

ANTHROPOLOGY IN NEW EUROPE: LITHUANIAN CASE

CONSUMPTION AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN POST-SOCIALIST LITHUANIA FROM ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Asta Vonderau

ABSTRACT

In the course of transition to market economy, political and economical structures of Lithuanian society changed generally. Many people lost financial capital, social positions and even cultural categories necessary for the orientation in society. In the course of this fundamental transformation the necessity to negotiate new cultural categories became obvious. In the context of these redefinition processes, consumption and consumer goods constituted important means for the creation of new social differences and their symbolic representations. What visions and images of a 'good life', of 'wealth' and 'success' exist in today's Lithuania? How are consumption-oriented patterns of behaviour provided with symbolic meaning? How are identities constructed and represented through ways and objects of consumption as well as particular lifestyles? Research on these questions may contribute to an understanding about processes of cultural redefinition and differentiation in a specific Lithuanian social context and, starting out from this understanding, it allows making plausible interferences about broader social relations and local visions related to global change.

KEY WORDS: socio-cultural anthropology, consumption, cultural differences, free market, political structures, economical structures, cultural categories, global changes.

ANOTACIJA

Perėjimo prie rinkos ekonomikos laikotarpiu Lietuvos visuomenės politinės ir ekonominės struktūros pakito. Daug žmonių prarado pinigines santaupas, socialinę padėtį, kultūrinės kategorijas, būtinas orientavimuisi visuomenėje. Vykstant tokioms fundamentalioms transformacijoms, būtinybė persvarstyti naujas kultūros kategorijas tapo akivaizdi. Šio performulavimo procese vartojimas ir plataus vartojimo prekės tapo svarbia priemone naujiems socialiniams skirtumams susidaryti ir jų simbolinei raiškai. Kokios „gero gyvenimo“, „turto“ ir „sėkmės“ vizijos bei įvaizdžiai egzistuoja šiandieninėje Lietuvoje? Kaip į vartojimą orientuoti elgsenos modeliai įgauna simbolinę reikšmę? Kaip kuriami identitetai ir kaip juos reprezentuoja vartojimo būdai ir objektai bei specifinis gyvenimo stilius? Šių klausimų tyrimas gali padėti geriau suprasti kultūrinių vertybių pervertinimo ir diferenciacijos procesus konkrečiame Lietuvos socialiniame kontekste, o tokiam supratimui tapus atskaitos tašku galima daryti patikimas išvadas apie platesnius socialinius santykius ir vietines vizijas, susijusias su globaliniais pokyčiais.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: sociokultūrinė antropologija, rinkos ekonomika, politinės struktūros, ekonominės struktūros, kultūros kategorijos, globaliniai pokyčiai.

*Asta Vonderau, PhD Cand., Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, D-10099 Berlin, Germany
E-mail: Asta.Vonderau@web.de*

The privatisation process in Eastern Europe is not simply a transition to a market *economy*. It is also a transition to a consumer *society* in the full sense of the term. By this is meant a society in which consumption, taste, and the culture of goods all require the constructing of new meanings, of new principles of organization of "who I am" and who "we" are and of who we are not. (Steven Sampson)

Following the objectives of my ongoing research, the article reflects on the question how the (re-)definition of cultural categories, social differences and strategies of representation can be analysed in the context of the transformation from a socialist to a capitalist type of consumer society.

The research needs a deeper understanding of rapid social change, sensitivity towards the fragility of social and cultural meanings and reflexivity regarding anthropological ‘pre-imaginings’ connected to a post-socialist context as particularly important aspects of an anthropological perspective. Such a perspective gives a better understanding of the social and cultural processes in question.

In the course of transition to market economy, political and economical structures of Lithuanian society changed, as did its *symbolic order* (Kneff 2002: 34). Many people lost financial capital, social positions and even cultural categories necessary for the orientation in society. In the course of this fundamental transformation the *necessity to negotiate new cultural categories* became obvious. In the context of these redefinition processes, consumption and consumer goods constituted important means for the creation of new social differences and their symbolic representations. What visions and images of a ‘good life’, of ‘wealth’ and ‘success’ exist in today’s Lithuania? How are consumption-oriented patterns of behaviour provided with symbolic meaning? How are identities constructed and represented through ways and objects of consumption as well as particular lifestyles? Research on these questions may contribute to an understanding about processes of cultural redefinition and differentiation in a specific Lithuanian social context and, starting out from this understanding, it allows making plausible inferences about broader social relations and local visions related to global change.

Following the objectives of my ongoing PhD study, I will reflect on the question, how the (re-)definition of cultural categories, social differences and strategies of representation can be analysed in the context of the transformation from a socialist to a capitalist type of consumer society. I will concentrate my argument on the specific Lithuanian social context and the social role of the ‘new entrepreneurs’ in that context.

Historical developments and social change

According to Hannes Siegrist, consumption constitutes one of the most important factors in the historical formation of western modernity both in Western and Eastern Europe (Siegrist 1997:14). Thus, in order to understand today’s process of cultural and social redefinition in Lithuania, it is necessary to analyze this process from an historical perspective, taking into account the dimensions of social and cultural transformations which Lithuania experienced since the collapse of Socialism.

Consumer societies in socialist east and capitalist west developed in opposition to each other. However, both sides were corresponding to the American model of consumer society: While western states were willing to adopt that model, socialist states distanced themselves and propagated an alternate model of consumer society as socially fair and just. Socialist society was dominated by collectivistic-egalitarian ideology, promising to provide Soviet citizens with consumer goods necessary for their everyday needs, independently of wages or social status. The interaction between consumption, price, wage and achievement which is essential for the western kind of consumer society, was suspended. As it is known, this ideological self image did not correspond with social reality. The majority of the population in socialist countries had to struggle with a shortage of consumer goods. The reminiscence of this lack of goods still is present in the collective and individual memory of socialist times in today’s Lithuania. One of my interviewees described the typical consumption situation: “I remember, I was maybe eleven years old, me and my mother were queuing three hours outside the shop to get pineapples. And I remember, that my mother got a voucher allowing her to buy a piece of furniture. It is not worth mentioning the quality of that furniture...

Having that voucher one still had to wait for half a year in queue and to undertake diverse correspondences. Seen from today's perspective, it seems that this experience only can be understood by someone who has lived through it."

Because of its geographical position at the western margins of the Soviet Union and because of a relatively high life standard and a big variety of consumer goods, Lithuania had an image of a 'Soviet west'. However, even when compared to other socialist countries like Poland, Hungary or the GDR, life standard was not as high as it was supposed to be. Access to material resources depended on an individual's position within the state system. The geographic proximity as well as the ideological (structural) distance to the western world stimulated active consumption and made the vision of a better, that is western-style life seem to be almost tangible. Since the 1960's a growing westernization of consumer expectations had been observable in Lithuania as well as in other socialist countries, and in the last years of socialist rule, a western kind 'second' society emerged. This orientation expressed itself in the imitation of consumption and lifestyles different to the restrictions of socialist consumption. Despite the proximity of Soviet society to the west, people had to use other than the official ways for acquiring the desirable consumer goods and for getting information about western consumption and lifestyle. Illegal trade with western and western like goods developed rapidly in the black markets. Imaginations of a 'better life' were likewise stimulated through images and objects which many of Lithuania's citizens used to get from their relatives living in the United States and Western Europe. These so-called "packages from America" most often contained food, everyday clothes, sometimes US-dollars, as well as pictures of family life and celebrations. Obtaining such western consumer goods and photographs had a powerful symbolic meaning: "Tangerines from Morocco in Christmas time or tinned peas, which were only available on rations and at special places – these goods had another meaning as they have now when you will find a broad selection of tinned peas in every shop as well as fifty different jeans labels. I got my first cord jeans from America. That really was something which you wouldn't find anywhere! There was a huge gap between what you really can buy and what you have got" (interview with a businessman). Consumer goods could be used as a means of identification, to express a protest attitude towards the Soviet regime. Social scientists even speak about an 'emigration' or escape from the Soviet regime into consumption (Merl 1997:296). The vision of a better, western lifestyle also was an important aspect of Lithuanian liberation discourse during the struggle for independence. In collective memory, Lithuania's independent past (1918-1939) was idealized, and reminiscences of freedom and wealth motivated reconstructing the continuity with 'former Lithuania' and suggested that its wealth easily could be regained, if only the country would get rid of Soviet rule. Accordingly, the change to free market society was linked to an expectation of realizing the dreams of unlimited access to western consumer goods (Hütten; Sterbling 1994:131).

After the end of socialism, people in Lithuania were confronted with goods and trends from all over the world. The country is currently undergoing one of the biggest economic growth rates in Europe, leading to active consumption, especially in areas as real estate property and on the car market. In order to represent one's social status through consumption, capital and cultural competences are required which only partly can be compared to those important in Soviet society. Activities and patterns of behaviour, which were regarded as morally and ethically unacceptable or even criminal according to socialist ideology, as for example involvement in private trade or an individualistic life and work style, suddenly appeared to be moral, acceptable and even guaranteeing a successful life in a free society. While getting access to the limited amount of consumer goods

made what was consumption in the Soviet era, money nowadays constitutes the most powerful factor, giving the freedom to buy and to choose. Correspondingly, individuals who are successful in private business today are the ones being 'better off' than the 'others' in comparison with and in opposition to 'us', that is, with regard to a large and mostly rural part of the Lithuanian population which has not yet found its place in a free market society. The opposition of 'we' and 'them', which during the Soviet era and in the first years of independence was oriented towards the outside of society and defined geographically (east/west), ideologically (socialism/capitalism) or nationally (Soviet/national), is now directed to the inside of society. Perceptions of 'otherness' changed, as did the feeling of social 'proximity' and 'distance', and a 'new wealth' and a 'new poverty' emerged. The gap has become larger between successful members of consumer society, for whom time is transformable to money and for whom space does not have any rigorous borders anymore, and those who, due to shortage of competences and resources, are bound to one particular place and excluded from the new possibilities of consumption. The social space between these two extremes is being filled up gradually, with new lifestyles and new social groups emerging, even though the two extreme positions still dominate.

Representing identity through consumption

Identity concepts of today's successful Lithuanians are often experienced as being new and different from those prevalent before. In the media and in public discourse, the new social differentiation is being described controversially. One example for this controversy is the public perception of the so called 'new rich' or 'new entrepreneurs', a group, which is in the centre of my research. On the one hand, business activities of these people are being regarded with suspicion and often labelled as illegal or immoral. On the other hand, the new entrepreneurs are recognized as the winners of the social modernisation process. "They are destroyers as well as builders. They take pieces of the past and they find them and recombine them into new structures, amazing capital and building new institutions. In the process they are themselves changed and they change the people around them" (Gustafson 1999:113).

Many members of this small but powerful social group of a "new kind of people very active in the post-socialist landscape", as Caroline Humphrey once noted (Humphrey 1995:44), seem really to live up to their image as the 'new elites', since they started their free market activities ten to fifteen years ago from scratch. One of my interviewees, the president of a big corporation, described the characteristic situation: "When I started my business, we had five employees. When somebody would have told me ten years ago, that our corporation would have 3.500 employees in 2005, I never would have believed it. But step by step we developed and this development seems to be absolutely normal. Now I would not be surprised when somebody would tell me that we might have 20.000 employees in the near future, and this even may come true in about four years". However, being a new entrepreneur does not just entail the accumulation of capital in a short time. It also means adopting to a permanent change by acquiring social and cultural competences needed for manoeuvring between east and west, past and present, in the context of a society, which permanently "struggles to come to terms with the clash between deeply ingrained moralities and the daily pressures, opportunities and inequalities posed by market penetration" (Mandel 2002:1; Humphrey 1995).

'New entrepreneurs' have access to all kinds of advantages and services offered by consumer society. As a daily life practice, their consumption appears in many cases to be less material, and it

is different from the ways the broad majority uses to consume. The so called ‘new elites’ do not go shopping, but rather pay other people to do the shopping. They buy services rather than goods, in case they are not buying abroad, travelling to exclusive spaces hardly accessible for others. Researching their consumption therefore can not restrict itself to the analysis of subject-object relationships: attention has to be paid to the specific context of this relationship (Miller 1998:185). The researcher’s attention has to focus on individual lifestyles as well as consumer identities, and she constantly has to place them in the context of consumer *society*. A movement which “in itself starts to open questions concerning power and inequality, individualism and identity, and social and economic stratification” (Edwards 2000:3). In the context of consumer *society*, consumption functions not just as an everyday practice, but as a societal orientation system (Siegrist/Kaelble/Kocka 1997:29), helping social actors to construct their identities and to position themselves in social hierarchies. That is why I regard consumption as an objectification of culture (Friedman 2002:234), using it as a prism which allows me to observe social and cultural redefinition processes.

Despite the ‘immateriality’ of the ‘elite consumption’ described above, public representations of elites still concentrate mostly on the material side of their lives and especially on the possession of certain prestige objects. The mass media often address the new elites as trend setters, and their lifestyles, consumption habits and other strategies of performing social status are regularly commented upon. For these and other reasons these social actors can be seen to embody a vision of wealth and success. This vision emerges as a result of discussions among different social actors. It is construed in the interplay of individual and collective imaginations of a ‘good life’, ‘success’, or ‘wealth’, and becomes publicly observable in the media. The description of the 1000 square metre house of one well known business millionaire in popular lifestyle magazine *Stilius* may serve as an example for this kind of media coverage: “Mr. Jason drives us with a Subaru land-rover to his garage. We enter the house through the garage, and instantly feel like entering a luxurious gallery! A bar, a dining room, a guest room with a fireplace, a grand piano and space for relaxation – everything on the same floor without any divisions and doors. The space is optically widened by huge curtainless windows, reaching almost from floor to ceiling, through which one admires the beautiful landscape. There are paintings by well-known Lithuanian artists on the walls, which Mr. Johns bought at charity performances organized by the W2W (woman to woman) club. Just to give you an example, for one of these paintings Mr. Jason paid twelve thousand Litass” (*Stilius* 2004).

Fragility of meaning

The communicative function of material goods seem to be extraordinary important in the Lithuanian context. They are used for negotiating and representing the social and cultural framework of a ‘new’ society. But even if identity concepts of the ‘new elites’ and their public representations are mostly perceived as radically different from those prevalent in Soviet times, the very moment of strong identification with material objects reminds of the Soviet ‘second society’ mentioned above, with its conspicuous desires and identifications. It is my hypothesis that particularly this kind of strong identification makes for one of the central differences between today’s consumer societies in Eastern and in Western Europe. The differences construed by means of consumption not only make “subtle distinctions” between lifestyles but rather mark significant social positions. Consumer goods are being regarded as a prolongation of the individual herself (Friedman 2002:242): They represent not secondary but fundamental life spheres, “time, space, distance,

communication, information, environment, peace and security – the central mental and cognitive areas of the everyday life” (Niedermüller 1999:61).

Fragility and heterogeneity of meanings as well as social roles distinguish identification by actual means of consumption from that in socialist times. Due to different orientations emerging during the years of transformation, the ideal of a western ‘better life’ which was dominant during the Soviet years now is being supplemented with alternatives and at least partly losing its importance. The process by which symbolic orientations and meanings are determined for new has just started a few years ago. This is why one can not be sure that certain strategies of consumption will have the expected social impact that the meanings attached to material goods and to the social position which manifests itself in these goods will not change. Caroline Humphrey gives a striking example of that fragility of social and cultural norms and values in her essay on the residences of ‘new Russians’, which function as a symbol of wealth and privacy. “But is privacy a bad or a good thing?”, Humphrey asks (1997:92), and her question seems to be more than relevant in the contradictory post-socialist context of Lithuania, situated between ‘old’ and ‘new’ social structures cultural values.

Conclusion

Analysing lifestyle and consumer identities in the course of transition from socialist to post-socialist consumer society allows to observe the formation of social groups and symbolic representations of social differences within the particular Lithuanian social context. A rapid social change and the fragility of social and cultural meanings have been described as particularly important aspects for anthropological research. By way of concluding, I would also like to point to the importance of sensitivity and reflexivity not only with regard to the specificity of a particular social context and the empirical findings in the field, but also with regard to professional expectations or ‘pre-imaginings’. According to Richard Fardon, regional and other factors inevitably influence the entry (in the broadest sense) of the ethnographer into the field, making it pre-imagined in terms of those circumstances under which the fieldwork will be carried out (Fardon 1990).

Speaking about Lithuania, it is important to bear in mind, that in western anthropological discourse this country does not yet exist as a separate entity (the only anthropological book addressing a particular Lithuanian social context was published last year), but rather is imagined as a small unspecific part of the post-socialist world. Accordingly, an anthropologist doing research on the Lithuanian context is tempted to generalize and to interpret all phenomena first and foremost in the framework of post-socialism, especially by searching for differences between east and west, capitalist and socialist or capitalist and post-socialist societies. I became aware of these disciplinary restraints during my fieldwork. I observed that socialism as a referential horizon and the differences between socialism and capitalism were not necessarily experienced as important for my informants as I had taken for granted in the beginning. First, I realized that there already exists a generation of people in Lithuania who did neither live an adult life nor did they begin their career in Soviet society, even if the biggest part of their life took place in a society, not identical with the classical western society model. Second, I understood that the degree of importance of the socialist past, of socialist experience and the awareness of living in the post-socialist present is varying according to social group and the phenomena in question. Consumption and lifestyle of ‘new entrepreneurs’ are globalized and future oriented. The same holds true for other spheres of their everyday life. For these reasons a combination of national, regional, post-socialist, global or other possi-

ble frameworks of explanation seem to be most reasonable for my research. Shifting explanatory frameworks can help to deconstruct pre-imaginings about post-socialist distinctions. In the case of my research, shifting perspective from the ingrained inside/outside (socialist/capitalist, post-socialist/capitalist) or past/present (socialist/post-socialist) differentiations towards the inside of society, clarified important principles of social differentiation *within* Lithuanian society: Powerful mechanisms of inclusions and exclusion, which would remain invisible when maintaining the general view described above.

The difference between possibilities and competences of acting and manoeuvring between socialist, post-socialist, national, European and other spaces marks a very important social distinction in Lithuania today: People who are excluded from power structures and from actual social developments experience socialism and post-socialism as the most important and only context of their identity. Shifting contexts and experiences and combining knowledge from all these experiential horizons is a competence characteristic for the powerful groups and needed for the achievement of high social status.

It thereby becomes clear, that for a further understanding of power structures, it is not enough to state principles of distinction, but also to relate the different social groups to each other. Exploring relations instead of differences is another important consequence, resulting from the deconstruction of pre-imagined borders of the post-socialist context. And even with regard to the historical dimensions of post-socialism I would like to plead for an anthropological perspective which does not restrict itself to the search for oppositions: between socialist and post-socialist consumer societies, or between the post-socialist and western societies today, but also regarding the points of reference and their relations to each other. The purpose of that perspective should be to demonstrate that one can not regard a transformation just as an abrupt, one-directional change from-to (from one strictly defined structural constellation to another), or as a collision of two societal models without any references to each other. Instead, it is more productive to analyze ways and strategies by which people establish bounds between societies in spite of political and structural barriers, and to investigate how they (re-)organize and adopt their social and cultural knowledge in the course of transformation searching for a place in a newly defined society.

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VARTOJIMAS IR KULTŪRINIAI SKIRTUMAI POSOCIALISTINĖJE LIETUVOJE. ANTROPOLOGINĖ PERSPEKTYVA

Asta Vonderau

Humboldto universitetas, Berlynas, Vokietija

Santrauka

Perėjimo prie rinkos ekonomikos laikotarpiu Lietuvos visuomenės politinės ir ekonominės struktūros pakito, kaip ir jos *simbolinė tvarka* (Kaneff 2002: 34). Daug žmonių prarado pinigines santaupas, socialinę padėtį, net kultūrinės kategorijas, būtinas orientavimuisi visuomenėje. Vykstant tokioms fundamentalioms transformacijoms, būtinybė persvarstyti naujas kultūros kategorijas tapo akivaizdi. Šio reformulavimo procese vartojimas ir plataus vartojimo prekės tapo svarbia priemone naujiems socialiniams skirtumams susidaryti ir jų simboliškai raiškai. Kokios „gero gyvenimo“, „turto“ ir „sėkmės“ vizijos bei įvaizdžiai egzistuoja šiandieninėje Lietuvoje? Kaip į vartojimą orientuoti elgsenos modeliai įgauna simbolinę reikšmę? Kaip kuriami identitetai ir kaip juos reprezentuoja vartojimo būdai ir objektai bei specifinis gyvenimo stilius? Šių klausimų tyrimas gali padėti geriau suprasti kultūrinių vertybių pervaldinimo ir diferenciacijos procesus konkrečiame Lietuvos socialiniame kontekste, o tokiam supratimui tapus atskaitos tašku galima daryti patikimas išvadas apie platesnius socialinius santykius ir vietines vizijas, susijusias su globaliniais pokyčiais.

Atsižvelgdama į savo rašomos daktaro disertacijos tikslus, norėčiau apsistoti ties klausimu, kaip kultūrinių kategorijų pervaldinimą, socialinius skirtumus ir reprezentavimo strategijas galima vertinti transformacijos iš socialistinės į kapitalistinę vartotojišką visuomenę kontekste. Mano argumentai grindžiami konkrečiu Lietuvos socialiniu kontekstu ir socialiniu „naujųjų verslininkų“ vaidmeniu jame.

Pasak Hannes Siegrist, vartojimas laikytinas vienu iš svarbiausių veiksnių istoriškai formuojantis vakarietiškam modernizmui tiek Vakarų, tiek Rytų Europoje (Siegrist 1997: 14). Vartotojiškos visuomenės socialistiniuose Rytuose ir kapitalistiniuose Vakaruose vystėsi kaip priešprieša viena kitai, tačiau abi pusės atitiko amerikietiškaį vartotojiškos visuomenės modelį. Vakarų šalys mieliai priėmė tokį modelį; socialistinės valstybės atsiribojo nuo jo ir propagavo alternatyvų vartotojiškos visuomenės modelį kaip socialinio teisingumo ir teismo pavyzdį. Socialistinėje visuomenėje dominavo kolektyvinio egalitarizmo ideologija, išpareigojanti aprūpinti tarybinius piliečius plataus vartojimo prekėmis, būtinomis kasdieniui buičiai, nepriklausomai nuo jų uždarbio ar socialinės padėties. Kaip žinia, šis ideologinis įvaizdis neatitiko socialinės realybės. Dauguma gyventojų socialistinėse šalyse nuolat patirdavo plataus vartojimo prekių stygių. Todėl perėjimas prie laisvosios

rinkos ekonomikos buvo siejamas su svajonės išsipildymo lūkesčiais – neriboto priėjimo prie vakarietiško plataus vartojimo prekių įgijimu (Hütten, Sterbling 1994: 131).

Socializmo epochos pabaigoje elgsenos atvejai ir modeliai, kurie socialistinės ideologijos požiūriu buvo morališkai ir etiškai nepriimtini ar netgi nusikalstamo pobūdžio, pavyzdžiui, užsiėmimas individualia veikla ar individualistinis gyvenimo ir darbo stilius, staiga virto moraliais, priimtinais ir netgi garantuojančiais sėkmę laisvosios rinkos visuomenėje. Atitinkamai tie, kurie sėkmingai vysto privatų verslą, šiandien yra „sėkmės kūdikių“, „kitokie“, lyginant ir priešpriešinant juos „mums“, t. y. didžiajai ir daugiausia kaime gyvenančių Lietuvos piliečių daliai, kuri kol kas nerado savo vietos laisvosios rinkos visuomenėje. „Mūsų“ ir „jų“ priešprieša, kuri tarybiniais metais ir nepriklausomybės laikotarpio pradžioje buvo orientuota į visuomenės išorę ir apibrėžiama geografijos (Rytai – Vakarai), ideologijos (socializmas – kapitalizmas) ar nacionalizmo (tarybinis – nacionalistinis) terminais, dabar nukrypo į visuomenės vidų. „Kitoniškumo“, kaip ir socialinio „artumo“ ar „atstumo“, sampratos pakito, atsirado „naujieji turtuoliai“ ir „naujieji varguoliai“.

Šiandieninių Lietuvos „sėkmės kūdikių“ identiteto koncepcija dažnai suvokiama kaip nauja ir besiskirianti nuo ankstesniosios. Masinės informacijos priemonės ir viešasis diskursas naująją socialinę diferenciaciją pateikia prieštaringai. Vienas iš tokio nesutarimo pavyzdžių yra viešosios nuomonės skirtumai dėl vadinamųjų „naujųjų turtuolių“, „naujųjų verslininkų“ visuomenės grupės, tapusios mano tyrimo objektu. Viena vertus, į šių žmonių verslą žvelgiama įtariai, prie jo klijuojamos „nelegalios“ ar „nemoralios“ veiklos etiketės. Antra vertus, naujieji verslininkai pripažįstami socialinio modernizacijos proceso nugalėtojais. Jiems lengvai prieinamos visos privilegijos ir paslaugos, kokias tik siūlo vartotojiška visuomenė. Masinės informacijos priemonės dažnai reklamuoja naująją elitą kaip mados diktatorių, o jų gyvenimo stilius, vartotojiški įpročiai ir kitos socialinės padėties realizavimo strategijos nuolat komentuojami. Dėl tokių priežasčių šie socialiniai veikėjai suvokiami kaip turto ir sėkmės vizijos įsikūnijimas. Tokia vizija išnyra kaip įvairių socialinių veikėjų diskusijų rezultatas. Ji konstruojama kaip individualaus ir kolektyvinio „gero gyvenimo“, „sėkmės“ ir „turto“ įvaidžių sąveikos rezultatas ir viešai pateikiama masinės informacijos priemonėse.

Norėčiau pabrėžti, kad analizuodama individualius gyvenimo stilius ir „naujųjų verslininkų“ vartotojišką identitetą, tyrėja nuolat turi žvelgti į juos vartotojiškos visuomenės kontekste. Tokiame kontekste vartojimas funkcionuoja ne tik kaip kasdienė praktika, bet ir kaip visuomeninės orientacijos sistema (Siegrist, Kaelble, Kocka 1997: 29), padedanti socialiniams veikėjams sukurti savuosius identitetus ir rasti savo vietą socialinėse hierarchijose. Štai kodėl vartojimą galima laikyti kultūros objektyvizacija (Friedman 2002: 234) ir panaudoti kaip prizmę, leidžiančią stebėti socialinės ir kultūrinės re-definicijos procesus.

Plataus vartojimo prekių komunikacinė funkcija lietuviškame kontekste atrodo ypač svarbi. Šios prekės vartojamos „naujosios visuomenės“ socialinei ir kultūrinei struktūrai aptarti ir reprezentuoti. Skirtumai, atsirandantys dėl vartojimo, ne tik sukuria „subtilius skirtumus“ tarp gyvenimo stilių, bet veikiau žymi reikšmingą socialinę padėtį. Jie reprezentuoja ne antrarūšes, bet fundamentaliąsias gyvenimo sritis: „laiką, erdvę, atstumą, komunikaciją, informaciją, aplinką, taiką ir saugumą – pagrindines kasdienio gyvenimo intelektualiąsias ir kognityvines sritis“ (Niedermüller 1999: 61).

Analizuodama socialinės ir kultūrinės re-definicijos procesus, norėčiau užtarti antropologinę perspektyvą, kuri neapsiriboja vien tik priešprieša tarp socialistinių ir posocialistinių vartotojiškų visuomenių arba tarp šiuolaikinės posocialistinės ir Vakarų visuomenės, bet taip pat atsižvelgia į atskaitos taškus ir jų tarpusavio santykius. Tokio požiūrio tikslas turėtų būti įrodymas, kad negali-

ma transformacijos laikyti staigia, vienos krypties permaina „nuo – prie“ (nuo vienos griežtai apibrėžtos struktūrinės sistemos prie kitos) arba dviejų visuomenės modelių kolizija be nuorodų į jų tarpusavio ryšius. Iš tikrųjų daug produktyviau analizuoti būdus ir strategijas, kuriais žmonės užmezga ryšius tarp visuomenių, nepaisant politinių ir struktūrinių barjerų, bei tirti, kaip jie (re)organizuoja ir pritaiko savo socialines ir kultūrinės žinias transformacijos procese, ieškodami savo vietos naujai apibrėžtoje visuomenėje.

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