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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN VALUES ON YOUTH MINDSETS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract. This study was motivated by evolving perspectives in historical and anthropological discourse, which emphasize the importance of understanding collective mentalities for interpreting social transformations and assessing the feasibility of reforms. The research hypothesis postulated that the dominant principles and values in a society significantly influence individual behaviors and attitudes, especially among young people. The main objective of the research was to analyze the role of European values in shaping the mentality of young people in the Republic of Moldova. To achieve this, the research explored how values underlie behavioral norms and influence social cohesion, highlighted the main manifestations of the modern crisis of cultural values, including in Moldovan society, and outlined the specifics of two types of mentalities among Moldovan youth: the flexible-autonomous and the rigid-collectivist mentalities. The main findings indicated that certain fundamental values have a strong impact on young people's attitudes and that shared values promote greater cultural understanding and social solidarity. The study concluded that identifying and promoting common values is crucial for supporting social cohesion and guiding effective social reforms and highlighted the importance of interconnecting fundamental values with national and European values to develop a sense of belonging to European culture and civilization.

Keywords: *attitude, behavior, crisis, education, mentality, social integration, social representations, value system.*

Rezumat. Acest studiu a fost motivat de perspectivele în evoluție din discursul istoric și antropologic, care subliniază importanța înțelegerii mentalităților colective pentru interpretarea transformărilor sociale și evaluarea fezabilității reformelor. Ipoteza cercetării postula că principiile și valorile dominante dintr-o societate influențează semnificativ comportamentele și atitudinile individuale, în special în rândul tinerilor. Obiectivul principal al cercetării a fost analiza rolului valorilor europene în modelarea mentalității tinerilor din Republica Moldova. Pentru a realiza acest demers, cercetarea a explorat modul în care valorile stau la baza normelor comportamentale și influențează coeziunea socială, a subliniat care sunt principalele manifestări ale crizei moderne a valorilor culturale, inclusiv în societatea moldovenească, și a conturat specificul a două tipuri de mentalități în rândul

tinerilor moldoveni: mentalitatea flexibil-autonomă și cea rigid-colectivistă. Principalele constatări au indicat faptul că anumite valori fundamentale au un impact puternic asupra atitudinilor tinerilor și că valorile comune promovează o mai mare înțelegere culturală și solidaritate socială. Studiul a concluzionat că identificarea și promovarea valorilor comune sunt cruciale pentru susținerea coeziunii sociale și ghidarea reformelor sociale eficiente și a subliniat importanța interconectării valorilor fundamentale cu valorile naționale și cele europene pentru a dezvolta un sentiment de apartenență la cultura și civilizația europeană.

Cuvinte-cheie: *atitudine, comportament, criză, educație, mentalitate, integrare socială, reprezentări sociale, sistem de valori.*

1. Introduction

The contemporary era represents a pivotal moment in history, characterized by a transformation in human thought as it moves beyond regional and national identities toward a more global consciousness. This shift is driven by two primary factors. The first is the diminishing influence of religious, political, and social beliefs that have historically shaped the foundations of our civilization. The second is the creation of completely new conditions of existence and thinking, generated by the accelerated evolution of the information society and, more recently, of the knowledge-based one. The contemporary era is characterized by a transitional phase, as the enduring influence of past ideas continues to shape the present, while the concepts destined to replace them are gradually taking shape and consolidating. At present it is not easy to predict the feasibility of this complex and contradictory process of spiritual maturation of humanity, which may result, one day, by replacing the oscillating state of contemporary man, with the certainty of identifying a state of self-balance and with the whole Universe. Although the fundamental principles upon which future societies will be constructed remain uncertain, we can confidently assert that their organization will be grounded in a "new" form of authority—the sovereign of the modern age: the power of the collective mentality. This assertion emphasizes the growing influence of shared beliefs, cultural norms, value systems, social consensus, and collective consciousness in shaping societal structures. This perspective suggests that as technology advances, especially in communication and information dissemination, societal influence increasingly stems from collective mentalities rather than top-down authority. Social media, mass media, and digital networks enable ideas, values, and narratives to circulate rapidly and widely, effectively creating a new form of sovereignty rooted in the collective mind.

Thus, in the following, we aim to highlight the importance of researching collective mentalities [1,2] as an essential step in awareness and understanding of the contemporary world [3,4], whose profound transformations depend on changes in the existing value system [5], the attitude of contemporary man towards these values [6,7], as well as the need to focus on the following questions: what do we have today a crisis of values [8] or a crisis situation that can be overcome by appealing to values; why in a given society, at a given historical moment, some principles and values influence more strongly than others, as shown by the content of norms and value criteria that guide people's daily behavior and what is the impact of education in cultivating a stable value system and favorable to the formation of responsible prosocial behaviors [9]. For these reasons, we consider it essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the role of general human values and European values [10], in particular, in shaping the mentality of young people in Moldova, given that values are the "hard core of mentalities" and identifying common values promotes a better understanding

of the cultural differences between us and others and increasing the degree of social solidarity, both nationally and globally.

2. Mentality-social representations-values

The most recent perspectives in the field of historical and anthropological discourse refer to the promotion of an innovative image of the past, but also to the realization of predictions regarding the degree of feasibility of social reforms, given the ways in which people perceive the world around them, themselves, others, as well as the system of values according to which they model their attitudes, behaviors and reactions, in other words, the mental paradigm specific to a certain historical time. The complex and heterogeneous nature of mentalities involves a wide variety of value judgments, behaviors, representations, attitudes depending on their age, origin and duration, which makes the concept of mentality difficult to be defined and explained, regardless of the accuracy of words used by historians engaged in the effort to highlight the substance of mentalities. Some of them, being affected by the lack of precision and inadequacies of the concept, gave up "mentalities" as an outdated term, and preferred alternative terminology established by other human sciences, such as "*imaginary*", "*representations of the imaginary*", "*History of representations*". The *imaginary* is a closely related to concept to the mentality, but they are not identical in meaning.

By their very nature, the *imaginary* and the *mentality* are objects of interest of several disciplines, whether it is: History of religions, History of arts and literatures, History of sciences and mentalities or Historical Anthropology, Psychology or Sociology, etc. "They all share their vast domain of the imaginary, discouraging any attempt at decolonization" [11, p. 11]. The multidisciplinary nature of approaches to the phenomenon of mentality (*imaginary*) is demonstrated by dissolving the boundaries of knowledge, as a result of awareness of the need for interdisciplinary "partnerships" initiated by researchers from various countries, among which, a place of honor is occupied by those from France. The French historian, Georges Duby, mentions that "a society is explained not only by its economic foundations, but also by the representations it makes about itself". In this order of ideas, the historian proposes to carry out a study of cultural models, of the *value system* in a community or society, in order to understand how people's vision of reality, about social, evolves. We can say more about a people, says G. Duby, if we make a rigorous analysis of people's and groups' attitudes towards marriage, family, towards maintaining and dissolving it, towards children and childhood, towards work and education, etc. The collective mind has on the surface transient emotions, towards depths, more stable mental structures, and in depth, the most resistant to change frames. Thus, the mentality is a system of "images and representations, arranged differently according to various groups or layers that make up the social formation" [12, p. 234], which governs people's behavior.

The same vision is shared by the Romanian historian, Al. Duțu, who claims that the history of mentalities cannot be made without strongly linking it to the history of cultural systems, systems of beliefs, values, mental equipment where they were developed, lived and evolved [13, p. 12]. Advocating, including, for a history of culture, the author emphasizes that talking about mentality means talking about behaviors, attitudes, visions, values that differ from one place to another, from one culture to another. In turn, Al. F. Platon systematizes the following features of mentalities: collective, extremely stable, irreducible and hierarchical. At the same time, the author claims that mentalities are manifested in and through a series of permanent frames (the "cosmological" framework, the religious phenomena and behaviors,

the morals, the categories of social life, the sacred and the profane, the *values* and hierarchies, the identity and the otherness.), regardless of time and space, of all social categories, their only variable being that of content, marked by the imprint of the era. Emerging from this, the above-mentioned historians find that each social group, "fabricated", images exalting its historical role and position in global society, "probed" its past and projected its future, expressed its aspirations, specific ideals, in other words, was defined through these representations [14, p. 65].

Thus, in a general sense, mentality means the set of mental structures and ways of thinking of a community, which includes valuable orientations, predispositions and other latent, common cultural patterns [15, p. 67], which have in their content ideas, *values*, behavioral schemes, social representations and ways of being, "diffuse latencies" that express the soul realities of a people [16, p. 6]. In a narrow sense, the term designates the set of intellectual and moral orientations, cognitive and affective, specific to a community, the mentality being expressed through opinions, attitudes, **value criteria**, beliefs, habits and specific representations. In multiethnic communities, the individual comes into contact with various cultures that are foreign to him, encountering certain difficulties in the process of establishing interpersonal relationships and social integration. This is due to the fact that the way of interethnic relations is developed is influenced by several factors, such as: the purpose, *the value systems* of the involved actors, the context in which the interactions take place, etc. Decisive for initiating such relationships are the cognitive patterns, the beliefs that underlie the development of the system of expectations towards the other, a generalized "Alter", respectively ethnic stereotypes and *social representations*. Representations refer to a common repository of social knowledge and information, which people share in the form of "theories" of common sense and, starting from them, build social reality. Social representations allow social actors to acquire certain knowledge and integrate it into a consistent framework with their cognitive functioning and the *values* to which they adhere. Social representations also play an important role in defining personal and group identity, compatible with the system of socially and historically determined norms and *values*. Thus, representations allow individuals or groups to situate themselves in the social field, to express themselves and to act in relation to others. By knowing and understanding the main representations of our fellow human beings, of those sets of images, myths and symbols, which define their relationship to reality, we are generally more willing to accept and tolerate the differences that separate us. Consequently, the research of the imaginary, as a dynamic factor of the collective mentality, can lead to a better understanding of cultural differences, to the identification of common *values*, but also to the increase of the degree of social solidarity.

Our values and beliefs reflect our identity, tell us who we are, what we want and what we believe that we can be or do, and especially what we can become if we choose to explore our potential. The analysis of the existential dimension of the world of values requires the consideration of the possibilities of classifying the values, according to certain criteria in a contemporary extension. The traditional classification took into account, in particular, the *values of culture*, divided into material values and spiritual values. *Material values* serve as a means of satisfying human needs, they being objects of the external world. The origin of material values or material goods lies in nature and labor. *Spiritual values* are distinguished by their immateriality and by their absolute or unconditional validity. Spiritual values are: *theoretical or knowledge values*, grouped under the category of *truth*, *ethical values*, grouped under the category of *moral good*, having an imperative character, *aesthetic values*, grouped

under the category of *beauty* and religious values, grouped under the category of *sacred*. The French philosopher L. Lavelle classifies values into three groups: 1. *economic and emotional values*, which ensure the existential existence of man in the world; 2. *intellectual and aesthetic values*, which reflect man's attitude towards the world; 3. *moral and religious values*, which express the rise of man above the world people [17, p. 123]. In his turn, highlighting eight types of values, among which: economic, vital, legal, political, theoretical, aesthetic, moral and religious, T. Vianu delimits them into values-purpose and values-means. This delimitation is very current especially in the context of the crisis of modernity which is characterized by the reversal of the natural relationship between means and ends. The values-means acquired supremacy, which determined the subordination of the spiritual values to the material ones.

Therefore, even if there are different classifications that separate the values by groups according to certain criteria, the values cannot be separated from each other in the context of social interaction. Value takes refuge among other values, it is supported by others, so that a person who participates, according to his own capacity and in the context of some circumstances, in the realization of a value, participates at the same time in the realization of all. In other words, the hierarchy of values is complex, being the result of a long historical process in which authentic values are always placed in the same system as non-values. An absolute hierarchy of values is for man only an ideal, which a noble conscience must constantly pursue. Hence the need to cultivate critical thinking so that the individual can select authentic values from this offer and distinguish them from non-values [18, p. 160]. In essence, values are both foundational and adaptable, guiding societal norms and individual behaviors but generally evolving through subtle shifts rather than sudden, revolutionary changes. This dynamic process allows societies to adapt gradually to new circumstances while maintaining a core set of guiding principles.

3. Crisis and values or the crisis of (European) values

Humanity has been created and survives because of values and for these values to become the element of social cohesion globally. Each historical stage represents, in relation to its needs, a hierarchical table of values that constitutes a guide and a stimulus of the creative activity of man. General human values go hand in hand with human rights, because they establish a framework of minimum requirements to create and strengthen resilient social structures in which people are treated with dignity. Values (economic, aesthetic, social ones) are the filter of normative and attitudinal information and, once changed, there is a change of mentalities, desires, aspirations and habits. At the same time, a system of values cannot undergo a radical and definitive change, but only a "rearrangement of the constitutive values", of the "dominant" values [19, p. 18]. Values serve as a filtering mechanism through which normative (what ought to be) and attitudinal (how one feels or behaves) information is processed. When these values shift, they can lead to transformations in mentalities, desires, aspirations, and habits, effectively altering how individuals and societies think and act.

However, many of us have the impression that we live in a time of crisis, especially in the contemporary period, when the topicality and relevance of the principles and values that make up the object of ethics are subject to doubt. Good and evil, virtue and vice, right and duty, finally all the ideas that were thought necessary, unchangeable, are called to show their titles before the experience [...]. It seems that humanity is not guided only by an idea, by a light; every epoch, every evening, it extinguishes the light it used, [20, p. 123]. Gh. Bunescu, in turn, is convinced that we can no longer interpret the world as a "perfect harmony nor as

an ocean of order with (only) islands of disorder, but as an ocean of disorder in which the islands of order appear through the knowledge effort and human creation” [21, p. 112]. The current crisis is fundamentally rooted in a decline of the moral model [22, p. 185], which has been exacerbated by industrialization. This ongoing process has deepened various crises across multiple domains, including moral, cultural, and spiritual values, as well as critical areas such as the environment, resource sustainability, health, food security, and education. According to Borza, Popa and Osoian [23, p. 46], this multifaceted deterioration underscores the interconnected nature of societal challenges stemming from a waning moral framework amid rapid industrial development.

Research in the field highlights the systemic and continuous nature of the crisis of cultural values of the XXI century, whose main manifestations [24, p. 25-26], which emerge from each other, are:

1. *Diminishing the appreciation of the role of classical art and culture in the system of formation and education of the society and maximizing the impact of low-quality mass culture*; Today we are witnessing a real digital revolution and a remarkable information explosion in which we are caught disoriented, without well-defined criteria to guide us in trying to distinguish the truth from falsity, persuasion from manipulation, authenticity from counterfeiting and good from evil. As a consequence, Th. Adorno observes an adaptation of art to the consumer society. As a result, art degrades, becoming a consumer good, loses its *raison d'être* and integrates into the world of cultural industry [25, p. 305]. Thus, young people, as a generation characterized by a high degree of use and increased familiarity with communication, media and digital technologies, are the main target of the massive media bombardment (movies, videos, certain genres of music, social networking sites, etc.), being difficult for them not to fall prey to the assimilation of non-values or deviant behaviors. This constant bombardment can lead to a loss of moral and cultural landmarks, leaving individuals as "objects of manipulation" and exposed to "anti-models" that exacerbate a crisis of values within society. Consequently, many young people may struggle to recognize their own identity, comprehend the vast flow of information they receive, or establish meaningful boundaries and understanding. This situation underscores the importance of fostering critical media literacy and promoting values that help guide young individuals through the complex digital landscape.

2. *The pervasive influence of consumerism—a lifestyle centered on the superficial accumulation of goods –on individual identity and society at large*". Today, consumerism, also known as economic materialism, is a force that undermines personal uniqueness and promotes superficial values. This perspective contrasts consumerism with the ideals of a healthy, simple lifestyle championed by anti-consumerist viewpoints, which emphasize minimalism and authentic living [26, p. 172-173]. In 1955, economist Victor Lebow stated that: "Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns" [27, p. 3]. In other words, Lebow articulates how modern economies have transformed consumption into a central life ritual, equating social status and acceptance with purchasing patterns. He suggests that in contemporary society, the pursuit of material goods fulfills spiritual and ego-driven needs, positioning consumption as a key measure of worth.

Similarly, writer Jeff Gates underscores the global expansion of consumerism, where economic interests drive a relentless race for profit across borders. He warns that financial values have increasingly replaced traditional ethical, religious, and community-based values, emphasizing the dominance of material pursuits over moral considerations. Overall, he critiques consumerism for fostering superficiality, diminishing individuality, and prioritizing material wealth over deeper societal and personal values.

3. *The depreciation of the general-human values in relation to the economic ones;* The models of ethics and behavior that society offers to young people today are poor and lacking in depth (superficiality, easy glory, gain without work, overnight enrichment, violence, etc.), and some politicians or business people, many of whom are leaders of opinion, show indifference, apathy, breach of promise, lack of respect for human dignity, attitudes that lead to intensification of antisocial behavior: lying, blackmail, violence, discrimination, corruption, tax evasion, crime in any form, which violates freedom, human health and life, all in the name of the over-accumulation of economic goods. In contemporary society, economic values are of particular importance because they are transferred in monetary value. Money has come to act as an equivalent of other human values, and people have come to believe that with the help of money they can procure other values. Thus, the ideology of the consumer society gradually inspires people with a simple and easily assimilable idea: everything is sold and everything is bought.

4. *The decrease of the general formation level of the society and of the personal intellect.* In mass culture, Adorno states that we can meet that curious man, presenting a nihilistic character: "everything he cannot recognize, subsumes: he verifies; everything he cannot assimilate as such, he rejects as stupidity, ideology, wrong subjectivity; what he knows and what has been identified thereby becomes worthless, mere repetition". In addition, in some countries, university diplomas are in many cases just a screen behind which hides the unprofessionalism of recent graduates, which the labor market absorbs according to completely different criteria than those strictly valuable. Instead of focusing on the advancement of knowledge and the holistic development of students, educational institutions appear to prioritize cultivating skills that will serve economic competitiveness, potentially at the expense of deeper intellectual growth

5. *The degradation of interpersonal relations* as a result of the establishment of a fierce competition of enrichment, devoid of any principle and norm of regulation, dominated only by the cult of greed and illicit material enrichment, and having as main rule of the game: whoever owns more has control. This competitive environment replaces trust and cooperation with selfishness and exploitation. Within such a context, professional integrity diminishes as unethical practices like corruption, influence peddling, blackmail, nepotism (*cumătrism*), and careerism become normalized and accepted. These phenomena undermine the principles of meritocracy, which emphasize competence and fairness, leading to a distorted and unjust professional landscape where power and possession overshadow merit and ethical conduct. In these conditions, we are currently witnessing the legitimization in the professional field of phenomena such as: corruption, influence peddling, blackmail, *cumătrism* and careerism, which exclude from the beginning the observance and application of the principle of meritocracy.

6. *Depreciation of the concepts: "honor", "shame", "dignity", "gratitude" "politeness", "generosity".* The depreciation of these virtues signifies a shift away from a society grounded in moral consciousness and respectful interpersonal relations towards one where shamelessness and unrestrained behavior dominate. In this sense, Andrei Pleșu expresses his conviction that: "today's entanglement of local realities has an irritating obscene dimension, a close affinity with the psychology of shamelessness: shamelessness in politics, shamelessness in journalism, shamelessness in morals, in public behavior, in speech, in the way of (not) thinking. [...]. It is about a nonchalance without criteria of aggressive exhibitionism, a generalized suspension of values and good manners. It is about the dissolution of shyness, of scruples, of any inner censorship. The result is a landscape that is both hilarious and dramatic" [28, p. 5]. His analysis suggests that contemporary society is experiencing a depreciation - or devaluation - of these core virtues, leading to a cultural landscape marked by shamelessness and a loss of moral restraint. The humor arises from the absurdity of shameless behaviors, while the drama reflects the potential moral and social crises stemming from the loss of these foundational virtues. Pleșu's perspective warns of the dangers inherent in this cultural transformation, emphasizing the importance of restoring these values to maintain social cohesion and moral integrity.

7. *The degradation of family values and, as a result, the destruction of the family institution* accompanied by the *reduction of the responsibility* of one or both parents towards the children or the elderly parents' fate, potentially resulting in neglect, reduced support, and diminished social cohesion within families. In families where quarrels have become more frequent, accompanied by both verbal and physical aggression, children often grow up with the feeling that they are the cause of these conflicts, which affects their self-confidence, self-esteem and future self-image. In addition, due to the lack of material resources, most families found themselves with either one or both parents working abroad to meet their children's needs. Thus, family education - the value pillar in the preparation of future members of the community - was replaced by the sums of money sent by parents, which led in time to the formation in the consciousness of young people, the belief that taking possession of goods without making the necessary efforts represents a value. Such trends can have significant social implications, including increased vulnerability of children and the elderly, weakened community bonds, and broader societal instability. Addressing this issue typically involves promoting family-oriented values, strengthening social support systems, and encouraging responsible parenthood and eldercare.

8. *The egocentric vision of man in his relationship with nature, and the destruction of the biosphere and the increased risk of global ecological catastrophe*, as a consequence of the industrial revolutions that began around 1760, as a result of the invention of the steam engine. The second revolution occurred about a decade later, being characterized by mass production in new industries such as steel, oil industry and key inventions that radically changed human life such as: light bulb, telephone and internal combustion engine. Subsequently, the invention of semiconductors, PCs and the Internet marked the third industrial revolution that began in the 1960s. In this regard, Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economic Trends and adviser to the European Union, emphasizes in his book *The Third Industrial Revolution*, the seriousness of the consequences of human activity on the environment, calling us "the fossil fuels people" because "we grow our food in petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides. Most of our construction materials - cement, plastics and so on - are made of fossil fuels, as are most of our pharmaceutical products. Our clothes, for the most part, are made of petrochemical synthetic fibers. Our transport, power, heat, and light are all reliant on fossil fuels as well", concluding, finally, that we have built "an entire civilization on the exhumed carbon deposits" [29]. In other words, human activities such as deforestation, pollution, overfishing, and fossil fuel consumption have resulted in habitat loss, species extinction, climate change, and degradation of vital natural systems.

Today we are already talking about the Fourth Industrial Revolution also known as the digital revolution, which refers, in simple terms, to the way in which new technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and the Internet merge with people's physical lives. Zvika Krieger of the World Economic Forum (WEF) highlights two key aspects that distinguish this revolution from the previous three:

- *blurring boundaries*: unlike earlier industrial revolutions, the lines separating the digital, physical, and biological worlds are becoming less defined. This convergence enables new possibilities but also raises complex ethical and societal questions;

- *rapid pace of change*: technological advancements are occurring at an unprecedented speed, challenging societies, economies, and governments to adapt quickly.

Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the WEF, expressed concerns in 2016 that the most significant fear associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the potential for increased inequality. There are risks associated with rapid technological change, including job displacement, increased inequality, and privacy concerns. This fact emphasizes the need for robust regulation, ethical frameworks, and policies that ensure inclusive growth.

9. *Inequality between people in terms of access to information and of the inability to effectively manage information sufficiency in the digital age*, in which both IT giants and users with a high degree

of digital literacy are driven by the Machiavellian maxim ("Purpose excuses means"), which means that they admit that they may infringe the limits of privacy, the limits of data integrity and security and the security of individuals, the limits of the principle of confidentiality, the limits of private property, including intellectual property, and all in the name of profit, measured in money, goods, power and influence. The digital revolution, on the one hand, has widened access to information and communication resources, making them available to an increasing number of individuals, and on the other hand has concentrated certain resources in the hands of interest groups. Thus, even if the number of users who have some access to development resources is constantly increasing, the number of those who can concentrate the critical mass of these resources and control them is decreasing. Therefore, if previously it was considered that whoever has the information has the power, in the new circumstances, this maxim must be reformulated as follows: whoever has the critical mass of information, he has the power: of decision, leadership and control. In other words, unequal access to information is nothing more than unequal access to economic and cultural resources, so that the same generation knows a range of lifestyles at opposite extremes, and the mechanism of social mobility is gradually eliminated from the system.

The question of whether the digital revolution represents a higher stage in human evolution hinges on how we interpret its impact on individual development and societal progress. On one side, proponents argue that digitalization streamlines daily tasks, freeing up time that can be invested in multi-dimensional human growth. This includes not only acquiring knowledge and skills but also integrating core principles and values such as human and social responsibility. In this view, technology acts as a catalyst for personal and collective advancement, enabling individuals to reach their full potential and fostering a more interconnected, conscious global community.

Conversely, critics highlight the challenges and risks associated with digitalization. They point out that excessive or unmindful engagement with digital technologies can lead to a loss of quality time, increased exposure to superficial content, and a decline in genuine human interactions. The idolization of technology and immediate success has led to the externalization of life and the alienation of man in the technical universe. Man is deprived of moral and existential landmarks, subjected to a process of robotization and standardization of attitudes and behaviors, human life is emptied of authentic aspirations and experiences [28, p.160]. This environment may diminish critical thinking, erode individuality, and make young people more vulnerable to manipulation or dependence on digital stimuli. Such effects could hinder personal freedom and authentic self-expression, raising concerns about whether digital progress truly equates to human evolution or simply transforms existing vulnerabilities.

Therefore, we note with regret that what Lebow said in 1955 is still relevant today, after more than six decades: "The greater the pressures on the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats- his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies [27, p. 3]. In a society that produces to consume and creates to produce, we meet the consumer man, dependent on the material elements around him. In such a society the value of things suffers an alteration, because of the same character of their consumption. In such a society we must be aware of the need to review priorities, reconsider the system of rules and principles governing behavior, activity and human life. Such a society, confused by so many double standards, must rely on a pillar of authentic values, on the pillar of European values. According to Articles 1a and 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon, "the European Union" is based on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and

men [30]. These values are the pillars of any sustainable and welfare-oriented society, or the European Union seeks to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.

Looking through the prism of social realities, in the Moldovan society, the following phenomena are attested: dissolution and compromise of values; consumerist behavior; giving up the value of the profession; the renunciation of the family values, of the identity ones, consequently the acceptance of other life models, of the sociocultural environment in which the individual tries not to integrate, but rather to let himself be assimilated. Since the Republic of Moldova became an independent state (in transition to democracy), European values have often been present as elements of manipulative communication, camouflaging narrow interests, both in solemn declarations and electoral speeches, and in various normative acts and documents signed by the authorities, at national and international level, but very rarely implemented in political, social and economic practice or consistently pursued. As a result, Moldovan citizens no longer trust the power of these values in rehabilitating our anemic society in all respects, because the political elite, through the adopted actions and behavior, determined that European values be compromised at the level of the collective mentality. In other words, today we are witnessing a real crisis of European values in Moldovan society, a minefield for any political force that dares to manifest through concrete actions its pro-European and genuinely democratic beliefs. This crisis of (European) values is deepened by the freezing of the Republic of Moldova in the Soviet project, which is to blame not only Moscow, but also the duplicity of our political class, obsessed with power and money. However, there are also people with an autonomous mentality, who advocate for fairness, civility, integrity, responsibility and genuine solidarity - that is, what we generically call "European values". As long as there are such efforts, there is hope that our society will become a prosperous society.

From this, we rightly state that, in caring for the well-being of society as a whole, we must start by educating the younger generation in the spirit of European values: human dignity and the common good, honesty and integrity kindness and generosity, love and wisdom, sincerity and loyalty, respect and tolerance, compassion and gratitude, solidarity and altruism, empathy and responsibility. The formation of prosocial behaviors, since family and school, is an imperative of modern education and an indisputable social need, which will result in the cultivation of responsible youth personalities with an adequate self-image, able to develop continuously and integrate into the community in which they live, thus contributing to its development.

4. European values – the "hard core" of the young Moldovans' mentality

The process of building, transforming and consolidating mentalities is one of the prominent topics at the heart of public debates in all countries of the world, but especially in countries in transition. The way in which the citizens of a country perceive, filter information and relate to immediate realities, is identified as one of the main obstacles to substantial social change. As a result, we consider that the issue addressed is relevant for the Republic of Moldova, starting from the need to highlight the multiple ways of perceiving, thinking and acting in a society in continuous transition, where the failure of the transition is due: first of all, to the weakness of state institutions, towards which there is a social apathy, secondly, to the lack of firmness and the political and geopolitical oscillation of the governing elites, which do not show verticality and do not promote a stable system of values and principles, and, last but not least, to the deficiency of civil society, divided from a cultural, identity and

geopolitical point of view, which as a result cannot influence or hold accountable the representatives of power for a government oriented towards the interests of the citizens.

In the process of transition from totalitarian to democratic regime, our country has systematically undergone transformations that have changed its social, demographic and economic structure, with direct effects on both cultural and social norms and values, as well as on the individual and collective mentality. Consequently, the growth, education and development of the young people personality (mentality), in a still in transition society has been and is marked, by almost three decades, of continuous oscillation between democratic values and principles and nostalgia for the Soviet past, between integrity and corruption, between the law and illicit schemes, between rights/freedoms and discrimination, between reform and stagnation, between hope, trust and deep disappointments. V. Sprânceană and P. Negură consider that our transition should not be approached only as a description of a situation that we have not yet overcome, but also as a mechanism through which power relations are reproduced or as a cunning way to make us accept without hesitation (and even with enthusiasm) some political experiments conceived outside and which are imposed on us in the same logic as those, which are administered from within (*the billion theft*). In this regard, it should be noted that both the authorities and citizens have turned into habit, the tendency to justify and even legitimize certain phenomena that erode Moldovan society by appealing to the concept of transition. They argue that it is natural that these antisocial phenomena (corruption, social injustice, discrimination, violation of the law, *cumătrism*, influence peddling) to happen constantly, since we are still in transition. Consequently, we notice as a predominant manifestation, the attempt of the population of the Republic of Moldova to adapt to these realities, to accept them, considering them normal and even to resort to them for solving personal problems than the effort to fight them.

All these has profoundly influenced the lifestyle and way of relating to the immediate reality of the new generation of young people, a generation that was born in the first days of independence, graduated from school, high school and university and has already made the first attempts to integrate into public life (in politics, business, science or the education of younger generations), a generation that has been exposed to processes that previous generations did not have much science and experience in, such as consumerism, virtual reality games, migration table, communication in virtual space. At the same time, the new generations of young people have been and are formed and shaped in a social climate in which previous generations have tried and still insist on projecting on them a certain version of the past as the only true one, often using various levers (educational, informational and , even, political) in order to root beliefs and representations, which subsequently determine their views on life, electoral choices and personal identity. The competition between the desire to belong to the European space and the desire to belong to the Russian space, considered as the only possible options, separated the population into two antagonistic segments which, despite often engaging in violent rhetorical disputes, came to the understanding that being on the border of two distinct geopolitical worlds (EU and Russia), with roots and affinities alike in both, our country cannot afford to promote a foreign policy and an unidirectional self-identification, to the West or to the East. This bipolarity of the Moldovan collective mentality is deepened by the contribution of political elites who use identity and cultural wars as a tool to obtain, exercise and maintain power and who contribute to the alteration of representative democracy by "technical" rigging of elections, which further disorients our young people. At the same time, wider phenomena such as economic

globalization, the explosion of the Internet and social networks and the technological revolution along with the crisis of spiritual values in favor of material ones, have left their mark on both models of thinking, action and behavior and the perception of the role that every citizen has in overcoming the problems that grind the stability of our country.

These realities eventually led to the shaping of two types of *mentalities* among young people: *flexible-autonomous mentality* and *rigid-collectivist mentality*. Young people with a *flexible-autonomous mentality* are distinguished by their options that are sometimes different from those of the group of origin, but which voluntarily show solidarity, based on common values, such as fairness, honor and dignity; they are receptive to reforms, they learn, gain experience, and contribute to the materialization of the aspirations of those they interact with, working continuously to become better. For them, there are no self-imposed limits, but challenges that must be overcome, and when they encounter difficulties, they assume their mistakes, seeing any problem encountered as an opportunity to overcome themselves and find better solutions. Young people with a *flexible-autonomous mentality* show love for their peers, aspire to the development and transformation of the society in which they live and are open to assimilating good practices, basing their attitudes and prosocial actions on universal principles and values. In their turn, young people with a *rigid-collectivist mentality* identify too much with their position and see everything in shades of superior and inferior. Slaves of consumerism and of the idea of having instead of being, they end up losing their identity and being dominated by unethical, illicit realities built on non-values, just because they are not able to realize the difference between what is good and what is bad. They are often resistant to change and innovation, show tolerance and support for the resources, legacies and contradictory discourses of the past in relation to the present of an independent, fragile and anemic state and outlining their political and electoral choices and behaviors, starting from this conviction, which having the meaning of "who is not with us, is against us", cannot represent an engine for the society.

In other words, in the Republic of Moldova, starting from the segmentation of the population on geopolitical criteria, are distinguished: "communist mentality" as a survival mentality based on appeal to relatives and relationships ("*cumătrism*", influence peddling), (as manifested in communist dictatorial regime, dominated by the policy of one party governing and the cult of personality), censorship and lying, with the rank of law, starting from the highest level of the state, poverty with multiple and serious shortcomings generating systematic thefts from the state budget (the billion theft), as well as various constraints, which have generated and still maintain the chronic distrust of the Moldovan people in the current government, whatever its political color is; and "*Western mentality*", which focuses on democracy, the rule of law, human dignity, the well-being and prosperity of society, respect for the principles and value system specific to developed countries, which creates optimal conditions for achieving new performance and modernizing society, starting from good practices and high standards, valid for all states that adhere to Western principles and values.

Therefore, taking as a point of reference this segmentation of the youth collective mentality, which further stagnates the acceptance and implementation of social reforms, we consider that young Moldovans remain a generation that still needs a stable system of values, that provides them with criteria of orientation towards the idea of Good, Truth and Beauty in a captive society, administered by an oligarchic political regime; a society impoverished with a down-to-earth economy, which bears the burden of the "billion theft"; a society in which a quarter of the population works permanently or temporarily abroad, leaving children in the

care of others and parents in the bondage of loneliness; a society in which reform is either not desired or only mimicked, and a well-defined development project for the country for at least the next 10 years, is missing and we do not even know if it can be adopted in conditions of permanent confrontations between political parties, which are fighting for positions and authority and less for the fulfillment of their electoral promises. Young Moldovans must understand that they can achieve their goals, only if they shape their mentality, by assimilating authentic values that guide them in this regard, by overcoming old patterns of thinking and by constructive critical analysis of all information that knowledge-based society gives them the opportunity to access and/or receive. In this sense, we consider important the role of the education system in cultivating European values as the core of the mentality of young Moldovans, a flexible mentality, open to change and reflected in adopting a responsible prosocial behavior.

In this sense, in Carol Dweck's view, any person can change their mentality into a flexible-autonomous one, but this effort must be accompanied and coordinated by a new system of beliefs and trust in all state institutions and their leaders [31]. The same idea is put forward by N. Niță who considers that the change of mentality must start from within the political class, in order for it to improve its capacity to build "vocation leaders", based on three important criteria [32, p. 9]:

- to have a passion for what they do, respecting high work standards;
- to show high social responsibility;
- to have a sense of temperance and moderation, with the purpose of guaranteeing the common good, but not the primitive impulses, which generate egocentrism.

In other words, both authors reiterate the need to identify political leaders who will become a model of public dignity and professional integrity for new generations. In addition, we believe that, in order to ensure the sustainability of the European destiny, the new mentalities of young people should be able to transform, in turn, the mentality of other members of the community, through social contagion, through the power of example of prosocial behavior, especially given that "theoretical values, as well as aesthetic, ethical and religious ones, are goods that are above the contingencies of time and the preferences of one generation or another: they must form permanent and equally justified targets of any generation, because in this way the spiritual treasure of Europe and, with it, of the whole humanity will be enriched" [33, p.383]. This perspective underscores the role of youth as catalysts for cultural and moral continuity, ensuring that Europe's rich spiritual and moral treasures are preserved and enhanced for future generations.

5. Conclusions

The historical communities that have succeeded each other over time have not only committed deeds and created institutions, but have accumulated, preserved and transmitted a "mental baggage" in the form of memories, concepts, values, ideals, norms, habits and traditions. For these reasons, the research of collective mentalities is an essential step in knowing and understanding the contemporary world and in trying to transform it. Values, in turn, represent guidance in life, set the direction we go and build our personality, while personal beliefs, which must be based on spiritual values, are the fuel that drives the engine called the person in action. As a result, taken together, values and beliefs, structure and shape our mentality on which our whole existence is based.

An open to change and innovation society is the society that invests in the education of new generations of citizens, in order to create a healthy environment for training and shaping their personality, by cultivating common values of freedom, solidarity, tolerance, compassion, empathy and social responsibility. Only in an environment, characterized by these values, young people can become creators of important and groundbreaking services, goods, innovations, solutions and contributions, which will ultimately provide the resources needed to ensure a decent life and well-being (determined by the existence of the hope of tomorrow, the maintenance of interpersonal relationships of cooperation and mutual support, ensuring the psychological climate conducive to productivity and emotional balance, etc.) of the entire population.

As a result, our young people will want to contribute to the transformation of our country into a developed and prosperous country, in which honest people condemn and do not admit to government politicians with immoral behavior, based on lies and lack of transparency, but advocate for promotion and respect of the principle of meritocracy and professional and personal integrity. They will also realize that in order for this transformation to take place, it is necessary for every citizen to adopt and consistently respect a system of authentic values that allows each individual to develop according to their own abilities and aspirations. The profound and sustainable transformation and consolidation of the mentality of young people will eventually lead to the manifestation of another type of behavior, which will become contagious at the societal level, being learned through the power of example, when honor, as a value-imperative, forces everyone to assume their mistakes and be aware of and respect their individual social role. In this sense, each individual contribution counts in supporting, at the social level, a culture of *self-confidence* and *trust in others*, *self-respect* and *respect for others*, *personal responsibility* through awareness of self-worth in the equation of totality and *social responsibility* through self-annihilation and active participation in the reform and development of the community in which they live. Therefore, transmitting values, teaching young people to respect and cultivate them in all that they are and in all that they do, means nothing more than reflecting this fact in their own behavior - a mirror of values, which anyone one can rely on.

Thus, it is necessary, in the process of exploring values in the educational environment, at all levels, to focus on developing the creative, psychological and social potential of educational subjects, by interconnecting *fundamental values*: Good, Truth, Justice, Beauty, Freedom; *with European values*: ethnic, cultural and religious tolerance, cooperation, respect for human dignity and human rights, the human ideal; *and national values*: identity, dignity, solidarity, equity, sovereignty, independence, language, history, culture, educational ideal, national ideal, etc. As a result, *education in the spirit of European values* will aim at shaping individual and community consciousness in the sense of assuming European values, developing a sense of belonging to European culture and civilization, exercising rights and responsibly assuming obligations and, last but not least, promoting human beings as an end in themselves and not as a means to something else, believing in man's ability to surpass himself and respecting his dignity.

Ultimately, recognizing the immense value of time underscores the importance of cultivating enduring human values - such as empathy, integrity, and responsibility - that serve as the foundation of meaningful existence. Whether digitalization becomes an evolutionary leap depends on our collective ability to harness its benefits consciously, while safeguarding the core principles that define our humanity. Balancing technological advancement with a

commitment to personal and ethical development is crucial in ensuring that the digital revolution elevates rather than diminishes the human condition.

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