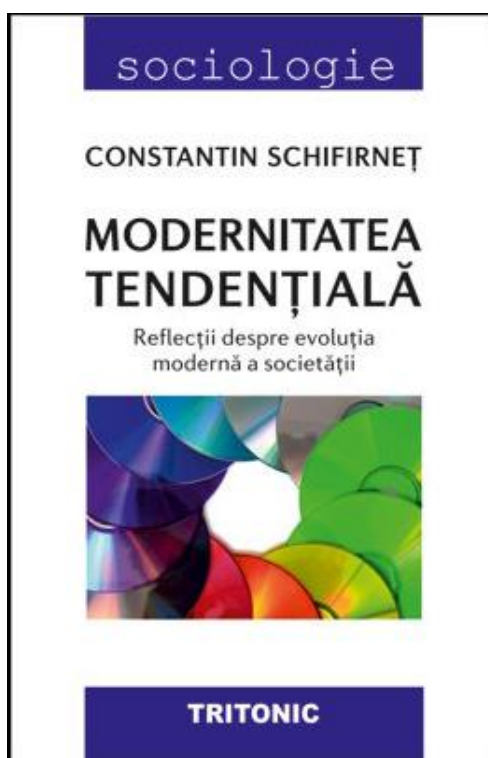


**TENDENTIAL MODERNITY. UNDER THE SIGN OF ε**

Review of the volume *Modernitatea tendențială. Reflecții despre evoluția modernă a societății* by Constantin Schifirneț, Bucharest, Tritonic, 2016

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**FIG.1** Constantin Schifirneț, *Modernitatea tendențială. Reflecții despre evoluția modernă a societății*. Front cover.

Constantin Schifirneț is a reference name in social sciences, professor at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest, with an important activity of researcher, coordinator of book editions and manager in the Ministry of Culture. The recognition of his academic value and merits comes from his scientific activity, which focuses on modernity issues, mass media, Europeanization, sociology of communication, sociology of culture, sociology of ages etc. Constantin Schifirneț is the author of the most important synthesis work regarding the different faces of the theory of forms without substance within Romanian culture, *Formele fără fond. Un brand românesc* (2007), and holds the paternity of a concept that includes the complex tendencies of the modernization of South-eastern European countries, the ‘tendential modernity’.

Starting from the realities of the Romanian modernization – the concept of ‘tendential modernity’ was launched within the above-mentioned paper on the Romanian modernization way (Schifirneț, 2007:205) –, from the need to synthesize the distinct stages of modernization, the distinct values and standards specific to each stage, the critical (and often antagonistic) elites’ position in relation to the theory of forms without substance, Professor Schifirneț highlights a concept able to define the differentiated manifestation of different aspects of modernization. This concept of ‘tendential modernity’ was more comprehensive and applicable in other contexts than those projected in 2007. First, the concept proved its explanatory potential in relation to the modernization efforts of the entire Romanian society, regardless of the way of social change. A critical history of the Romanian change underlines three major ways of dealing with social and cultural change. There is, firstly, a dialectic of cultural closing and opening, that has been analyzed within conjunctive or disjunctive logics; secondly, there is the reference to exteriority – the Western model – by appealing to different logics in relation to diffusionism: the selective retrieval of external forms (the theory of forms without substance) or non-selective retrieval in order to recover the gaps in the development of society (the theory of synchronism); thirdly, there is an appetite for a Europe that serves both as a home and as a model for the development of Romanian society. Professor Schifirneț felt immediately the potential of the concept and extended its signification to the entire variety of forms and standards of the Romanian society. Moreover, the umbrella-concept of ‘tendential modernity’ was useful in order to explain other models and ways of modernization. It became in general an explanatory model of societal evolution, of gradual and tendential change in all the Eastern states where there was a gap in as compared to the Western modernization, naturally produced. In relation to this form of modernization, explained as follows:

Modernity, in the initial meaning of the term – that of progress or linear evolution, of unlimited advancement over a predetermined distance of development towards a certain social actor – appeared in Western space; we call it classical (Western) modernity (Schifirneț, 2016:19),

Professor Schifirneț (2016:25) has redefined the concept: “the Western model of modernity has spread all over the world as tendency”, publishing in this respect the book that is the subject of our analysis.

Under these circumstances, the tendential modernity can be defined in relation to (organic) one, taking into account a set of assumptions regarding the delay of the first one and the its specificity, and the peculiarities of its forms on spatial-temporal coordinates, i.e. in relation to the socio-historical context. If the classical modernity implies a natural way, sometimes understood as a linear one, constituting itself as a model of development for non-Western European societies, then we can discuss about principles and characteristics of modernity. We can also take into account the differentiated and discretionary application of those principles in the case of tendential modernity and the tendency to align its characteristics with those of the classical modernity. Once operationalized the term ‘modernity’, meaning its forms, principles, and characteristics, the operationalization of the alignment function becomes necessary, i.e. of the modernization understood as a “path to modernity”:

Modernity is an effect of modernization. There is no modernity without modernization. Modernity is a standard that becomes a goal of the societies evolution, and modernization is the process of achieving this goal (Schifirneț, 2016:41);

Sociologically, modernization is defined as a transformation of traditional, rural and agrarian society into a secular, urban and industrial one, so that trade and industry becomes dominant aspects of economy (Schifirneț, 2016:45).

Taking into account the modernization process as a function, mathematically defined as admitting asymptotes, we can consider a small positive number,  $\varepsilon$ , tending to zero, which expresses the gap within the classical and the tendential modernity. The exceptional understanding and explanation of the synthesis-concept 'tendential modernity' consists in this association of modernization with the mathematical set of functions that admits asymptotes. Professor Schifirneț refers in his work to the modernization of modernity as a continuous process, as Ursula Beck proposed, namely: "The modernization of modernity expresses the dynamic, continuously regenerative, asymptotic character of the modernization process" (Schifirneț, 2016:60), that means modernity can be understood only in tendential terms, in dynamics, and not in the attempt to clarify contents. The sociological concept 'tendential', characterizing the process of modernization, requires also an operationalization in the framework of the present work, and Professor Schifirneț's referral is obvious and broader than the meaning used by the Romanian sociologist Dumitru Sandu:

The meaning given by Dumitru Sandu to the term 'tendential' – reducing of diversity to the essential characteristic – intersects, in some historical contexts, with the term 'tendential modernity'. Tendential, from the examples given by Sandu, refers to the trend, to the general orientation. I refer to the asymptotic meaning of tendential: something that tends to something else or approaches a landmark, but never touches it (Schifirneț, 2016:91).

Understanding tendential modernity as a result of a mathematical function that admits asymptotes is the key to understanding Constantin Schifirneț's perspective on a reality described by the planned outcome and the related process, of modernity and modernization. This reality could not have been circumscribed so far under another umbrella-concept. Even if the tendential evolution is probabilistic, "the concept of tendential modernity does not refer to its statistical dimension" (Schifirneț, 2016:95), but to an evolution under the sign of an always present  $\varepsilon$ , however small, able to allow the description of function in relation to the asymptote it admits. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Professor Schifirneț considers that "the *tendential* notion signifies unfulfillment, postponement, zigzagging of the tendency" (Schifirneț, 2016:90) – the latter part illustrating the path of social/cultural change following different trajectories, in terms of a transient, oscillating regime, described by an  $\varepsilon$  that varies in value and in mathematical sign –, respectively why tendential modernity implies unfulfillment of the modernity project, as Habermas stated, in the completeness of the "dimensions and principles of modernization processes" (Schifirneț, 2016:93).

The work of Professor Constantin Schifirneț is complex and deals with fundamental topics regarding 'tendential modernity' concept's settlement in the field of scientific debate: *Modernity; Modernization, the path to modernity; Types of modernity; Tendential modernity; Elites, between modern rhetoric and reality; The space of modern reality; The modernization of countryside; The State – a source of modernity*, to conclude under the umbrella of the *universal tendential state of modernity*. Each of these chapters that deals with the previously listed topics requires a consistent analysis, but, within the limits of this review, we aim at highlighting the complexity, validity and universality of the concept 'tendential modernity', that radically changes the projection of Romanian critical thinking on the ways of social and cultural change. It is worth noting Professor Constantin Schifirneț's openness and flexibility in the analysis of the concept.

He started the book by describing the modernization in relation to a linear Western model, but, after the analysis of multiple models of modernity, he admits to redefine the concept: tendential modernity begins to “express the inclination of some social actors to imitate and take on conducts and conceptions outside their national space” (Schifirneț, 2016:161). To understand struggles of the current Romanian society, we recommend the last four chapters of the book, especially the one that refers to the elites.

Professor Constantin Schifirneț’s work *Modernitatea tendențială. Reflecții despre evoluția modernă a societății* is fundamental in a broad field of disciplinary areas, in the proximity of Aaron V. Cicourel’s interdisciplinary alliance (including sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy). The work is the space where the concept proposed ten years ago gains an operational form.

### REFERENCES

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