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## The paradoxical happiness - Essay on hyperconsumption society, by Gilles Lipovetsky. Book review and analysis for work organization, leisure and consumption concepts.

A felicidade paradoxal - Ensaio sobre a sociedade do hiperconsumo, por Gilles Lipovetsky. Recensão crítica e análise aos conceitos organização do trabalho, lazer e consumo

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*The book has as its original title *Le bonheur paradoxal - Essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation*. It was written by Gilles Lipovetsky (philosopher and professor at the University of Grenoble, France), and published for the first time in 2006. The read book version was Lipovetsky, G. (2014). *A Felicidade Paradoxal - Ensaio sobre a Sociedade do Hiperconsumo*. Lisboa: Edições 70. ISBN: 978-972-44-1354-9. It has 357 pages and is divided in two parts. The first comprises six chapters and the second comprises five chapters.*

### **Part 1 - The Hyperconsumption Society**

*Chapter 1. The three phases of consumer capitalism*

*Chapter 2. Beyond statute: the emotional consumption*

*Chapter 3. Consumption, time and play*

*Chapter 4. The post-Fordism organization of the economy*

*Chapter 5. The emergence of a turbo consumer*

*Chapter 6. The fabulous destiny of Homo*

### **Part 2 - Private Pleasures, Blessed Happiness**

*Chapter 7. Penia: material pleasures, existential dissatisfaction*

*Chapter 8. Dionysus: hedonistic society, anti-Dionysian society*

*Chapter 9. Superman: obsession for performance, pleasure of the senses*

*Chapter 10. Nemesis: overexposure of happiness, regression of envy*

*Chapter 11. Homo felix: greatness and misery of an utopia*

After the advent of mass capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century and the society of abundance, in the post-World War II, the world lives a new form of consumption. It begun in the last five decades and is marked by the permanent supply of products on a global scale. Lipovetsky claims that this time represents the third stage of capitalism, which he termed as the Hyperconsumption Society. The times and the experiences of the leisure are, in this space of time, valorized, bringing a discussion on different points of view in relation to the purposes of this appointed time.

Tourism, at the present time, is already considered a global activity, being responsible for 10.2% of world GDP (in 2016) and having been of 1,322 million the international tourist arrivals (in 2017). In order to explain how tourism (and leisure times) has been growing and will continue to follow, according to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) projections for the next decades, it's crucial to understand how leisure is involving and changing the society. If we'll be able to understand these changes, we will be better prepared to plan and adapt ourselves to the tourism activity. In order to understand how the

organization of work, Fordism and post-Fordism leisures, and contemporary leisure in this hyperconsumption society are addressed in this book, four questions will be made as an approach model.

## **What are the main characteristics of the new forms of work organization?**

The characteristics of the new forms of organization exist from the follow-up or evolution of the corresponding systems to previous phases of consumption (phases I and II), and the revolution of information techniques, the globalization of markets and financial deregulation. Companies have made structural changes in the approach to the market in the forms of competition and in the supply policies. Market segmentation, the extreme differentiation of products and services, the existence of a quality policy, and the acceleration of the launch pace of new products take place. Work organization is now configured for the demand-dominated market to replace the supply-driven market. Moreover, "the material-based economy has become a service

economy: the era of over-consumption is dominated by intangible supplies and by the service structure" (Lipovetsky, 2014: 66).

The time factor has become, at the moment, primordial for the organization of the labour structure. The aim is to increase consumption through the renewal of products and goods in smaller time spaces. Through the seduction and the novelty, the appetite for the acquisition is stimulated. Through technological and organizational evolution, companies reduced the time of designing and placing new products on the market, rendering obsolete goods that even had a short functional life span. As the author points out, "the challenge is not so much to produce massively and continuously, but to ensure faster entry of products into the market, to respond to demand before the competitors" (2014: 77). Lipovetsky concludes that this phase III of post-Fordism has, as determinants factors, the reactivity, the design and the rapid innovation of the products.

### What are the differences and similarities between Fordism and post-Fordism leisure?

*It was in the Fordism period that economies grew more, bringing an era of marked consumerism. With the large increase in wages, purchasing power has skyrocketed and access to economic goods has been given to the majority of the working population. Over time, the share of wages earmarked for the acquisition of social goods has increased. The author points out that, "for the first time, the masses have access to a more psychological and more individualized material search, to a way of life (durable goods, leisure activities, vacations, fashion) hitherto exclusive to social elites" (2014: 29).*

The Fordism phase "is assumed as a 'society of desire', all daily life is imbued with an imaginary of happiness achieved through consumption, beach dreams, erotic fun, ostensibly young fashions" (2014: 31). The well-being masses cult celebrated in phase II has begun to undermine the logic of expenditure in terms of social status, promoting an individualistic type of consumption. The social classes were noticed in their differentiation through the purchase and use of goods that, according to the corresponding marks, it was possible to affirm the different social status.

Post-Fordism leisure thus arises in the context of the process of reducing expenses due to status issues. The individualistic premise is, at this stage, the characteristic factor and, in addition, it differs

from the previous phase. The diversification of supply, and the democratization of comfort and leisure occurred, the access to the novelties available in the market became a commonplace, class regulations have been disintegrated, and new aspirations and new behaviours emerged. "It is the era of hyperconsumption, phase III of the modern commercialization of needs, orchestrated by a deinstitutionalised, subjective, emotional logic" (2014: 36). In phase II, an example would be a social demarcation through the possession of a personal computer. In phase III, the access to this property is generalized / mass-oriented; the characteristic individualization occurs through the creation of a profile in a social network and a new return to the collective through belonging to a thematic group within it. Post-Fordism leisure "translates a new relationship of individuals with the items that establish the primacy of sensation, the change of the social and individual significance of the consumption universe that accompanies the individualization impulse of our societies" (2014: 39).

### What is the impact of post-Fordism on the structuring of times and leisure spaces?

At the end of the (19) 60's decade of the twentieth century emerges the rupture with the technocratic and authoritarian society. "Instead of discipline, family and work, a new culture celebrates the consumption and present life pleasures". With this introduction, "a generation that opposes authority and war, puritanism and competitive values, calls for sexual liberation, for the direct expression of emotions, for the psychedelic experiences, and for different forms of life in common" (2014: 177).

The central zones of the former industrial cities are transformed (after Fordism) into spaces of distraction, organized around the values of environment, animation and spectacle, as the author affirms, "the old building is recovered, converted into a museum, hotel or cultural centre (...). There are cafes and restaurants everywhere, clothing and handicraft shops, exhibition galleries (...). It is the time of the city dedicated to idle conviviality, to buy for pleasure" (2014: 180). Lipovetsky also points out that, "the private pleasures of leisure activities consumption took place over the collective pleasures of the united community. Travel, tourism, sports, television, cinema, outings with friends: what dominates is the dissemination and pluralisation of pleasures chosen according to the tastes and aspirations of each one" (2014: 182).

## **The hyperconsumption society presented by the author extended consumerist principles to all spheres of social and individual life. To what extent do contemporary leisure practices socialize and educate subjects' subjectivity to the hyperconsumption society?**

The striking individualistic characteristic of the hyperconsumption society is, itself, permissive of a self-sustaining cycle. In this society, the author claims that "people tend to situate their interests and their pleasures, first and foremost, in family and sentimental life, rest, holidays and travel, leisure activities and other associative activities" (2014: 227).

The hyperconsumption society, filled with the leisure practices that instil in the population the development of individual fitness, health, sexuality and beauty, expects a constant intensification of these same objectives. "The individual must build up, distinguish himself, expand his capacities: the 'performance society' tends to become the preponderant image of hypermodernity" (2014: 223-224).

The author points out that "more and more material pleasures, more and more trips, more amusements, greater life expectancy - and, after all, none of this has opened the doors to the joy of living" (2014: 127). It is in this context that paradoxical happiness arises today to each person when have the freedom to choose and obtain the goods and services with what they wish to fill the existential void. But then, after their limited time success, an unceasing desire to new consumption rebirths, and the snowball effect follows with an undefined horizon.

Lipovetsky's book characterizes and explains the process of change in the globalized society in which the world we live in today has become. However, there are some elements that constraint the way we must see this society's evolutionary process of hyperconsumption. The author began his discourse with the systematization and characterization of the three phases of consumer capitalism. It would have been pertinent to contextualize the different phases into the territories in which it was inspired. He identifies the French and North American example and more rarely, the English case. He also encompasses other countries, but which are not identified.

Both space and time will have varied in each country, being difficult to make a generalization as it did. For instance, the Portuguese case in which

there was never a settled process of industrialization making the idea of the existence of Phase I to be impossible.

The work organization notion, referred to as being set up in Phase III for a sense of supply rather than demand, does not encompass some societies, among them the Portuguese, where the population not triggered itself the demand but, primarily, the competition between Portuguese and foreign companies in the context of the European Single Market, have brought this new concept and organizational philosophy.

The author highlights the almost complete disappearance in Phase III of consumption based on the social status (characteristic of Phase II). We must not neglect the importance of not taking tendencies or majorities as absolute truths. Today, both in Portugal and in Finland (geographically and culturally opposed), access is possible, for example, to the acquisition of well-known brands of handbags, yet economic access to and possession of a Louis Vuitton bag remains a status differentiator. The access to portable computers or mobile phones is now massified but the acquisition of an Apple laptop or phone can be a differentiation, again, with the existence of social motivation nuances in some societies.

The human body worship is referred to as one of the standards for the hyperconsumption society. However, the high percentages of obesity, never seen before among the populations of the most consuming countries, were discarded.

In sum, if we assume the paradox of individual happiness in the present, we also must highlight the presence of a society with huge contradiction levels.

## **Reference**

Lipovetsky, Gilles (2014). *A felicidade paradoxal - Ensaio sobre a sociedade do hiperconsumo*. Lisboa: Edições70.