What is important to us in our lives?

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I. Introduction

Even though many sociological texts deal with the issue of values, contemporary sociology has no unified theoretical conception of values. According to Strmiska, Lautman counted 180 various definitions of the notion "value" in 1981, when he tried to identify the perception of values in social sciences [Strmiska 1996: 375]. The notion of values is not only theoretically unanchored. The methodology is not unified either. The research of values is complicated not only by theoretical ambiguity of the notion but also by the fact that the figures are not accessible to direct observation in any of their form. Empirical sociology surveys usually deduce values from attitudes, which are measured on various scales [Rabušic 2000: 19]. In practise, the survey of values is most frequently outlined by one of two possibilities: either the respondents assess the individual figures by rating or by ranking [Buriánek 2003: 134].

Both of these methods have their pluses and minuses. If the respondents assess individual "values" (or rather statements expressing some attitude) separately, they have a tendency to mark all of them as "very important." Differences in the assessment of individual items are to a certain extent blurred. If the researchers use the second method and ask the respondents to rank the presented items, they come across an opposite problem. This method, when the respondent "is forced" to chose between individual "values", is closer to the actual decision-making. The disadvantage of this method is that it leads to an artificial increase of differences among the individual items. Another problem of every survey of values (to a certain degree it is a problem of all sociological surveys) is the respondents' tendency to a certain stylisation. One of the problematic items in the Czech society is "health", especially with regard to the common statements such as "health always comes first" or "the main thing is health and the rest will come alone." Researches sometimes substitute the general value of health by somewhat more specific items (for example Buriánek used the notion "to be in a good condition" [Buriánek 2003: 136]).

II. Rank of values in the Czech society

The regular surveys of the Centre for Public Opinion Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Sociological Institute of the Czech Republic use both of the previously mentioned methods to detect the value orientation of the Czech society. In April 2005 we asked respondents to rank the presented "values" according to their significance. One stood for the most important value, seven for the relatively least important value. The respondents could use every number only once. Table 1 indicates the weighted mean of order, which the respondents assigned to individual values, and number of the respondents, who placed the given value in the first place.

Table 1: Rank of values in the Czech society

	Average placement - total	1. Placement -total	Average placement -men	Average placement -women
To have a steady partner	3,01	22 %	3,01 (1.)	3,00 (2.)
To have children	3,23	22 %	3,66 (3.)	2,83 (1.)
To achieve success at work	3,38	17 %	3,07 (2.)	3,67 (3.)
To get married (to be married)	3,93	13 %	4,09 (4.)	3,78 (4.)
To achieve the highest education possible	4,24	18 %	4,29 (5.)	4,19 (5.)
To have time for hobbies	4,75	5 %	4,56 (6.)	4,93 (6.)
To have a rich social life	5,47	4 %	5,32 (7.)	5,60 (7.)

When we look at the results for all respondents, who have been selected as a representative sample of the Czech population over the age of 15, majority of them find stable partnership and children as the most important thing in their lives. Success at work was placed second and it was followed by marriage. Most of the Czechs find education less important than stable partnership, marriage, children and success at work. Most respondents found their hobbies and social life the least important.

The overall results provide interesting information about the Czech society as a whole. The fact that individual socio-demographic groups differed in the ranking of values is not surprising. The largest differences in the order of values can be found between men and women and between individual age categories.

Czech men regard stable partnership as the most important thing in their lives. 24 % of men placed this value in the first place. Only a slightly smaller number of men (22 %) placed success at work in the first place. Having children was placed third in men's ranking. There are no significant differences between men and women in the order of other values.

Women most frequently placed the item "to have children" at the top of the scale (30 % of the questioned women put it in the first place). Having a stable partner was placed second and success at work placed third. The biggest differences in the order of values of Czech women and men concern success at work and conception of children. Generally we can say that women, in comparison with men, emphasize having children much more. Men, in comparison with women, assign more importance to success at work. In case of other items the differences in the opinions of men and women are not so obvious. We can conclude that women value marriage and education more than men. Men, on the other hand, value their hobbies and rich social life more than women.

As we have already mentioned, apart from differences between men and women, there were significant differences between the individual age groups. Since the differences between various age groups can affect the previously mentioned differences between men and women, I indicate the differences between age cohorts of men and women separately (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Ranking of values according to individual age categories of men

Age:	Order of values				
	15-19	20-29	30-44	45-59	60 a vice
To achieve success at work	1.	2.	2.	3.	4.
To get married (to be married)	5.	6.	4.	4.	3.
To have a rich social life	7.	7.	7.	7.	7.
To have children	6.	3.	3.	2.	2.
To have time for hobbies	4.	5.	5.	5.	6.
To have a stable partner	3.	1.	1.	1.	1.
To achieve the highest possible education	2.	4.	6.	6.	5.

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2005 survey, 05-04

Table 3: Ranking of values according to individual age categories of women

| Age: | Order of values | | | | |
	15-19	20-29	30-44	45-59	60 and more
To achieve success at work	2.	3.	3.	4.	4.
To get married (to be married)	5.	4.	4.	3.	3.
To have a rich social life	6.	7.	7.	7.	7.
To have children	4.	2.	1.	1.	1.
To have time for hobbies	7.	6.	6.	6.	6.
To have a stable partner	1.	1.	2.	2.	2.
To achieve the highest possible education	3.	5.	5.	5.	5.

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2005 survey, 05-04

With increasing age, Czech men and women assign less significance to success at work. Men from the age category from 15 to 19 years placed success at work at the top of the scale most frequently. Men in the age category from 20 to 44 years put success at work in the second place (following stable partnership). Men in the age from 45 to 59 years placed success at work only in the third place and men over the age of 60 put it in the fourth place (which is evidently affected by the fact, that majority of them are retired and do not participate in the labour market). In case of women, we find a similar decrease of significance of success at work.

The item "to get married (to be married)" develops in an opposite way as far as age is concerned. Its significance grows with increasing age of the respondents, both men and women.

The item "to have children" is interesting from the point of view of differences between opinions of men and women as well as different age categories. Women over the age of 30 place it at the top of the scale and it holds the exclusive position among other age categories of women. As we have already mentioned, men generally assign slightly less significance to children than women. However, even in case of men the significance grows with increasing age. The breaking point for men, however, is not the age of 30 but the period after 45 years. Men from 20 to 44 years of age put the item "to have children" in the third place (following stable partnership and success at work). Among men over the age of 45 the significance of success at work drops down and children shift to the second place.

III. Change of value orientation in time

As I have already said, the Centre for Public Opinion Research of the Sociological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences uses another method to survey the value orientation of the Czech public, The respondents are given value tinged statements, which they have to rank on a four point scale (very important, rather important, rather unimportant, not important at all). Since the respondents have been repeatedly asked the same question since 1990, we are able to follow the development of opinions of the Czech public in time. Rather than analysing the differences between men and women or various age groups, I decided to briefly outline the changes in value orientations from 1990 to 2004.

Majority of the questioned assign most importance to their closest friends and relatives. This holds true both for the last survey executed in May 2004 and for the whole of the nineties. Practically all of the questioned regarded helping their family and friends, having friends and living in a happy family as very important or rather important.

Surroundings and health is also very important to the Czechs. Practically all of the questioned found these values very or rather important. For absolute majority of Czech citizens, working life also plays a significant role (around 90 % of the questioned marked these values as very important or rather important). One of the most important values concerning work is that it is

interesting, useful and meaningful at the same time. The respondents also preferred well-paid work in a team of pleasant people.

For a more detailed analysis of value orientation in the Czech society I used a factor analysis[1] of the data from the CVVM survey executed in May 2004. This method helped me to distribute the 33 items, presented to the respondents for assessment, into six significant and logically easily interpretable factors. On the whole they explain almost 53 % of the total variance.[2] The individual units (factors) contain items that are somehow connected or to which the respondent reacted in a similar way.

Let us now analyse each of the six factors separately and focus on the changes of their importance in time.

The first factor unites values that are somehow related to the respondents' private life, their lifestyle and their closest relatives and friends (see Table 4). I called the factors "private life". Among the items in this factor are mainly those that the respondents found most important (around 95 % of all the questioned marked them as very or rather important). The development of the significance of private life has not changed dramatically. As we have already said, family, friends and life in healthy and nice surroundings were the most preferred values in 1990 and have remained the most preferred until today. It seems that the change of political regime after 1989 has not shaken the position of these values.

Table 4: Factor 1 – private life (data in %)

FACTOR 1 – private life	1990	1994	1999	2004
To live in a happy family (0,666)	97	98	97	95
To live healthily, to take care of one's health (0,647)	96	93	94	94
To live in healthy surroundings (0,645)	98	96	95	95
To help family and friends (0,641)	96	96	97	96
To have friends (0,599)	96	96	95	96
To live according to one's creed (0,578)	94	94	94	93
To live in nice surroundings (0,538)	97	96	94	94
To help those in need (0,470)	86	79	77	85
To have undisturbed private life (0,462)	83	78	79	81

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our Society (Naše společnost) 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

Another factor joined predominantly values characterising pleasant life of a people, who try to gain as much as life offers (see Table 5). At the same time there are some values characterising life in material prosperity. I called this factor "pleasure-seeking life." In comparison with the values of "private life", there is no general agreement on the significance of values typical of the "pleasure-seeking life." If we ranked all the 33 items from the array according to the number of respondents, who marked them as very or rather significant, most of these values would be placed somewhere in the middle. From 1990 to 2004, the significance assigned to the values characterising "pleasure-seeking life" mostly increased. Nowadays, significantly more people than in 1990 wish to live pleasant lives, live their lives to the fullest, to have friends, who might be useful to them, to live interesting and exciting life, to have time for hobbies, to make a lot of money and to achieve an important position in the society. It seems that the changes after 1989, which enlarged the possibilities of spending free time and increased the income and property differences, lead to the increase of the respondents' desire to live their life in comfort and material abundance.

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[1] Factor analysis belongs among the methods of statistical data analyses. The aim of this method is to condense information from a number of variables into a few factors that affect individual answers.
[2] For the purposes of factor analysis we have applied the method of main components, rotation, the minimum value of eigenvalues was 1.

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Table 5: Factor 2 – Pleasure-seeking life (data in %)

FAKTOR 2 – Pleasure-seeking life	1990	1994	1999	2004
Live a pleasant life, live life to the fullest (0,718)	67	69	71	79
Have nice things not everybody can afford (0,671)	38	39	33	36
Have friends, who can be useful (0,614)	73	68	66	79
Have an interesting, exciting life (0,606)	54	52	53	59
Have time for hobbies and interests (0,594)	67	69	70	75
Make a lot of money (0,502)	80	74	65	86
Be popular among people (0,481)	82	82	78	84
Achieve an important position in the society (0,433)	36	35	33	50

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our society 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

The third factor includes mainly values that are connected to working life. It is a specific type of values that are linked to a leading position at work, either to the position of a manager or of the owner of a company. I labelled this area of values "life of an entrepreneur/manager" (see Table 6). Closely connected to the values characterising the life of an entrepreneur/manager life are values characterising demand for information. People who profess the values of the entrepreneur/manager life often wish to have general knowledge and to be well informed about events in their country and elsewhere. It is also important to note that this type of values is definitely not preferred by the whole of the Czech population. Only roughly one third of the Czechs find it very important or rather important to manage other people at work or to have their own company. The number of those who found these values important was higher in 2004 than in 1990. One exception is the item "to be well informed about events in my country and elsewhere," which was found less important than in 1990. The reason is obvious. In 1990 the Czech Republic (as well as other European countries) experienced significant political and economic changes and people found it very important to be informed about current news. Nowadays, political situation in the Czech Republic is to a large degree stabilised and people do not find it that important to be informed about current events.

Table 6: Factor 3 – Life of an entrepreneur/manager (data in %)

FACTOR 3 – Life of an entrepreneur/manager	1990	1994	1998	2004
To have a job where I can manage other people (0,662)	30	29	26	34
To have a job which enables me to try new things (0,619)	58	51	50	67
To have general knowledge (0,588)	71	66	70	75
To have my own company where I can be my own boss (0,563)	28	29	31	36
To be well informed about events in my country and elsewhere (0,557)	81	65	71	78
To achieve an important position in the society (0,549)	36	35	33	50
To perform well as a professional (0,503)	79	70	71	78

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our Society 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

In the fourth factor there are fewer items than in the previous ones. I call it "public life", because it unites mainly the items related to civil activity in public life, whether it is politics or environment protection (see Table 7). The item "to promote the policy of my party/ movement"

belongs among the least preferred (in 2004, respondents ascribed smaller significance only to life according to religious rules). In comparison with 1990 its significance remained practically unchanged. The statement "to support development of democracy in the society" decreased, which does not require any explanation. On the contrary, active participation in improving life in the place of residence and protection of environment were found slightly more important than in the previous years. We hope that it is a start of a new trend that will result in higher engagement of Czech citizens in these activities.

Table 7: Factor 4 – public life (data in %)

FACTOR 4 – public life	1990	1994	1999	2004
To promote the policy of my party or movement (0,734)	31	32	22	31
To contribute to the development of democracy in the society (0,707)	69	51	54	66
To participate in the improvement of life in place of residence (0,674)	70	55	53	74
To actively participate in environmental protection (0,460)	-	61	59	70

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our Society 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

The fifth factor, like the third one, includes mainly values related to work. In this case, however, we deal with quite different values (they are not connected with leading position at work). I call this factor "life of an employee". For people, who profess this type of values, even the fact that they have a job and that they are not dependent on social welfare is important. The most emphasized value is interesting and meaningful work in a group of nice people, which is well paid at the same time. People find most values of "the life of an employee" as important as they did in 1990 – with the exception of "to make a lot of money" and "to have a job and not depend on welfare", which they find more important.

Table 8: Factor 5 – employees life (data in %)

FACTOR 5 – life of an employee	1990	1994	1999	2004
To have an interesting job (0,707)	88	81	82	89
To have a job and not depend on welfare (0,662)	59	46	56	67
To have a job, which is meaningful and useful (0,597)	90	81	79	89
To make a lot of money (0,563)	80	74	65	86
To work in a group of nice people (0,425)	86	77	79	87

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our Society 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

The last, sixth factor, is rather specific, because only two items significantly score in it. I called the factor "religious life" and it includes items "live according to religious rules" and "help those in need" (see Table 9). The Czech society is known for its atheism and it is not surprising that only less than a third of the Czechs regard living according to religious rules as very or rather important. Life according to religious rules became the least valued item of all 33 items that were presented to the respondents for assessment. It is interesting that in 1990 more people found it important than in the following years. The explanation is easy. In 1990 the survey questioned citizens of the whole Czechoslovakia. When we look at respondents living in the Czech Republic,

only less than a third of them (32 %) found life according to religious rules important. Absolute majority of Czech citizens find it important to help those in need (in May 2004 it was 85 %). The question remains, however, whether the generally declared willingness to help those in need is really reflected in their behaviour.

Table 9: Factor 6 – religious life (data in %)

FACTOR 6 – religious life	1990	1994	1999	2004
Live life according to religious rules (0,760)	37	28	29	31
Help those in need (0,423)	86	79	77	85

Note: Values in brackets present factor weight of individual items. The figures in the following columns present the sum of answers "very important" and "rather important." The total of 100% in each place of the table is completed by the sum of answers "rather unimportant," "completely unimportant" and "doesn't know."
Source: IVVM 1990 (N = 1444), IVVM 1994 (N = 969), IVVM 1999 (N = 1007), CVVM – Our Society 2004, survey 05-04 (N = 1002)

Conclusion

I think it will not be amiss to remind ourselves once again in the end that a research of values always encounters a number of problems. The values are inaccessible to direct observation and therefore they have to be deduced from value-coloured statements that are given to the respondents for their assessment. In spite of all the problems related to the value orientation research, however, I believe it is worth to overcome them, because this type of research brings valuable information about attitudes and moods in the society.

The Centre for Public Opinion Research uses two different methods to survey value orientations: assessing individual values by rating or by ranking. Let us summarize, what information has been revealed by the application of these methods.

In April 2005, respondents ranked individual statements according to their importance. Generally we can say that Czech citizens assign most importance in their lives to stable partnership, children and success at work. Generally, men assign more importance to success at work than women and women assign more importance to having children. From the point of view of age (for men and women) the significance of success at work gradually decreases with increasing age of the respondents. On the contrary, both men and women find "having children" more important with increasing age.

Since 1990, CVVM measures value orientation with an extensive array of statements expressing different attitudes. Respondents assess them on a scale ranging from very important to not important at all. The analysis of this array proved that for absolute majority of the Czechs their close friends and family are most important. This fact was not affected by changes that have happened in our country since 1990. The last survey executed in May 2004 indicated that the significance of somewhat egotistical values, which characterize comfortable life in material abundance, has increased since 1990 (items such as live comfortably, live life to the fullest, have interesting and exciting life or have time for hobbies). It seems that the Czech society is characterized by increase of individualism. Whether this trend will increase in the future is a question for further researches.

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