west and east, north and south? Which are the social groups that shop from brand name stores in the malls and from downtown luxury boutiques? The full answer to this question requires special study with an appropriate methodology. The conclusion that can be made at this stage is that these are people[300] belonging to high income groups and various elites, to the high-paid members of the "upper" middle strata, and to marginal groups with high income coming from suspicious sources. Is the number of clients of this category of stores, and the volume of sales, sufficient to justify their existence? Or is it that, for the time being, profit is not really the chief goal of these intense changes in the consumer environment?

In counterpoint to the rapid and sweeping "mallization" of consumer culture and lifestyle, there is also an obviously growing number of second hand clothes stores which, instead of losing ground to imported cheap Chinese and Turkish made clothes,

298 For more details on this type of centers of consumption, see Maya Keliyan, 2008, pp. 272-274.

299 Cited from data presented on the official site of NSI: http://www.nsi.bg/index.php

300 Here I exclude those who shop there only when there are sales and price reductions in the supermarkets and malls.

are actually expanding their market positions.

Bulgaria is becoming increasingly globalized; but the impact of globalization processes manifests itself differently in each society. While our society is beginning to become "MacDonaldized", throughout the world the values of "anti-MacDonaldization" are gaining in popularity. Due to the lag in our socio-economic development, we find ourselves "Americanizing", "globalizing" and "Westernizing" in a way that is already considered outmoded in developed countries. Unfair trade is flourishing in Bulgaria, while in the developed countries during the new century ethical consumption is of growing importance, and requires buying goods from fair trade. These values, as well as the values of "sustainable" and "green" consumption are penetrating slowly into Bulgarian society as well, being shared by small groups, especially by highly educated people from the middle strata.

The consumer values spread in contemporary Bulgarian society are contrary to the above-mentioned recent trends and popular consumption patterns in developed consumer societies. For the time being our society remains a stranger to ecological values, and profit is much more important than preserving the natural environment here. The judiciary system is corrupt and slow and the laws do not adequately safeguard the natural environment from the encroachments of those seeking quick profit.

In the transition to democracy and market economy colossal changes take place in a very brief time in the value system and in the very meaning attached to consumption. Marketing, advertising, and some of the media, in order to stimulate consumption of specific goods and assert the image of the "modern" lifestyle of "successful people", promote the popularization in public space of the values of consumerism[301]. These values are linked with the striving, typical in mass consumption, for abundant and affluent consumption, which is aimed not so much at satisfying needs but primarily at demonstrating social status[302]. Consumerism is incompatible with traditional Bulgarian consumer values like thrift and self-restriction. It is also in contradiction with the moral norms promoted in the times of communism, which censured the avidity for possessions as a "disease of capitalism". Today it is no longer considered immoral to be rich and to demonstrate one's wealth: on the contrary, such conspicuous extravagance carries social prestige and recognition among certain social groups. After half a century of declared "universal equality" in Bulgaria, the leisure class is gaining visibility in public space, with its typical conspicuous consumption and extravagant lifestyle[303]. For the members of this class consumption has become a spectacle and a means of demonstrating status. This is eroding the moral values and social integration of communities and of society as a whole.

But consumerism is presented in advertising as a "mass-democratic lifestyle

301 It should be made clear that marketing, advertising, and the media are certainly not the cause of consumerism. They did not generate it but they can be disseminators of its values. Apart from this, it is also true that in contemporary societies they have great power over public opinion and can promote the massification of these values.

302 Elizabeth Schor, 1998.

303 In terms of Thorstein Veblen, op. cit.

engendered by the universality of monetary economy by the development of the market". It claims to be an essential aspect of democratic and market societies; the striving for consumption is presented as a "quest for happiness" and "continuous discovery of new things" [304]. Norbert Boltz uses the term "consumism" and entitles his book The Consumerist Manifesto. The analogy sought with "communism" and the "Communist Manifesto" is quite obvious. According to this author the successful policy at the start of the 21st century against Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism should not be the "export of Western universal human rights" but "to infect 'risk states' with the virus of consumption"[305]. I prefer the term "consumerism", which I believe is more precise, besides being long-established in literature[306], but Boltz's term is a very apt metaphor for designating the great transformation in consumption patterns and lifestyle undergone by Bulgarian society after 1989 – a transition from communism to consumism. It is not accidental that according to Boltz "consumism acquires the features of a world religion" and represents an "addiction" to consumption[307].

The social-economic transformations change consumer culture and its values[308]. Under conditions of shortage and the dominating ideology of "a society of social equality", consumerism can be present in the consumption patterns of some social groups and be a characteristic of their lifestyle, but society officially condemns and rejects it as something accidental, not immanent to the nature of society. With the penetration of the market, of its commodity abundance, consumerism receives what it lacked under communism – moral legitimacy. It becomes a consumer value which, far from having to be concealed, must be displayed as something that testifies to status. According to some authors, whereas socialism claimed to make luxury accessible to the masses, to refashion it into "democratic luxury"[309], in the transition it has been transformed into "elitist kitsch reserved for the few"[310]. The display of luxury is not enough in itself – some groups of the "new elites" take as their group marker a "stunning amount" of expensive goods, and the "quantity of the style" becomes a measure of "refinement"[311]. The desire to consume more and more new things quickly grows into avidity, into "pleonexia, that can never be satisfied"[312].

In post-communist society the middle strata still lack strong social-group characteristics compared with their counterparts in developed countries. They are much smaller and their social-economic status is lower; in some socio-professional

304 Norbert Boltz, op. cit., pp. 11, 89.

305 Norbert Boltz, op. cit., p. 15.

306 Elizabeth Schor, 1992, op. cit., and others.

307 Norbert Boltz, op. cit., pp. 9-16.

308 More on consumer values and attitudes see Kristian Bankov, 2009.

309 Jukka Gronow, op. cit., p. 49.

310 Sergey Oushakine, op. cit., p. 113.

311 Sergey Oushakine is referring to the "new elites" in Russia, the so-called "new Russians", but their Bulgarian counterparts, though on a smaller scale (because of their comparatively smaller resources), are not essentially different in their "stylistic" orientation.

312 Norbert Boltz, op. cit. 89.

groups in Bulgaria[313] there is even a considerable status discrepancy between economic and cultural status. That is why the middle strata in the transition societies, together with their consumption patterns and lifestyle, have not acquired the leading position and role that they have in postmodern society. Nevertheless, the development of post-communist societies tends to bring to the fore the consumption patterns and lifestyle of middle strata members, such as the professionals and managers of prospering branches in the private sector. It became clear when these trends in postmodern society were discussed in Chapter One, that these socio-professional groups are characterized by a striving for luxury, for the demonstration of luxury, for vulgarization of taste, etc. Evidently in our country as well the same groups of the middle strata are already asserting their leading position in consumption behavior and culture as a result of their standard of consumption.

Members of the separate middle strata have different conceptions as to what constitutes success and as to the importance of wealth in defining success. Entrepreneurs who took part in focus group discussions conducted as part of the Round 3 of the ESS, indicated that consumption level and prosperity were among the criteria for success in present-day Bulgarian society. According to focus group participants, material prosperity is important but cannot be considered the chief mark of success. They pointed out that "success" means "a life without deprivation" but they also specified it should be a life "without unnecessary, wasteful spending". "Conspicuous consumption" is associated with enrichment attained by dishonest and illegal means, involving conspicuousness and selfish individualism. It is a demonstration of success and achievement that are in drastic disharmony with the social environment. The examples indicated in the focus group discussions were: luxury cars parked in front of prefab apartment blocks amidst the used cars typical for most Bulgarians; a guard booth in front of the houses of the newly rich, placed at the entrance of the apartment block in the prefab neighborhoods, etc. The demonstration of wealth, and thereby of prestige and personal importance, is described and assessed by the interviewed entrepreneurs in the following words:

"... he amasses wads of money and shows himself with the big, modern cars, he builds himself... an awesome house at the foot of Vitosha Mountain[314]. Many people will say, now that's a successful man. There's the recipe of success. But I don't accept this recipe. And I think that ordinary people, most people don't accept it."

"The one who's build a big house at the foot of Vitosha Mountain, he hasn't given a thing to society, instead, he has taken from it. Well now, should that be the recipe of success? Not for me."

According to the respondents, some entrepreneurs follow conspicuous consumption patterns that are characteristic for the present-day Bulgarian "leisure class". They are motivated by the desire to "outdo" their neighbors and "be envied" for their material acquirements. Thus these entrepreneurs gradually get more interested in conspicuous luxury than in the growth of their business, and their behavior might

313 For instance, the professionals from the budget sphere, who will be mentioned further below in this chapter.

314 Vitosha Mountain is on the outskirt of Sofia and its foothills shelter the presidential and governmental residences, resort quarters, luxury estates and villa complexes.

eventually lead to failure.

"Your business starts going well. You don't begin to reinvest immediately, instead you buy a luxury house and an expensive car, showiness, because this or that neighbor … has that kind of house or car. And… you amass easily, you don't distribute it properly, and you lose."

The interviewed entrepreneurs, like most Bulgarians, look upon such ultimate failure as a kind of "moral retribution" for the "conspicuous consumption" displayed by the "leisure class" against the background of the material difficulties faced by large parts of the population.

Consumption patterns in contemporary Bulgarian society, due to the important social-economic, political, and cultural transformations that took place in the last two decades, have rather heterogeneous and even contradictory characteristics. On one hand, they contain trends that differentiate them significantly from the ways and forms of consumption in developed countries, from consumer values, tastes, and attitudes there, such as, for instance, "Orientalization" and unfair trade. On the other hand, these consumption patterns are quickly and visibly becoming "Westernized", globalized, and "MacDonaldized", and they include both some rational aspects of the changes and some negative tendencies. Among the latter are consumerism, the loss of traditions and local specificity, the spread of unhealthy practices, etc. Along with these, there is a slowly growing interest in healthy lifestyle, especially among consumers belonging to the middle and upper strata. These changes are similar to those undergone by developed societies at their transition to a postmodern stage in the late 1960s, as studied in detail in Chapter One.

All these general similarities between developments in post-communist consumption patterns and those in postmodern consumption testify that the global environment in which post-communist society is developing is favorable, regardless of all the social-economic problems in society, to its "transition" to a higher stage (including all the latter's positive and negative aspects). Of course, this transition is marked in each society by specific social-economic and cultural transformations, and the changes in consumption, being part of those transformations, certainly have their specific particularities as well. The growing similarity or difference from consumption patterns in developed societies are determined by the expansion of market relations and democracy, so the local particularities of market and democracy ultimately determine the nature of Bulgarian consumer society today.

The social-group characteristics, size, and stability of the middle strata are important for the nature of every modern consumer society. These particularities (for instance the relative weakness of the middle strata's social-economic position compared with corresponding social groups in developed countries) are among the causes of the contradictions – indicated above – of the present-day Bulgarian consumption patterns. Nevertheless, by the ways and forms in which the middle strata are consuming, through their consumer tastes, values, and attitudes, they largely contribute to the trends that make Bulgarian consumer society akin to the postmodern one.

The difficult "Europeanization" of Bulgarian consumption patterns

In connection with Bulgaria's membership in the EU, numerous bureaucratic structures were established for "servicing" the process of "Europeanization" and acting as intermediaries between local and European institutions. In order to deal with the rise in prices of goods and services after January 1, 2007 (the day of Bulgaria's accession to EU), a Commission for Consumer Protection was formed at the Council of Ministers. The public's and media's assumption that this would be just one more commission "reporting on its activities" and fruitlessly using up budget resources proved all too true. At that time – when EU membership was already a fact – an active campaign was started for informing the population about consumer rights. But it played mostly a propaganda role, for again, there were no mechanisms and institutions capable of undertaking real and effective measures against the registered violations. Numerous commissions have proven ineffective and incapable of fulfilling the tasks for which they were formed. Evidently, the high-level corruption in institutions tied to various lobbies, to political and economic groups, and even to shady or criminal business activities, is among the major obstacles to solving these problems.

In the last three years the Ministry of Agriculture and Food has periodically undertaken campaigns, accompanied by loud media coverage, against fake or low-quality food products, or to promote the separation of such products in stores from the genuine and good-quality foods. The first campaign of this kind was related to fake milk products: milk, yogurt, and cheeses containing vegetable oils instead of milk[315]. Products would have to carry labels indicating the contents clearly and in an understandable way; products containing vegetable oils should be offered on separate store counters. But when the media campaign passed away, things went on as before. Other initiatives of the same ministry concerning various products – meat and sausages, bread, etc. – transpired in the same way. The state standards for food production that were in effect in the times of communism ceased to be applied after 1989. At present there are no standards in effect, and instead of up-dating the old standards, attempts are made to develop new ones – of course, the scientific research "groundwork" for the project will be well-remunerated. Clearly, this situation is to the advantage of many firms that are amassing large and quick profit at the expense of the consumer's health.

Institutions are important for Bulgarian "Europeanization", but are they not enough. Even assuming they really do operate in a "European" manner, they are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for their purpose. Hence, appeals to consumers for greater activeness are justified. But civic activeness in itself is also not enough for dealing with the phenomena described above, such as the sale of fake products, unfair trade, and it is especially helpless when confronted with the irresponsibility and lack of interest of administrators. Still, it is an important precondition, lacking which, consumption in our country cannot be "Europeanized". It is a commonly known fact that, as yet, there

315 These oils are harmful to health, because when accumulated in the organism they increase the level of cholesterol in the blood and hence the risk of heart attack or stroke.

is an insufficient amount of civic associations that genuinely protect the interests of consumers (and of society, for that matter)[316]. Regrettably, this conclusion is also true as concerns the structures of civil society in general in our country: they are still weak, insufficiently effective participants in the life of society.

The cause of the weak civic activeness of consumers is looked for in their low legal culture and ignorance of their rights, in the costliness of lawsuits, especially in proportion to the income levels, and in the low effectiveness, sluggishness of the judicial system. In the few cases when the violators of consumers' rights are discovered and the problem is taken to court, the latter imposes merely token penalties. The public has come to the conviction that "white-collar crimes[317]" in Bulgaria practically go unpunished, what is more, they are covered up effectively, being (perhaps) connected with interests of people at much higher levels than is apparent. This would explain the high level of corruption that continues to be tolerated despite the severe criticism coming from EU institutions.

What has been said so far indicates that:

- A considerable part of producers are primarily interested in making fast and big profits without observing the rules of fair trade and without regard for the quality of their goods and the consumer's health;

- There is a lack of effective state or civic institutions that are clean of corrupt practices and interests, and really defend consumers' rights;

- Civil society is still weak, its structures are not fully built and stable, and civic culture in our country is still underdeveloped.

There is an absence of formal or informal structures that might function, in Norbert Boltz's terminology, "in the interest of the consuming citizen"[318].

The effectiveness of institutions and that of citizens prove to be like interconnected vessels: the irresponsibility of the former leads to the passivity of the latter and vice versa. Institutions seek solutions to problems, verbally encouraging citizens to be more active, while the citizens complain to one another of the inaction of the institutions and assert that "nothing can be done". Why is it that institutions do not act for the public good, that civic activeness of consumers is low, and civil society in our country still ineffective? Where should we look for the causes? In history, in the national psychology, in the legacy of the communist past? Undeveloped civic culture and weak civil society may be typical for countries undergoing a transition to market and democracy, especially like ours, where the economy is still weakly developed, the market mechanisms and

316 I believe that most of the numerous civic organizations taking part in the work of various ministries and department are not genuinely informal and civic. It remains unclear whom exactly they represent and whose interests they protect. The fact that a large number of NGOs are registered does not automatically indicate a developed NGO sector or high civic activeness or the existence of a civil society.

317 The term was introduced by Edwin Sutherland in 1949 in his well-known book White Collar Crime. It designates crimes committed by prestigious people with a high social position in the performance of their professional duties. For more details, see Edwin Sutherland, op. cit.

318 Norbert Boltz, op. cit., p. 15.

institutions are not fully established, the market is a pseudo-market, and there is a high rate of corruption.

All the above-mentioned facts are probably part of the explanation. But the complete answer, I believe, can be found by seeing contemporary Bulgarian society in an European context. The low level of civic culture in our country is one of the causes of our difficult "Europeanization". We find that civic society is effective in developed countries, and the movement in that direction we perceive as constituting "Europeanization". Hence, the low level of consumer culture is a feature of the difficulties of "Europeanization" in our society.

The findings of the ESS, Round 3, confirm these observations. Social and civic inertness and apathy are predominant in the lifestyle in our country, and this hampers the development of society and our whole integration into Europe. The data show that during the last year before the survey, most Bulgarians (91%) had never worked for voluntary or charity organizations. The levels of social solidarity are also very low, the capacity for cooperation and mutual aid, and the feeling of being part of a larger community are withered. According to the same survey, more than half of the Bulgarians (55%) have never helped other people without being professionally obliged to do so. Over three fourths (78%) have never taken part in activities organized in the neighborhood. Most Bulgarians in the past year (95%) have not done anything to promote the real development of the country: they have not contacted people from local or central government, have not worked in associations, and have not taken part in legal protests or demonstrations. Only 5% have signed petitions and less than 2% have boycotted certain products sold on the market. This percentage is hopelessly low in proportion to the large share of products and services of low quality and high price.

In Chapter Three are discussed the civic activeness and solidarity displayed by Japanese consumers. The Japanese are proverbial for their highly developed feeling of social responsibility, their ability to act in the name of common interests, to unite around common goals[319]. Why is it so difficult for us to "Europeanize", i.e. to assimilate the civic values and culture of Western Europe, given that Bulgaria belongs to European civilization? The Japanese, though with a culture much different from the European tradition, have long ago achieved what we constantly say we are striving for but have certainly not attained. During the modernization period Meiji, having chosen the "Western model" of development, Japan achieved changes that were in many respects more rapid and intense than those occurring at the same time in Europe[320].

Why is it that in the third quarter of the 19th century the Japanese could successfully modernize and even "Europeanize", while we are still unable to be "Europeanized" consumers with "European" consumption patterns?

The Bulgarian case confirms that the lack of a strong feeling of community, of unity and organization in the name of public goals, raises obstacles for social development. Edward Banfield explains "extreme poverty and backwardness" as largely due to the

319 See Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 22-64.

320 Samuel Eisenstadt, 1996, p. 266.

inability of people "to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate material interest of nuclear family"[321]. He calls this ethos "amoral familism". The quoted author has reached these conclusions as a result of his research on a backward region of Southern Italy in the mid 1950s, but his findings equally apply to Bulgaria at the beginning of the 21st century.

The problem is related not only to the difficulties of "Europeanization" of consumption patterns but to the general social-economic and cultural life, to all social structures and institutions. An important factor of successful social development and surmounting these problems is the capacity of culture as regards "creating and maintaining the high degree of organization" in the name of a common good and beyond the immediate material interest of separate people. Without creating and developing such cultural resources "modern economy and democratic political order are impossible"[322]. This is confirmed by the compared examples of Japanese and Bulgarian development.

The creation of a strong feeling of community, of unity and organization in the name of common goals is also hampered in our country by the lack of institutions capable of winning the trust of citizens. The crisis of trust that exists at various levels, ranging from interpersonal relations to trust in institutions, is a significant problem of post-communist Bulgarian society.

Certainly one of the important causes of the difficult Europeanization of consumption patterns in our country is the small size and insufficient strength and social-group stability of the middle strata. In the first chapter, I pointed out as a marker of these strata the role within them of enterprising civic actors, who are a foundation of developed civil society. The Bulgarian middle strata at present, due to their relatively weak position, social-group resources, and presence compared with those in developed societies, are still not in a condition to become leaders of the "Europeanization" of our consumption patterns. But having in mind the changes in postmodern consumption described in the first chapter and the role of the middle strata in these processes, it may be expected and assumed that in Bulgaria as well, this is the social group that will play a decisive role for the positive changes in our consumer society.

The study of the changes that took place after 1989 has shown the heterogeneous, multi-directional, and even contradictory character of consumer environment and culture in our country. Bulgarian post communist consumption patterns are certainly marked by the particularities of the difficult and dramatic social-economic transformations; they are an important and directly visible part of those transformations. It is not accidental that a large part of the social strata assess the winners or losers in the transition, and the actual results of the changes, on the basis of their own consumer standard and of the changes in consumer culture and consumer behavior in our country. Thus, the social status of individuals and groups is increasingly being defined (whether people are aware of this or not) by their consumption. It is increasingly visible that people differ

321 Edward Banfield, 1958, p. 10.

322 Edward Banfield, op. cit., p.8.

in the ways and forms of their consumption, which comes to be specific to a particular social group, category, and stratum.

According to the thesis of this dissertation, it is in the consumption patterns of the middle strata that the most important changes are observed in modern consumption, and they are the bearers of the most symptomatic trends in these patterns. It has been made clear that the contradictory nature of consumption patterns here is a result of, among other things, the still insufficiently strong position of the middle strata here as compared with their counterparts in developed countries; is a result of their weaker social-group resources, lower civic activeness and initiative.

And what are their concrete characteristics and presence in Bulgaria, what are their consumption patterns, how are they similar or different from other social groups and strata, what are the leading trends in their consumption? In the next part of this book we will examine these questions in detail using the rich information provided by representative sociological surveys and statistical data.

3. The middle strata in the formation of bulgarian consumer society

Social-group characteristics of the middle strata in contemporary Bulgaria

The Bulgarian middle strata, i.e. those who possess the "typical characteristics of middle strata" are calculated as being between 20% and 30% of the population, while about 42% of the people identify themselves as falling in this group[323]. Their share varies within this range according to the classification models used by different researchers and by the size of the sample used in representative surveys. Many national representative studies, such as ESS and ISSP, have shown that since the beginning of the 21st century the relative share of objective and subjective middle class has remained the same and falls within this range. A phenomenon familiar in developed countries and described in Chapter One is observed in Bulgaria as well: consumption pattern and lifestyle of the middle strata are acknowledged and desired even by people who, assessed by objective traits, do not belong to them.

This phenomenon can be observed not only in transition countries but also in highly developed societies[324]. For instance in Japan during 1970s and 1980s, the subjective middle class attains, according to some surveys' results, as much as 90% of respondents. In some societies during the period of rapid economic development and increased prosperity there has been a diffusion of believe that the greater part of society belongs to the middle class. The data of comparative international surveys show that 90% of respondents in Canada, West Germany (71% in 1986), Italy, Brazil,

323 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, 200, p. 363.

324 John Goldthorpe, 1982, Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Rosemary Crompton, op. cit., Tom Butler and Mike Savage, op. cit., Mike Savage, Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst, 2001.

India, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, USA and Australia self-identify as middle class[325]. The phenomenon of "middle self-identification" itself indicates the importance of the middle class in societies of varying levels of development. The fact has been widely commented in relevant literature. Jonathan Kelley and Mark Evans have analyzed the psychological causes that make people identify as belonging to a certain group or community. According to the quoted authors, self-identification as middle class is a kind of relating to a social "mean". They see this as a typical phenomenon of mass consciousness. People avoid the "extreme" social positions and identify with the majority, with the "others"[326].

Scholars have also sought an explanation to this in the impact of the following factors: the growing share of non-manual occupations in modern and post-modern societies; the symbolic importance for the middle strata of the modern lifestyle; the prestige of belonging to the middle class; the changes in consumption patterns. The greater part of those self-identifying as belonging to the middle strata, actually have in mind belonging to it in terms of prestige, i.e. they assess themselves as middle prestigious class, and make their estimate on the basis of their lifestyle, consumption and position in the "middle" of the stratification range, not according to economic resources, in other words not as a "middle economic class"[327].

The distribution of the different middle strata in present-day Bulgarian society by objective indicators can be traced through the cited data in Table 2.

Table 2[328]
Social Strata in Bulgaria

Social groups – Social strata	*1999*	*2006*
1. High level state officials/administrators/managers	1.1	3.4
2. Professionals, non-top administrators and managers, experts	8.7	8.1
3. Routine non-manual employees	12.1	12.3
4. Small and medium sized entrepreneurs and self-employed farmers	5.2	2.9
5. Skilled manual workers and technicians and supervisors of workers	13.5	8.9
6. Semi-skilled and non-skilled manual workers, incl. agricultural	8.3	6.9
7. Pensioners	29.8	34.3
8. Unemployed	15.0	12.1
9. Students	2.7	4.8
10. Others	3.6	6.3

325 Kenji Kosaka, 1994, p. 110.

326 Jonathan Kelley and Moriah D.R. Evans, 1995, pp. 157-158.

327 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., p. 97.

328 Source: Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp. 360-361 and ISSP research results for 2006.

The stratum of intelligentsia and intellectuals comprises professionals, experts, specialists, administrators and managers with a higher education and special qualification, people of the artistic-creative intelligentsia and other similar categories. In studying the part of this stratum that belongs to the middle strata, researchers exclude those occupying high leadership positions. The members of the intelligentsia comprised in the Bulgarian new middle strata may be people employed in state or private institutions or working in their own firms. The data show that in 2000, 95% of this category was with a higher education. Their relative share in 2006, according to the data in Table 2, amounted to about 8%; the percentage varies in different representative survey according to the size of the sample and the classification used, and ranges between 7% and 12% of the adult population of Bulgaria.

The specific stratum of contemporary Bulgarian intelligentsia whose Western counterpart are professionals, differs considerably by its status characteristics from professionals in developed societies. In our country after 1989 the middle class primarily has the image of a class of entrepreneurs, businesspersons and self-employed. Obviously in a changing society of the Bulgarian type, the resource of material wealth, associated with entrepreneurs, is much more prestigious than that of knowledge. In developed societies the educational and qualification background of professionals is assessed and used as an important resource for obtaining and preserving general social prosperity. In the modern world, the demand for "educational achievements spirals upward", a phenomenon designated as positionality[329]. Positionality carries prestige but also high income for the highly-educated and highly-qualified social groups that make possible, with their knowledge, skills, and experience, the creation and growth of the economy of knowledge and high technologies. Incomes of the members of the intelligentsia in our country are around and above the average for the country, but are lower than those of entrepreneurs, qualified workers, and technicians, and even of some categories of unskilled workers.

In contemporary societies differences with regard to economic position, income, power resources, and work autonomy, are evident between representatives of the separate parts of the middle strata but also within the boundaries of the same stratum. The differences depend on occupation in the state vs. the private sector, on the economic importance of the branch, and on the size of the firm (here the highest-income companies are those in the field of information technologies[330]).

In Bulgaria there are large differences between the incomes of the separate groups within the intelligentsia, depending on whether they are employed in the private or budget sector. Those occupied in the budget sector receive considerably

329 Fred Hirsh, 1977.

330 These differences are analyzed in detail by a number of scholars cited at the end of Chapter One - John Goldthorpe, op. cit., John Goldthorpe, Catriona Llevellyn and Clive Payne, op. cit., Fred Pfeil, op. cit., Scott Lash and John Urry, op. cit., Scott Lash, op. cit., Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding, op. cit., Scott Lash and John Urry, 1994, Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., 2003, Maya Keliyan, op. cit., 2008, etc.

lower salaries than their colleagues in the prosperous branches of the private sector, such as finance, real estate property, construction, telecommunications, etc. These are not just normal differences but large income inequalities that enforce the conviction of those in a disadvantaged social-economic situation that "the Bulgarian middle class, as yet, is only a dream".

There are also large differences in income between the people employed in the budget sector: professionals receive considerably lower salaries than administrators and managers[331]. Also, some budget sectors are traditionally considered more prestigious and the professionals and experts employed in them have much higher salaries than their colleagues in other spheres[332]. Some of the inequalities that appear here are looked upon as something usual by Bulgarian society, but would be considered bizarre and paradoxical in other societies, not only in developed ones but even in those of the neighboring Balkan countries: the salaries of specialists with secondary education and even of low-skilled workers[333] are in some cases higher than those of professionals with university education and special qualification[334]. Lowest paid are the representatives of the intelligentsia[335] occupied in education, something that will have a devastating impact on the nation's future. This cursory comparison of incomes of various social groups of the intelligentsia is not without a purpose, nor merely motivated by the wish to express solidarity with the concerns and problems of those who have been "underestimated" in economic terms. This situation is not due merely to accidental circumstances or oversight, but to a state policy that has persisted since after WWII. The causes and objective of this policy is a separate topic; what is important for our discussion are the results of this policy: they are devastating not only for the consumption patterns and lifestyle of those directly affected and their families, but for Bulgarian society in general and for the future of the nation. The fact that part of the Bulgarian intelligentsia is placed in such a humiliating position draws the country further away from the developed societies and EU, to which political leaders since 1989 have declared they are leading the country. The situation is even much worse than in societies that are still far from EU membership. The causes are many and varied, but some important local factors are passiveness, low civic activeness, weak civil society, incomplete structures of civil society, and the lack of experience and skills for coordinated, united action to uphold common interests. Also, when these socio-professional groups of the intelligentsia are placed and kept in such a situation, they, as in a vicious circle, cannot fulfill the kind of leadership role their counterparts play in developed societies, where they are in the front ranks of civil society as enterprising social actors.

331 School teachers, teachers in some universities, researchers in the Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS), etc., have much lower salaries than officials in ministries, in local departments, commissions and other government institutions.

332 For instance, the salary of a non-commissioned officer in the army or police is higher than that of a professor in the BAS or in The University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski".

333 Such as workers in construction, in the security sector, transport, etc.

334 For instance, the salaries of nurses in certain hospitals are higher than those of associate professors in the institutes of BAS. Also, the salaries of cleaning women in banks are equal to those of professors in BAS.

335 The salaries of researcher in BAS are the lowest for their category of any European country.

According to Table 2, in 2006 the small and middle entrepreneurs from small and middle business amounted to about 3%; in 2000 according to various representative surveys, their relative share varied between 5% and 12% of the adult population. Their incomes are considerably higher than those of the intelligentsia. The predominant part of the intelligentsia and entrepreneurs live in Sofia and the large cities, which has a certain impact on their consumption patterns and lifestyle. The exception to this rule are the independent farmers occupied in the agricultural sector, who generally live in villages and small towns. The latter usually have secondary education or higher.

Students, who have a lifestyle and consumption patterns similar to those of the middle strata, amounted to about 5% of the population in 2006, according to the data in Table 2.

Members of the middle strata in our country have a specific lifestyle that defines them as people who follow an "active strategy"[336]. Despite the impoverishment and low living standard, the presence of middle strata consumption patterns and lifestyle has been registered in surveys of Bulgarian society. What is defining for these patterns and lifestyles is not only the levels of income, which, as we saw, are lower than those of some skilled and even unskilled workers. In seeking additional sources of income and in distributing their household budgets, this category of people are guided by values and attitudes related to a modern lifestyle, and they follow a specific cultural model of thinking, valuation, and behavior[337]. Their consumption patterns and lifestyle, together with their socio-economic and cultural characteristics of enterprising, active social actors, distinguish them from the other social groups and unite them into one category, despite the status differences between various parts of the middle strata. These features cause them to resemble their counterparts in developed countries: though they may differ from the latter considerably by income levels, they share similar values, attitudes and preferences regarding consumption and lifestyle.

The distinction between "nominal" and "real" middle class made by N. Tilkidjiev[338] can be used as an apt methodological tool for analysis of the particularities of lifestyle and consumption patterns of the Bulgarian middle strata and for comparing them with those in developed societies. Here the analogy with "nominal" and "real" wage is appropriate, for the "nominal" middle class is that in our post-communist society, and the "real" one, in developed societies. This distinction enables understanding and explaining what seems at first glance to be a contradiction: why is it that the middle strata are generally said to be enterprising social actors, as mentioned previously, but before that it was said that their insufficient enterprise in our country was one of the reasons for the difficulties encountered here in "Europeanization" of consumption patterns and strengthening of civil society? They are enterprising but only compared with other social-groups within their own society. But when compared with corresponding social group formations in developed societies, it becomes evident that the Bulgarian middle

336 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp. 381-384.

337 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp. 386-399.

338 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., pp. 400–403.

strata are still only “nominal”, not “real” middle strata like those in advanced countries.

As it was made clear in the Chapter One, the middle strata are heterogeneous social-group formations. The considerable income inequalities between people occupied in the budget sphere and those in the private sector, as well as within the budget sector itself, have had a formative impact on their consumption patterns and lifestyle. Professionals and managers in some spheres of the private sector, such as finance, real estate, staff management, communications, media, show business, advertising, etc., have much greater opportunities to transform their cultural and organizational resources into economic ones. Some Bulgarian yuppies follow conspicuous consumption patterns and lifestyle, thereby giving public visibility to their social status. They are patrons of certain clubs and establishments, spend vacations in resorts that match their image, follow “refined” models of dress, choose “suitable” hobbies, diet, sports, etc. They are among the clients of malls and brand name stores, the clients of luxury hotels, of spa and wellness centers. They impose the consumer lifestyle in its contemporary Bulgarian version, striving to imitate their counterparts in developed societies.

Professionals from the influential electronic and printed media, advertising agencies, as well as representatives of celebrity pop culture in our country have an important cultural and especially organizational resource for exercising influence on the consumption patterns and lifestyle of various social categories, groups, and strata. There position as creators and especially disseminators of cultural models (especially when they are employed in prosperous media influential on public opinion), enables them to be lifestyle leaders. The combination of economic and financial resources with power resources and the influence of the institutions they represent, make them the Bulgarian “lifestyle trendsetters”. In some cases, what are obviously commercialized, even vulgarized, kitsch forms of mass culture are declared to be models of “elite culture”. These trends in consumption patterns and lifestyle of high-income groups of professionals in our country are not only a Bulgarian or post-communist phenomenon: they occur in every contemporary society. The trends evident in consumption patterns and lifestyle of postmodern society, as described in Chapter One, are visibly present in our country as well. Here too we may point to the growing mass culture, vulgarization of taste, the imposition of pseudo-esthetic models as a standard of refined taste, consumerism as a criterion of modern lifestyle, etc. In other words, the negative tendencies in postmodern consumption and lifestyle are assimilated and disseminated much faster than the positive ones.

The middle strata among other social groups of consumers: similarities and differences in their consumption patterns

The middle strata consumption patterns stand out distinctly as a significant indicator of their status when they are compared with consumption patterns of other social-group formations. In the dissertation I have used the findings of two representative empirical sociological surveys conducted in Bulgaria as part of large European surveys. The first one, already mentioned in previous paragraph, was “Young People:

Partnership, Marriage, Children”, completed in 2005; the second was “Relationships between Generations and Genders”, conducted in 2007[339].

In the first of these sociological surveys, a 15-level scale is used to determine the work and qualification status of the surveyed persons. In view of the objectives of this work, I have united groups that are closely similar in their characteristics, and have reduced the 15 levels to 6. As a result, the following socio-professional groups were distinguished: high-level officials/administrators/managers; intelligentsia and intellectuals; middle-level technicians and administrators with a higher education or college education; employees with a secondary education; skilled workers and non-skilled workers. In constructing these groups the following criteria were taken into account: the type of employment, the work situation, profession and professional status, occupation, education and qualification, consumption patterns and lifestyle.

Falling under the group of “high-level officials/administrators/managers” are the following: high-level officials, such as professional politicians, prosecutors, judges, high-level army and police officers, directors of large state enterprises and administrative institutions, bankers, managers in private firms. All these categories, by their position and the power resources stemming from that position, fall under the category of high strata, which is why they have been united in a single group. According to the results of the survey, the relative share of this group is 2,1% of all surveyed persons.

The next group, “intelligentsia and intellectuals”, comprises the following respondents in the survey: “specialists from the humane, economic, and liberal professions, with a higher education”, such as directors of cultural and educational institutions, economists, leaders of teams of specialists, researchers, lawyers, writers, painters, actors, physicians, clergy, journalists, university teachers, and “specialists in mathematical, technical, natural science professions, with a higher education”, such as leaders of production units, engineers, designers, specialist in agriculture, constructors, mathematicians, chemists, biologists. Intelligentsia and intellectuals are united into one group, because they are similar in education level, do highly-skilled mental and creative work with a relatively higher degree of autonomy. The share of respondents falling in this united group is 8,2%.

In the third group, “middle-level technicians and administrators with a higher education or college education”, are included technical managers and specialists, production technologists, laboratory assistants, medical nurses, and those classified as “middle-level administrative officials and specialists”. These include inspectors, information processing specialists, accountants, cashiers, school teachers and educators, economists. Falling under this category are 15,5% of the respondents. Their work is also high-skilled mental labor, although some of them, such as educators, laboratory assistants, medical nurses, and cashiers, may perform routine activities as well, while others, such as teachers, accountants, technical leaders, do more complicated and creative work. The previous group, “intelligentsia and intellectuals”, together with that

339 Both were realized by the Coordinating Research Council for Social Development and Social European Integration of the BAS, the NSI, and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany, which financed the surveys. The Bulgarian part of the survey was headed by Atanas Atanasov.

of “technicians and administrators”, are representatives of the middle strata. They include professionals, experts, specialist, administrators, and managers.

The fourth group, “employees with a secondary education”, comprises those designated in the survey as “office employees” (typists, secretaries, administrators, suppliers), “occupied in trade and services” (store managers, sellers, postal service workers, security guards, hairdressers, waiters, cooks, firefighters), and “low-level leaders” (occupied in any sphere except agriculture and forestry; such as heads of brigade, foremen, heads of production units). Their percentage is 21,1%.

The fifth group are “qualified workers”, who are directly engaged in processing raw materials and materials; such as turners, mechanics, drivers, plumbers, electrical technicians, machine setters. Their percentage is 29,5%.

The fourth and fifth group, if characterized by the nature and contents of their work, their education, qualification and professional position, would be defined as intermediate groups with intermediate status (mentioned in Chapter One). They “possess the characteristics both of the typical middle strata and of the working class”[340].

The sixth group, “low-skilled workers”, comprises those occupied in auxiliary activities, such as packagers, warehouse workers, loaders, workers in road construction, unskilled workers in trade and services (store attendants, cleaners, sanitation workers, porters, waste collectors), and hired workers in agriculture, forestry, fishing industry. They amount to 19% of the surveyed persons.

The relative shares of the socio-professional groups described above are different from those cited in Table 2 of the previous paragraph. This is because the Table 2 refers to a population that includes school students and pensioners, and people of working age. In the quoted survey, Young People: Partnership, Marriage, Children, the various social groups include only those occupied under a work contract or civil contract, and exclude the unemployed, pensioners, and students of working age. The size of the sample and other particularities of the various surveys also influence the size of the relative shares of the various groups.

The relative share of the people possessing basic mass consumption commodities in the different socio-professional groups is indicative of their consumption patterns. It has been established that, even with respect to one of the most common products in use at the beginning of the 21st century, the color TV set, some stratification in consumption is evident. Non-skilled workers appear to be the socio-professional group whose consumption is most clearly distinct from that of all other groups. Whereas about 99% of the respondents in the groups “high level officials/administrators/managers”, “intelligentsia and intellectuals”, “middle level technicians and administrators”, and “skilled workers”, possess a color TV, this is true for 89% of the non-skilled workers.

The next most widespread durable goods of consumption after the TV set are the telephone (mobile or fixed) and the washing machine[341]. Nearly all surveyed persons possessed both a telephone and a washing machine, the lowest share of people

340 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., p. 369.

341 The information quoted in graph 2 and graph 3 is good illustration of this tendency.

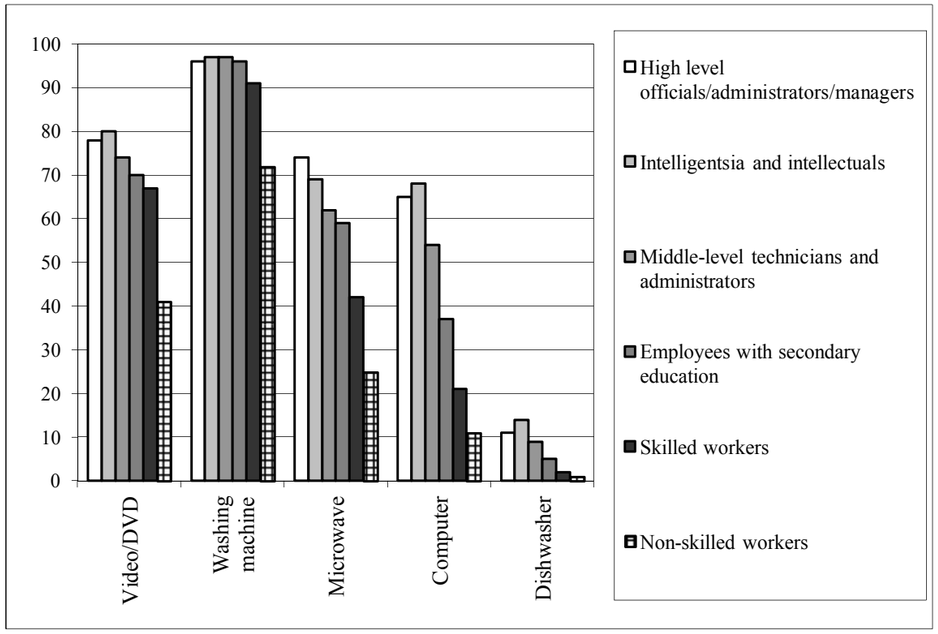
possessing these being once again in the category of non-skilled workers – 81% and 72% respectively for the two items.

The socio-professional groups of high level officials/administrators/managers and intelligentsia and intellectuals appear to have similar consumption patterns as concerns the possession of various durable items. The relative shares of the two groups were close in size with respect to color TV, telephone and washing machine, but also with regard to video/DVD player. The group of middle level technicians and administrators with higher and college education was similar to these two groups not only with regard to possession of color TV and telephone but with regard to the possession of washing machines. This shows that, with respect to the level of possession of widespread commodities of contemporary consumption in our country, the people belonging to the middle strata are close to the high socio-professional groups.

The share of households of the category of the intelligentsia and intellectuals possessing a computer, a dishwasher and a video/DVD player is even slightly higher than that of high level officials/administrators/managers. These two social groups have relative shares that are close in value with respect to possession of microwave ovens. With regard to possession of video/DVD players and microwave ovens, the middle-level technicians and administrators have relative shares that are close to those of employees with secondary education. The surveyed persons in this latter group who have a video/DVD player are close in percentage to the respective share in the skilled workers group.

Graph 2[342]

The relative share of the people possessing basic durable goods in the different socio-professional groups (first part)

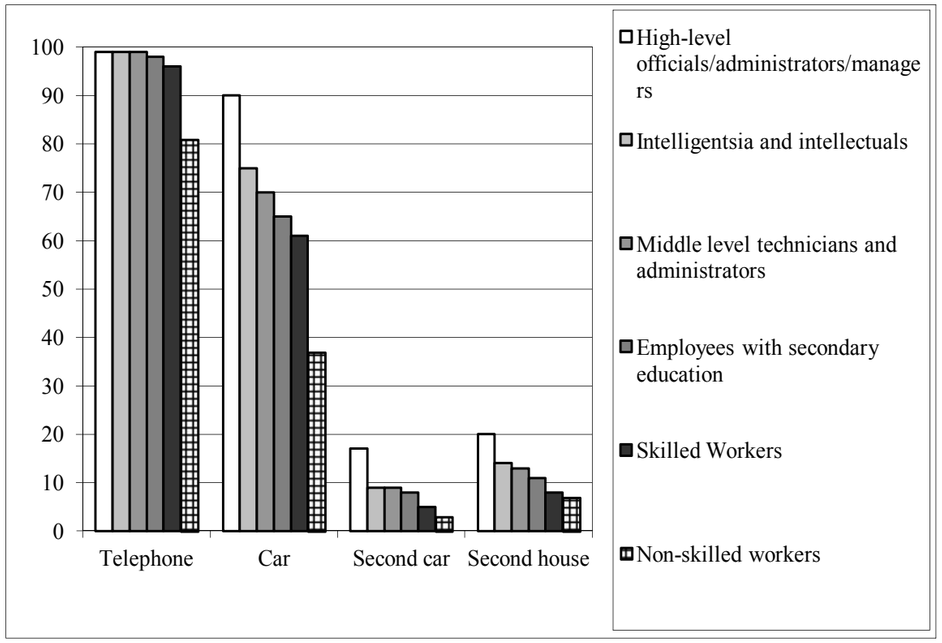


342 Graph 2 and graph 3 are prepared using data from empirical sociological survey “Young People: Partnership, Marriage, Children”, completed in 2005.

The dishwasher is an item the possession of which is characteristic for the consumption patterns of the middle and high strata; in this respect the intelligentsia and intellectuals are the socio-professional group most inclined to buy this article. This shows the value it holds for them as a means of alleviating domestic work and increasing leisure time.

The personal computer is a device owned by more than two thirds of the intelligentsia and intellectuals, a little over two thirds of the high level officials/administrators/managers, and more than half of middle level technicians and administrators. It is an object typical for the consumption patterns of the high and middle strata, of the people with a higher and college education. The higher the level of education, the more probable it is that a person will own a computer. Seventy percent of the surveyed university graduates and 42% of the specialists with a college education, over one third of the professionals who have specialized after completing their secondary education, and one third of those with a secondary education, have personal computers. The possession of a PC is correlated with place of residence: the highest share, 62%, of households having a PC are in Sofia; 56% of those living in a district center city have one, 46% of those living in a city, and 24% of rural dwellers. It appears that possession of a microwave oven increases proportionately to level of education: 55% of those with secondary education have one, and 71% of those with a higher education.

Graph 3
The relative share of the people possessing basic durable goods in the different socio-professional groups (second part)



According to the data shown in Graph 3, the highest share of people owning a car/van is found among the high level officials/administrators/managers (90%). Three fourths of the intelligentsia and intellectuals have a car, which is close to the respective share of middle-level technicians and administrators (70%). The latter category displays a slight difference compared with employees with secondary education who have a car of their own (65%). With regard to the indicator "possessing a second car" and, to a certain degree, "possessing a second home/country house", high level officials/administrators/managers are definitely in first place: nearly twice as many households in their group have a second car compared with those of the intelligentsia and intellectuals.

The group of non-skilled workers has the lowest relative share of owners of these durable objects, even the most widespread ones.

There is an evident trend with regard to the reasons for owning a given object. Among high level officials/administrators/managers, the answer "I don't have one, because I don't want to" is prevalent; the lower the socio-professional status of a group, the higher the share of those who have indicated the answer "I can't afford it".

Among the intelligentsia and intellectuals we have the highest share of objects that facilitate household work (and increase leisure time), such as dishwashers, and of objects related to information technologies, such as a personal computer. Among high level officials/administrators/managers we have the highest percentage of owners of all the other categories of items, and this group displays a small difference compared with intelligentsia and intellectuals with respect to the above-mentioned objects. High level officials/administrators/managers' group is definitely in first place with respect to possession of expensive objects such as a car, a second car, and a second home/country house.

Graph 4[343] confirms that the level of income is certainly not a definitive indicator of consumption patterns. Higher incomes can be no more than a precondition for certain consumption patterns and lifestyles. They create the possibility for satisfying needs by ensuring access to commodities of the desired quantity and quality, but they cannot in themselves determine what will be consumed, how much, when and how, nor the values, preferences, and tastes of consumers.

People with a tertiary education are not the group with the highest income, but in 2007 the percentage of people within this group that possessed a computer was almost equal to the percentage of people with computers in the highest income group (according to the data in Graph 3 and 4). The share of households with a net monthly income of over 1 401 BGN[344] possessing a computer is 72%, and that of people with a university education and possessing a computer is 70%. The same is true as regards other non-mass (in the context of our standards) commodities, such as video/DVD player, microwave oven, and washing machine. Only about three quarters of people in the upper four income groups possess a microwave oven while dishwashers are even less common: the relative share of people possessing this item even in the highest

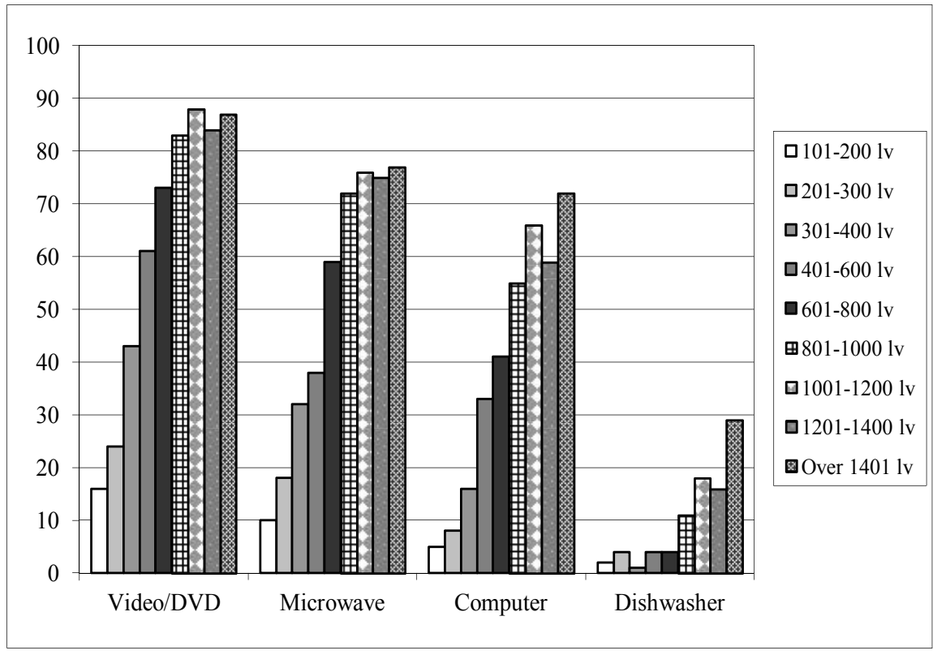
343 The Graph was built using the results of the Generation and Genders Survey, 2007.

344 One lev (BGN) is equal to approximately 0,50 Euro.

income group is 29%.

Graph 4

The relative share of different income groups of households possessing basic durable goods



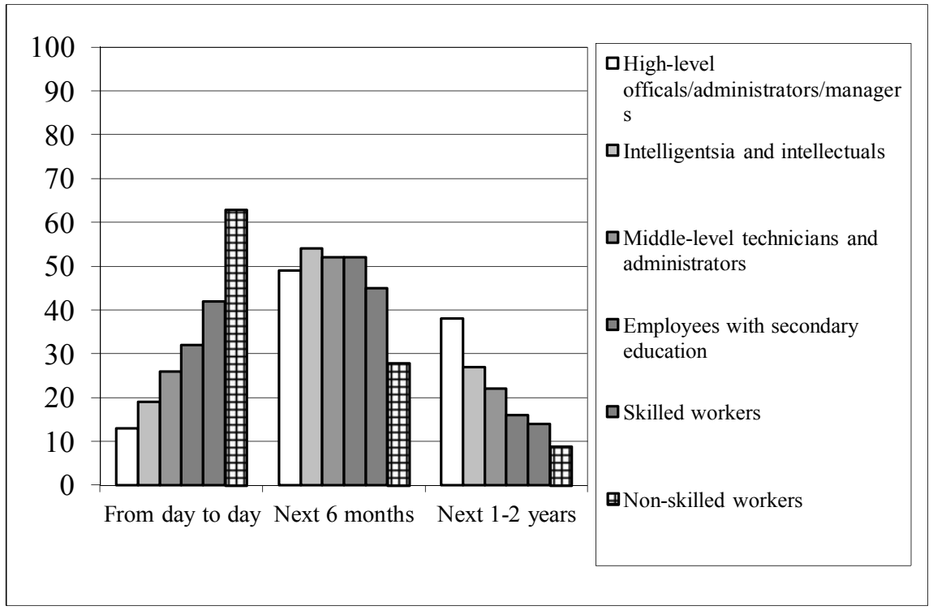
Graph 4 indicates that video/DVD player is the most highly preferred commodity among all household income groups. The highest share (88%) of people possessing these items is in the income group with a net monthly household income between 1001 and 1200 BGN. The share of households possessing a video/DVD player and falling under the high income groups does not get close to 100%, unlike the shares of households with TV sets, telephones, and washing machines for example. This shows that an item becomes a mass commodity not only because it is affordable but also because it has become a permanent part of the consumption patterns of large parts of the social strata and people feel it is necessary to possess this item. It has become a necessity that holds a permanent place in consumer practices and values.

The possibility of individuals and groups to plan their future, to direct and change it, is an important indicator for the activeness and initiative of these groups, and of their consumption patterns and lifestyle. As regards living from day to day, the high level officials/administrators/managers are the ones who indicate such a situation in the least degree, and, according to the data illustrated in Graph 5, more than a third of them (38%) have a long-term perspective on the coming one or two years of their life. More than half in the categories of intelligentsia, of middle-level technicians and administrators, and of employees with a secondary education, have a clear idea about what they and their households will achieve in the coming six months. Over 80% of the intelligentsia and intellectuals have a clear picture about their near and more distant future, and just slightly more than one fifth of them live from day to day. This

socio-professional group is in second position, after high-level officials/administrators/ managers, with respect to these indicators, which demonstrates that their members do not drift with the current of life and circumstances, but strive to foresee and plan their lives and the lives of the people in their households.

Graph 5 [345]

The relative share of the people planning their future in the different socio-professional groups



With regard to the capacity for planning their future, middle-level technicians and administrators are positioned between the intelligentsia and intellectuals on one hand and employees with a secondary education on the other. More than half of them (52%) have a clear idea about their lives in the middle-term perspective; more than one fifth (22%), in a long-term perspective; while more than one fourth (26%) live from day to day. Employees with a secondary education and skilled workers have similar characteristics with respect to activeness in life and the capacity of planning and directing their future. More than half of employees with secondary education (52%) have a clear perspective about the next six months, but nearly one third (32%) of them live from day to day.

Less than half of the skilled workers have a clear perspective on their life in the next half-year (45%), but the share of those who live from day to day is close to this value, being 42%. Among the employees with a secondary education, those who can plan their future for the next 1-2 years are 16%, while among skilled workers the percentage is 14%. Non-skilled workers have the largest share of persons living from day to day: nearly two thirds of them passively follow the current. A little more than one fourth of the group are clear about what they will achieve in the next six months; and a little more than one tenth, in the next one or two years. They stand out as the

345 The Graphs 5 and 6 were prepared using the results of the Young People – Partnership, Marriage, Children survey, 2005.

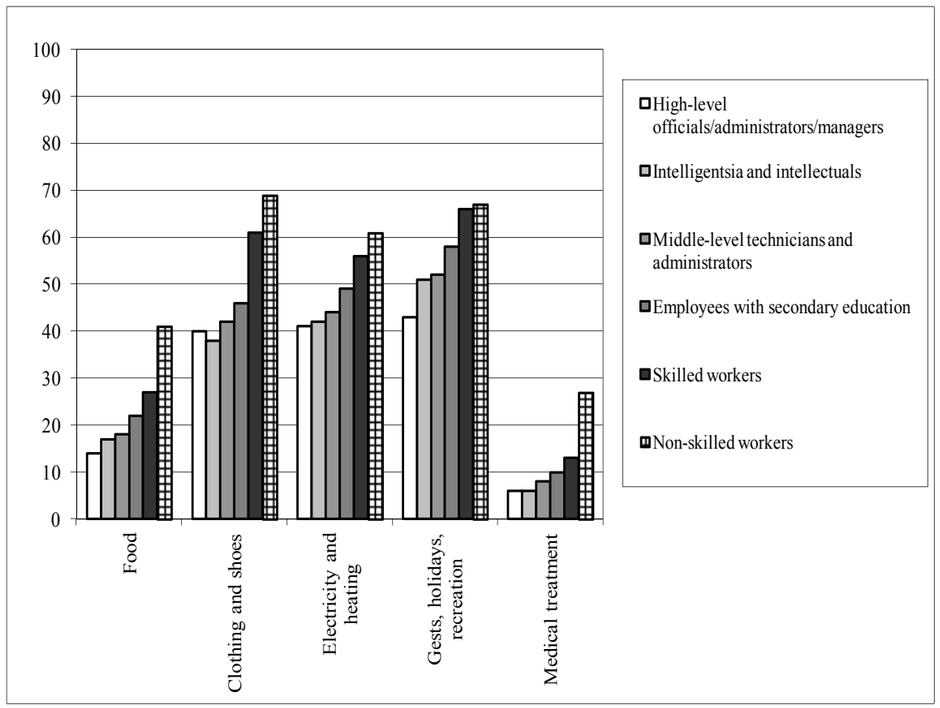
socio-professional group with the most passive lifestyle.

An important indicator of consumption patterns and lifestyle is the self-restrictions that various socio-professional groups display (see Graph 6). It is indicative for the living standard in our country that 14% of high level officials/administrators/managers restrict themselves in consumption of food, a share that is close to that among the intelligentsia (17%) and middle-level technicians and administrators (18%). More than one fifth of employees with secondary education try to decrease their living expenses by restricting food consumption (22%), and this holds true for over one fourth (27%) of skilled workers, and 41% of non-skilled workers.

Restrictions in consumption of clothing and shoes, electricity and heating, receiving guests and paying visits, going on holiday and cultural recreation, prove to be a basic resource of Bulgarians for coping with the economic situation. With regard to these three items, representatives of all socio-professional groups economize.

The least degree of restrictions in spending on clothing and shoes is registered among the intelligentsia and intellectuals (38%), but the difference between their share and the shares of high level officials/administrators/managers (40%) and middle-level technicians and administrators (42%) is comparatively small. The relative share of employees with a secondary education who restrict their spending on this item is higher (46%), while among the skilled and non-skilled workers it amounts to about two thirds of each group.

Graph 6
Relative share of people from different socio-professional groups self-restricting their consumption



About 40% of high level officials/administrators/managers, intelligentsia, and middle-level technicians and administrators restrict their consumption of electricity and heating, and this is true for nearly half of employees with a secondary education, over half of the skilled workers, and under two thirds of the non-skilled ones. In this respect the socio-professional groups belonging to the high strata and those belonging to the middle strata prove to have similar consumption patterns. Similarities also exist with respect to the groups with intermediate status, such as employees with a secondary education and skilled workers.

Restrictions with regard to paying visits and receiving guests, going on holiday and satisfying cultural needs, are an important indicator of consumption patterns and lifestyle. Of all self-restrictions on various items, this is the item on which all socio-professional groups restrict themselves the most, except for non-skilled workers (who restrict themselves most of all on clothing and shoes). The lowest share of people restricting themselves on this item is registered among high level officials/administrators/managers (43% of the surveyed ones). Near to this share is the respective portion of intelligentsia and middle-level technicians and administrators, a little over half of whom restrict themselves. The share is higher among employees with a secondary education – 58%, and highest of all - nearly two thirds of respondents - among skilled and non-skilled workers. The representatives of the middle strata, intelligentsia, and middle-level technicians and administrators, are in an intermediate position between the high strata and the employees with a secondary education, with respect to self-restrictions.

The smallest share of people restricting themselves is with regard to medical treatment – 14% of all respondents. Only 6% of high level officials/administrators/managers and intelligentsia and intellectuals restrict themselves on treatment, and the figures are similar among middle-level technicians and administrators, employees with a secondary education, and skilled workers (with respective shares of self-restriction: 8%, 10%, and 12%). Over one fourth (27%) of non-skilled workers restrict spending on medical treatment, which means that their health is at serious risk.

The predominant part of the surveyed persons in all socio-professional groups shared that the restrictions they made had not significantly improved their financial state. This shows that most Bulgarians do not deprive themselves of these items in order to accumulate savings, but simply to cope with the economic situation.

The respondents felt their life two years before and at the time of the fieldwork (2005) had remained the same with regard to standard of living. Looking ahead at the next two years, the people who hoped they would be living better in the future amounted to two thirds of high level officials/administrators/managers (69%), more than half of the intelligentsia group (53%), the middle-level technicians and administrators (51%), and employees with a secondary education (53%). About one third of skilled and non-skilled workers were of the opinion they would live “a little bit better”, and the same share in each of these groups felt their situation would remain the same. The two worker groups were less optimistic about their future living standard than the other

socio-professional groups.

The results of the Generations and Genders survey of 2007 indicate that age and place of residence (Sofia, district city, city, or village) influence consumption and lifestyle. Beyond a certain age limit, the share of people gradually decreases who: can afford to heat their homes as much as necessary, afford to go on vacation, to replace old furniture with new, buy new clothes, invite guests at least once a month. There is an evident trend here: over two thirds of Bulgarians aged up to 44 (68%) can afford all the listed items. In the age group between 45 and 60 the share of people that can afford them decreases to 56%, and among those over 60 it falls to 28%. A large part of pensioners and elderly people are forced to restrict their consumption drastically, which marginalizes them and condemns them to meager consumption and an impoverished lifestyle.

In all, one fourth of Bulgarians can afford a one-week vacation away from home for their household. The greater part of Sofia residents can afford it (70%), but only 13% of rural residents can go on vacation. A similar correlation applies for the item "replacing old furniture with new". Between one fifth and one fourth of residents of Sofia and of central district cities (22% in each of these two categories) can afford to replace their old furniture but only 10% of rural residents can do so. As for buying new clothes, a little over two thirds (69%) of Sofia residents can afford this, 63% of residents of central district city, 60% of city residents, and 42% of rural residents.

During the years of socio-economic transformations in our country, society has come to see in a new perspective the problem of the balance between labor and remuneration, between work, family, and personal life, between work and leisure.

The above mentioned entrepreneurs, surveyed during focus group discussion conducted in October 2006 in the framework of the Well-being and Identity module of the ESS, also indicate the importance of this balance. According to them:

"Money earned through very hard work, with many deprivations, is simply not enjoyable money."

Due to the lack of such a balance, most of the participants in focus group discussions do not consider themselves successful: their business is "based on a lot of deprivation, on a lot of tension and work" and they practically have no time for leisure.

The lack of leisure among certain socio-professional groups is a phenomenon that was typical for the 20th century, being caused by a variety of factors. Some authors account for it by the development of mass production and mass consumption. It is related to the consumer society, in which most people have consumer attitudes and lifestyles, and consume not because they need to but for the sake of consumption itself, which demonstrates their status[346]. People work increasingly and have no leisure: free time proves to be practically "cannibalized"[347]. It is eaten up by the need to work more and more, which proves damaging for communication within the family, for the rearing of children and their socialization, for integration in the community, for social contacts

346 Juliet Schor, 1998.

347 Juliet Schor, 1992.

and relations in society in general. The decrease of leisure time among certain socio-professional groups is linked not to consumer attitudes but to the growing demands in the postmodern world regarding professional skills, achievements, and career. Such is the case of professionals, experts, specialists, and of other middle strata groups who, in order to meet these challenges, are restricting their leisure time. It is paradoxical that these are the socio-professional groups that value leisure the most.

The interviewed entrepreneurs compare the stress and the competition they are undergoing in a market-based society with the opportunities for "serious leisure" and "developmental leisure" they had in "totalitarian times".

"I don't have the time, in the past I used to read a lot. Now I can't permit myself the luxury of an evening of reading, of lying down, of resting on Saturday and Sunday. I'm constantly thinking about my work, about whom I must meet, about what might happen."

According to the respondents, professionals employed in the budget sector still have these opportunities. But while their lives are calm, they receive very low salaries, which is why

"… we can say they are not very successful, because their salaries are not very high."

"But they live calm lives."

Entrepreneurs are among the high-pressure occupations, and among them there is a shortage of time for leisure, typical for this social category; their leisure is almost entirely "engulfed by work time", by the concerns of their business.

"The small and middle business is something awful. They pressure you on all sides, you are constantly living in tension, you can't go calmly, go out, for instance go abroad, or even go on vacation within the country without thinking about your work."

The balance between work and leisure, between work and the family, is perceived as an important and necessary condition for achieving success in one's professional and personal life.

"The efforts I put into my work - I insist on pointing this out, because at times I have to work 16 hours a day – the work I do ought to bring me the amount of income that I would have with normal working hours- for instance in the range of 8 to 10 hours a day."

The unequal distribution of resources, which is directly linked with the difference in leisure patterns, determines not only the degree of satisfaction of different social subjects with their lifestyle, but also their status self-identification. It impacts on the way in which they experience and assess social inequality.

Since the 1990s there has been an observable reverse trend as regards leisure in postmodern market societies. Among some social groups leisure time is getting shorter[348], while among others it is increasing[349]. The question is which social groups have more and for which ones is it decreasing? It is diminishing usually among the high

348 Juliet Schor, op. cit.

349 Oriel Sullivan and Jonathan Gershuny, op. cit.

income, highly educated, and highly qualified groups, i.e. the upper, upper middle and middle-middle strata. These are the "income-rich, time-poor" referred to above, as opposed to "time-rich", but income-low social strata. Among the groups that have a shortage of leisure, contradictions are more likely to occur between personal/family life and professional life, and a misbalance between these two is more probable.

We find that, according to entrepreneurs, the representatives of the new middle strata and specifically the young managers, administrators, experts, and professionals working for leading companies, firms, and administrations, are successful because they have achieved balance between their working time and their leisure time, between work and the family, between their income and the efforts invested for obtaining income, between their leisure patterns and the lives they are leading.

"Young specialists get very good salaries. We know such people with big resources, working in banks, in administrations, in firms as executive directors, as some kind of brokers, etc. There are banks where the incomes are the kind that we so-called businessmen do not have, cannot afford. Those people have an eight-hour work day, a regular lunch break, normal working hours, normal vacations, their business trips abroad are paid for… everything is as it should be."

According to the surveyed entrepreneurs, the young highly educated professionals and managers of prosperous companies achieve the right balance between the kind of "abundant" leisure time that some employees enjoyed in the times of the communist past, but combined with high income and a "European work life and lifestyle".

"This kind of person, he knows just how long his working hours are, he has a normal Friday, Saturday, Sunday. He works exactly like the state budget employees in the past… He works with European standards. This kind of person has long since become a European."

The unequal distribution of means of labor, access to work and autonomy on the post-communist pseudo labor market has an impact on the consumption patterns and leisure patterns of the various social strata: this dependence is clearly indicated in the opinions expressed by interviewed entrepreneurs. It is not accidental that they describe themselves as "businessmen in quotes" thus emphasizing the difference compared with their counterparts in the developed EU countries. But in all European countries, together with the differences, there is an evident general tendency: those with a higher level of education and those with higher income indicate more often that they are finding it harder to achieve a balance between work and leisure. This misbalance is a consequence of their more active social life and the higher goals and expectations they have respecting their work and professional realization, and also respecting their personal life[350]. This shows there are social-group similarities between identical social strata in societies at differing degrees of social-economic development. Although situated under different conditions of work and life, members of the middle strata in our country and in the developed European societies indicate they have similar consumption patterns, leisure, and lifestyle, which is an important sign of the

350 First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of Life in Bulgaria and Romania, op. cit.

"postmodernization" of lifestyle in Bulgaria.

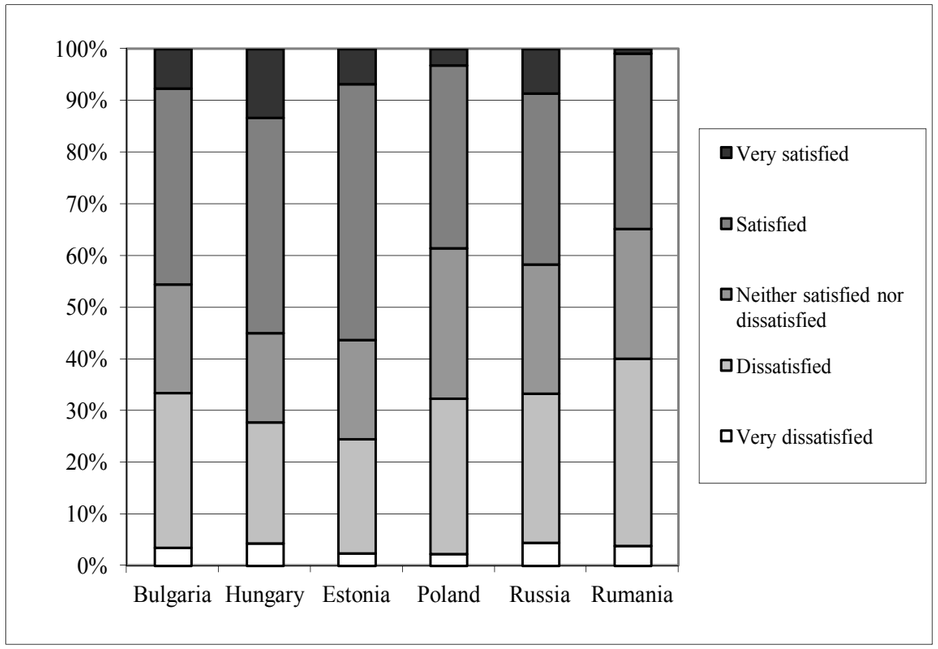
The results of the EQLS confirm the opinion of the quoted entrepreneurs regarding the length of working hours in Bulgaria. According to the data, Bulgarians have a comparatively longer workweek – nearly 41 hours, while the average for the 25 EU member states[351] is 38 hours[352]. We also have the biggest problem achieving a balance between work, family, and social contacts. The surveyed Bulgarians indicate the greatest degree of difficulties in finding the time and energy to fulfill domestic and family tasks and in concentrating sufficiently at work. Bulgarians are in second place after the Rumanians in the proportion of respondents who share they do not have enough time for social contacts and a hobby.

On the base of the data received from Round 3 of ESS we could arrive to the conclusions concerning the degree of satisfaction regarding the proportion of time devoted to work and time for other activities, indicated by respondents from the former communist countries. As shown in the date represented in Graph 7, with respect to the category of respondents "very dissatisfied" with the balance they have, Bulgaria is in a middle position between countries with the highest percentages of very dissatisfied (Russia – 4,5% and Hungary- 4,4%) and the lowest (Estonia- 2,5% and Poland – 2,4%). Of all interviewed Bulgarians, 3,6% indicated they were "very dissatisfied" with the balance between their working time and their leisure; this figure is close to the percentage among the Rumanians – 3,9%. The share of those who were "dissatisfied" was highest in Rumania, where it was more than one third of the respondents (36,2%), followed by Poland – a little less than a third (30%). The lowest shares of respondents dissatisfied with the balance between working time and leisure were indicated in Estonia (22%) and Hungary (23,4%). As regards the percentage of people who stated they were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied", Bulgaria was once again in a middle position compared with other former communist countries – a little over one fifth of Bulgarian respondents (21,1%) indicated this answer, whereas Poland had below one third (29,2%); and Hungary, under one fifth (17,3%). The most satisfied by this indicator were respondents in Estonia – a little under one half (49,7%), followed by Hungary (41,7%) and Bulgaria (38,1%). Below us were Poland, Rumania, and Russia. The highest share of satisfied was registered in Hungary – 13,3%, followed by Russia – 8,6%; in our country the percentage was 7,6%, much higher than the figures in Poland (3,2%) and Rumania (0,9%).

351 This refers to EU members at the time the survey was conducted, in 2006.

352 First European Quality of Life Survey: Quality of Life in Bulgaria and Romania, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

Graph 7[353]
Level of satisfaction from proportion between time for work and time for other things in former communist countries (%)

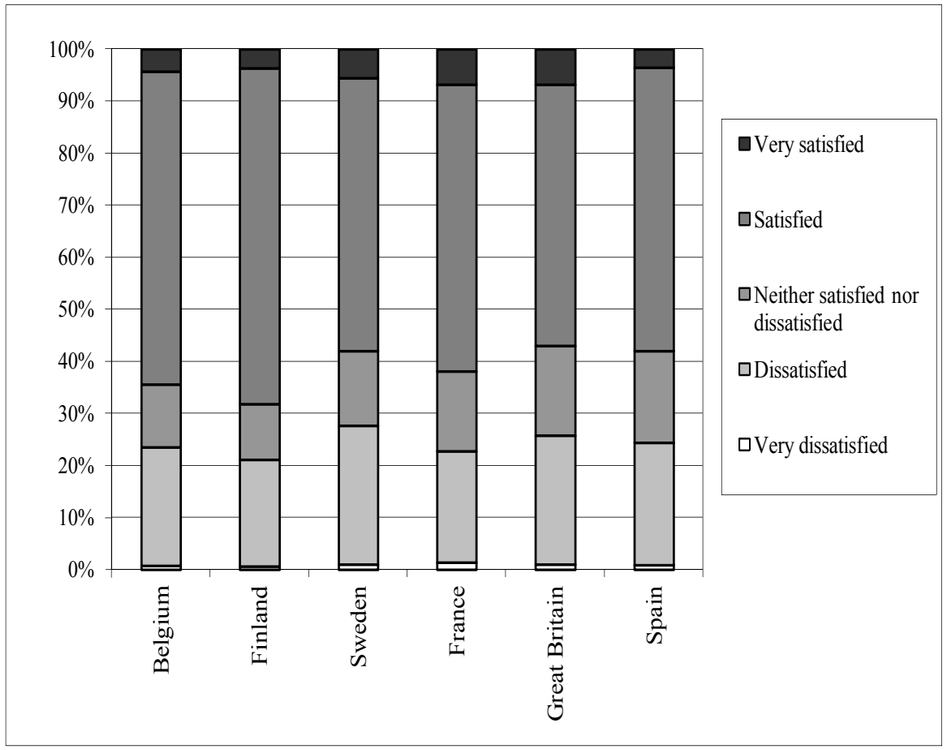


By degree of satisfaction with the balance between work and leisure time Bulgarians hold middle positions among the former communist countries. But what about a comparison with old member states of the EU? Were the quoted entrepreneurs right in saying that those who have achieved a balance between work and leisure are leading "a European style of life", and "have now become Europeans"?

The Bulgarian respondents indicating they were "dissatisfied" (30%) were more than those in Sweden (26,6%), which was the old EU member with the highest share of dissatisfied. As shown in the data represented in the Graph 8, the respondents from old member states and in the category "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" were much fewer than the respective ones from the former communist countries: the greatest shares of people in this group were in Spain (17,6%) and Great Britain (17,1%), and the smallest was in Finland – 10,7%. In our country the percentage was 21,1%, which was greater than that in Spain and Great Britain and twice bigger than in Finland. More than half of the respondents from developed European countries were satisfied by the balance of their work and leisure time: in all these countries this was the answer given by more than half of the interviewed people; the percentage was comparatively the lowest in Great Britain: 50,2%.

353 Graphs 7 and 8 present the results from Round 3 of ESS.

Graph 8
Level of satisfaction from proportion between time for work and time for other things in old EU member countries (%)



The highest share of satisfaction with the work-leisure balance among old EU members was indicated by the Finns: 64,4%. The share of satisfied Bulgarians was 1,7 times smaller than the figure for Finland. These data show that, overall, the respondents from old member states and in the categories "very dissatisfied", "dissatisfied" and "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" are definitely a smaller percentage than their counterparts from the former communist countries. The people from old EU member states were much more satisfied with this balance compared with those from new member states. But this trend is not valid for the respondents who indicated "very satisfied": a higher percentage of Hungarians (13,3%), Russians (8,6%) and Bulgarians (7,6%) chose this answer compared with Spaniards (3,5%), Finns (3,6%), Belgians (4,3%) and Swedes (5,6%).

The conclusion we can make is that, overall, in the developed part of Europe a considerably better balance has been achieved between work and leisure time. The entrepreneurs who took part in a focus group discussion in Sofia proved to be right: those Bulgarians who display a good balance between work time and leisure do indeed have a European style of life.

The Bulgarian problems of work-leisure balance stem from the low productivity of labor in our country, from the particularities of the culture of social contact, where

traditional elements predominate. Compared with the developed European countries, here there is a comparatively low degree of inclusion in social activities outside the family, of involvement in interest clubs and hobbies, participation in civic organizations, and of voluntary work.

The separate socio-professional groups have stratified consumption patterns and lifestyles. Among the middle strata, the intelligentsia and intellectuals stand out by their consumption oriented to items that make possible a more meaningful use of leisure time and to IT products. They are the socio-professional group with the most rational kind of consumption and leading the most active lifestyle, in which respect they surpass even high-level officials/administrators/managers, who are representatives of higher strata. The latter, however, have a considerable advantage with regard to consumption of luxury and prestigious commodities, which they can afford and evidently strive to possess. Middle-level technicians and administrators are another middle strata group, and they are close to the intelligentsia and intellectuals, but occupy more of an intermediate position between the rational and post-modern consumer orientation of the latter and the consumption of more mass commodities. Employees with a secondary education and skilled workers, being groups with an intermediate status, are similar to the above-mentioned middle strata with respect to consumption of mass commodities. Non-skilled workers have the most limited consumption, and in their lifestyle they are most inclined to drift with the current of circumstances.

Separate social groups, categories and strata are becoming clearly stratified with respect to each other, and the ways and forms of their consumption, their consumer tastes, values, and orientations, characterize them as social-group subjects that each have a specific status in society. Consumption patterns, leisure patterns and lifestyles are becoming increasingly important indicators of social stratification in Bulgarian society.

The middle strata are clearly becoming the main bearers of trends that draw us closer to consumption patterns in developed societies. Their lifestyle displays their orientation to information technologies, leisure time, communication and a healthy way of life. By these distinctive features, they stand out as bearers of modern, innovative and significant trends of lifestyle in Bulgaria

Chapter three: the middle strata in Japanese consumer society.

1. Japanese consumption patterns: basic characteristics, stages, defining trends, and the role of the middle strata

This third chapter, in following the goal and tasks of the dissertation, is devoted to Japanese consumption patterns and the place and role of the middle strata in Japanese consumer society. Here consumption patterns are used as a methodological tool for the study of this developed postmodern society, and of the particular features and significant role of its middle strata. What are the characteristic and distinctive consumer status, behavior and culture of Japanese society; and how do the middle strata differ in these from the other social-structural formations in Japan? Through what stages have consumption patterns gone in postmodern Japanese society and how did they reach their present stage? What are the basic similarities and differences between Japanese and Bulgarian consumption patterns, between the significance and role of the middle strata as consumers in Japan and of the corresponding social-groups in Bulgaria? What conclusions can we draw from all this in the practical-applied aspect?

Women - leading figures in Japanese consumer society

Contemporary Japanese consumer society not only has a distinct gender-related character, but is also highly feminized. Japanese women have a specific “consumer power”[354] stemming from their status of household “ministers of finance”. This position of theirs is also connected with the values and ideas regarding the social status of women in traditional society. In feudal Japanese society the traders were situated at the lowest scale of the stratification hierarchy. Since dealing with financial matters was considered “beneath the dignity” of the samurai, the spouses were assigned this important and responsible function[355]. This practice quickly spread among the other social strata as well. Apart from the low-status associated with “financial matters”, this function and role of Japanese women is additionally derived from an important particularity of Japanese society. Important for its social structuring and functioning is the balanced distribution of power resources among the separate actors. Since the husband enjoys a higher status position in society, the wife has the “compensation” of distributing the economic resources of the family.

354 Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, op. cit.

355 Inazo Nitobe, op. cit. 78.

Given the tradition that women manage household financial affairs, it is necessary to focus special attention on Japanese housewives, because, to a great extent it is they who shape contemporary shopping patterns in Japanese consumer society. The social status of "housewife" appeared in the 1920s as a result of the successful modernization of the country. This status is linked to the social position of the wives of members of the new middle strata – sarari man[356] - the well-known "white collars" working in firms; the status emerged as a result of their economic stabilization and growing public prestige[357]. The spouse-housekeeper is an emblem of the higher social status position of her husband and family, and an indication that the husband enjoys greater economic freedom and has provided a quality of life for his family that makes it possible for the wife not to take a paid job outside the home. After the 1960s the position of housewife became a social norm to such a degree that it is now synonymous with the woman's social role and status position in general. This, of course, is not accidental: it is linked to the higher living standard and the expansion of the middle strata, especially the new middle, which play a leading role in society[358].

Today, as earlier, a large proportion of wives are housewives[359] and continue the tradition of managing the family budget; the husbands, as a rule, go to work and devote all their day to their professional duties away from home[360]. The wives, as they have done for centuries, divide the family expenditures by items and determine the amount of pocket money the husband and children can dispose of. Even today, about half of them continue to keep a detailed debit and credit account in a special accountancy daybook of the household, called kakeibo. To some extent, Japan owes the high share of savings in the country to the careful calculations and practical shopping pattern of the housewives[361]. They usually purchase not only the necessary for the home and for themselves, but also for the children and their husbands. They are considered responsible for the educational performance of the children and for the outward aspect and dignified appearance of the whole family, the members of which should always be dressed in "clean, modern, well-ironed clothes"[362]. Thus, traditions, social norms, and values impose on the contemporary Japanese woman the hard task of finding a balance between her numerous social roles and her full responsibility for the consumption and lifestyle of her household.

The wife's position of leading figure in Japanese consumer society clearly marks the social roles related to consumption. Managing the family budget is an important

356 A general designation for employees in firms and corporations who receive a *salary*; for more details, see Maya Keliyan, 1999, p. 47-63.

357 Emiko Ochiai, 1997, p. 37.

358 For more details, see Maya Keliyan, 2008, pp. 81-85.

359 Although the proportion of working women is growing, most of these are employed part-time.

360 See Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 55-63.

361 The highest per capita levels of savings in the world and the largest per capita state reserve in currency and gold are those of Japan.

362 John Clammer, op. cit., p. 197.

function with respect to the family's and family members' consumption. The gender-based differences lead to specific status authority and responsibilities, which, of course, are present to various degrees in contemporary societies. What is particular in the Japanese case is that the two are distinctly defined even in postmodern consumption. They are an inseparable part of the wives' social position and role, of their important social-status characteristic. As a result, wives have become an important and significant consumer category of Japanese society, and they determine to a great degree the distinguishing particularities of Japanese consumption patterns.

Shopping patterns and social status: the middle strata as a model for emulation

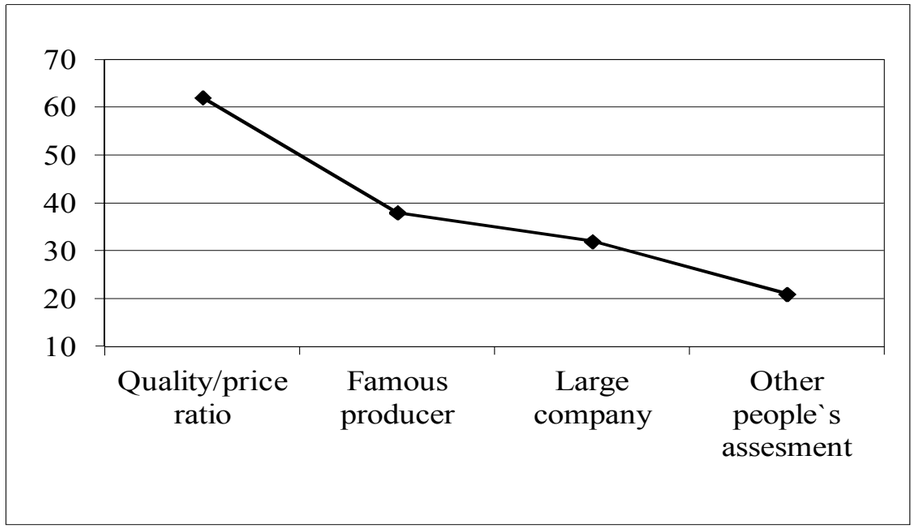
The rationality and pragmatism in consumer choice are qualities of key importance[363] for Japanese consumers: since early childhood they are reared in these values by their mothers, whom they accompany in shopping. This is an important family and social responsibility of the Japanese woman. The children are trained in school as well to be informed about what they are consuming. Special attention is devoted to such commodity qualities as safety, security, sturdiness, freshness, expiry date, and durability. Quality has a special place in Japanese consumption patterns, and the choice of quality goods is an important criterion of rational and pragmatic consumer choice[364].

Japanese consumption patterns have very distinct and pronounced status characteristics: the goods and services selected must match social affiliation and must indicate and clearly distinguish the status, i.e. the items must clearly embody and express the social position of the consumer. This meaning of a commodity or service is conveyed by signs such as quality, price, brand name, producer, packaging, the store from which it is purchased or ordered. All people consume products that accord with their social-group positions and roles. Even the ways of dress of the different social categories and professional groups are carefully calculated to be strictly consistent with their socio-professional status.

363 Andreas Hernadi, 1990, Kerrie MacPherson, 1998, Joseph Tobin, 1992.

364 Paul Herbig, 1995.

Graph 9
Leading criteria in consumer's choice.
(by relative share of respondents indicating them)



The results of the sample survey conducted by the NRI[365], and cited in Graph 9, illustrate these particularities of consumer taste in Japan. The leading criterion in consumer choice, far before all others, is the ratio of the quality and price of the product: less than two thirds of the respondents indicate that they are guided by this consideration when choosing a given product[366]. More than one third prefer to buy goods of famous producers, rather than to experiment with new ones. A little under one third prefer the products of the large corporations, while over one fifth of respondents trust other people's assessment of a commodity. About 78% of the cars bought in Japan are of the three leading companies in this branch, Toyota, Nissan, and Honda, which confirms once again the importance of the "leading producer" and "famous brand name" criteria, and the social prestige these carry. It is assumed that the educated consumer is well acquainted with the quality requirements for various kinds of products and services offered on the market. Shopping quality goods is an indicator not only of being well-informed but also of social status. Middle strata consumers show and prove their social-class position by preferring quality to low price.

This leads to uniformity in taste, resulting from and conformed to, the requirements of status; this uniformity is another important characteristic of Japanese consumption patterns. According to some scholars, in Japanese society there is an evident conformity of taste that is strictly oriented to group norms[367]. According to these authors, the Japanese conform to the "collective tastes" of their environment, to what is approved

365 The survey cited in the Graph 9 was conducted in 2006 with over 10 000 respondents.

366 Hiroyuki Nitto, 2008, p. 7.

367 Hellmut and Schutte and Deanna Ciarlante, 1998, pp. 102-105.

and adopted as a group standard; and they do this to a much greater degree than their Western counterparts. That is why they prefer to buy the products used by people in their environment instead of trying new ones. According to these authors, Western consumers likewise often choose familiar brands, but with an evident difference in motivation. In Japan the choice is connected with the need to preserve the homogeneity and cohesion of the group, to maintain a sense of security that comes from abiding by universally accepted norms.

But these principles are applied as regards commodities and services used personally or in the framework of the household, outside of the public eye. Consumer behavior is guided by one of the basic principles regulating mutual relations in Japanese society: the important distinction made between uchi and soto, between inside and outside the home, the group or the community[368]. Consumption is stratified, so it is important to maintain status-based requirements in front of people. But when the individual or the family is concealed from the judging eye of others, then pragmatic considerations are allowed to prevail and one may consume in ways characteristic for lower status groups.

Harmony is the leading principle regulating relations within the group, and competition is excluded here. It is inadmissible for members of the same group to compete, but it is obligatory for them to compete outside the group. In this way harmony and solidarity is preserved within the group and competitive spirit is encouraged with respect to other groups. Following group rules is important but it is not an aim in itself, but is connected with one's place and position in society. I share the view that, for the Japanese, it is more important to show what group they belong to than to display "group conformism" in their tastes. In Japan, consumption is a means of proving oneself and visibly demonstrating status and prestige that is observable by others; this is especially true as regards public consumption. The conventional distinction between Japanese and Western consumption patterns, based on the opposition between "groupism" and "individualism" in the values of the two societies, is, to say the least, not sufficiently argued and fails to go beneath the surface of the phenomenon under study, does not reach its social nature and foundation. In the perspective of this opposition it would be impossible to explain the growing trends, current since the 1990s, of individualization of taste and diversification of consumption patterns. It would also be difficult to account for the broad presence and popularity of consumer models coming from various youth sub-cultures and displaying individualism and the desire to emphasize difference with regard to the status quo and the commonly accepted. The uniformity in consumption patterns and lifestyle of people belonging to separate social categories, groups and statuses is connected on one hand with the need to be like those with whom one is in an uchi relation, i.e. in the same social group as oneself. The "uniform" serves to distinguish people from those who are soto, or outside the group.

Also, from this perspective on Japanese and Western consumption it is not clear what the social basis of conspicuous consumption in Japan is. The authors mentioned above believe that in Western culture this is employed to demonstrate personal

368 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., pp. 38-41.

independence, while in Japan it is a sign of mutual dependence[369]. According to these authors, the Japanese consumer is highly sensitive about his/her public image, and buys objects and services that correspond to the public image he/she desires. Conspicuous consumption in any society is connected with the desire to demonstrate status, power, and prestige in public[370], not individualism and personal independence. By its very nature it clashes with some traditional Japanese consumer values, and the fact that it occurs is explained by the importance of luxury as an expression of status and as a means for obtaining social recognition[371].

Shopping is a collective activity, and people shop in the framework of the social group or category they belong to; in this way they demonstrate social position publicly and assert the group lifestyle. Shopping consolidates relations between group members and is an important element of social communication within the community. This community may be a group of friends who went to school or university together; a group of mothers whose children are classmates; a group of neighbors, of wives whose husbands work in the same firm, etc. Shopping becomes a sphere of social contact, of joint decision making, exchange of experience, establishing social contacts and formation of social networks.

In Japan, shopping is looked upon as a form of art. While in the West trade and shopping are considered something quite different from esthetic pleasure, Japanese consumer culture since the beginning of modernization has been based on the principle that the two are equated[372]. Buying expensive goods is a proof of "good taste", so advertising strives to create and suggest the status meaning of the offered products[373].

Brand name is an important factor influencing consumption patterns, for it not only gives legitimacy to the product or service, but imparts social value to it as well. Brand name is a symbolic intermediary in social relations between various social groups of consumers. Having unquestionable authority, it plays the role of a convention between these consumers as to what is most appropriate for consumers with a given social status. Therefore brand not only has the "greatest power" over the market, but performs a "delimiting function"[374]. It has long ago transcended its immediate function as a measure of quality and a design for a given product. In Japanese consumption patterns and lifestyle, brand has become a direct, distinct, and visible indication of social-group status. The separate social groups and categories are users of respective brand products that are publicly accepted as status symbols of those groups. Specifically in the Japanese case, brand products are not preferred only by the upper and upper middle strata: the consumption patterns of the rest of the socio-professional groups of the middle strata are also focused on them. Moreover, these goods are an important indicator, a mark of belonging to these strata. The differences between upper, upper

369 Hellmut and Schutte and Deanna Ciarlante, op. cit., pp. 102-105

370 Thorstein Veblen, op. cit.

371 Millie R. Creighton, 1992, 1998.

372 Chin-Tao Wu, 2004, p. 121.

373 Judith Williamson, 1978.

374 Douglas B. Holt, 2006.

middle, middle middle and lower middle strata do not consist in their buying or not buying mark goods, but in the specific preferences for some of these goods rather than others and the specific designers and products thought suitable for a particular status.

The Japanese "passion" for brand goods first arose in the third quarter of the 19th century, when the country began to modernize and Western goods were first imported on a large scale. At that time they were the symbol of high quality and standards associated with the West; they were modern and prestigious. As the Japanese were not connoisseurs in the matter, they naturally tended to trust the well-known brands of producers that set the world fashion trends. Its "devotion" to famous Western brands made of this country the preferred market for producers of luxury goods, some of whom sold a considerable portion of their produce in Japan[375]. Specific brand commodities were created solely for this unique market and were not offered or sold elsewhere in the world[376].

According to the data from a study conducted in May 2006 by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)[377] Japan is the "most concentrated source of revenue for producers of luxury products". Even though its population is only 46% that of the US, 41% of all world sales of luxury goods are in Japan. This is the largest and most important market for leading expensive brand commodities, and these companies realize very large parts of their total world profits in Japan, namely: 35% of the revenues of Baccarat; 36% of Burberry; 27% of Gucci; 30% of Louis Vuitton; 27% of Salvatore Ferragamo, and more than 25% of Bulgari. Firms like Tiffany[378] and Chanel choose Japan as the place where they present some of their new products for the first time, as this market is a criterion of high taste as regards quality. Due to the great demand for luxury boutique commodities, in Japan there are 34 Bulgari stores, 37 of Chanel, 115 of Coach, 49 of Gucci, 64 of Salvatore Ferragamo, 50 of Tiffany, etc.

The client's convenience is the leading principle of Japanese consumer society. The subway stations and the urban railways have an important function as centers of modern and postmodern urban culture, similar in this to the town square in the European tradition[379]. Numerous stores and establishments are concentrated around them for the convenience of daily commuters. These areas offer all kind of goods; have different categories of restaurants, cafeterias, cafes, and invariably at least one bookshop. The stores are open until late, even the smaller ones that offer cheaper goods. Through their longer working hours they make up for the lower prices at which they sell their goods. Most of these stores are family businesses and there is always a

375 Although the country is in first place in this respect, the same trend is evident in other countries of East Asia as well. Most companies producing luxury cognac, for instance Hennessey, sell more than half their produce in this part of the world; the same is true for the car producers Mercedes-Benz and BMW, for expensive whiskey brands, Swiss watch producers, etc.

376 For instance, Dunhill brand men's handkerchiefs and socks, Burberry umbrellas, and even Pierre Cardin toilet seat covers.

377 This NGO is connected with the Japanese government and works in the sphere of foreign trade and foreign investments. The data are from the site http://www.jetro.org/content/361.

378 In the last 20 years the greatest number of Tiffany boutiques have been in Japan.

379 Roland Barthes, op. cit.

family member ready to serve clients. In every neighborhood there are convenience stores, offering a full range of goods, from foods to domestic cleaning products and cosmetics. The numerous bookstores, full of clients at all hours of the day or night, are another typical phenomenon of Japanese consumer society.

Vending machines (jidouhanbaiki) are one more item characterizing the variety, convenience, and practicality typical for Japanese consumer society. The first vending machines were installed at the train stations Tokyo and Ueno in 1926. All sorts of goods are dispensed through them today, ranging from ice cream, candy, sandwiches, soups, non-alcoholic beverages, coffee, tea, liquor and cigarettes, to newspapers, magazines, books, eggs, rice, t-shirts, CDs, DVDs, etc. They are wide-spread throughout the country, and Tokyo in particular has been called the "world capital of vending machines".

Japanese economy is known as a "gift economy"[380]. People of all social categories, groups and strata are caught up in an "endless cycle of giving and receiving gifts" interwoven in the complex network of social relations. Gifts are presented on all possible occasions, and the traditional gifts are related to the Japanese system of duty. Gifts are always in accordance with the social status of the giver and with the hierarchic position of the receiver. The "gift culture" has a great formative influence on Japanese consumer society.

An important feature of Japanese consumption patterns is renewal – the regular and frequent replacement of old clothes, objects, furniture, electric devices, cars with new ones. This practice is influenced by the Shinto idea of the "purifying" effect of new things. It has a strong impact on the market, on consumer behavior and culture, which attaches great importance to the periodical substitution of old commodities by new, fashionable, improved products and services. Just as the consumers, in order to "save face", must renew their items, so too the stores must "preserve face" by offering new articles. Renewal has a status meaning as well: it is obligatory not only for the upper but for the middle strata as well, and even for the working class, and has become an important norm that regulates consumption. Renewal is meant to show that consumers can afford to maintain and observe the living standard corresponding to their social-group status.

One of the reasons why Japan, during 1960s, became the second biggest economy in the world was the role played by innovations in production and consumption. Consumers aim at quality products but also at products connected with technical and technological innovations, with high technologies[381]. This is especially true for the highly educated strata, the new middle strata, and young people, who strive to buy the latest high tech and high quality products. Since the middle of the 1990s a large part of the goods related to high technology have become mass commodities, and new products, with which Japanese industry is flooding the market, are constantly being added to the list. These include LCD television sets, computers, laptops, iPhones, electronic readers, etc. All these have become a permanent part of the consumption patterns of large social strata, groups, and categories.

380 John Clammer, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

381 Paul Herbig, op. cit.

Likewise related to periodic renewal and to the reverence for nature inspired by Shintoism, is the distinctly seasonal aspect of consumer behavior and culture in Japan. Consumers follow the "requirements" and "prescriptions" regarding consumption and lifestyle suitable for the different seasons, again in accordance with the social group and category they belong to. Their consumption patterns have a distinct and visible seasonal characteristic.

Civic activeness of consumers and the role of the middle strata

The forms of trade established in Japanese consumer society are based to various degrees on the civic activeness of consumers. In this respect the middle strata social groups and categories play a leading role. Their consumption behavior and culture largely determine the directions in which these forms of trade develop.

Consumer co-operatives[382] play an important role in Japanese society and in the latter's consumption patterns. By the end of 2006 they numbered about 600, encompassing 23,5 million members, which amounts to 18,5% of the country's population. The members of regional consumer co-operatives are approximately 16 million in number, encompassing nearly 32% of the country's households. In eight prefectures the relative share of households using these co-operatives even surpasses 40%[383]. Among the largest consumer co-operatives in the world is Co-op Kobe, with over 1,65 million members and 170 retail locations. While in other developed countries consumer co-operatives are struggling to survive and find a place in contemporary market societies, in Japan they are flourishing[384] and their membership is growing.

Since the 1960s, consumer co-operatives in Japan have grown in popularity, for society has become increasingly mindful of the quality of foods and of consumer rights, which, in co-operatives, are much better ensured against the vicissitudes of the market. The trade practices of consumer co-operatives are periodically updated in order to withstand the competition of market and to preserve the trust of clients; the bio-products they offer are felt to be increasingly important by the customers. In order to keep the old customers and attract new ones, these co-operatives offer commodities of tested and proven quality, and relations of mutual trust have grown between the sellers and buyers.

Although the co-operatives exist as structures at central, prefecture, and local level, the various kinds of co-operatives are closely interwoven in the life of groups and communities, especially local ones. They represent a significant part of Japanese trade, are actively present in all trade spheres, offer all imaginable products and services, as well as conveniences and facilitations for their members. As a rule, membership requires participation through capital contribution, which is usually a small sum; in some cases

382 Their predecessors date back to the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), and the structures of the best known among them, Co-op Kobe, were created in 1924. In 1948 the Law on Co-operatives was adopted, but various forms of co-operatives are basically regulated by different laws and by-laws.

383 According to the calculations of the Japan Consumers' Co-operative Union, see http://jccu.coop/eng/

384 Ruth Gruber, 2001/199, p. 308.

membership fees are also paid. The co-operatives apply many modern forms, such as: catalogue trade, regular reductions, periodical sales, home delivery on demand, even when clients are absent from home, as well as other facilitations for consumers.

In local communities, groups of five to ten people are usually formed; these are called han. They encompass co-operative members who take turns in preparing special lists of the weekly products each household will need. The goods are delivered, as a rule, once a week, and every six months the co-operative sends its members lists of all the products they have ordered in the preceding period. Customers' orders arrive in the co-operative one week in advance, so that the distribution centers might prepare to deliver perishable foods and the latter might not remain long in warehouses or refrigerators.

In general, women are active members of the consumer groups formed around the consumer co-operatives. A typical example of civic activity of mothers and women is their participation in the Consumer's Co-operative Union, called Seikatsu Club (in Japanese, this means "lifestyle club")[385]. The Union was created in 1965 initially providing its members with fresh milk produced without chemicals and at low purchase prices. This co-operative has a strong environmental orientation, and strives to strengthen clients' trust in the purity of offered products; it is well-known for its large-scale environment protection campaigns. Intense competition on the Japanese market not only stimulates consumer co-operatives but also incites merchants to apply new practices for guarding their position on the market. Despite the commercial aims that any market player inevitably pursues, the commitment of traders to environmental education, to the spread of ecological awareness and values, is a very important factor for affirming a postmodern consumption in harmony with nature.

In order to implement their environmental ideas, Seikatsu Club members are even prepared to enter politics, which is something quite innovative and unusual, considering these members are housewives with no political experience or ties to political parties: in 1979 a woman was elected for the first time at local elections in a district of Tokyo; later, other women adherents were also successfully elected. Their program envisaged building a factory for production of organic soap, as the usual detergents not only pollute the environment but are bad for the health, especially children's. Since the early 1970s there has been an increasing number of allergies among children (and adults), and people relate this to the increased use of "better cleaning" products, which, however, are allergy-provoking; their disposal in the rivers and seas adds to pollution. Thanks to the efforts of Seikatsu Club activists, such a factory has actually been built, creating new jobs for the residents of the region. Recently the co-operative has been conducting regular campaigns for providing more information to consumers regarding the harmfulness of genetically modified products. Among the Seikatsu Club's priorities are delivery of bio-products: eggs, meat, vegetables and fruits, as well as supplying regular information on the quality and origin of the goods offered to its members.

In 1991, the above-mentioned Co-op Kobe adopted an "alternative healthy

385 This union includes 29 co-operatives on the territory of 19 prefectures and has a total of about 307 000 members (see http://www.seikatsuclub.coop/about/english.html).

nutrition program"[386]. In striving to abide by the rules of fare trade, this co-operative maintains regular contacts with Japanese as well as foreign producers who are self-employed farmers raising organic products. The purchase of these farmers' produce is helpful to the survival of foreign petty farmers, for without the support of the co-operative they could not compete with the large agricultural producers on the market[387]. Since 1991 Co-op Kobe has been conducting a campaign for environment protection against chemical pollution coming from detergents, bleaches and cleaning chemicals[388]. In 1992 an Environment Protection Foundation was created at the cooperative; this foundation monitors the quality of the cooperative's own products but also regularly measures the quality of the air, the waters, and the agricultural produce in the region; it also educates customers and stimulates them to be responsible consumers, to use resources wisely, and to recycle waste. In 1995 Co-op Kobe stopped using plastic bags; it utilizes natural energy sources for the production and storage of goods, organizes programs for environmental education for children, etc. In April 2011, together with Fujitsu, it started daily delivery of bio-foods and pre-cooked dinners made with bio-products to the homes of their clients. This service is meant for the needs of elderly people[389], many of whom live alone.

Another good example of the civic activeness of Japanese consumers is the development of community supported agriculture. This term denotes the practice by which farmers provide ecological agricultural products, such as vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs, meat, directly to the consumers, without the mediation of the market. In Japanese the term for this is teikei, which emerged in the beginning of the 1960s, almost simultaneously with its beginnings in Western Europe. Its appearance was connected to the growing popularity of ecological products, a trend that was a response to growing urbanization, to the covering of agricultural lands with buildings, and to the use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides for intensifying agrarian production. In 1965 a group of Japanese mothers, concerned about the quality of the products going into their children's and family's food, organized the first teikei groups for obtaining ecological fresh milk[390]. In 1971 the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) was created. As defined in its documents, teikei is "an alternative form of food distribution, which is independent of the conventional market" [391]. It is a system for food provision in which producers and consumers interact. Both sides take part voluntarily with their labor, their financial resources; they often invest joint capital in order to

386 Offering eggs from "free-range hens" and a variety of bio-foods.

387 One example is the small family-run banana farms in the Philippines, whose bio-produce is offered by Co-op Kobe, and whose activity is described in detail and illustrated with maps and numerous photos in the bulletin of the co-operative.

388 Ruth Gruber, op. cit., p. 320-322.

389 In the Kobe region, the relative share of the entire population aged over 65 is 21%, while 30% of the co-operative members fall in this age group. Pensioners are concerned about the quality and safety of foods, but without the aid of Co-op Kobe they would hardly be able to provide themselves with bio-products, especially those among them who live in remote areas.

390 Similar organizations, influenced by the already existing European and Japanese ones, were created in USA, but only two decades later, in 1984.

391 Quoted from http://www.joaa.net/english/index-eng.htm

facilitate activities. The movement was a result of self-initiative and self-organization of producers and consumers: it was created without the participation and control of the state and of state institutions; it was also outside existing commercial organizations and consumer cooperatives. In its conception, character, and effectuation, teikei is a new philosophy of consumption, but also of lifestyle, both for the producers and for the consumers.

One of the characteristics of modern consumer society is its formalized relations between traders and clients. These relations go beyond the borderline of personal contacts, and trust is shifted from the individual to the institution that he/she represents. In postmodern societies, however, we observe a return to informal contacts, to mutual trust between seller and client, and civic organizations provide good conditions for this to happen. High civic activity and inclusion in the activities of local communities are typical for the Japanese lifestyle. According to a representative survey of leisure time conducted by the Japan Statistics Bureau in 2006, 26% of Japanese take part daily in voluntary activities. Volunteers most often take part in activities for assisting local communities; 14% of Japanese are active daily in their neighborhood[392]. The high degree of civic activeness and inclusion in the life of local communities is a solid basis for the creation and development of independent consumer associations.

Teikei is a new social-economic model for food production: through it, consumers and producers unite efforts in order to protect their common interests more effectively. Farmers stand a greater chance of surviving, because they have constant clients and are incited to grow ecological produce. Consumers feel sure about the quality of the foods, and informal relations of mutual trust and cooperation exist between them and the farmers. Teikei is also connected with a new lifestyle based on ecological values, enterprise, cooperation, trust, and civic activeness.

The producers of ecological agricultural products play a decisive role in this movement. They are called "new farmers", and the author of this article was able to study them in the course of three empirical sociological surveys[393] conducted in Japanese

392 *Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2009*, 2010, p. 182, *Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2011*, op. cit., p. 185.

393 These surveys were done in the framework of the programs of the Sociology Department of Kyoto University. The first of them was conducted from October 1994 to March 1995 and dealt with "Contemporary Japanese Village: Economic Activity, Social Stratification, and Value System". The fieldwork took place in three villages of Shiga Prefecture, in a village near to Nagoya, and in a village in the Kobe region of Hyogo Prefecture. The number of interviewed persons was 30. The persons surveyed were farmers, heads of village communities, leaders of informal and official structures; leaders of Japanese agricultural cooperatives at local level, at village level, and at prefecture level. In the second survey, conducted from July 1997 to January 1998, "The Role of Village Communities in Contemporary Japanese Agriculture", 20 people were interviewed, including farmers and leaders of informal rural communities in Bushoji and Kehara, within the territory of Oe, a small city in the northern part of Kyoto Prefecture, as well as local administrators of the municipality and the management of the agricultural cooperative. The third survey - "Local Initiatives and Lifestyle of Japanese Municipalities" was conducted in 2004-2005 in Mie Prefecture and what were then the municipalities of Kumano, Owase, and Kiwa. About 30 people were interviewed, including farmers, leaders of informal rural communities and local administrators. In all surveys, the information was gathered using 5 different questionnaires, according to the particular features of the respondents; and the *case study* method was used. The results are not representative, but they do contain useful information that permits drawing conclusions about the problems and development of Japanese villages and agriculture. For more details see Maya Keliyan, 2010, pp. 6-10.

villages in the period 1994-2005. For the new farmers, this mode of farming is more a means for practical fulfillment of their ideas about a lifestyle in harmony with nature, than something done out of respect for family traditions. They are occupied full-time in agriculture[394] and do organic agriculture. With regard to their form of occupation and the values and lifestyle they share, they differ entirely from the "traditional farmers", those who use artificial fertilizers and chemicals.

Interviews showed considerable differences existing between the attitudes of farmers who do organic agriculture and the others with regard to the ecological aspect of agricultural produce. "Traditional farmers" are also of the opinion that polluting the produce with nitrates, herbicides, and pesticides is one of the gravest problems of Japanese agriculture; but they believe this is an inevitable evil, because modern production cannot get by without chemicals. Some respondents were even convinced that to refuse to use such means would be tantamount to turning one's back on progress and the achievements of modern civilization, would mean reverting to the times of hard drudgery in the rice fields, low yields, and a primitive rural life.

The number of "new farmers" is small, but slowly growing; the respondents are mostly young people, but one of the serious problems facing teikei is the aging of farmers, engaged in it. Their political views are connected with those of various ecological organizations; recently the influence of new farmers has been growing, especially among young and highly educated new middle strata representatives. They take an active part in NPO activities, while the development of IT enable them to create and maintain virtual communities with their consumer clients and with colleagues from the country, and even with some researchers who are studying their experience. All the interviewed "new farmers" believed that ecological agriculture was not simply a way of agricultural production but a social movement with a philosophy of its own. The teikei groups are not only a center of ecological consumption but also connected with a lifestyle oriented to harmony between society and nature in postmodern Japanese society. The surveyed farmers indicated the importance to them not only of ecological food production and the preservation of nature, but also of upholding and disseminating the ideas, values, and specific lifestyle related to these. These farmers organize consumer groups as clients of their produce, maintaining close and immediate contacts with these groups: they are facilitated in this by IT. In addition to rational market relations, there are also relationships of cooperation, mutual help, and emotional links between the farmers and the consumers. The consumer group usually consists of residents of large cities who buy ecological food directly from the producers. In order to achieve successful economic activity and normal reproduction of these farms, a consumer group should consist of about 50 people. Attaining cost effectiveness of these farms usually requires the combining of vegetable growing with raising poultry. For all the interviewed farmers in this category, the practice of organic agriculture was a source of pride and self-esteem. They are people with a higher education, and some of them were born in cities and were not of a farmer family background. Their orientation to organic agriculture and involvement in teikei has been aided by civil society structures and some NPOs. In

394 They do not work in any other sector of the economy.

turning to organic agriculture, they have been motivated above all by their ecological ideas and views, for in itself organic farming does not give them economic advantages over the traditional farmers, those who use chemicals, pesticides, herbicides, artificial fertilizers, etc. The “new farmers” are concentrated in regions near the megapolises, in the more developed industrial rural regions, and not in the traditional and conservative rural communities, where it would be hard for them to find adherents and consumers for their produce.

The popularity and expansion of this movement requires more than volunteers: it needs special experts, professionals, and managers. Its leaders, both the formal paid workers within its structures and the volunteers helping informally in its activity, are mostly representatives of the middle strata. They have the necessary education, training, and experience for organizing and managing it; they also have the needed civic initiative and spirit of enterprise, the lifestyle in which post-materialistic values are of decisive importance.

The experience of developed countries, such as the US, Japan, Western European countries, could be applied in Bulgaria as well. For instance, Japanese colleagues and respondents have often indicated their assumption there could be a future for teikei in our country. Ecological foods supplied directly from farmers would soon find their customers in Bulgaria. This way of interaction between producers and buyers would provide support for the producers, some of whom now find it difficult to sell their produce on the market and for many pensioners with low incomes living in villages. (The low prices at which farmers are now forced to sell their produce cannot even cover the production costs.) On the other hand, consumers would be supplied with fresh and ecological products at lower prices because the multiple intermediaries would be eliminated. These clients would have access to the same good-quality, healthy food as farmers and their families. Such a trend would help overcome natural consumption in our country and would also stimulate the civic activeness of consumers. All this could serve as a good foundation for a development of civic activeness, which would change consumption patterns in our country, and lifestyle in general; it would “Europeanize” them and draw them closer to patterns in other EU countries.

But many problems remain to be solved before such an organization could gain ground under Bulgarian conditions. Here are some issues: the monopoly of traders and intermediaries on the market, the lack of willingness of consumers and producers to take part in volunteer work and create these structures, the need for support by the central and local government institutions, the capacity of producers and consumers to build and maintain relations of mutual trust, without attempting to “get the better” of the other side.

The alternative to this cooperation is for consumers to continue complaining that foods are “tasteless” or full of nitrates, while the rural producers continue to making preserves for themselves and their relatives, as their ancestors have done for centuries. Building civic activeness and solidarity will then remain an unrealized wish, and mistrust, corruption, apathy, and inertness will prevail.

The Japanese postmodernization and the changes in middle strata consumption patterns

Immediately after WWII, Japanese consumption was characterized by poverty, shortage of commodities, a growing black market and smuggling. Since the mid 1950s the country began to restore its economy; the emblematic commodities of consumption at that time were the washing machine, the refrigerator, and the vacuum cleaner; by the mid 1960s these items were indeed found in every home. When Japan achieved the level of second strongest economy in the world in the late 1960s, shopping had come to be considered something patriotic. All this radically changed the nature of Japanese consumer society, which underwent a “transition from quantitative to qualitative consumption”[395].

It became important and at last possible for middle strata consumers to display their grown living standard by the use of prestigious brands of commodities and services. At that time there began a development and gradual growth of conspicuous consumption, which attained a mass scale and characterized Japanese consumer society throughout the 1980s.

In the 1970s Japan was a leader in the development of the so-called “fifth generation” computer systems and robotization. By the mid-1980s the country had achieved its goal and turned into an information society. Typically, Japan emphasizes foremost the social values of the media, communications, and information technologies, and their use not only in the sphere of production but also in leisure, recreation, and consumption. Since then high technologies have found a permanent place in Japanese consumption patters, especially those of the new middle strata. They have become a characteristic feature of the Japanese consumer society and lifestyle in general. Japan has practically realized its post-war ideal, and is a real example of the post-industrial society described by Daniel Bell. Japan has become a society oriented mostly to information and services, and its industry is based on the development of science and technology, particularly modern technologies. Japanese products symbolize high quality, and the country has a well-established image as the land of high technologies.

In 1985, in the city of Tsukuba, Ibaraki prefecture, north of Tokyo, the International Science and Technology Exposition - Expo ’85 was held. It popularized Japanese achievements and confirmed the status of the country as a world power in the field of science and technology. Advocated amongst the public and the media was the idea that information is of paramount importance for achieving and leading a “meaningful life”; especially receptive to this message were the new middle strata. Knowledge-related professions have enhanced their influence, and this has changed the stratification structure of society and the place of the new middle class in that structure.

According to Imada[396], Japan passed from the stage of “consumer society” in the

395 Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 28.

396 Takatoshi Imada, 1998.

1960s and 1970s, to that of a yutakana shakai or "affluent society" in the 1980s. He uses this term to characterize the changes taking place in postmodern Japanese society. Due to these changes, the status differences between people and groups were now defined not only and not mostly by the material dimensions of their social situation but increasingly by their consumption patterns and lifestyle.

The increasing number of white-collar workers in the Japanese economy at that time was a factor leading to the development of mass society and mass consumption. In the 1960s and 70s, the growth and stabilization of the middle class became the goal of the ruling elites, and also the model of material success at the individual and social level. The increasing number of white-collar workers in the Japanese economy at that time was a factor leading to the development of mass society and mass consumption, which in turn promoted the myth that Japan was a "middle class society". The political party platforms at that time were elaborated in this direction. These changes led to the emergence of another myth, according to which the country was turning, during the 1970s, from a middle class society into a "new middle mass society"[397]. The new middle mass is understood to be a mass middle stratum, homogenous in respect to lifestyle, consumption patterns, and value system. This massification was due to the increased proportion of the new middle class of professionals, experts, and managers.

Starting from the 1980s, Japan turned from a "society of the middle mass" into a "divided middle mass" society. The "divided middle mass" has consumption patterns and lifestyle that do not directly result from its achieved status, i.e. from the profession, income, and education of its members, unlike the "middle mass society"[398]. "Divided middle mass" consists of differing social strata whose lifestyle is centered on the values of a good family, satisfaction derived from personal life and leisure, from the display of personal qualities, ample social contacts, possibilities for exercising leadership, and self-expression in informal relations. The concept of "divided middle mass" is used to characterize the middle class in postmodern societies like the Japanese one, in which values are reoriented from the achievement of material status to greater spiritual self-expression.

In reality, after WWII the share of the middle class, especially that of the new middle strata, did increase, but Japan was never a "middle class society", much less a "new middle mass society"[399]. Starting from the mid-1960s, the lifestyle, consumption patterns, and cultural patterns certainly did become factors of growing importance for stratification, but this does not mean that economic criteria had lost their impact. Past inequalities have intensified since the 1980s, and done so not only in the direction of growing differences in values, leisure, and cultural status. Under the impact of the "bubble economy", the prices of real estate and land grew several times higher, thus engendering considerable inequalities between those who had these resources and

397 Yasusuke Murakami, 1984.
398 Takatoshi Imada, op. cit.
399 Maya Keliyan, 2012, pp. 95-101.

those who did not[400]. The "new rich" and "new poor" emerged: the former have the resources for leading an affluent and even lavish lifestyle, which the latter cannot afford even when they are employed and with an income above the poverty line. In studying the financial resources and capacity for savings of the households, Ozawa states that society is entering an "era of neo-stratification consumption", brought about by the "birth of the divided masses"[401]. Similar conclusions are presented by Yamazaki, who writes about "the emergence of fragile individualism" of "masses divided with regard to consumption and lifestyle"[402], while Fujioka entitled his article about these trends with the nostalgic phrase "Goodbye, masses"[403].

Other authors define that in the 1980s and early 1990s Japanese society entered a period of "post-scarcity"[404]. The greater part of the population had by then no problems satisfying its basic needs, and could even afford to consume luxury goods[405]. The contrast between the deprivations of the post-war years and the subsequent plenty was quite sharp and this change took place within a single generation. At that time the new stratifying role of consumption in Japanese society became increasingly distinct – by then society had achieved the material-economic freedom for such consumption.

There were indisputable differences between the status positions of the different social strata in Japan during this period. The question is not whether differences existed or whether they grew or decreased – the important point is that in a postmodern Japanese society, consumption patterns and lifestyle, together with economic situation, are a significant, in fact key factor defining the status positions of the separate socio-professional groups. The views of various authors quoted above confirm this important finding: the ways and forms in which the separate groups and strata consume, become increasingly differentiated and this testifies to the status differences between these groups. Research interest is focused primarily on what is happening in the middle strata: analyzed are the differences within them engendered by the specific consumption patterns of the separate socio-professional groups. The processes occurring in these consumption patterns have shaped the main trends in the social stratification of post-war Japan and show the significance of the middle strata as bearers of the most important, symptomatic and emblematic changes in society.

Since the mid-1980s Japanese postmodern consumer society entered a stage in which the stress shifted from conformism of the "consumer masses" to an individualism influenced by Western values. Consumer groups, in their striving to express most fully that they are "different", have become increasingly segmented[406]. Consumer culture in this period was dominated by the values of individualism and self-expression, which

400 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit.
401 Masako Ozawa, 1995.
402 Masakazu Yamazaki, 1984.
403 Wakao Fujioka, 1984.
404 Yuichi Tamura, 2007.
405 Murray Bookchin, op. cit., p. 10.
406 Hellmut Schutte and Deanna Ciarlante, op. cit., p. 103, Millie Creighton, op. cit., p. 219.

sought adequate projection in the lifestyle. The educated new middle strata of the so-called "new middle mass" (shin chukan taishu[407]) are the suitable target group of consumers with the necessary income but also with the cultural potential to adopt the ideas of "diversified" consumption patterns and lifestyle.

In the 1990s the Japanese postmodern consumer society underwent changes in values: the preference shifted to simple and functional products, in which the most important aspect was utility, not design and brand. These values have been shared especially by the new middle strata, who express the ideas of globalism, pragmatism, and the "new refinement of taste". These processes are stimulated by economic recession, which makes the cheaper stores not only increasingly popular, but even "in vogue" among certain social groups of consumers.

Ecological consumption, healthy lifestyle, and striving for digital affluence: the leading role of the middle strata

An important trend in Japan, and particularly popular among wide circles of the population, is the ecologically oriented consumption and lifestyle that are characteristic of postmodern societies. The morally "responsible", "sustainable", and "green" lifestyles are part of the agenda of Japanese civil society, which is increasingly mindful of preserving ecological balance. People began to increasingly attach importance to the ecological lifestyle as early as the mid 1960s but at that time the trend was mostly rooted in the middle and especially new middle strata. By the beginning of the 21st century ecological consumption and lifestyle have become a goal for all who wish to be perceived as "enlightened modern consumers"[408]. The media – both printed and electronic – have played an important role for popularizing these lifestyles, and in complying with state policy, they conduct active educational campaigns in this connection. The aim is for consumers from all social strata to be informed about the norms and requirements for a healthy lifestyle so that the latter might become a widespread practice. Certainly the leaders in this respect are the middle strata, especially the social-professional groups of the new middle strata; the other social-structural groups are in various degrees followers of the consumption patterns of the middle strata.

By the beginning of the 21st century Japanese society had become an increasingly "recycling" society: in 2001 the Law on Food Recycling was passed, which obliges hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, etc., to recycle their food waste. The motto of environmental lifestyle (the so called 3Rs) is: "reduce, reuse, recycle". Leftover food is reprocessed and the organic manure thereby obtained is used for growing ecological vegetables and rice, thereby closing the food chain. Separate garbage collection, with even highly detailed separation, began to be practiced in Japan back in the 1990s,

407 See Yasusuke Murakami, op. cit., Takatoshi Imada, op. cit.

408 As a result of increasing popularity of "environmentally and morally responsible lifestyle" in Japan, brands with high environmental evaluations are growing. For its efforts to increase emphasis on protecting the environment, Toyota Motor Corporation was awarded with the first place in the "Best Global Green Brands" rankings for 2010. Other Japanese companies ranked in the top 10 were Honda Motor Corporation, which placed seventh, and Panasonic Corporation, which ranked 10th.

and is considered very important in this country. Increasingly strict requirements for separation of categories of garbage are being introduced each year.

In January 2001 the Basic Act for Establishing a Sound Material-Cycle Society was brought into force. This law has established a legal framework to address issues such as waste disposal and automobile and electrical appliance recycling. Other ongoing efforts include better waste management, and research and development for the use of waste as a source of energy, with a view to generating a synergy between efforts to manage waste and tackle global warming. Thanks to this development, the volume of final disposal (to be put into landfills) of waste generated as a result of business activities, fell from 89,73 million tons in fiscal 1990 to 16,70 million tons in fiscal 2008. Meanwhile, the recycling rate of "nonindustrial waste" (household waste and also shop, office and restaurant waste) in fiscal 2008 was 20, 3%. Both the total volume of recycled waste and the recycling rate have been rising every year[409].

Since the beginning of the 21st century more and more efforts are being made for increasing greenery in the megapolises. Most large construction enterprises are offering green roofs on their buildings: these are spaces with grass, bushes, flowers, and even trees. The aim is for these plants to absorb the heat and purify the waste gases in the "concrete jungles", thereby reducing the greenhouse effect that has led to an increase of several degrees in average temperatures in large cities. Some home furnishing companies make and sell such furnishings not only for residential buildings and various high-rise buildings, but also for one-family houses. This roof greenery is expected to improve the appearance of cities and also to provide a place for recreation for inhabitants, to improve the insulation of buildings, to decrease heating expenses in winter and cooling expenses in summer, to decrease noise and contribute to the fight against global warming. Gardening is among the favorite traditional hobbies of the Japanese, but with urbanization fewer people today can indulge in it. But now the new technologies are making this possible, in happy combination with Japanese society's striving for a natural lifestyle and for preservation of ecological balance.

The middle strata are leading this trend. On one hand, people from this class, such as professionals, experts, managers, entrepreneurs, are among those who observe ecological norms and requirements. On the other hand, their social-group position and resources enable them to popularize and take part at various levels in spreading the values of ecological culture throughout society.

Tokyo was the first megapolis to introduce the requirement of planting greenery upon at least one fifth of the surface area of the roofs of newly constructed buildings – this was in April 2001. Since then, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport has developed and implemented a program for reducing taxes of people with "green roofs", as well as VAT for "green roof equipment". The local authorities in other large cities, such as Osaka, Sendai, Kanazawa, etc., are also taking measures for financial incitements for such green areas.

Contemporary Japanese consumption patterns are characterized by their high

409 *Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2011*, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

tech orientation and nature. The country has succeeded in maintaining the image of a society that has achieved digital affluence, due to the leading role in it of digital media and communications and their ubiquitous presence in all spheres of life[410]. Becoming a postmodern society, Japan entered the "information age", and the country's economic priorities were reoriented from the production of physical products to information technologies. The Japanese "cult of high quality", the Shinto tradition of renewal, and the "will to innovation"[411] are some of the factors stimulating the application of modern technology in everyday life.

Computer technologies started penetrating Japanese society in the mid 1970s, in the form of various video games and "home play stations". This changed the consumption and leisure patterns of various social groups, categories, and strata. The use of information media, the so-called information literacy, has become an increasingly important resource for achieving high social status[412]. In postmodern society this quality is as important as the ability to read, write and do sums was in modern society. The differences in the level of digital culture are related to differences in status, stratum, and class; according to some authors, the development of information technologies even tends to enhance the already existing class inequalities. The expectations of Japanese sociologists are that these trends will continue with even greater intensity in the future. The middle strata are leaders in digital culture, and the greatest level of information literacy is registered among them.

Japan is a society increasingly dominated by digital media and communications. For Japanese consumption society what is important is not only the use of IT and their further development, but for the country to be a leader in innovation in the IT sphere and in the quality of related services offered. In 2001 the biggest mobile operator in Japan – NTT DoCoMo was the first in the world to introduce third generation mobile phones. Since the beginning of 2005 the government has been applying a policy[413] known as "u-Japan policy", an abbreviation designating its objective – the building of a "ubiquitous communications network society". The goal is for Japan to become the world leader in ICT. The commodities offered in this sphere are constantly being varied and renewed; new, better-quality, higher tech products are supplied, and this market is exceptionally dynamic.

Fukushima nuclear crisis: The failure of the myths about effective control over technologies and the prime importance of efficiency and comfort in consumption and lifestyle

The natural disasters and the ensuing nuclear crisis in Japan, known as the triple March11, 2011 tragedy, have placed on the agenda of developed and developing

410 Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda, 2005.

411 Ronald Dore, 1973.

412 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 208.

413 The goals, tasks and measures were widely discussed in public space throughout the year 2004.

countries alike the issue of nuclear power plant safety, but likewise the more general question of the value of an ecological consumption and lifestyle. Japan has a developed and functioning policy for environmental protection and functioning laws for the application of that policy. But despite the achieved results, many problems still exist, provoking the criticism and protests of civic movements. The country's tragic experience with the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the popularity and importance of the ecological consumption and lifestyle, are circumstances that make the tragedy even harder to explain and come to terms with. This is a country that has undergone the nightmare of atomic bombing and is particularly sensitive in its mentality and culture to the risks of nuclear energy, till March 2011 obtained one third of its electricity precisely from nuclear power stations. To make matters worse, one fifth of the earthquakes taking place in the world occur on its territory, and are often followed by tsunami waves. In this country earthquakes are part of daily life. Yet the ecological consumption and lifestyle are not a distant goal for Japan, they are the actual practice of large groups and strata of the population. The public is informed, concerned, and sensitive about natural environment protection.

But this is not only a Japanese problem; it is one of the most important issues facing all countries in the world today. The development of technology, of the IT sector in particular, has given rise to the dangerously illusory idea that nature and man-made technology are under control, and that what has not taken place during the past decades will not take place in the future. In a number of countries, among them Japan, a serious additional cause for the extent of damages coming from the destructive power of nature, is human error. The latter is often linked with economic interests, and with corrupt practices tying political elites to economic structures: data indicating this connection were presented and discussed after the Fukushima nuclear incident.

The nuclear crisis in Fukushima has its global impact: it is shaping how nuclear energy is perceived globally - both by countries with nuclear power plants as well as those considering the role of nuclear power in their own infrastructure planning. The devastation has shown how vulnerable a highly developed technological society can be, for all its conviction that it can meet the challenges of natural disasters. These events brought about, albeit in a tragic way, a clear awareness of the importance of the ecological consumption and lifestyle for the quality of life in general. In the global world of today it has become urgent and unavoidable to rethink the predominance of economic and political priorities over the ecological ones on which our existence ultimately depends.

The Fukushima nuclear crisis brought about the demise of the blind faith in the infallibility of technology, of nuclear power technology in particular, the faith that people are capable of fully managing it and subordinating it to their goals and will. This naïve and risky belief is related to the priority assigned to efficiency and comfort in the modern world, values that are mythologized at the expense of security, of moral responsibility for preserving the natural environment and human health and life. At first glance the middle class consumption patterns and nuclear power safety

are not interconnected issues. But they both are linked to the postmodernization of contemporary societies. The March 11, 2011 tragedy, according to the moving words of Japanese writer Haruki Murakami "The situation marked the collapse of the myth regarding Japan's technological prowess, of which the Japanese people had been so proud[414]". The catastrophic events changed the agenda, goals, values, and priorities of Japanese society, as they did the agenda of the whole world, even though not all societies may be aware of the change. The myth of the safety of nuclear energy is part of the myth about the ability of people to control technologies effectively and with entirely beneficial results. Both myths are connected with that of the predominant importance of efficiency and comfort in the postmodern consumption patterns and lifestyle. The creation and spread of these myths has occurred in parallel with the myth about Japan as a "middle class society", and this is no coincidence. The speedy and successful post-war development of the country, which turned it into a postmodern society, also created favorable social, economic, political, and cultural conditions for this kind of social mythology. Since the late 1960s, as a result of the postmodernization of Japanese society[415], the myth was established regarding the importance of efficiency and comfort, which have become priority goals in the country's economic development. Economic production and developing technologies are expected above all to be efficient and provide comfort for consumers, especially for raising and demanding middle class consumers. At that time the myth became established in the country that technologies can be fully controlled by Man and society; and Japan seemed to be among the world leaders with regard to the efficiency of this control. But with the great stress on the values of efficiency and comfort, the issues of safety, security and environment protection somehow remained in the margin of public attention.

In 2010 the government plan for power production envisaged an increase in the share of electricity produced by nuclear power plants from 30% to 53%. The crisis in the Fukushima nuclear power plant put an end to such plans. Now widely discussed in the media and in public space are revelations about the corrupt practices in the energy sector, about the suspiciously close relationships between high-ranking civil servants from the nuclear power sector and state officials responsible for overseeing the safety of nuclear power plants, about irregular activities in support of nuclear energy not only on the part of the nuclear lobby but even of certain representatives of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. Dismissals and resignations followed, as well as civic protests and appeals for altogether abandoning the use of nuclear power. Then prime minister Kan Naoto even declared the intention that Japan would shut down its electric power plants and henceforth to rely mainly on renewable energy sources. This was the start of a long road towards what the media have called a "post-nuclear Japan"[416]. The tragic

414 See Haruki Murakami's acceptance speech titled "As an Unrealistic Dreamer" on receiving the Catalunya International Prize, 2011, http://www.senrinomich.com/?p=2728

415 Maya Keliyan, 2010, pp. 35-42.

416 In April 2013 only two of 50 commercial reactors are working, but The Nuclear Regulation Authority plans to introduce new safety requirements for nuclear power plants by July 18, 2013. Reactors would be restarted after the compilation of the guidelines and if their safety is confirmed. To restart those reactors, it would be necessary to obtain local communities understanding and approval.

events led to a rethinking of the myth of safe nuclear energy, of effective control over technologies, of the priority of efficiency and comfort over safety. But this has come at a very heavy price, an "unbearable" one: the country finds itself in a similar situation as in the last days of WWII, when, in the words of the emperor Hirohito in his radio speech declaring capitulation, Japan had "to bear the unbearable".

2. Development, establishment, and particularities of the Japanese middle strata consumption patterns: the consumer universe of the department store

The firm establishment of the ***middle strata as modern and postmodern consumers*** in Japan, and the development of consumer society, would have been unthinkable without the existence of the ***department store as an emblematic institution.*** First created under strong Western influence and as a direct testimony to the "Westernization" of consumer culture, the department store is based also ***on the traditions*** of Japanese trade, and has been modified[417] into a specific, distinctive, recognizable ***symbol*** of the country. In this way it proves that ***typical Western institutions can be Japanized*** to a degree where they become markers of the country itself. Our discussion of the Japanese department store is in line with the ***goal*** of the dissertation and ***contributes to the fuller characterization of consumer society, which is the object of study.*** This discussion is an important stage of ***the demonstration of our underlying thesis,*** for it shows ***the development of the middle strata*** and their ***transformation*** into bearers of the most emblematic and symptomatic trends in postmodern consumption. The department store is their consumer universe, which to a great extent determines the ways and forms in which they consume, their values, attitudes, and tastes relevant to consumption; their lifestyle is also organized around it.

The emergence of *depaato* as consumption and lifestyle center of the middle strata

An important ***institution*** in Japan, which ***introduced Western, hence modern, patterns, standards, and styles in commerce and consumption***, is ***the department store – depaato*** [418]. The Japanese ***depaato***, though adopted under Western influence after the opening and modernization of the country, had its predecessors in the trade expositions, markets, bazaars, and fairs of the 1870s and 1880s (the so called ***kankouba)***.

The emergence of department stores was provoked by social-economic changes

417 Traditions have important role during „modern transformations of societies"; communities not only inherit traditions, the crucial thing is that they are creating traditions. For more details see Motoji Matsuda, 1998, pp. 18-21.

418 Toru Hatsuda, 1993, Chizuko Ueno, 1998.

in society. Their swift development and expansion was due to:

- Economic growth;
- Urban processes leading to the emergence of the new urban culture;
- The growing share of middle strata, which became increasingly prosperous in this period, especially middle strata of professionals, experts, managers, and administrators[419].

It is believed the first modern department store in the world was Bon Marché, opened in Paris in the 1860s; the first Japanese counterpart is considered to be Mitsukoshi[420]. Like its celebrated Parisian forerunner, the Japanese store was based on ***middle strata consumer culture*** from where it drew its models, power, and inspiration[421].

Its name ***depaato*** is a Japanese modification of the English term "***department store***", although there is also a purely Japanese word for this type of store. Not only its name but also its architecture and design have been a ***symbol of the West*** for the Japanese. It tries to maintain its image by being modern and unsurpassed[422] in its exterior and interior: this store had the first high towers, built after the destructive Tokyo earthquake of 1923. In it were installed one of the first elevators[423], the first escalator[424] and air conditioning in the country. The first fashion review presented in Japan was in ***depaato***[425]. As a ***product and embodiment of the "revolution" in trade***[426], this store dared to first introduce and display "foreign mores"[427].

In Japanese tradition, the different trade groups had as regular clients members of ***specific social groups,*** who identified their social status with the prestige of the respective store, market, bazaar, commercial street, etc., they frequented. For instance, Mitsukoshi was preferred by wealthy merchants and the aristocracy; the clients of Shirokiya were the feudal lords ***daimyo*** and their families; Takashimaya was preferred by members of the imperial family, while Matsuzakaya, by the Buddhist and Shinto clergy. Of all the large commercial groups that later created chains of department

419 Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 76-85; 97-103, 2008, pp. 121-138.

420 There is a debate between experts when exactly the department store was registered under that name: whether in October 1904, December 1904, or January 1905. See Edward Seidensticker, 1983 p. 111, Brian Moeran, 1998 pp. 143, 174.

421 Michael B. Miller, 1981 p. 3.

422 Mitsukoshi for instance, has been called "the largest store east of Suez" and "incomparable to anything east of Suez", see Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 155.

423 Installed in 1911 in the Shirokiya building.

424 In the Mitsukoshi store built in 1914.

425 The first air conditioning was installed and the first fashion review were held in Mitsukoshi in 1927; Shirokiya followed this example in 1931, and so did Takashimaya and Isetan in 1933 (ibid. 175).

426 Edward Seidensticker, 1990, p. 7.

427 In all other stores, as well as in *depaato* during the first decade of its existence, the clients were obliged to follow the tradition and take off their shoes upon entering, donning slippers offered them there. After the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923, Mitsukoshi, following Western influence, was the first to allow its clients to keep their shoes on in the store, something tantamount to a revolution in mores.

stores, only Daimaru had as clients the middle and lower middle strata[428]. The rapid modernization processes changed not only the trade institutions and practices, but the clientele of these stores as well. Mitsukoshi, ever since its creation, targeted as clients the members of the ***upper middle strata of administrators, professionals, and entrepreneurs,*** such as military officers, state officials, scientists, intellectuals, bank employees, employees of the big corporations[429]. By attracting these as customers, the aim was to influence the consumer behavior of the ***middle middle strata,*** who strove to "ascribe" to themselves at least some of the glamour and elegance of the upper middle by following their consumption patterns. Mitsukoshi acquired the image of the ***depaato*** preferred by the ***relatively well-to-do, well-educated, and "progressively" minded,*** by people willing to assimilate the "Western lifestyle". Its advertisements were published in the daily newspapers read by the ***intelligentsia.*** The store aimed to win regular customers among the foreign diplomats, aristocrats, intellectuals, and businessmen. The aim was to make this a place where the ***intellectual elite*** would not only shop but meet and socialize. In pursuing this strategy, the store created its ***"intellectual salon"*** where well-known scientists, writers, artists, would gather and hold discussions[430].

In 1929 Umeda station of the Osaka Hankyu Railway Company opened the first ***terminal department store*** in the world. Since then such stores have become typical for the first and last metro stations throughout the country; they are the property of the railway company that owns the respective train line. Ever since they were first created, the ***terminal department stores*** have aimed at ***middle middle and lower middle strata consumers.*** Gradually, however, they too began to offer high quality goods and in this respect they are now no different from other stores, though in conception and initial strategy, their ***emphasis was on practicality rather than luxury.*** The stores sell ***high-quality but mass commodities*** for daily use at the best prices. Like its predecessors[431], the terminal department store also contains restaurants, theatres, cafes, tea houses, zoos, barber shops, marriage offices, and various services and entertainments. It gradually became the favorite shopping place of daily commuters from the ***new middle strata*** and had a definitive influence on their consumption patterns. The ***traditional depaato attracts customers from the high strata*** and presents their consumption patterns and lifestyle as a model for emulation of the middle strata, emphasizing ***prestigious consumption.*** The ***terminal department store*** directly aims at the ***more mass consumers in the new middle strata*** and is focused on mass commodities for daily use, i.e. on "practical consumption". It has tended to ***massify*** the consumer culture and lifestyle that the first department stores promoted, and to spread them among the middle and lower middle strata. Because of this it has been called an institution

428 Toru Hatsuda, op. cit., p. 84.

429 Edward Seidensticker, 1983 p. 249.

430 Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 153.

431 These are the traditional *depaato* which originated from the large commercial associations of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), including the above-mentioned Mitsukoshi, Shirokiya, Takashimaya, Isetan, which are still known as the first echelon *depaato*.

of social engineering"[432]. It "democratizes" consumption, making the "consumer's paradise" more accessible to the daily commuters, who can now reach this paradise without deviating from their daily route.

This well-tried strategy, proven in intense market competition, has gradually been adopted by the traditional ***depaato.*** In order to meet the competition, it offers all sorts of sales, and in order to attract more clients it is willing to decrease its profits and propose high quality goods at reasonable prices. Thus, the ***new middle strata*** are becoming the store's ***basic target group of consumers.*** The store even provides buses that drive clients from Tokyo train station to the respective branch of ***depaato*** and back, in order to facilitate their shopping; later, new branches were built near to central metro stations. This set the start of a ***new cultural phenomenon:*** the ***combining of travel and shopping*** into one[433]; a new kind of tourism has thus emerged, the so-called shopping tourism, and with it, a new lifestyle and new leisure patterns.

The *depaato* as legislator of middle strata consumption patterns and lifestyle

The establishment, prospering and rise of the department store as a dominant institution of the Japanese market are stages that fall into respective periods of spread, development, and consolidation of ***mass consumption*** in the country. As a ***social phenomenon*** these stores were made possible thanks to growing ***mass production.*** The suggestion that purchasing would stimulate national production was cleverly used to appeal to Japanese patriotic feelings. Thus, the consumption patterns engendered by ***depaato*** were supported in different ways by the ideology of modernization during the Meiji period and then after the WWII. The ***middle strata consumption patterns*** set by the store not only increase demand and sales, thus stimulating production, but in addition, ***require that producers supply fashionable goods of highest quality at world level;*** this has been the store's contribution to Japanese economic success.

The new methods of trade and management stimulate the interest not only in commodities but also more generally in ***consumption,*** which in itself becomes a ***mass scale leisure pastime characteristic for the middle strata*** and a ***marker of a modern (later, a postmodern) lifestyle.*** Since it was first established in the early years of the 20th century, and until the great earthquake that struck Tokyo in 1923, the department store was a ***location of consumption of the upper middle and middle middle strata,*** and after that began to define the consumption patterns of the ***lower middle strata*** as well.

Depaato is ***fundamental to modern Japanese consumption society***. Despite the numerous changes it underwent over the years, as well as the increasingly competitive environment, it continues to be a ***symbol*** and "monument" of the "of the middle class culture"[434].

Depaato was conceived and created as a ***center*** of contemporary lifestyle. The separate stores were built in those places in the city where people from the middle

432 Chin-Tao Wu, op. cit., p. 122.

433 Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 166.

434 Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 141.

strata passed ***daily***; the ***depaato*** is present at ***nodal locations*** in the urban environment and thus became an organic part of the lifestyle of the ***contemporary city***; it became the ***modern*** and later ***postmodern*** face of the city. It ingeniously ***shapes the consumer behavior and culture of its most loyal clients, the upper middle strata***.

Depaato succeeds in "harmonizing" the Japanese tradition with imported Western commodities and consumer practices. These stores sell not only products but a "new lifestyle" as well. In this way they have created a ***new type of consumption patterns*** that suits the quickly growing ***new middle strata*** in Japanese cities. ***Depaato*** also fulfils an ***educational function:*** it introduces new customs but also "enlightens" its clients about the traditions and customs of their counterparts, the Western middle strata whom the Japanese strive to imitate. In the early 1990s the average Japanese family gave an average of 300 gifts a year, presented on various occasions related to Japanese traditions or influenced by Western culture[435]. The Japanese housewife may buy items for the home and family from supermarkets or cheap goods stores but gifts are invariably bought from ***depaato,*** for the name alone on the packaging is a sufficient sign of status and prestige. ***Depaato is an institution, an arbiter of national taste and etiquette*** regarding fashionable trends in consumption patterns and lifestyle: it defines what the right thing is, how it is done, and on what occasions.

Since it was first created, the department store has been a "city within the city"[436]; it displays the ***culture, values, and lifestyle of the Western middle strata,*** which their Japanese counterparts want to quickly assimilate. It embodies the ***striving of the new middle strata for self-expression, refined style, and material prosperity***[437].

"Vertical hierarchic relationships"[438] are of definitive importance for all spheres of life in Japanese society. The ***depaato***, thanks to its size, "cosmopolitan image", history, and importance for the creation and establishment of modern consumption patterns, is at the ***top of the hierarchy*** of stores (a hierarchy that includes malls, supermarkets, specialized stores, etc.). The different department stores have, as always in Japan, their inner hierarchy based on rank, volume of sales, prestige, etc. The prices of their goods are relatively high, but they offer high-quality fashionable items, elegant packaging free-of-charge, free-of-charge delivery and maintenance; customers are invariably shown impeccable courtesy. Some of these bonuses are offered in other categories of stores as well, and courtesy toward the client is ubiquitous in Japan, but in the department store all this has been perfected to the level of ritual. Because of its high status in Japanese consumption culture, the ***depaato*** offers and sells not only goods and commodities, "but status and prestige as well"[439]. In this aspect its social role is identical with that of advertising, which tries to "sell us something other than consumer goods; in presenting before us a structure in which we and the goods are mutually determining, it sells us

435 Millie Creighton, op. cit., p. 45.

436 Toru Hatsuda, op. cit., 102.

437 Edward Seidensticker, op. cit., p. 279.

438 Chie Nakane, 1992.

439 Millie Creighton, op. cit., p.p. 44, 56.

ourselves"[440]. This explains the great popularity of a wide range of products, including soaps, cosmetics, foods, clothes, shoes, accessories, refrigerators, all made under the brand name of a given ***depaato*** by producers and designers working for the store.

The Japanese department store, with its "innovations" is a ***legislator of modern lifestyle*** and successfully succeeds in ***combining trade with social responsibility.***

The store has concert halls and exhibition halls, museums, galleries, theatres, cinemas and auditoriums, with which it attracts not only clients but also art lovers and people who wish to attend the various courses, clubs, and numerous forms of education and training organized by ***depaato.*** On the roof of the store there is a great variety of recreation and social contact sites, such as summer and winter gardens with fountains, artificial lakes, flowerbeds, trees and bushes, greenhouses, tea houses, music stages, amusement parks, zoos and botanical gardens, skating rings, sports grounds, panorama observation points; all these are visited not only by shoppers but by people who come specially to them. These recreation spaces have been perceived as ***symbols of contemporary urban culture*** ever since the early 20th century, and the ***depaato*** came to be seen as more than a commercial institution, as they acquired the image of urban centers that lend a unique atmosphere[441] to the modern and postmodern city. The ***depaato*** feels ***socially responsible*** to create and develop the contemporary urban environment and culture, and society expects it from the store.

The department store has its ***regular educated and informed audience*** for the various cultural events it offers, such as permanent and visiting exhibits of world masterpieces of art; museum pieces and objects of historical value; concerts by musicians of world renown, theatres presenting traditional Japanese arts, such as ***kabuki theatre, Noh theatre*** and others. The store offers the best in this respect and competes with private, public, and state museums. It periodically organizes exhibits of world masters such as Leonardo, Van Gogh, Picasso, Miro, etc., not only for connoisseurs but for a wider public, including children; moreover, some of these exhibits are free of charge for the public, the ***depaato*** assuming the enormous costs. In this respect, the store follows the traditional trade ethics of the Tokugawa period, when it was believed the pursuit of profit is justified only when serving the demands of ***duty and social responsibility.*** The contemporary department store looks upon the museums, galleries, concert halls, and exhibition halls it maintains as a fulfillment of this ***social role,*** for it has become ***not only a commercial centre but an important cultural-educational institution*** as well. To ***attend these cultural events and forums is considered prestigious, a sign of belonging to the middle strata, specifically to the upper middle and middle middle strata.***

The stratagem of attracting clients by means of exhibits is known as the "shower effect"[442]: a person entering the store to attend an artistic event may be tempted, in addition, to spend some money on shopping. Thus the store uses the artistic interests of visitors to make clients of them. It has been calculated that during exhibits in ***depaato***

440 Judith Williamson, op. cit., p. 13.

441 See Toru Hatsuda, op. cit., pp. 124-129, Brian Moeran, op. cit., p. 160.

442 Chin-Tao Wu, op. cit., p. 123.

sales usually increase by about one fifth. The fulfillment of the social responsibility helps increase gains. The two purposes are not at all mutually exclusive: trade is ultimately stimulated, which is the goal of every market institution, whether it be socially responsible or not; but when it happens to be charged with a socially useful function as well, the institution can build its image beyond the commercial level and become a cultural intermediary, a disseminator of cultural values.

The role of ***depaato*** in introducing and popularizing Western merchandizing practices and commodities, but also educating the consumer taste of clients, has been aptly defined as ***edutainment,*** a combination of the English words ***education*** and ***entertainment***[443].

It is traditional for ***depaato*** to organize courses for acquiring various knowledge and skills, such as interest clubs, foreign languages, cooking, singing, courses in various musical instruments, history of music and art, various styles of art, the history and function of specific musical instruments, acting, drawing, dancing, various sports, etc. Great efforts are made that profit will not appear to be the immediate aim of the ***depaato.*** For instance, in 1986 Mitsukoshi declared that its task was not only to sell goods and services, but also to "promote the revival of interest in education and culture".

In the earlier period, when the department stores were created and becoming firmly established, the educational courses and programs offered there were focused on Western culture, but in the last twenty years there is evident an increased interest in ***education in traditional Japanese customs, practices, holidays, and arts,*** and in the ***languages and cultures of other East Asian countries,*** especially Korea and China. The ***depaato*** periodically present local holidays and celebrations; they organize special days devoted to a certain region and its culture; they sell local products, souvenirs from various cities and prefectures; they offer educational programs and courses in regional cuisine, dances, customs, folklore, etc. They thus respond to the ***interest of their educated clients from the middle and upper strata in the roots of their national culture and identity.*** Having already assimilated the Western lifestyle, since the 1980s the Japanese have shown increasing interest in their own traditions. Today Western ways and customs have become part of everyday life, and now it is the ***Japanese ones that are perceived as "exotic"***[444]. Young people have departed from the lifestyle of their ancestors, and in order to learn, for instance, how to correctly dress in a kimono, they need the consultation of the ***depaato, just*** as their grandmothers needed it to learn the Western manner of dressing. In the past Western foods were considered exotic, while in the last few decades the same is true for the dishes of various local cuisines from different parts of Japan. The recipes and consultations on cooking offered in ***depaato*** are increasingly in demand, including not only local specialties but half-forgotten New Year delicacies, the tea ceremony, and dishes connected with various holidays and rituals.

The second new trend has been engendered by the growing interest in the culture

443 Millie Creighton, op. cit., pp. 49, 51.

444 Isamu Kurita, 1983, Marilyn Ivy, 1988.

and traditions of Korea and China, as part of the search for an "East Asian identity and spirit".

Depaato were the first to introduce ***membership cards*** providing various reductions and bonuses for regular clients, for members of interest clubs within the stores, for the accumulated value of the purchases above a certain sum, for shopping during specific periods, etc. In this way is formed a "***club of shoppers in a given depaato"*** and the feeling of ***belonging to a community,*** which ***stimulates the identification with the consumption and, hence, the social-status symbols*** of that community.

In the course of its history the ***depaato*** has undergone a ***social metamorphosis:*** in the beginning it was an ***importer of Western commercial practices, models, and symbols;*** later, it came to serve as a ***measure and standard of consumer status, behavior, and culture;*** later still, it turned into an ***exporter of Japanese consumer culture and the symbols of Japanese middle strata consumption patterns abroad.*** The department store won the reputation of a "legislator" of taste for the middle strata in Eastern and Southeast Asia, Australia, Western Europe, and the US. Its branches in these parts of the world were looked upon as ***"cultural emissaries" and "symbols" of Japanese consumption patterns and lifestyle*** and they had a strong impact on the local shopping patterns and consumer culture in the countries to which they were exported.

Depaato is an institution that legislates with regard to postmodern consumption patterns in Japan, especially those of the middle strata. But are these stores similar to the malls that are have become so numerous in Bulgaria, and in what way are they different? Throughout the whole period of socialism, TsUM (Central Universal Store) in Sofia remained the largest and most modern store of such a rank, although universal stores later appeared in other large Bulgarian cities as well. In its form in that period, TsUM was rather similar to the Japanese supermarkets, the so-called ***supaa.*** In Japan, even today, malls are considered to be a lower class of stores compared with the ***depaato,*** which are at the top of the hierarchy. Nevertheless, can malls be said to fulfill social functions similar to those of the ***depaato***? Undoubtedly they are places of more prestigious consumption of the upper and upper middle strata, similar in this to the ***depaato*** when they first appeared in the early 20th century. Both the Bulgarian malls and the Japanese department stories are connected with the "Westernization" of consumer culture, while preserving, in their own separate ways, the national traditions. Bulgarian malls, for instance, are marked by the particularities of the Bulgarian culture of servicing clients evident in the attitudes of sellers and consultants towards the customers, in the quality of the goods, etc. They are a place where different stores are gathered in a single building without a unifying conception. Some malls offer the same goods that can be found in other branches of the respective stores. On the various floors one finds coffee shops of the leading chains, modern movie theatres, bookstores, offices of banks and mobile operators, electric game rooms. Yet the malls are far from being the kind of recreation centre that ***depaato*** represent, not to mention that the educational and social function are lacking here. Their trade capacity leaves much to be desired; they offer no services for maintenance of the goods they sell. As commercial establishments they are more like the above mentioned ***supaa*** in Japan, but they lack the special atmosphere produced by the latter's unifying conception, courtesy of service, quality and variety of goods.

The basic differences between depaato and the Bulgarian malls lies in the quality, standard, variety of goods sold, and the stores' social functions, role, significance. These differences are not accidental but logically result from the consumer standards and environment in Bulgaria. Gradually, as these change and develop, ***consumer centers for the middle strata*** similar to ***depaato*** will inevitably appear in our country as well. The historical destiny of Bulgaria has placed the society in a position of "catching up"; ***depaato*** have a history and course of development spanning nearly a century, and it took them more than just a few years, even more than a century to become ***symbols of Japanese consumer society and of the middle strata.*** We are familiar with their experience and we know that they learned from Western models – all we need do is follow their example.

In its ***conception, realization, function and role the depaato was made to service the middle strata.*** This is not accidental: they are the ***fastest growing social-structural formations*** in Japanese society since the country's modernization. The state stimulates their development; and the new middle strata, on whom the country's prosperity depends, are particularly satisfied with this purposeful state policy. ***Depaato is an institution that educates consumer tastes and values and orients the consumer behavior of the middle strata.*** It is a ***center of their lifestyle and shapes their consumption patterns*** and leisure. The ***development and consolidation of the depaato*** in Japanese consumer society ***takes place in parallel with those of the middle strata,*** and it is impossible to imagine one without the other.

Since the Bulgarian middles strata are less numerous and developed than the Japanese ones, they lack an institution of consumption similar in its social function and role to the ***depaato.*** But with the stabilization and growth of the middle strata here, such an institution will inevitably be created and assert itself in Bulgarian consumer society – of course, it will have some cultural characteristics specific to our consumer culture.

3. The Japanese middle strata

Development of the middle strata in contemporary Japanese society

Lifestyle and the prestige connected with it are among the important criteria by which contemporary Japanese sociology ***distinguishes the middle strata*** from other

stratification groups[445].

In Japanese we can recognize three major notions pertained to the concept of middle class: "middle economic class", "middle prestigious class", and "middle strata"[446]. "Middle economic class" is used to denominate the middle class which some conceptions define as "bourgeoisie", or as a middle class defined on the basis of owned means of production and economic power. "Middle strata" is used as a concept characterizing the middle class as regards their intermediate position in the stratification space. After 1970s, the sociological concept, equivalent to the understanding of a middle class in western sociology, is "middle prestigious class", or in Japanese ***chuuryuu kaikyuu***, situated between the upper and lower classes[447]. Since the 1970s in Japan the term ***class – kaikyuu – is taken to mean precisely "middle class"***, whereas before the country became a postmodern society the term referred primarily to "working class" due to the latter's importance for industrial development at that time.

The growing economic well-being after the WWII brought to the gradually expanding of the middle class in Japan. According to SSM[448] surveys the Japanese middle class share, defined on the base of objective criteria, grows from 30% in 1955 to over 50% in 1985[449], it share remaining relatively stable during following decades. The share of those who self-identify with the middle class in Japan in 1964 reached 90%[450]. These data differ from those of the SSM survey, according to which 70-75% of the population self-associate with the middle class during the same period, mainly because of differences in the classification categories and schemes used.

The data on people identifying themselves as middle class show that those who have placed themselves in this category, i.e. the so-called "subjective middle class" are far more than those who fall into the "objective" one; this is a phenomenon that can be observed in all societies[451]. The explanations for this can be found in the impact of the following factors: the growing share of non-manual labor professions in postmodern Japanese society; the symbolic significance of the middle strata for the modern lifestyle; the prestige of the middle class; the changes that have taken place since the mid-1960s in living standard, consumption patterns, and lifestyles of large groups in Japanese society[452].

There is certain difference between those who believe they belong to the "middle prestigious class", and the "middle economic class". The majority of those who identify themselves as belonging to the middle class do so from the view point of prestige, consumption patterns and lifestyle, as well as of their position as a middle stratum in

445 See Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 68-85, 97-103.

446 Kunio Odaka, 1966, p. 543, Kenji Kosaka, 1994, pp. 95-97.

447 Kenji Kosaka, op. cit., 103-104.

448 Social Stratification and Mobility National Surveys (SSM) are held every 10 years since 1955 and are representative for the Japanese population.

449 Kazuo Seiyama, 1993, p. 26.

450 Quoted data are from PMO (Prime Minister Office) survey. See Kenji Kosaka, op. cit., p. 9.

451 Nikolai Tilkidjiev, op. cit., Maya Keliyan op. cit., 2008.

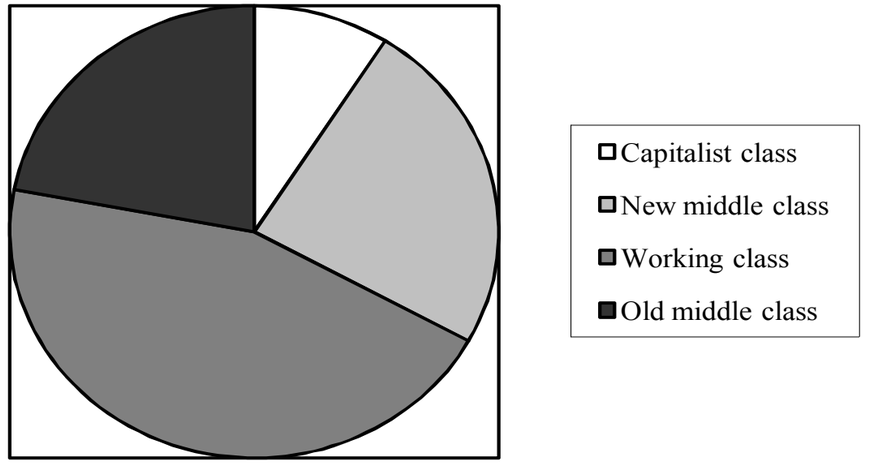
452 Kenji Kosaka, op. cit., Takatoshi Imada, op. cit., Hiroshi Ishida, op. cit.

the stratification environment, but not according to their economic resources[453].

The economic prosperity after WWII and the fact that within two generations Japan turned from a poor country into a rich society, provide the foundations of the myth of "a middle class society", zealously maintained by political parties and the media.

Similar in this to the US in the 1950s, in Japan 20 years later there was a ***state policy of purposeful and methodical support for the development of the new middle strata.*** They enjoyed high social prestige and received income corresponding to it. In the mid 1950s Japan was an "old middle class society"[454]. The numerical size of this old class sharply declined in the following forty years, while the ***new middle class nearly doubled in size*** in the same time. The period of the latter's most rapid growth as a proportion of the population was in the period between the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s. In the following decade its growth slowed down slightly, but in the mid 1980s it again started to speed up considerably. In the mid 1990s the ***share of the new middle strata grew to nearly one fourth of the occupied population and has remained at this proportion ever since.*** One third of these people work for large companies, one fourth, for state institutions, and about 40%, for small and middle firms (ibid.: 61).

Graph 10
Relative share of different classes
(as proportion of the total working population)



Calculated by the data cited in the graph 10[455], the ***new middle class***[456] includes

453 Maya Keliyan, 1999, pp. 97-103.

454 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 18. The quoted author has used the findings of an SSM survey conducted in 1995, and regroups some of the data to fit his class schema.

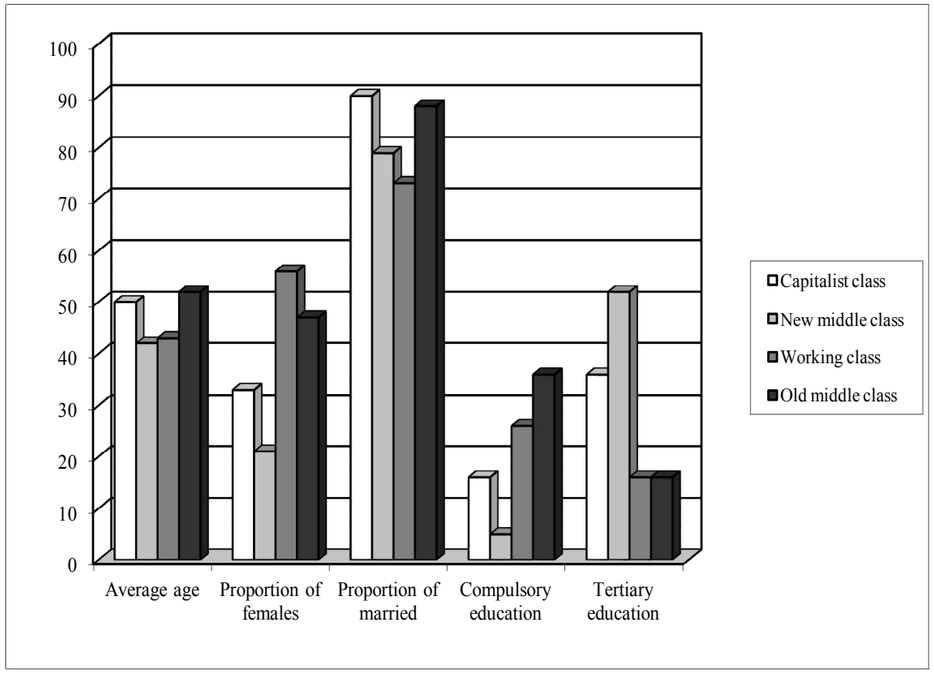
455 This and the following graphs up to Graph 18 inclusively, present data from the SSM 1995 and I built them on the basis of data, presented in Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 89. The information from the SSM survey analyzed below is cited from the same source, so Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., designations of social groups are used.

456 It includes professionals, administrators, specialists, officials, and office workers.

nearly one fourth of all occupied persons (24%), and is a little more numerous than the ***old middle class***[457] (22% of all occupied), but its relative share is two and a half times bigger than that of the ***capitalist class***[458] (9%). According to Kenji Hashimoto's schema[459] the ***working class***[460] , with its relative share of 45%, is nearly equal in size to the new and old middle classes put together.

According to the data in Graph 11, the representatives of the ***new middle class*** are the youngest: their average age is nearly 42, which is 10 years younger than the average of the old middle class. The members of the latter class, together with those of the capitalist class, are the oldest by average age.

Graph 11
Different classes compared by average age, proportion of females, proportion of married and level of education



The new middle class has the ***highest proportion of men and the share of women in it – about one fifth – is the lowest,*** compared with other classes. More than half

457 In this class Hashimoto includes leaders and directors of enterprises with a staff of less than five persons, as well as entrepreneurs, self-employed, and family members working for the latter.

458 Falling under this category are leaders and directors of enterprises with a staff of five persons or more, as well as entrepreneurs, self-employed, and family members working for the latter.

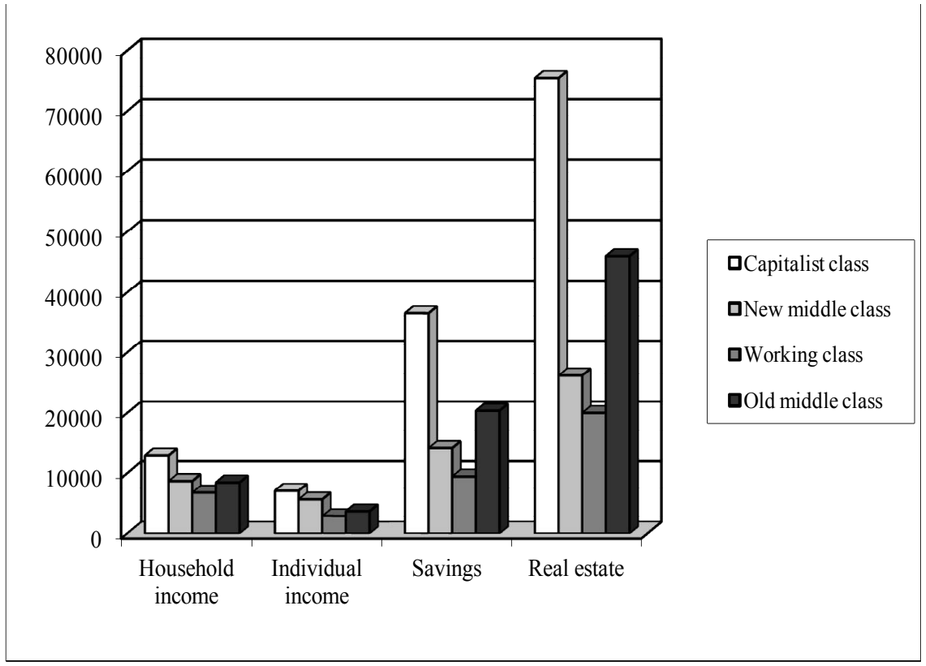
459 The criteria this author applies to delimit these four classes are in keeping with his neo-Marxist schema. In Chapter One it was made clear that the positions assumed in this book are related to the Neo-Weberian tradition in stratification analysis. A large part of the groups Hashimoto assigns to the capitalist class are entrepreneurs in small and middle business as well as managers, i.e. they belong to the new and old middle. Although Hashimoto's theoretical arguments are not accepted here, the results of the SSM survey he cites are a good basis for characterizing the consumption patterns and lifestyle of the middle class in contemporary Japan.

460 Hashimoto assigns to this class all employed excluding professionals, administrators and officials.

of the working class are women (56%), and the proportion of women among the old middle class is about ten percentage points lower than this (47%). One third of the members of the capitalist class are women. Women are most widely present in lower-status positions, and their proportion is lower in leadership positions within firms. They are present in stable proportions in family businesses, where their role is often that of an unpaid worker.

The highest percentage of married persons is that in the capitalist and old middle class: respectively 90% of the former and 88% of the latter have created a family. More than 80% of the men in the new middle class are married, and only two thirds of the women. The average age of these women is 39, which indicates that a high share of them have preferred their professional career to making a family. According to the data in Graph 11, the new middle class is ***the most highly educated:*** more than half its members (52%) have a university education.

Graph 12
Different classes average individual and household income, savings, and average value of real estate (1000 Japanese yen)

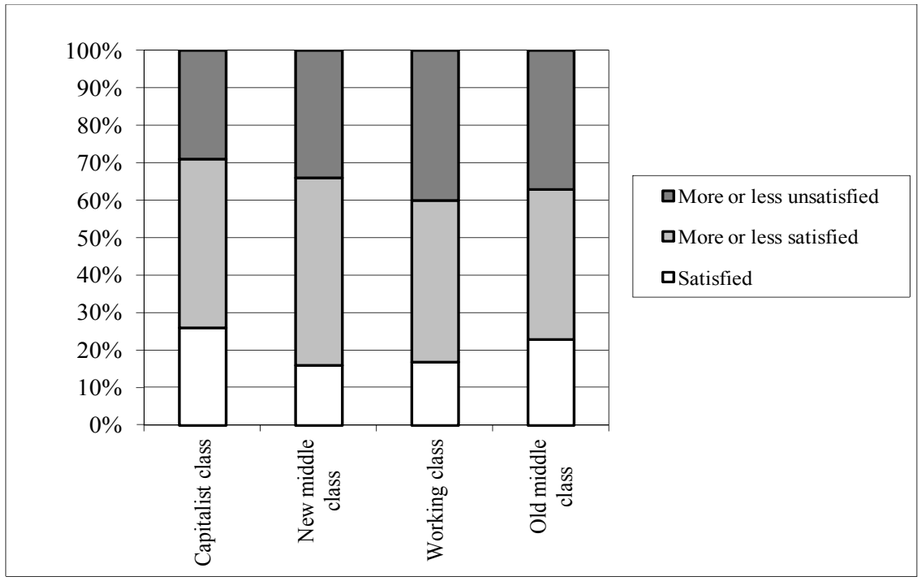


The living standard of the members of the ***new middle class is above the average*** for the country: their ***income level*** as indicated in Graph 12, is the second highest after that of the capitalist class. The old middle class is in third position, the difference between second and third being negligible. The representatives of the new middle class have a ***considerable autonomy in their work,*** possess ***authority*** in their firm, and take part in decision making, especially as regards distribution of work tasks. They have much better possibilities for ***growth in their professional career. Their social contacts***

are usually with professionals, administrators, and managers, which means with people of their own class or of the capitalist class (company directors, etc.)[461].

Nearly two thirds of the new middle class are ***satisfied with their life*** (Graph 13), by which indicator they are in the ***second highest position***, coming after the capitalist class. Half of the satisfied have specified they are "more or less satisfied", and one seventh have indicated "satisfied".

Graph 13
Life satisfaction



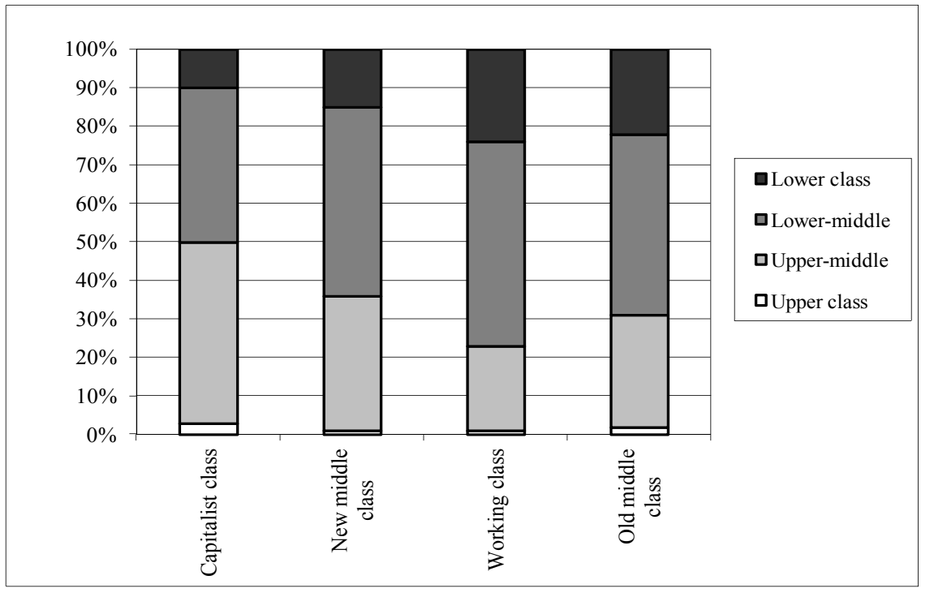
Over one third of the members of the new middle class ***self-identify as upper or upper-middle class*** (Graph 14), and 41%, as "middle class" (Graph 15), which once again puts it in second place after the capitalist class. ***Two thirds*** of the new middle class ***are not supporters of any political party:*** in this it is similar to the working class and differs from the capitalist and old middle class. Nearly half of the people belonging to the latter two classes are not sympathizers of any party but approximately 40% of them are supporters of the Liberal Democratic Party (the share of supporters of this party among capitalists is slightly higher than among old middle class).

The composition of the ***old middle class*** at the end of the 20th century was different from that in the middle of the century. Farmers were the main component then but are now a minority; instead, self-employed traders and industrialists make up two thirds of it[462]. It is has the best ***gender balance,*** but has the ***highest average age:*** nearly one third of is members are over 60 (Graph 11).

461 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 110.

462 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 94.

Graph 14
Status self-identification

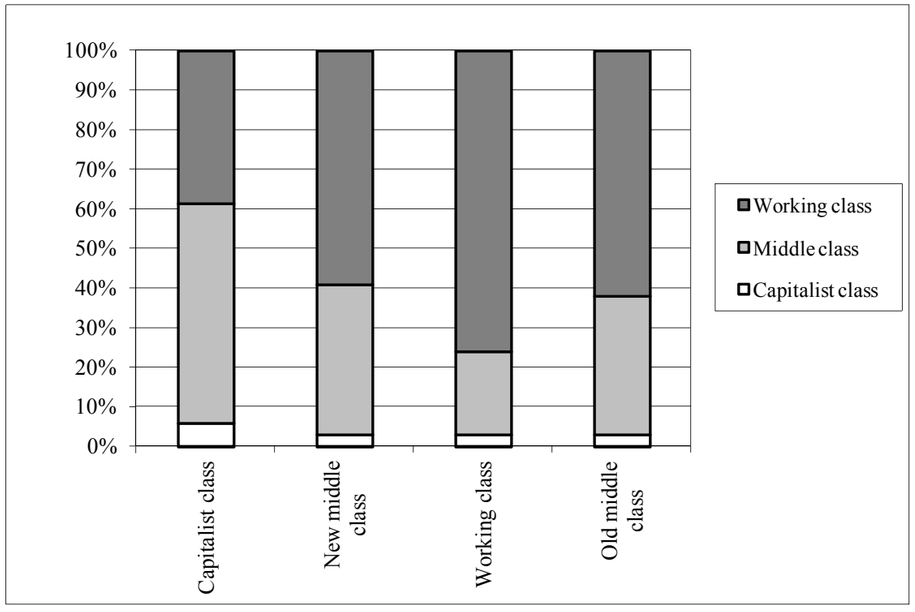


The old middle class also proves to be the ***least educated,*** and more than one third of its members (36%) have completed only the obligatory educational level[463], which is the highest share of this level of education among all classes (Graph 11). The average level of household income, as indicated in Graph 12, is equal to that of the new middle class, but their individual income levels are much lower, which shows that the household revenues come from the active participation of family members in the business. Since they are self-employed, they have a high degree of work autonomy and can decide how to organize their work. Most of the ***people they socialize with belong to their own class*** or to the new middle and working class. They ***maintain very good contacts with local administrators, with high-ranking officials from the trade associations, and with politicians,*** contacts that are necessary and useful for their business.

According to the data contained in Graph 13, by its ***degree of satisfaction with life, the old middle class is in third highest position,*** after the capitalist and new middle class (but the difference between it and the new middle is slight).

463 In Japan the obligatory education is 9 school years, which comprise the full three levels of basic education.

Graph 15
Class self-identification



By ***status and class self-identification*** (Graph 14 and 15), the members of the old middle are ***in a slightly lower position*** than those of the new middle, but here too the difference between the two groups is small. The old middle class has ***a much larger percentage of supporters of the Liberal Democratic Party*** – more than one third of the members of this class, which is twice more than the share of the party's supporters in the new middle class. Slightly over half its members do not support any political party, which is nearly 15% less than the non-supporters among the new middle.

The working class has a low level of education (next to last, with only the old middle class below it) and ***the lowest income level*** (Graph 11 and 12). The average household income for this class amounts to two thirds that of the households in the new and old middle classes. Among workers is registered the ***lowest degree of satisfaction with life*** (Graph 13). They self-identify as part of the ***lower and lower-middle class*** (Graph 14), but more than one fifth of them define themselves as belonging to the middle class (Graph 15). Workers have the ***lowest degree of autonomy in work,*** and they are least able to determine the rate of work and the organization at their job. They show the ***lowest degree of political activeness:*** three fifths of them indicate they are not supporters of any political party, and one fourth feel that "politics is too complicated for me to understand"[464].

What has been said so far allows us to generalize that in Japanese postmodern society the proportion, social role, and importance of the ***new middle class*** is growing; it is the class with the fastest and steadiest growth in the last few decades. Were it not for this class, Japanese society would hardly enjoy its present level of "digital

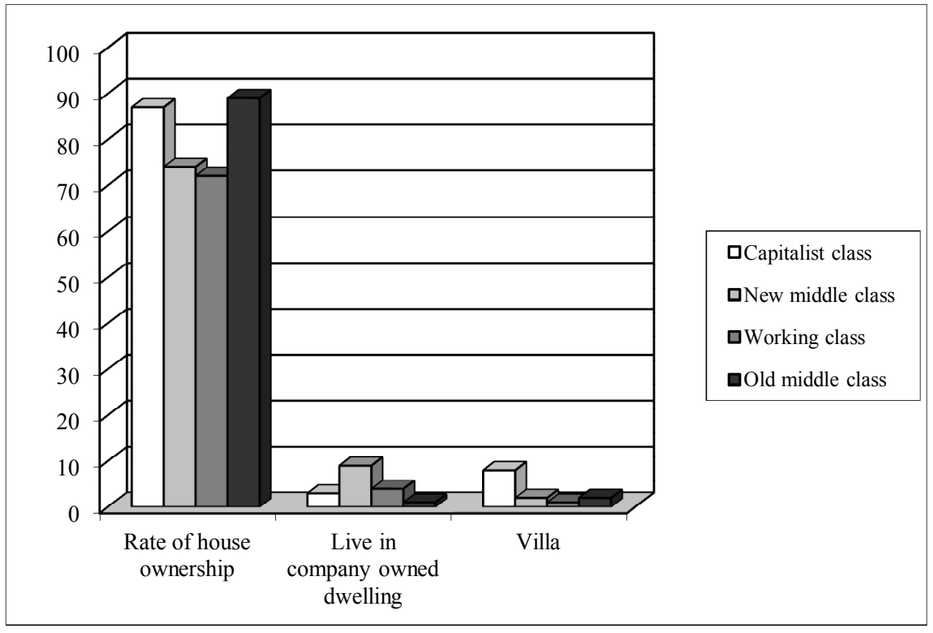
464 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 93.

prosperity" and would hardly strive for "all-encompassing communication nets" and ubiquitous information technologies. The relatively young age of its members, its high educational level and income level, the ample social contacts of its members, its high degree of satisfaction with life, and its class and status self-identification, have made it the ***bearer of the latest trends in consumption and lifestyle.*** Unlike the ***new middle, the old middle class*** is more conservative, as its members are older, less educated, more connected with other household members in the framework of the family business. The tendencies in the post-war stratification structure of Japanese society have determined the ***stratification in the consumption patterns of the various classes,*** as well as the ***growing internal class differences within the middle class itself.***

Stratified consumption and leisure: their particularities among the middle classes

The new middle class is in ***third position*** as regards the average amount of its possession of consumer durables, house ownership and financial assets, and by this criterion seems nearer to the working class than to the old middle and capitalist classes (Graphs 16, 17 and 18).

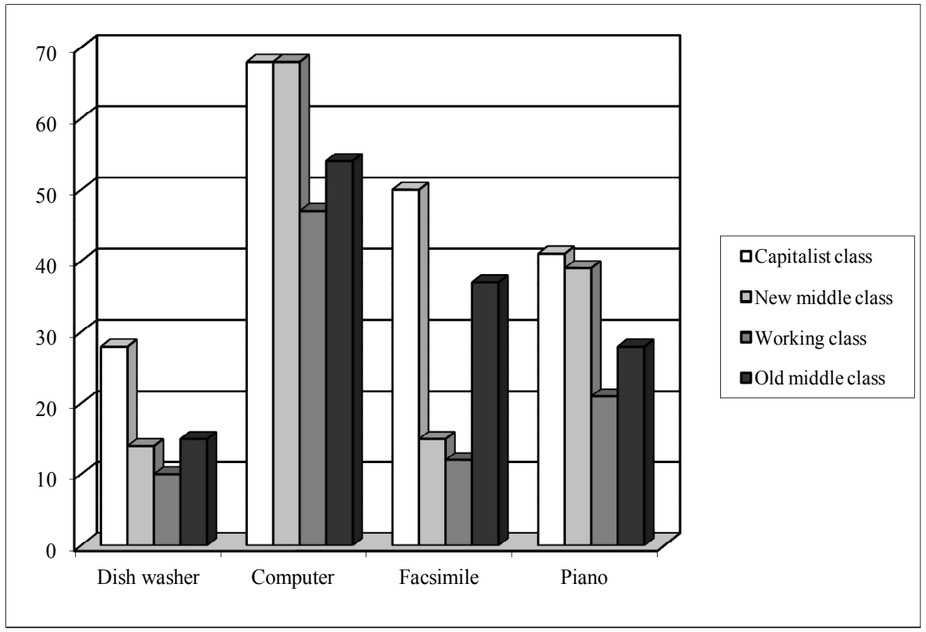
Graph 16
Rate of house ownership



The situation of this class is similar as regards the ***rate of house ownership***; nearly two thirds of its members, which is almost as much as in the working class, live in a home of their own (Graph 16). The data show that ***this class has the highest share of members*** – nearly one tenth, as shown in Graph 16 – who ***live in company-owned***

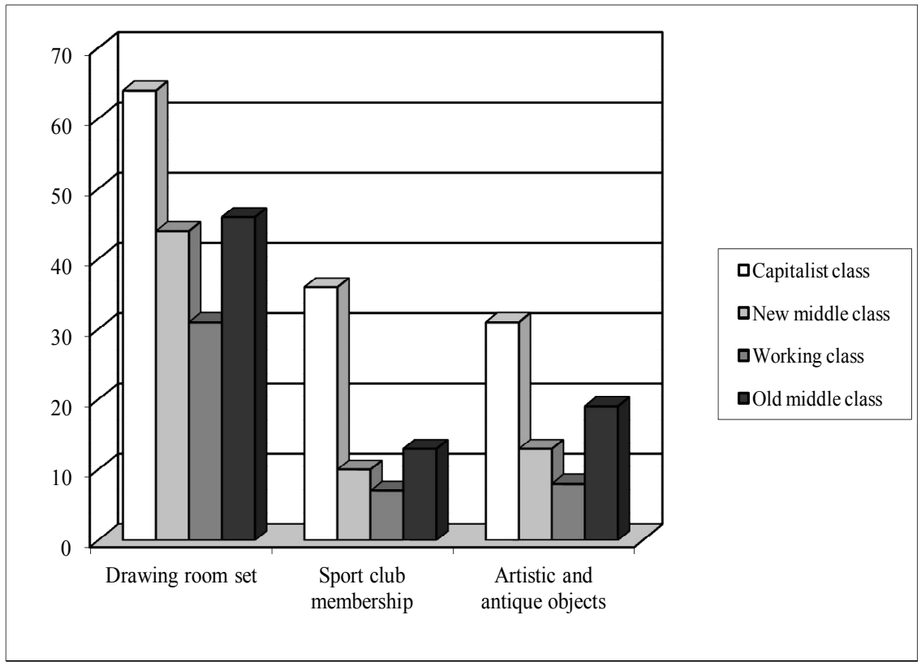
dwellings. This fact is indicative of the ***advantages*** provided by the status of "people belonging to the organization". The ***new middle class is in second place, below the capitalist,*** with regard to ***consumer durables ownership,*** as evident in Graph 17.

Graph 17
Consumer durables ownership (part one)



This trend is especially clear with respect to the rate of ***ownership of a computer and piano,*** a criterion by which the new middle follows ***consumption patterns very similar to those of the capitalist class and quite different from those of the old middle and working class*** (the latter two prove to have approximately equal percentages of owners of these two items). Because of its higher educational level, the ***new middle class invests*** in objects related to ***high technology and culture***. The percentage of people possessing a computer and piano is indicative of what this class would prefer to invest its money in, and of its interests and occupations in leisure – these are connected with ***high culture.*** This class is in second place with respect to the level of the individual salary but in third place with regard to house ownership (Graph 16). Its members can rely on "the organization they belong to" so they do not feel they must buy property as an eventual source of income should the need for this arise. The ***new middle class prefers to spend its money on consumer durables and leisure activities, due to its higher educational level and more developed esthetical taste.***

Graph 18
Consumer durables ownership (part two)



According to the criteria "rates of consumer durables ownership, house ownership and financial assets" the ***old middle class is in second place,*** following the capitalist class (Graphs 16, 17). By the indicator "rate of house ownership" it is even in ***first place,*** ahead of the capitalist class (Graph 16). Most of its members are self-employed and they want to be able to rely on this property in case of need. By investing in a home, in real estate and movable property and savings, they are providing for their family members actively engaged in the family business. By the ***rate of consumer durable ownership*** (Graph 17), the old middle class is in ***third place,*** following the capitalist and new middle class, but is in ***second place*** after the capitalist class by the criterion ***sport club membership and ownership of art objects and antiques*** (Graph 18).

The capitalist class is oriented above all to objects and property of high value and prestige. It has the highest percentage of owners of a home plus a country house (Graph 16). In Japan the possession of a country house is something rare, for three reasons: the high price of dwellings; the high tax rates on buildings, which grow in geometric progression for every following dwelling owned; the small amount of leisure time they have in which to go to a country house even if they had one. The people belonging to the capitalist class and possessing a country house are four times as many as those in the new and old middle class. Also, the capitalists possessing a drawing room set (an expensive possession and a mark of high social status, as it requires a large dwelling and Western style furniture), are a higher percentage by one fifth than those in the old and new middle class (Graph 18). Members of ***sport clubs among the capitalist class***

are three and a half times greater as a percentage than those in the new middle and 2,8 times greater than those in the old middle class. A similar proportion is evident for the indicator "ownership of art objects and antiques" – these owners are 2,4 times more among the capitalist class than in the new middle, and 1,6 times more than in the old middle class (Graph 18).

The working class has a similar level with regard to house ownership as the new middle class (Graph 16), but has the lowest level of consumer durables ownership (Graph 17 and 18).

The leisure patterns of the four classes differ considerably from one another[465]. Of ***all four classes, the most active one during leisure time is the new middle class.*** This shows it has a ***lifestyle*** in which ***leisure*** holds a special place. The highest relative share of people performing activities such as ***karaoke, reading sports newspapers, women's weekly magazines, fiction and history books,*** are in the new middle – 80% for each of these activities. Members of the new middle class are the ***most frequent visitors of art exhibitions and museums*** – about 70% of all members. The same proportion of it takes part in costly recreation activities such as golf, skiing, and tennis, while 40% go to concerts of classical music. It has the ***same percentages*** for these two indicators as the ***capitalist class,*** even though the latter has higher income. This confirms that ***the new middle have a leading place*** in activities requiring ***high esthetical taste and education.***

Professionals and managers, though they respectively amount to 7% and almost 12% of respondents, represent ***more than one fifth of the group with the highest level of "information literacy"***[466]. The latter dimension has a strong influence on the consumption patterns and lifestyle of the various social strata in Japan, and modifies them to a considerable extent. The groups differentiated on the basis of information literacy represent separate consumer groups with specific lifestyles. The social differences between groups distinguished by their various skills in using the information media are closely linked to differences based on the use of traditional media. As may be expected, the groups with the highest level of "information literacy" are also the most active users of Internet: nearly 90% of them are regular users. Two thirds of them read literary fiction and specialized literature in their spare time, nearly 80% read magazines and comics, and more than half go to the theatre and movies. By comparison, in the group with the lowest level of "information literacy" only 3% use the Internet, 12% read fiction and specialized literature, one third read comics and magazines, and one fourth go to movies and the theatre.

Unlike the new middle class, the members of the ***old middle class are not very active in their leisure time. Their leisure patterns are the most passive,*** i.e. with regard to the listed activities they are least active of all classes, even less than the working class. Unlike the new middle class, they do not belong to an institution to which they must be loyal and on which they can rely. This ***limits their leisure time*** and orients them above all to so-called social activities – in these they are the most active class next to

465 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., pp. 105-107.

466 Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., p. 208.

the capitalist. Taking part in various social activities[467] are 40% of the old middle class and nearly half the capitalist class. For the old middle these activities are useful for creating and maintaining useful connections with members of local government, with politicians, with members of trade and industrial associations, with business partners, etc. The leisure time of the old middle is not as distinctly separate from their working time as that of the new middle class.

Despite differences in leisure patterns between the different classes, there are evident ***similarities*** in their preference for two activities: reading sports newspapers and women's magazines, and for karaoke. People attending classical music concerts are the smallest share in all classes. The explanation for this may be that this activity requires specific taste, knowledge and feeling for the music; also, tickets for such concerts are expensive. Still, about 15% of the old middle class and even 20% of the working class go to classical music concerts. This fact confirms how important high culture is for the Japanese and the impact of the education of taste in school.

The working class is the most active in playing ***pachinko*** (pinball machines): more than half its members do this in their leisure. Next in order by this activity are members of the capitalist class and the new middle class, with about 45% each, while old middle class has less than 40% of its members who share in this recreation.

This study of postmodern Japanese middle strata consumption patterns and lifestyle, of the changes they have undergone and their development trends, yields an answer to the basic question underlying the goals and tasks of this book: ***what are the general similarities and differences of these patterns and lifestyle compared with those of the middle strata in Bulgaria?***

Japan is a developed postmodern society. As such, it enjoys digital influence; the country's "enlightened" consumers, who are found mostly among the higher-educated members of the new middle strata, share the values of "sustained", ecologically-oriented consumption, of a healthy lifestyle; they are socially responsible consumers and citizens. They are enterprising social actors who display civic activeness; it is on their activity that civic associations of consumers are largely based. Consumers' cooperatives and ***teikei*** rely on them. The postmodern stratification in Japanese consumption patterns develops towards greater "specialization", "fragmentation", and "diversification" between the separate socio-professional groups of middle strata consumers.

And what are the tendencies in the two countries under study, as regards consumption of the commodities that are most emblematic for modern information and high tech society? Of course, the ***differences*** between the two are particularly visible: the computer had already become a mass commodity in Japan in 1995, whereas we cannot say as much for it in our country even fifteen years after this date. The relative share of owners of computers among the Bulgarian intelligentsia in 2005 was equal to that among the Japanese new middle in 1995. Again in 1995, the relative share of workers who owned a computer in Japan was twice as high as the share of computer owners among skilled workers in Bulgaria ten years later. Even though the dishwasher

467 Including activities in the local community, in various neighborhood clubs, in volunteer organizations, etc.

is far from being a mass commodity in Japan, the percentage of owners of this item among Japanese workers in 1995 was almost equal to the respective share among executive officials in our country in 2005.

Despite these obvious differences stemming from the different living standards, consumer status, and market specificities in the two countries, there are also some important ***general similarities*** ensuing from the mechanism of contemporary social stratification and the place and role of the middle strata in the stratification structure of today's increasingly global societies. In Japan and Bulgaria alike, the new middle have the highest relative share of computer owners: in Japan the percentage is equal to that of the same category among the capitalist class, and in our country it is even slightly higher than that of executive officials. In Japan the new middle class has the highest level of computer literacy, while in our country, people with a tertiary education that are among the typical representatives of the local new middle, are some of the most active computer users and the most frequent Internet and electronic trade users. This is an important argument in support of our thesis that these middle strata are leaders in the latest important trends of contemporary consumption.

The middle strata of the two countries also display some ***similarities in their leisure patterns,*** specifically in the proportion between working time and leisure. The members of the Japanese middle strata are known to be people with very little leisure on their hands, with a preponderant amount of their time spent at work, in social activities and social contacts with colleagues at the expense of leisure. The changes in our country in the last 20 years have engendered a similar problem. As regards satisfaction with the achieved balance between work and leisure, the Japanese, despite their reputation of workaholics proverbially loyal to their firm, despite the evident changes undergone in the last decade, are more similar to their counterparts from Bulgaria than from the most developed countries.

Apart from this, the consumption with respect to certain items is naturally influenced by local traditions and specificities related to the social-historical past of the two countries; in this respect some paradoxical phenomena are evident. In Japan people rarely possess a ***country house,*** while in Bulgaria the percentage of unskilled workers who have one is almost equal to the percentage of such owners in the Japanese capitalist class. Of course, this does not mean workers in our country have as high a living standard as this Japanese class.

The study of ***trends of development of the middle strata*** in Japan and Bulgaria show that, despite the differences between their respective living standard and quality of life – due to the different states of development of the two societies – there are some ***substantial general similarities*** between them:

1. What makes them similar is above all related to their ***consumption patterns and lifestyle***, which, in Japan and Bulgaria alike, are ***significant indicators of one's position in the stratification structure*** of society.

2. They have a ***similar social role as leaders in the latest important trends in modern consumption and lifestyle.***

4. Changes in Japanese society and in the consumption patterns of the middle strata in the late 20th and early 21st century

The social-economic and structural changes

The middle class, both old and new, was protected on the labor market up until the late 1990s. The new middle strata benefited by the system of life-long employment, and the salaries of people in this group were set according to length of service and age. The old middle strata were protected through the existing regulations on the activity of large corporations, rules that alleviated the competition pressure on the self-employed and small entrepreneurs. However, at the end of the 1990s there was a reevaluation of the existing economic order. Since the second half of the 1990s Japanese society, as part of the increasingly global world economy, has been undergoing recessions and crises, followed by periods of recovery[468]. The first crisis of this kind was in 1997, and the earliest signs of recovery were seen in 1999. The second crisis came in 2008; the economy began to revive slowly from it in the middle of 2009, but the disasters of March 11, 2011 led to a new crisis.

As a result of the social-economic and structural transformations in the country and the world, important changes can be seen in the consumption patterns and lifestyle of various social strata in Japan. In the Japanese media there appeared indicative expressions such as ***kachigumi*** (the group of the successful) and ***makegumi*** (the group of losers). These terms are a sign of the increasingly perceptible social-economic changes that are depriving Japanese society of its past aura of a homogenous middle class, and ending the myth about Japan as a "middle class society". The issue of growing economic inequality is being raised with increased emphasis in Japan, together with that of the "working poor" among the low-educated social strata and part-time employees[469]; it is regarding these problems that the discussion among the academic community and the general public first began about the on-going structural processes and their disturbing social consequences. There is an increasingly clear understanding in Japan and the world about the "end" of Japanese prosperity, about the "exhausted" potential of the country, and its "obsolete model". Public discussion is going on about the need for a change of the "economic model", of the economic culture, and even of the value system. The traditional features of Japanese morality, such as harmonious relations and avoidance of conflicts, are pointed to as the primary cause of the "crisis of the model", because they may inhibit creativity and lead to the toleration of corruption. Such views have been held in the past by Western and Japanese researchers[470]. The difference now

468 Maya Keliyan, 2010, pp. 35-42.

469 Toshiaki Tachibanaki, 1998, 2005, 2006.

470 Ruth Benedict, op. cit., Richard Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, op. cit., Jon Voronoff, 1990, 1997,

is that these views are increasingly popular with the public and the media of Japan.

At the turn of the 20th century the growing income inequality in Japanese society made it be defined through key phrases popularized by the media, such as ***kibou kakusa shakai***[471] (the hope disparity society) and ***karyu shakai***[472] (lower-class society). Two contrary trends are emerging in the consumption patterns of the various social strata. On one hand there is a distinct group of upper strata demonstrating their affluent consumption. On the other hand there is an increasing share of people who must restrict their consumption because of their lower income. The media discuss poverty, and even the existence of working poor, as a considerable social problem. These two contrary trends in social stratification have determined the "boom" of stores and consumption centers meeting the different needs of these social groups: there are expensive stores offering luxury items and services, and there are stores offering cheap[473] and recycled commodities. Together with this, the representatives of the new middle strata have a stable, though relatively slowly rising, income. The various kinds of stores and centers for consumption and recreation are offering increasingly varied products in order to meet the needs and demands of the consumers belonging to these different strata.

All these changes have an impact on the myth-making process in Japan: they tend to destroy the myth about the country as a "middle class society". But how significant is this impact specifically on the ***class self-definition*** of the Japanese?

The results of a number of sociological surveys indicate that since the 1970s and until now the proportion of the ***subjective middle class***, i.e. of those who consider themselves to be middle class, has remained stable. This is confirmed by SSM and by other surveys, for instance the Public Opinion on National Life survey, conducted by the Cabinet Office research centre. According to its findings, approximately 90% of the Japanese define themselves as middle class; within this category, about 10% believe they are upper-middle class, less than 60% indicate they are middle-middle class, and about one fifth, lower-middle class[474].

The representative panel studies that have been conducted by NRI every three years since 1997, encompassing over 10 000 respondents, have made it possible to outline the dimensions of the class self-identification in Japan since the late 1990s and until 2010. The interviewed persons were asked to assign themselves to some of the indicated classes on the basis of what they assessed to be their living standard. For the whole nine-year period from 1997 to 2006, the share of people who defined themselves as middle class, i.e. all those who placed themselves in one of the middle class groups - lower-middle, middle-middle, or upper-middle, decreased by 6%[475].

Kenji Hashimoto, op. cit., etc.

471 An expression introduced by Masuhiro Yamada, 2004.

472 2 A concept introduced by Atsushi Miura, 2005.

473 These are stores where goods are priced at 100 yen; they are found near all the central stations of the public transport in Japanese cities and offer a great variety of goods, ranging from stationery to household appliances.

474 *Annual Report on The Japanese Economy and Public Finance* 2006, http://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai3/2006/0718wp-keizai/summary.html

475 Hiroyuki Nitto, op. cit., p. 3.

There was respectively a slight increase of those who assigned themselves to the lower class and to the lower-middle class, at the expense of the decreased share of people identifying as upper-middle or upper class. But the changes are two small to allow the assertion that the class self-identification of the Japanese during this period has changed significantly. The results of the survey conducted in July 2009 show that the average income of Japanese households had not changed by then compared with 2006[476]. The proportion of those defining themselves as lower-middle and lower classes decreased by 7%, while those identifying as upper and upper-middle classes grew by 6%. Ultimately, on the basis of NRI survey findings, it can be asserted there is a slight change in self-identification with the upper-middle class (rising from 7% to 8,5%) and with the lower-middle class (rising from 28% to 30%), but the share of those identifying with the middle class in general is relatively constant: between 85% and 90% of the respondents assess that, according to their living standard, they fall in this category.

Overall, the changes occurring throughout the entire period since the 1970s until today in the class self-identification of the Japanese on the basis of living standard have been inconsiderable and do not justify the claim about a "disappearing" or "melting" middle class. What then are the reasons for the demise of the "middle class society" myth and the appearance of the myth of the "vanishing middle class"?

Prevalent in Japanese society are egalitarian values; this is a communitarian society with a developed group culture. Which makes it very sensitive to the growing inequalities in income, education level, consumption, and lifestyle. The increased proportion of part-time employees, of employed women, the end of the life-long employment system, have radically changed the labor market of Japan. The rapid aging of the population is a serious problem for social insurance, while the unwillingness of young people to create families of their own, and the decreasing number of children born, engender insecurity about the future. The periodic global recessions and crises in the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st are a serious challenge for the economy, while the rapid economic growth of China has ousted Japan from the position it held for half a century as the second strongest world economy. The Japanese know perfectly well that the ranking of world economies according to their nominal GDP does not give a realistic picture of the actual development of a society, and that, for instance, quality of life is a much better indicator. But this is certainly no consolation, for obviously their economy is finding it increasingly hard to deal with the contemporary global challenges. The political elites have proven powerless to find a solution to the problems of society, and the country has had a series of quickly changing governments.

The social-economic and structural changes in Japanese society since the end of the 1990s have led to:

1. A decreasing share of people working on permanent work contract and an increasing share of part-time workers. Some of them are known as ***furita*** (a combination of the English term ***free time*** and the ***arubaito,*** the Japanese variant of the German word ***arbeit***).

476 Shinichi Ishihara, op. cit., p. 6.

2. The increasing inequality of income between people with high education level and skills, and the others.

3. Two opposed tendencies in consumption patterns are emerging. On the one hand there are the upper strata with their display of conspicuous consumption; on the other there is the growing share of people who are limiting their consumption.

4. At the same time the representatives of the new middle strata have stable, though rather slowly-growing incomes.

5. The share of employed women has been increasing constantly in the last decades.

6. The demographic trends of population aging are having an impact on producers and on various categories of consumer and lifestyle centers.

The new trends in social structuring of Japanese society and the economic upward trend are leading to a growing variety of stores, centers, streets, neighborhoods, and even "towns" for shopping, services and entertainment, a variety in terms of their orientation, consumer policy, and market position. The leading tendency in contemporary Japanese consumption patterns is their growing diversification. A visible sign of this process are the increasingly distinct differences and stratification of stores and the different kinds of shopping and consumption centers. The survival of the latter depends on their ability to find their own target groups of consumers by keeping up the balance between quality and prices of goods and services on one hand, and the requirements of social status of consumers, on the other.

The changes in postmodern Japanese society since the beginning of this century have led to new "differentiation", "specialization", and "regioning" in Japanese consumer society. Women and pensioners are becoming increasingly important social groups and categories.

Youth subcultures consumption in postmodern Japan: Kogyaru and otaku

Youth subcultures are acquiring an increasingly important place in the sphere of consumption and lifestyle in contemporary societies. By analogy with Pierre Bourdieu's term "cultural capital", some authors even distinguish "subcultural capital", whereby members of various youth subcultures strive to set themselves apart from the predominant culture. Subcultural capital is seen as an alternative to cultural and economic capital. It is born out of the strong desire of some young people to find their distinctive social-group characteristics outside the categories of class, gender, ethnicity, or race, and to do so they seek them in certain tastes they share with others[477]. But their desire to demarcate themselves often leads to the opposite of what they intended. The consumption patterns of youths in sub-groups become so alike as to serve as "uniforms" signaling a person's choice of fashion. This phenomenon has been referred to as the beginning of the "age of tribes" in consumption[478]. In striving to be in tune

477 Sarah Thornton, op., cit.

478 Michel Maffesoli, op. cit.

with the latest fashion trend, subculture members are guided not by personal tastes and preferences, but tend to blend into what is typical for their circle, their "tribe" of "fashion followers", their shared consumption patterns. This de-individualization and "segmentation by tribes" of consumption and lifestyles was typical for the late 1980s and the 1990s. And the trend has grown even stronger since the beginning of the 21st century. Present-day societies encompass "tribal societies" with respect to consumption, each "tribe" having its own specific lifestyle. The "tribal identity" of the members is linked with certain commodities they prefer, with certain social roles they chose and display, and with the social fantasies they identify with. The tribes may even decide to change their identity and choose a different lifestyle depending on the latest fads. Youth subcultures at the turn of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century had a chameleon-like and conformist quality, choosing the lifestyle that happened to be "correct" and fashionable at the time. In this they differed from the youth subcultures and countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s, which were characterized by the desire for individuality and independence, and involved protest against, and opposition to, the status quo. That is why I now refer to youth "post-subculture", which is active and creative only in the choice of consumption pattern and lifestyle most suitable for a given social and life situation.

In present-day Japanese society, there are numerous, varied, and dynamically changing youth subculture groups. I will restrict my discussion to two of them, which to a great degree present a typical image of the youth subculture consumption patterns and lifestyles of the late 20th and early 21st century. My choice of cases has been determined by the following considerations:

- First, they have a significant presence in Japanese consumer society and lifestyle. They are an important part of contemporary Japanese youth culture.
- Second, their consumption of commodities has brought about the appearance of new market niches but also stimulated the development of certain sectors of the economy and of the market in general.
- Third, their impact has long ago crossed the boundaries of the country and is influencing the consumption and lifestyle patterns of young people at the global level. In a sense ***kogyaru*** and ***otaku*** are among the biggest and most influential "products" of Japanese "cultural export" in recent times.
- Fourth, they are an appropriate illustration of the role of youth subcultures in postmodern societies consumption and lifestyle changes.

Kogyaru and ***otaku*** for the main part come from middle strata families, and they themselves belong to various socio-professional groups of the middle strata. The emergence, growth, and influence of these groups serve to illustrate the transformations of the middle class consumption patterns in postmodern society. These youth subcultures and their consumption could not exist without the stable presence of the middle strata in Japanese consumer society. Although their consumption patterns are

essentially meant to be different from those of the middle class, they in fact represent a modification of the latter into an outwardly bizarre form. That is the main reason for studying them in this book: analyzing them has enabled us to trace the subcultural reincarnations of postmodern Japanese middle class consumption patterns.

Although both sexes are part of these two subcultures, ***kogyaru*** is preferred by young women, and ***otaku*** by young men. These groups are concentrated in Tokyo, Osaka and other large urban centers, but in recent years their popularity has been growing in smaller cities as well.

Kogyaru includes different groups derived from the so-called ***gyaru.*** The name comes from the English word ***gal,*** a familiar expression for "girl". It first appeared in the 1970s, taking its designation from the eponymous brand of jeans. These jeans were preferred by young women interested in fashion, asserting their sexual freedom, and preferring to remain single long enough to enjoy many sexual contacts and be able to follow the changing fads. They created for themselves the image of girls who had "preserved their childish ways" well into adulthood, and tried to demonstrate this in all possible ways. In traditional society, the ideal of femininity was connected with the child-woman, and the contemporary Japanese woman is influenced by this tradition to a great degree. She has to be ***kawaii,*** i.e. not only good-looking, but lovable, "cute" in a childish way, and this quality must be displayed in all aspects of her outer appearance and behavior. Young women are the chief promoters of the "culture of cuteness", and their lifestyle and way of thinking is ***kawaii***[479].

In the late 1980s, the designation ***gyaru*** began to seem outdated and was substituted by ***kogyaru*** when referring especially to junior-high and high schools girls of this subculture. ***Kogyaru*** emerged and became established as a subculture creating and spreading the street fashion of the mid 1990s. They wear makeup and short skirts, unlike their classmates, and assume the image of social outsiders belonging to the fringe of society. Later the negative perception of them gradually began to change, and they are now associated in the minds of people with the latest waves in street fashion. They are children trying to escape from reality into an imaginary world of fashion, and their striving for refinement and style gives them the self-confidence they otherwise lack[480]. This social group is clearly distinguishable by indicators such as gender, place of residence, age, consumption patterns and lifestyle[481]. ***Kogyaru*** are not a single subculture group; they are stratified into different subgroups comprising girls of different tastes but likewise of different financial status. It would be hard to systematize and characterize all the different trends within the general category of ***kogyaru***. They are so diverse that, overall, this subculture seems rather eclectic with respect to style. What is common to them is: the wish to impress people and to always be in tune with the latest and most extravagant trends; fashion is the single great passion in their lives[482].

479 Sharon Kinsella, 1995, p. 795.

480 Maya Keliyan, 2008, p. 193.

481 Tadashi Suzuki and Joel Best, 2003.

482 Yunia Kawamura, 2006.

This youth subculture is exceptionally dynamic: in it fashion trends follow one after the other, sometimes changing in a matter of days. These youths are "extreme" adherents of the idea of renewal, which is generally very important for Japanese culture and consumption. While some subgroups of ***kogyaru*** typically darken their faces with makeup (typical for the late 20th and early 21st century), others make great efforts to whiten it as much as possible (popular trend among some of them in recent years). The ***kogyaru*** fashion trends that were most striking just a few years ago are now considered to be outmoded.

Especially prominent among the ***kogyaru*** are:

- ***Ganguro***, who first appeared in the mid 1990s and were particularly popular in the first years of the 21st century. Their various subcategories strive to resemble in their outer appearance the "California girls" of Hollywood movies. Their faces are systematically bronzed at the solarium, or tanned with dark makeup. The makeup around the eyes is bright, and the hair is dyed blond. Falling in this category are various subgroups that differ in their style of dressing, makeup and accessories. ***Manba*** have strongly darkened, almost black faces, with contrasting white makeup around the eyes, and with flowers or stars drawn around the eyes, with very pale lipstick, and hair dyed very light blond. They dress in clothes with metal or neon designs and fabrics.

- ***Lomanba*** are a Lolita-type variety[483] of ***manba,*** but invariably sporting expensive designer clothes and LizLisa accessories. ***Kokolulu*** (so-called after their favorite brand name) also dress expensively. The youths in these several groups belong to middle strata families and have relatively good financial means, enabling them to buy the products typical for this fashion trend.

- ***Himegyaru*** are a subculture of girls who, in their desire to be ***kawaii,*** aim to look like fairy tale princesses. Their hair is long, painted in different colors ranging from blond to chestnut, and with romantic curls. They are dressed in expensive brand name garments and follow "refined" and elegant models of dress and outer appearance.

- ***Gosurori*** – The Japanese abbreviation for "Gothic Lolitas", are among the most eye-catching of ***kogyaru.*** According to their style preferences, they may be "***classical" Lolitas, "cute" Lolitas, "black", "rose" or "white" Lolitas*** (dressed respectively in black, rose, or white colors), etc. This group emerged in the late 1990s; they have formed their own Internet community, and are connected with the ***kosupure***[484] movement. Their clothes are styled after the dolls typical for the Victorian Age and are generally more modest[485] than those of vanguard ***kogyaru*** but include elements of current Gothic fashion[486]. Particularly fashionable at present is the "Alice in Wonderland" style

483 In Japan this is a very popular designation for teenager, taken from the name of the heroine of Vladimir Nabokov's eponymous novel.

484 The name is derived from the English expression *costume play*: they wear the costumes and accessories of their favorite comic-book or cartoon heroes.

485 Their skirts are approximately knee-length or slightly longer, some add crinolines to the skirts, others wear high boots.

486 Such as black clothes, leather accessories, etc.

of clothing, influenced by the illustrations of the book and by the film[487]. The lifestyle center of ***gosurori*** is the bridge near Harajuku Station in Tokyo, where they meet with others of their group and display their clothes and accessories.

- On the borderline between ***kogyaru*** and ***bosozoku***[488] (the deviant youth motorcycle bands, which, since the 1950s, have supplied young recruits for the yakuza) are the so-called ***baika*** (from the English word biker). They are dressed in black leather clothes and accessories and drive powerful motorcycles. Their outer appearance includes stylized elements of the work clothes worn by car mechanics, drivers, and related professions. They belong to the lower social strata – the low middle and working class.

- Some ***kogyaru*** members are past teen age: these are called ***oneegyaru*** (elder sister ***gyaru***) who try to continuously live out their high school dreams. The plans of these young women are to remain in this group for several years and, once they have had their fill of freedom and independence, to return to the normal everyday life of their coevals: then they will complete their education, start work, and create a family. Usually they come from middle strata families who can afford to support them and provide them the commodities they desire[489]. The brand commodities they prefer serve as a distinctive uniform for them: Burberry scarves, Louis Vuitton handbags, etc.

- The few young men and boys in this subculture are: ***sentaa gai***, who dye their hair in different colors, wear white makeup around the eyes, draw various little figures around the eyes, etc.; there are also the ***young aristocrats*** – the gallants accompanying Lolitas, etc.

Each of these groups is devoted to, and centered around, a certain fashion magazine[490], which, starting from the age of 12-13, becomes the favorite reading of these girls. When looking for fashion models to display their garments, the magazines turn to ordinary girls from the ***kogyaru*** community instead of to professionals, but they also hire celebrities who follow the styles created by teenage girls. The magazines present the latest in clothes, makeup, hairdo, and accessories, articles that are the hit for a certain period or in a single issue.

Since 2005 ***kogyaru*** have formed an Internet cyber-community[491]. Thanks to this, they can quickly and regularly exchange information, which is an important resource for maintaining their leading position in the field of street fashion. ***Kogyaru*** are very important consumers for the fashion goods producers and dealers.

Since the 1990s, in addition to the fashion trends introduced by local and world fashion houses, street fashion has also become increasingly influential in Japan. While the Japanese who aim at "refinement" and "elegance" generally imitate Western

487 Of course, this is not an accidental choice: like the heroine of the book, they are afraid to grow up and want to remain children forever.

488 The literal meaning of the phrase is "raving tribe".

489 Maya Keliyan, 2011, pp. 98-100.

490 Some well-known and authoritative street fashion magazines are: *SOS, Tokyo Style News, Cawaii, Fine, Egg*.

491 Yunia Kawamura, op. cit.

trends, the teenagers in question are creatively combining odd, eclectic combinations of different, often incompatible, styles, thus "creating a product" that, in turn, is copied by the leading Western and East Asiatic fashion designers[492]. This leads to the strange phenomenon of "commercialization of street fashion"[493], typical for postmodern societies.

In the postmodern world the borderline between "production and consumption of fashion" is dissolving[494]. ***Kogyaru*** have been called "***trendsetters"***, people who create fashion outside the leading designer studios[495]. This subculture has become a leader of youth street fashion, and their "innovations" in this field often pass from the street into the world of pop culture and even of high fashion.

Kogyaru are law-makers in matters of taste for teenagers and young women around the age of 20, and they even have a strong influence on people who are not fervent followers. Their specific impact stems from the importance attached to modern pop culture by young people in postmodern Japanese society. They have managed to establish their position due to the specific resources they have at their disposal: leisure time, money to spend, communication contacts, facilitation through the Internet. Some objective factors of their importance include: the general values of Japanese culture that prove favorable to their role, such as the ideal of a lovable appearance – ***kawaii***; the frequent economic crises, which create a situation where even less expensive goods become desirable; the attention shown to them by the media[496]. ***Kogyaru*** have become modern "fashion icons" also thanks to the importance and social value attached to fashion in Japan. The country has a market always on the lookout for innovations and which knows how to profit by them, including innovations in street fashion. Japan's leading position in the world economy provides good opportunities for ***kogyaru***: once they have established their status as legislators of fashion at the local level, they are able to become such abroad as well.

Otaku is the second large subculture we will discuss here: its members are introverts who strive to escape from society into a world of collections, hobbies, technology, the Internet, and other such, as a way of "cultural resistance" against the foundations and values of society. They first appeared in the early 1980s; they are mostly males aged 13 to 40, usually single, and living in the large cities. The typical ***otaku*** dresses in a casual sports style, and his outer appearance is far from the modish trends, which do not interest him in the least. ***Otaku*** illustrate some typical global trends in modern youth subcultures: such groups later appeared in the US and Western Europe as well, mainly under the influence of Japanese pop culture[497]. The literal meaning of the designation is "your home", which is a very polite appellation for the second person singular. According to some scholars, the name of the group demonstrates the

492 Ted Polhemus, op. cit., p. 12.

493 Yunia Kawamura, op. cit., p. 785.

494 Diana Crane, op. cit.

495 Tadashi Suzuki and Joel Best, op. cit.

496 Sharon Kinsella, 2000.

497 Lawrence Eng, 2006.

alienation of its members from other groups, their desire to politely keep their distance both from the dominant culture and from the people in their own group. They have been described as "pathological techno-fetishists suffering from social dysfunctions" and from communication problems[498].

Otaku are addicted to some hobby or other, and this has become the meaning of their life. They devote all their time, means, emotions, and efforts to hobbies, and have therefore been described as enthused, passionate, even maniacal, consumers[499]. ***Otaku*** are loyal customers who buy certain goods persistently and with utter devotion; they collect all sorts of objects, including information related to their hobby. They are extreme adherents of the Japanese idea of "meaningful leisure": for them leisure is such only when it is devoted to a hobby. Japan is a country with a developed hobby culture and this creates a favorable environment for the spread of this trend. But in a country where 85% of the population has a hobby, it is at times difficult to tell at what point the line of the "generally accepted" norms is being crossed[500]. ***Otaku*** are also a typical phenomenon for a consumer society, for a society where people want to possess more and more products, which are getting outdated in a matter of hours, not days.

Otaku have a high level of IT literacy, and they form cyber-communities that unite them as consumers of certain products. Their best-known Internet forum is the IT icon, 2channel. These people are creatures of the Net culture, living in the unreal world of their hobby, and substituting the Internet forum in place of live contacts.

Otaku is essentially a phenomenon of postmodern society, with its characteristic consumption, communication, and lifestyle patterns. The developed digital culture and cult of innovations in Japan are congenial to such consumption. It is typical for them that they are creative consumers, for "they create by themselves, or take part in the creation of their adored objects"[501]. They take part in the writing of ***manga*** and even of films devoted to their own way of life. In 2004 the film ***Densha otoko*** (The Man from the Train) was created, which tells about the love between an ***otaku*** and a beautiful young woman. This movie changed public opinion about the group – until then society at large tended to look upon them as strange or even dangerous, as suspicious. This negative image was provoked by a criminal case dating from 1989, when a sadistic psychopathic killer was described in the media as an alleged ***otaku***. But the film ***Densha otoko*** shows that these young people are not only no worse than other people, but are even capable of greater compassion and show willingness to help out strangers in trouble. The film was based on a true story that took part in the ***otaku*** Internet forum, the above-mentioned 2channel.

Their creative potential is displayed above all in perfecting various IT appliances and in the creation of new products. For instance, in order to be able to record their

498 Volker Grassmuck, 1990, see http://www.cjas.org/~leng/otaku-e.htm

499 Ken Kitabayashi, 2004, see http://www.nri.co.jp/english/opinion/papers/2004/pdf/np200484.pdf

500 Maya Keliyan, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

501 Ken Kitabayashi, op. cit.

favorite TV programs on their computer and then edit them, they have invented a TV tuner for PC. Their innovations are influencing the policy of producers and traders, and are determining trends of development of digital appliances. In this way they are stimulating industrial innovations and, as a consumer community, are forming a market for the innovations invented by them. ***Otaku*** are the first and most enthusiastic consumers of new products, even when these are still expensive. Their consumption is more than a craze for collecting; it is also a creative transformation of the products, involving their adaptation to the buyer's views and needs. Producers are studying the innovations made by ***otaku*** and re-orienting their production accordingly, looking for new solutions that will make the product preferred by mass consumers. The lifestyle of ***otaku*** is designated by the 3 C's: – collection, creativity, community[502].

Otaku can be of very different kinds, the most widespread of which are: ***manga otaku*** (people sharing a craze for Japanese comics); ***anime otaku*** (passionate admirer of Japanese animated cartoons); ***kosupure otaku*** (people who dress like their favorite heroes from ***manga*** and ***anime***); ***pasokon otaku*** (addicted to computers and to assembling computers from separate parts); ***tokusatsu otaku*** (collecting different figurines of superheroes from their favorite ***manga*** and ***anime***), etc. Recently young female ***otaku*** have appeared, who are mostly enthusiasts of ***manga*** and ***anime***, and follow the "romantic boys' love" style.

The total number of ***otaku*** is calculated as being approximately 1 720 000. Some authors believe they are as many as 6 460 000[503]. The market share of the commodities they buy each year amounts to 411 million yen, while according to Kitabayashi it is much larger, 1 408 million yen. These data clearly indicate the important market created around ***otaku*** and the significant economic role they play for the maintenance, growth and flourishing of this market. The shift of their consumer enthusiasm from one sphere to another is connected with their participation in other fan communities as well. This leads to a "dispersion and dissolving of their ***otaku*** identity" and to the appearance of new trends in their subculture.

What unites ***otaku*** with ***kogyaru*** is their passionate devotion to their favorite occupation, and their creativity. Both these large youth subcultures display creativity in the fields to which they are devoted. Both are opposed to the status quo, to commonly accepted values, norms, and rules of Japanese society. ***Otaku***, unlike ***kogyaru***, are individualists who communicate with others of their kind mostly virtually. They are not tempted by fashion, and generally find it difficult to communicate with the opposite sex[504].

These two youth subcultures are examples of postmodern changes in the dissemination and perception of fashion trends and of innovative products. According

502 Ken Kitabayashi, op. cit.

503 According to the data presented by Ken Kitabayashi, op. cit.

504 In recent years, as mentioned, these too have been changing; there are now women *otaku,* married *otaku,* and family couples in which both spouses are *otaku*. Nowdays some young people do not hesitate to declare openly that they are *anime* or *manga otaku.* Some years ago such a declaration would be considered as ambarassing and shameful.

to Georg Simmel[505], the first to assimilate the new fashion trends are consumers belonging to the higher strata, after which the fashion trickles down the social ladder, the lower levels imitating the upper ones. In postmodern societies the situation has changed, for the creators and spreaders of fashionable and innovative trends may be "diffused" across various stratification positions – hence, the theory describing this phenomenon is called "diffusion theory"[506]. It is no longer necessarily true that the first adherents of vanguard trends and innovations are of a high status: the more important factor is that there be an existing social network to inform them. Also important for them is to have enough resources; they have a strong desire to experiment and are willing to break with conventions[507].

Both ***kogyaru*** and ***otaku*** demonstrate the particularities of postmodern power relationships between the dominant culture and the subcultures. The dominant one turns into "nominally dominant" and the subcultures strongly influence it and even modify it. This reversal is another example of the effaced borderline between high and low culture in postmodern societies[508]. The consumption patterns of youth subculture groups have an increasingly strong influence on Japanese consumer society. They are visibly modeling the lifestyle centers in the large megapolises like Tokyo and Osaka, as well as in the big cities.

Adherents of various subgroups of ***kogyaru*** shop from specific stores specialized in the respective fashion styles and offering brand name commodities from their favorite designer houses. These stores are concentrated in the neighborhoods preferred by these youth groups, such as Harajuku and Shibuya. The back streets of Harajuku – Ura Hara, are full of small boutiques selling expensive commodities in limited numbers. This urban center of "high street fashion" has a purposely-contrived marginal style and underground atmosphere. It is specialized in presenting the difference and uniqueness of youth subcultures.

Shibuya is emblematic for a more mass category of consumption associated with ***kogyaru.*** Its symbols and markers are ***depaato*** Shibuya 109 and Shibuya 109-2[509]. The dream of every ***kogyaru*** is to work in one of these stores. The wages of shop attendants are relatively low and their work does not require special skills, but it is prestigious because they are "experts" in the field of "street fashion". They are among the leading creators and disseminators of fashion trends and attract crowds of clients. They are the "face" and inspiration of the ***kogyaru*** consumption and lifestyle centers, the floors and shops of which resound with the elated cries "***kawaii"*** of enthused young female clients. The store attendant girls in such stores often appear as models on the pages of the street fashion magazines.

The specialization and regional distribution of consumer and lifestyle centers of

505 Georg Simmel, 1971/1904.

506 Everett M. Rogers, 1995, op. cit. 263-280.

507 Diana Crane, op. cit., Tadashi Suzuki and Joel Best, op. cit.

508 Scott Lash, op. cit.

509 Yunia Kawamura, op. cit., p. 786.

kogyaru and ***otaku*** have made them a site of subcultural tourism for young people living in smaller cities and remote prefectures. On non-working days they travel to see their idols and, with their assistance, they devote the day to shopping tour of the cult stores. They wear similar clothes and makeup, and "show themselves" around the urban spaces that are emblematic for the subgroup. Then come photo sessions documenting their one-day of a "new life", and on the following day they are back in their hometowns and resume their usual social roles.

The best-known consumer and lifestyle center for ***otaku*** is the Akihabara in Tokyo: in its streets they can find everything they need to pursue their "maniacal hobby" in tune with fast-changing trends. There also are the so-called ***meido cafe***[510], a favorite place for every ***otaku***. These examples of the "dream world" first opened in Akihabara in 2000[511] and were later followed by a version for women ***otaku***, the so-called ***shitsuji kissa*** (butler café).

The popularity of these places is connected with the ***amae*** culture. The term ***amae*** is difficult to translate but approximately means "emotional dependence". Doi Takeo characterizes ***amae*** as one of the basic principles that explain Japanese culture[512]. Dependence on the attitude, affection, and consideration of others is only one reason for the growth of business of these cafes and their growing popularity among ***otaku,*** whose ***amae*** is evidently linked to a need for the atmosphere and service these cafes offer. Perhaps ***otaku*** would not seek them in this artificial world if they could find them in the real one. Since the atmosphere and service in ***shitsuji kissa*** and ***meido cafe*** resemble the fantasy world of ***manga*** and ***anime***, and the staff behave and dress like characters in these fantasies, these places are sorts of "thematic restaurants" of the ***kosupure*** culture[513].

The causes for the existence and growth of these two influential subcultures – ***kogyaru*** and ***otaku*** – are related to the problems facing Japanese society as a whole. These are the social and economic difficulties befalling the economic system, the educational institutions, and the family. The changes that have taken place in the value system are enhancing the feeling of loneliness and alienation. The strict social hierarchy, the increasingly difficult balance between working time and leisure, tension at work, the necessity for the young generations to work as hard as their predecessors in order to deal with economic problems, the high demands imposed on them by the Japanese morality of duty – all this drives ***kogyaru*** and ***otaku*** into the realm of fantasy, where the rules are completely different. The education system rears people in the duty of tireless labor, subjection to rules, obedience to the requirements of the group and society. The upcoming generations are also reared to follow the principles of harmony:

510 Transliteration of the English word *maid*. The waitresses are dressed in chambermaid uniforms from the Victorian Age, in black garments, white aprons and bonnets, but with short skirts and low necklines; they often resemble characters from *manga* and *anime. Meido* is a word that also refers to female characters from *manga* and *anime.*

511 Under Japanese influence, such cafes have opened in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Mexico, and Canada.

512 Takeo Doi, op. cit.

513 Maya Keliyan, 2008, p. 213.

to be radiant and courteous, not to express their negative feelings and emotions, to fit smoothly and without conflict into their social environment and into society, to pursue group goals even when these are damaging to their personal goals. These demands at times prove too severe and unbearable for young people. In their desire to escape from the rules and pressure of the groups to which they belong institutionally, they create new rules and informal groups of their own, which are meant to be the rules and groups of their "other self". What is paradoxical about subcultures is that in their striving to be different, and even to oppose the commonly accepted rules, members of these groups ultimately follow rules as well, and in extreme forms at that.

Adherents of these two subcultures are like children who do not want to grow up and to leave the world of dreams and fantasies. But fleeing from social requirements, rules, and obligations, and following their inner urges, young people at some point find they are past teen age, have entered the age of maturity, but have lost the desire and even the capacity to grow up, to create a family and to assume social responsibility.

The consumer and lifestyle centers of modern Japanese youth subcultures (Akihabara, Harajuku, etc.) resemble thematic parks, Disneyland, or a parade of Walt Disney characters. The streets of Shibuya and Harajuku, with the ***kogyaru*** and Lolitas parading around in them, recall a festive carnival, except that the holiday here is daily. These people are themselves an attraction for tourists visiting such places in order to see "live" the exotic young people, and to attend their "street spectacle". This spectacle is part of the postmodern everyday life, of the postmodern street, in which the tirelessly working ***sarariiman*** and the idle young people with a "strange" appearance mingle. All this illustrates the increasing Disneyfication of contemporary Japanese society, in which the imagined and real worlds exchange places. It turns out that dreams and fantasies can not only be a haven for young people but a source of growth for a large and profitable market.

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Middle strata consumption patterns in Japan at the beginning of the 21st century are increasingly globalized and influenced by the development of information technologies; they are increasingly linked to high technologies, even at everyday level. Traditional and local products have a notable presence among the objects of consumption, and they continue to be important in Japanese consumer society. At the beginning of the 21st century the trend of seeking greater individualization in consumption patterns has grown stronger, and the fragmentation of consumer groups, even greater. The subgroups based on age, gender, and forms of occupation have a structure-defining impact on Japanese consumer society. Growing social inequality has become noticeable in recent times, and this is influencing the shopping patterns and consumption in general, being materialized in different-standard stores, consumer and recreation centers. This inequality is increasingly determined by criteria such as education, qualification, occupation, gender, age, and marital status. The practical

aspect and convenience are preferred qualities of consumption for the middle strata, who are more inclined now to prefer these to "conspicuous leisure". This is a reversal from the conspicuous consumption that characterized the consumption patterns after the period of the "economic miracle", when conforming to the conspicuous type was almost considered a measure of one's affiliation to the middle strata. In recent years, "conspicuous consumption" and "leisure class" are associated with the upper strata, even though the latter frequent the same places for shopping and recreation as the middle strata. But in the latter's consumer choice, the practicality of an item now prevails to a considerable degree over the consideration of brand name and costliness. Middle strata consumers increasingly demonstrate their status through pragmatic and rational choice, knowledgeably discriminating between symbols, quality, and price of goods. Like their British counterparts (discussed at the end of Chapter One), they are inclined at times to follow "ordinary" rather than conspicuous consumption patterns, depending on circumstances. The recent trends, described above, and the growing economic crisis, which is seriously affecting Japan, lead us to presume that in the future the middle strata will continue to be leaders in imposing the following important directions in consumption patterns:

- The demand for high tech, ecological, healthy commodities.
- Increased importance of the quality of leisure and of a "meaningful" lifestyle.
- Continuing preference for "ordinary" consumption patterns.
- Preserving the tradition of a lifestyle and consumption patterns connected with local communities and community activities, with consumer cooperatives and teikei.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this dissertation, several important questions should be answered: ***What did this study achieve?*** After pursuing the ***objective,*** fulfilling the ***tasks,*** demonstrating the ***thesis – what is the result*** and meaning of everything that has been stated so far? Did the comparative study of Bulgarian and Japanese middle strata consumption patterns lead to new knowledge of the two societies?

This work is based on ***the traditions*** of stratification theory and the ***contemporary concepts regarding the importance of consumption for the social structuring of the middle strata*** in today's increasingly ***global societies.*** These views have led me to search for the ***immanent characteristics of contemporary Bulgarian society by studying the consumer environment, consumer behavior, status and culture of its various social-group formations, and above all its middle strata.*** In order to achieve a ***fuller and deeper analysis*** of current processes in our country, and in order to ***understand them in***

the contemporary global context, Bulgarian society has been compared with Japanese. Nine reasons were pointed out for choosing this approach.

I have studied the *changes that took place in the character of social production and labor in the developed countries* after the WWII; the conclusion is that *these changes have led to the emergence of postmodern society,* in which *consumption comes to play a key role for understanding the specific nature and essence of the society.* The various *views on consumption* and its *new social role are classified* and presented from the viewpoint of their *evolution.* It is not by accident that the *stratification approach* is used in this work: on one hand, it enables us to show *most comprehensively and in depth the new role of consumption as one of the significant indicators of social-group status.* On the other hand, this approach *penetrates to the immanent characteristics of contemporary societies,* whose nature is explained through their *social structure* in using consumption as the new "key" to "unraveling" structure. On this basis, *postmodern society is defined;* it is with the emergence of this society that the new *structure-defining role of consumption also appears,* as well as the *leading role of the middle strata for social stratification structuring***.**

The concepts "consumption patterns", "leisure patterns" and "lifestyle" are defined here, including their mutual connection. Each of these is, in its own specific way, an important indicator for position within the social-group formations in the stratification system of developed contemporary societies after their entry into the postmodern stage.

The *middle strata* are defined, special attention being focused on their composition and particularities, on their significant role as consumers in postmodern society, whose consumption patterns define the nature and trends of this society most comprehensively. In order to define them, we have traced *the changes in the ways and forms in which the separate middle strata consume, and their attitudes towards consumption.* Because of their *social-group heterogeneity, the separate groups are bearers and representatives of specific tendencies* of contemporary consumption. We have studied the *particularities of the consumption patterns of the main groups among them,* as well as *the specific impact of their various resources* (financial-economic, cultural, power, institutional, etc.) on their positions as *leaders of postmodern lifestyle.*

The *distinctive particularities of consumption patterns* of the social strata have been identified; we find that *the most important consumption patterns* in the two societies after the WWII and until now, are those of the *middle strata.* The dissertation also studies *consumption patterns that tend to stratify Bulgarian and Japanese society, the characteristic social structuring of the two societies, the place and role of the middle strata* in these processes, their *consumer status, consumer behavior, and consumer culture.*

Postmodern society by its nature is a *consumer society,* while *post-communist society is just entering its "consumer stage";* this lag is due to its insufficient economic development, its "pseudo-market" and the economic deprivation in which large social strata of the population are living today. Bulgarian society is still far from consumer abundance, far from the variety and high quality typical of postmodern consumer

standards; yet in it we see some processes and trends that we normally see in developed countries. Bulgaria is a society undergoing a transition to market principles and democracy, but the country is developing in the context of the contemporary global world, in which postmodern societies are in the lead. Our society, however slowly and painfully, is experiencing the increasingly strong influence of the postmodern world environment, especially since the country's accession to the EU (and despite the great differences in comparison with the developed European countries and the serious criticism coming from EU institutions) *Bulgarian consumer society* is passing through *the stages covered long ago by its Japanese counterpart,* such as "Westernization", "MacDonaldization" and globalization. In our country these trends, and the values of consumerism, have gained ground and grown strong despite the conditions of poverty, "Orientalization" and unfair trade. A serious problem confronting our society with respect to its consumer behavior and culture is the *lack of a functioning civil society,* with its typical structures, initiative, socially responsible institutions, and the *lack of consumers with a corresponding civic behavior, values, and culture*.

In Bulgaria, under the impact of the global postmodern environment, some *leading world trends in consumption and lifestyle* are already evident, though on a much smaller scale. *Digitalization,* a sign of the ubiquitous impact of information technologies, is present in Bulgarian consumer society and is changing it ever more vividly. But while in postmodern societies digitalization has reached a mass scale, in our country it is typical primarily for the consumption patterns of the *more educated, better-qualified, better-paid socio-professional groups, of the younger age categories,* and especially of *urban residents.* It is *typical for the consumption patterns of our middle strata.* In Bulgarian society, due to the conditions of its dramatic transition, *the differentiating impact of consumption is much more visible than the integrating one.* It tends to *delimit social groups and strata much more than it unites. But in postmodern societies,* due to their developed economies and much higher consumer standards and quality of life in general, there is a fundamental level of mass consumption that is accessible to wider social strata.

Social inequality is growing not only in Bulgaria but in Japan as well; *in both societies, consumption patterns are increasingly stratified, diversified, and "regionalized".* But overall, the *Japanese middle strata, especially the new middle, retain their advantageous position as consumers.* They continue to be bearers of their society's emblematic and significant consumption patterns and lifestyle trends.

In Japan and Bulgaria alike, *consumption is significantly differentiating the population into separate groups, categories, and strata, and consumption patterns now indicate social status.* These patterns indicate, on one hand, the resources of social groups, categories, and strata. On the other hand, the patterns themselves are an important social, cultural, and power resource for their bearers. This *significant function and role of consumption as one of the essential indicators of one's stratification position* is evident both in Bulgarian society, in the course of its transformation to a democratic market society, and in a developed country like Japan. Consumption in Bulgaria is no longer simply a result of the social status people have, it is an important indicator of that

status. Both in our type of society and in the postmodern type, consumption patterns "stratify" individuals, categories, and groups and define their positions in social relations and structures. Therefore, ***our society bears certain traits of the postmodern*** (with all due reservations, as made above, for this society's limitations); of course, it is still ***in the phase of underdevelopment, of "apprenticeship" with respect to the postmodern,*** similar to its "pseudo-market" and its democracy. Bulgarian society, similar to the Japanese one (though in ***a characteristic, limited way***) is ***stratified by consumption; this is an essential feature that basically assimilates it to postmodern society.*** This ***important conclusion confirms the validity of the first hypothesis formulated*** in the beginning of Chapter One.

The emergence and development of postmodern societies is accompanied by expansion and increasing relative share and importance of the middle strata, especially the ***new middle strata***, which are in the vanguard of contemporary consumption. Their qualification, educational and cultural resources are decisive for the prosperity of developed societies. In today's Bulgarian society the middle strata are still ***not strong enough, without sufficient resources, and in a weaker social position.*** But, similarly to their counterparts in postmodern societies, ***their consumer standard goes beyond the mass level, and "post-materialistic values" become of leading importance in their leisure activities and lifestyle.*** In the last two decades, ***they too have been fulfilling***, in a sense, ***the role of vanguard of consumption and lifestyle.*** This is because they follow the leading contemporary trends, especially those connected with ***digitalization, healthy and ecologically-minded lifestyle, and consumption centered on the value of leisure.*** The conclusion drawn from the analysis carried out in the dissertation proves the ***validity of the second initial hypothesis.***

We have thus come to the ***confirmation of the thesis of this dissertation,*** which states that consumption patterns are a significant indicator of social-status position in contemporary societies, and the middle strata are social-structural formations that carry the most important, symptomatic and emblematic trends and changes in contemporary consumption.

In many places in the text, the analysis of middle strata consumption patterns leads to ***concrete conclusions of a practical-applied kind.*** They are practical for they ***explain the causes of high development of Japanese society*** and the ***obstacles to the development of Bulgarian society.*** The ***main hurdles*** for our society are related, on one hand, to the ***work of the institutions,*** and on the other, to the ***civic activeness and initiative of citizens. State policy and its priorities*** proved decisive for the development of Japanese society, and of its middle strata. ***Investments in education, incitements for the high technology sectors, are not an excessive luxury*** that only wealthy countries can afford: these countries became wealthy precisely because they staked on all this, because it was important for them. The creation of ***favorable conditions for fulfilling the potential of the middle strata,*** especially the ***new middle*** (who have the resource of knowledge), ***would not be a paternalistic, statist, populist policy*****,** but would demonstrate the state cares about social development and national prosperity. The Japanese have long since been successfully applying such a policy. We may well ask

when our state will finally show – not only by words but by deeds – that it is convinced of the need for this? If Bulgarian society wants to keep pace with contemporary trends, our economy should above all be based on the development of science, technology, and information technologies. This means it is necessary to fully rethink state policy in the field of education and science. The professions related to science must be stimulated, so that their public influence, prestige, and social status may grow. The current price policy and incomes policy must be changed, as they condemn large strata of the population to misery. The widespread corruption at different levels of government and institutions, is one of the leading causes of economic lag, of the prevalence of pseudo-markets, of underdevelopment of Bulgarian society, and of the phenomena of "Orientalization", fake goods, and unfair trade, described above. A long-term and purposeful institutional policy for important investments in the infrastructure is necessary, for no modern society is able to function effectively and develop without an adequately constructed infrastructure. Not only must programs for environmental protection and healthy lifestyle be adopted (like the European and Japanese ones), but purposeful and effective mechanisms must be applied for achieving concrete results. Concrete measures are needed for preserving the health of different social categories and groups, for meaningful leisure time and rational recreation.

But by themselves, the efforts of institutions cannot achieve the desired result if civic activeness and initiative is lacking, if society is not capable of building civic structures that protect its interests, if the common interests are not widely understood and levels of solidarity like the Japanese ones are not attained. In other words, in order to become postmodern, Bulgarian society needs citizens who are socially responsible, enterprising, united, aware of their own interests and the public interests, and capable of acting in defense of these; it needs citizens like those of Japan and the Western European countries.

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Potential contributors must submit a short abstract (200-300 words) and the full text, which can be in English as well as in any other language from the countries covered by PECOB.

Upcoming deadlines for submitting proposals are:
January 31st
June 30th
November 30th

All texts must comply with PECOB Submission Guidelines (www.pecob.eu).

All proposals, texts and questions should be submitted to
Ms Luciana Moretti
luciana.moretti@unibo.it

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