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## Social Changes and «Points of no Return»: an Attempt to Conceptualize

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The modern world is characterized by fluidity, changeability, and unpredictability. In particular, social life is full of events that often inspire fear, affect and have unpredictable social effects. Almost every community faces such events: economic crises, political revolutions, environmental disasters, terrorist acts, and so on. Modern sociology pays much attention to the individual consequences and causes of such events, but in practice, a deep global change is remaining uncovered. The value of the presented work consists in an attempt to conceptualize the points of no return, in order to introduce the possibility of analyzing such driven events and to find the connection between the points of no return and value changes. As the main result of the study, the author's definition of the points of no return was deduced.

**Key words:** social changes, social dynamics, value changes, conceptualization, bifurcation points.

**Яшкіна Дар'я. Соціальні зміни та «точки неповернення»: спроба концептуалізації.** Сучасний світ характеризується плинністю, змінюваністю та непередбаченістю. Зокрема, соціальне життя насичене подіями, що часто вселяють страх, вражають і мають непередбачуваний соціальний ефект. Сучасна соціологія приділяє багато уваги окремим наслідкам та причинам таких подій, але практично в тіні залишаються глобальні глибинні зміни. У роботі здійснено спробу концептуалізації точок неповернення задля впровадження можливості аналізу сукупності таких наведених подій і пошуку зв'язку між точками неповернення та ціннісними змінами. Як результат дослідження, виведено авторську дефініцію точки неповернення.

**Ключові слова:** соціальні зміни, соціальна динаміка, ціннісні зміни, концептуалізація, точки біфуркації.

**Яшкіна Дар'я. Социальные изменения и «точки невозврата»: попытка концептуализации.** Современный мир характеризуется текучестью, изменчивостью и непредсказуемостью. В частности, социальная жизнь насыщена событиями, которые часто внушают страх, поражают и имеют непредсказуемый социальный эффект. Социология уделяет много внимания отдельным последствиям и причинам таких событий, но практически в тени остаются глобальные глубинные изменения. В работе представлена попытка концептуализации точек невозврата для внедрения возможности анализа совокупности таких приведенных событий и поиска связи между точками невозврата и ценностными изменениями; наводится авторская дефиниция точки невозврата.

**Ключевые слова:** социальные изменения, социальная динамика, ценностные изменения, концептуализация, точки бифуркации.

**The problem situation** is that sociology exploring a large number of phenomena that in one way or another affect the values of societies; the value problem among researchers is rather popular. But we see the absence of a macro level and the development of a concept that can explain or at least partly explain the similar impact of certain events on the society values. Valuable changes are usually fixed in a static way outside of attempts to systematically study causes, factors, and mechanisms, sometimes without a clear reference to specific conditions and the origins of these changes. One can state the general need to create a categorical apparatus that would fix and mark the influence of multilevel and multi-order events and processes on value orientations. However, modern sociology does not have a definition that would combine these events and processes in a single focus, through the prism of the above-mentioned influence.

Thus, **for the purpose of** this article, we see the attempt to conceptualize the notion of points of no return, which are pre-determined by us as multi-level events or processes that have an unpredictable rapid nature and influence the value orientations of social groups.

Social change is one of the most common and broad sociological concepts. Depending on the research paradigm under social change is the transition of a social object from one state to another (change as a change of states), a change in socio-economic formations, a significant modification in the social organization of society, its institutions and social structure, changes in established patterns of behavior, updating and an increase in the diversity of institutional norms. Such a variety of approaches indicate its significance, as the dynamics of social life is realized through social change. There are many typologies and researches for social changes.

In the context of the given work special attention is given to a meaningful typology proposed by the Polish sociologist P. Shtompka in his work «Sociology of Social Change». The main criterion for typology is the ratio of statics and dynamics in the theories of representatives of different approaches. This typology includes three basic ones approaches organic, systemic and dynamic concepts (Shtompka, 1996).

In the organic one the approaches of statics and dynamics are separated as separate fields and actually contradict each other (the brightest representatives O. Comte, G. Spencer, E. Durkheim). In the system approach, there is no hard contrast between statics and dynamics. However, the static acts as a primary in terms of dynamics. Representatives of this approach understand by social changes as what happens to the system itself (with the entire system as a whole) or within the system (with some of its constituents) (T. Parsons, N. Louman, Yu. Habermas, E. Guides). Dynamic concepts are the third approach, which is allocated by P. Shtompka who distinguishes between static and dynamic and static considered useless, do not research attention since social life is expressed exclusively in the dynamics, this approach does look like a history (field theory, A. Filippov (theory of events), K. Marx, C. Tilly, K. Polanyi, N. Elias). Of particular interest to us is in the context of this work the concept of sociocultural trauma by Polish researcher P. Shtompka. It can be attributed to the socio-historical approach (which can be distinguished from the dynamic approaches to P. Shtompka) in the study of social change, which was mentioned earlier. But it should be noted that the specifics of this concept is that with some success it can be attributed to linear theories, and to structural functionalism, to a system approach. This makes this theory more interesting for consideration and gives it more potential, but at the same time gives reason to question its authenticity. For of cultural trauma required: traumatic events (which play a key role in the context of this work) and responses that is «injury». «Injury» is represented as a process, and this process must develop dynamically. To describe and explain the logic of this process P. Shmompka uses the logic of the manifestation of social movements of N. Smelzer, to some extent by modifying it, he divides the sequence of traumatic process into six stages: environment favorable for occurrence, traumatic events or situations, interpretation and perception of traumatic events, traumatic symptoms, traumatic adaptation and overcoming injury. This work is devoted to the search for traumatic events that affect the value dynamics of society. We propose such events as «points of no return», and its appearance in the theoretical plane arises precisely from the concept of P. Shtompka.

Like traumatic events, «points of no return», from the author's position, have four main characteristics:

- temporariness (rapid and unexpected change);
- informative character (comprehensive, radical, deep);
- exogenous character (perceived as external, even if it is not);
- the character of perception (shocking, causing rejection).

The emphasis in the consideration of «points of no return» is made on the second, informative characteristic. When we talk about the influence of the point of noreturn, we are not just talking about the fact that it deeply affects different segments of social life. The point of noreturn concerns the value-normative system and provokes its change not only at the normative level and/or level of installations but also at the level of values, if the consideration is made at the level of culture, that is, at the macro level. If we describe the changes in mesoforms, then here we are talking about the value orientations of groups and communities in which there are changes. The point of noreturn can be considered only such an event, which leads to a change in the value system, value orientations.

The second distinction that differentiates a traumatic event from the point of noreturn is expressed in the following. According to the theory of P. Shtompka, the event is considered traumatic, even if it only injures potentially, but actually does not lead to injury. «Point of noreturn» is considered as such only if the expected

effect of it is confirmed, that is, leads to active value dynamics. In fact, the «point of no return» is a traumatic event that actually caused the trauma on a cultural level.

The next distinctive feature is the attitude to the effects of «points of noreturn»: if «traumatic events» are evaluated by the author of the concept as an exclusively negative phenomenon that can potentially produce a certain positive effect, but has a preferential negative color, then the «points of noreturn» cannot be evaluated in the negative or positive key. Undeniably, only the fact of their profound influence on social life remains.

P. Shtompka gives his examples: «revolution (successful or not), collapse of the market, stock market crisis; radical economic reform (nationalization, privatization, etc.); foreign occupation, colonial conquest; forced migration or deportation; genocide, extermination, massacres; acts of terrorism and violence; religious reformation, new religious prophecy; the murder of the president, the resignation of a senior official; disclosure of corruption, government scandal; the opening of secret archives and the truth about the past; revision of the heroic traditions of the nation; empire collapse, lost war» (Shtompka, 2001, p. 4).

Potentially, all of the above events can lead to changes in value-normative system and value orientations. However, the list is rather broad both in terms of exogenous/endogenous and widespread (colonial conquest encompasses a broader community than exposing corruption). It seems necessary for us to typologize such potential points of noreturn that appear to be traumatic events for P. Shtompka. At the same time, we consider it necessary to supplement the list. This does not contradict the logic of P. Shtompka, since he did not claim that the list is exhaustive, but, conversely, spoke about his incompleteness. We do see it necessary to add environmental disasters (eruptions of volcanoes, provoking forced migration, crash in factories, which lead to critical pollution of water and the like).

We assume that the points of no return can be divided into four general conditional categories: «points of no return» of ecological origin (ecological disasters, large-scale earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.), of economic origin (crises, crash exchanges, etc.), of political origin (revolution, reform and other); Separately, we distinguish terrorist acts. We see the phenomenon, as the migration crisis in Europe, as a consequence of the points of noreturn that have occurred in the Middle East and in African countries.

It should be noted that in many respects the extent of the impact of «traumatic events» depends on the prevalence and publicity of the media, the same applies, respectively, to «points of no return», but while P. Shtompka did not include media coverage as a compulsory description of a «traumatic event», then “points of no return” do include it. Also we note that the value sphere is extremely inert, so the concept of «cultural lag», which is often mentioned in the concept of trauma, remains relevant.

Thus, we tried to elucidate the concept of «traumatic event» and «points of noreturn», which we present in table 1.

Table 1

#### Comparison of «Traumatic Events» and «Points of Noreturn»

Traumatic Events	Points of Noreturn
4 main characteristics	4 main features with emphasis on compulsory touch value-normative systems + illumination in the media
Potentially has injured	Really small influence on the value-normative system
Events from above given below the list of P. Shtompka	Events from above given below the list of P. Shtompka + “ecological disaster”
Has a negative color	May have both a negative and a positive color

The focus of attention on the research problem immediately encounters another metaphor, which is the expression «point of no return». In everyday discourse, under the «point of no return» we mean a critical boundary, a limit, passing through which there is no return path and can not be returned to the original state. The phraseology originates from an aviation term, which means a point after which the aircraft will not have enough

fuel to return to the base of the flight. For the metaphorical transfer of this concept to the sphere of social, we obtain the following definition, which does not claim to be comprehensive but gives an idea of the subject under study in this work.

*Point of no return* – *swift, fast, unexpected, radical, rejecting events or complexes of events that are perceived as exogenous to the group/society where they occur, which result in irreversible changes in the value orientations of the group/community or the value-normative environment in within a certain culture.*

It is worth noting that «breakthrough moments» in social sciences are studied long and widely; as a result, there are already several metaphorical concepts that are somewhat similar to «points of no return», for example, «bifurcation points» and «singularity». To avoid borrowing and confusion, consider these two concepts and divide them with «points of noreturn».

«Bifurcation points» – a concept borrowed from thermodynamics, which indicates the state of uncertainty of the system; the release from this state will be either in the form of chaos, or the transformation of the system to a new level (Bevzenko, 2006). In political science, this term has become a fragmentation of the political system as such. In social sciences, the bifurcation points are more often used in theories of synergetics, which point to the nonlinearity of social change, but again they say the formation, rebirth or reorganization of the whole system is alternatively chaos (Music, 2011).

The term «singularity» came into the social science from mathematics and denotes the point in which the object can not regulate its behavior. In the social sciences, «digitalness» has already fallen to the point: «the phenomenon in which the number of crises becomes infinite, and the intervals between them are directed to zero» (Struk, 2011), which refers to the boundaries of an innovative society. In Ukrainian sociology, the term «singularity» is most actively used by S. Makeyev. He says that the state of singularity (which he considers on the example of Ukraine after the events of the winter of 2013–2014) is a set of elements such as the economic crisis, the state of emergency in culture, the state of exclusion in politics. This state provokes the animation of a social structure (the author cites, for example, such phenomena as liminality, social folds, the formation of «eventful solidarity»), new social inequalities and so on (Makeyev and other, 2017). In the framework of this work, such an interpretation is interesting, but it is more about the consequences of such a state that the state as a consequence of the event, and focuses solely on the perception of such a state by the population.

Thus, we see that the bifurcation points are the points of the radical fracture, in which the system ceases to be a system with different variants of the subsequent process (or self-destruction and chaos, or reorganization). Points of singularity are points of crisis saturation. These concepts have different levels of application. The point of bifurcation is an attempt to describe the reality of complicated terminology and conceptual apparatus. Then the point of singularity does not apply to reality as such; it characterizes the perception of reality, and in fact, it simply is a statement that at some point we lose the ability to explain reality, since the processes in it are irregular, and the crises are infinite. Thus, we see that the concepts represented differ in content from the «points of no return», despite its metaphorical similarity. Already having a general idea of what is meant by «points of no return», we give a few examples which would confirm, on the one hand, the right to existence of the concept as such, on the other hand, would help to rearrange its typology, which we mentioned earlier.

Potential «points of no return» are in our case such events that are suitable for the above parameters. We highlight the «points of no return» of the ecological, political, economic character, as well as terrorist attacks, migration. Let's consider each of them more.

«Points of no return» of economic origin in a capitalist society seem to be the most common, and at the same time leave the deepest imprint. The brightest and most familiar events that could be called the points of no return for the whole capitalist world is the world economic crisis (for example, the crisis of 2008 and its second wave of 2012) (Impact of the economic crisis on social, economic and territorial cohesion of the European Union, 2014). The impact of the crisis has been described by many researchers for a long time, and it is not just about economic welfare of the population, but about social conditions, value changes, demographics and a multitude of various social processes occurring all over the world and have their own specificity not only in each region but in each country, in every society. So, the impact of the crisis, which began mainly in the United States and Europe, is described for the countries of Africa (The EU, the Global Financial Crisis and its Impact on Democracy Building in Africa, 2010) for China (Haan, 2010), India (Kumar, 2009) and so on. The economic «point of no return», also well-known throughout the world, but which is largely local in nature, is the Greek economic crisis of 2010 (The Greek crisis: social impact and policy responses, 2013). It is also the Irish crisis triggered by the

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global crisis (Whelan, 2016). In general, under the influence of the global crisis, everyone, without exception, fell into danger, and this event has become, probably, a point of no return for many, but the consequences of this point for each community have their own peculiarities.

«Points of no return» of *political origin* are different kinds of revolutions, rallies, unexpected political decisions, radical changes in legislation, and so on. The most resonant in the political arena of Europe at the moment is the so-called «Brexit» – the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union. This phenomenon is considered by researchers as having an impact not only on the social environment of Great Britain but also on the state of the European Union and the mood of the inhabitants of the countries of the Union (Kimberly, 2016). As a potential «point of no return» can also be considered a different kind of revolution, coups, color revolutions, large-scale rallies. Thus, the potential «local points of noreturn» include the revolution in Moldova in 2009, also called the twitter-revolution, because the mobilization of the masses was carried out mainly through social networks, in particular, «Twitter» (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2009); «Revolution of Roses» in Georgia, which had more resonance and consequences than the previous one (Tsikhelashvilix, 2011). In Ukraine, the Orange Revolution and events of 2014 can be attributed to such points as they are consistent with all of our proposed parameters for defining points of no return. A similar «point» can be the Catalan conflict in Spain (E cooperación, 2011). Astonishing for most of the world, the election of D. Trump by the US president also shocked the world – and may also be called a «point of no return». The «points of no return» for the countries of the European Union and for the European Union itself may be waived by the policy of the Union. Examples of such refusals are the positions of Poland and Hungary on the migration policy of the European Union, namely the protest against the migration quotas introduced in 2005 (Kuceva, 2016).

«Points of no return» of *ecological origin*. Such points can be of several types: the provoked by man and his activities (plant accidents, garbage discharge into rivers, lakes, space, etc.) or natural (volcanic eruptions, split glaciers, earthquakes, etc.). In the first case, the most famous such events are the Chernobyl accident of 1986, the echoes of which are still present both in the post-Soviet space and in the western countries, as well as the accident in Fukushima (Japan) in 2011, which has affected the whole East. The local «point of no-return» of this nature can be considered an accident at an aluminum plant in Hungary in 2010 or a dioxin catastrophe in Seveso (Italy) in 1976 – as a result of an accident at a chemical plant in Italy, which also affected the lives of all Italians, and water pollution in China in 2008 (Alok, 2018). The second type of «points of non-return» of environmental origin can be attributed to the eruption of the Sicilian Etna volcano in 2002, after which Italy suffered significant losses in the agricultural sector. The activation of the Icelandic volcano, Eyyafyadlajokudl, in 2010 triggered the closure of airspace over virtually the whole of Europe, which resulted in significant damage. The Indonesian Merapi volcano in the same year took around 400 lives and made about 400,000 people displaced. An earthquake in the Republic of Haiti took hundreds of thousands of lives in 2010 and left about one million homeless.

Separately, we propose to consider events such as terrorist acts. Moreover, terrorist acts can become «Points of no return», mainly when it comes to a series of terrorist acts occurring in a short period of time, such as a series of terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. If we talk about terrorist acts, then the biggest one is the 2001 World Trade Center building in the United States. There are also grounds for recognizing «Points of no return» for 4 train trains in Madrid in 2004, a series of bombings in public transport in London in 2005, a series of terrorist attacks in Paris and its suburbs in 2015.

We find such a phenomenon, like the migration crisis in Europe, as a consequence of the points of no return that have occurred in the Middle East and in African countries. Thus, the problem of migration is acutely on the agenda of virtually every European country (Boswell, 2000). The starting point here is the adoption of quotas of migrants to the EU, but for each state, the migrant influx was a separate cornerstone (Migration and refugee crisis, 2013).

Thus, we see the entire breadth and variety of potential «points of no return». However, every such point should be checked: whether it really affected the value orientations and can be considered a «point of no return». The question arises of how the value orientations of societies change under the influence of these «points of no return».

We believe that such points of no return should introduce a tendency towards the shift of values towards conservatism: preservation, conformance, and security – according to the value model of Schwartz. The argument in favor of such an assumption can be the expression of Ye. Golovakha: «Not finding in the society not only new effective democratic values, but even valid elementary laws, mass consciousness refers to the

traditionalist value basis of regulation of social relations» (Golovakha, 2006, p. 42). Here we are talking about the fact that such events, which we call the points of non-return, deprive people of confidence. Terrorism leaves people confident in current legislation and its effectiveness, migratory crises deprive people of confidence in the absolute value of democracy, and people are forced to seek «protection» in traditionalist values.

Our next hypothesis is the assumption that the susceptibility points of no return depends on the generation. The generations that are socialized in the permanent instability are less vulnerable to «non-returns» than the generation that was socialized in periods with a small number points of no return for this period of time. On the other hand, if we say that the points of no return can be different in scope and degree of influence, then we can also say that for groups that have experienced the points of non-return of one scale, the points of no return of a smaller scale will be perceived so sharply.

Hence the following hypothesis, which concerns the longer the time segment, and the territorial location and regional features of the societies and communities in which there were points of no return. That is, the perception of the point of no return on the territory of the former USSR (with their past experience) and the same scale of the points of no return, but already in the territories of Western Europe, will be significantly different.

**Consequently**, we see that the definition we have derived is quite complex and, despite the arguments, is a very controversial entity. But this definition, in our opinion, provides opportunities for analyzing the indicated events in the value cut.

Since such an attempt to conceptualize has predominantly a test nature, the argumentation and logic of its construction can cause many questions before we begin to find out directly the presence or absence of value dynamics under the influence of this construct, we see the need for clarification and correction of the derived definition. Only then it will be logical to continue to study its impact on values and value orientations. Consequently, further work will be aimed at clarifying the proposed definition and studying the impact of its content on values and value orientations.

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