CERTAIN NOTES CONCERNING THE NEEDS PYRAMID IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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Abstract:
Paper aims at highlighting certain ground elements for building a new economic conception of human life, adequate to sustainable development in a knowledge society.
Methodologically, the conceptual grounds of the research come from re-analyzing human needs. Certain remarks concerning the needs pyramid are assumed, in the light of the knowledge society requirements and also consistent with the state of actual data.
Connections with genuine European roots and also with invoked future development scenarios are made.
Conclusive critical conclusions and proposals for long and mainly very long term result, in (and from) the light of the invoked issues.

Key words: human needs, market liberalism, sustainable development, knowledge society

JEL classification: D01, D03, D99

1. Introduction
There are certain famous issues (ideas, matters of research, topics or achievements) that are not just well known in a given form, but also so much accepted (assumed, motivated, demonstrated, used and quoted), that it looks like being prohibited to put them in discussion or revisit them with debating or contesting intentions: such an approach could be considered actually a blasphemy (keeping the proportions, it seems to be the same with changing/switching geo-centrism to heliocentrism...).

Such a matter is also Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (please see the model of Abraham Maslow in the adjoining scheme/pyramid, as usually found in handbooks).

The present analysis does not intend to turn the well known pyramid with 180 degrees! But just wants to find and discuss certain criteria of putting needs in a hierarchy in it (or in different hierarchies), and try to make nuances or even, maybe, to enrich it.

Our interest today for Maslow’s well known theory was opened by an electronic letter from a Russian researcher1, who, after introducing himself, was asking me certain details on my

1 Ivan Kotliarov, associate professor, Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, Russia.
generalized concept of services theory (firstly published in 1993). Trying to know a bit about this researcher, I found interesting models he made – on different topics – and that reminded me how my servicity approach is not yet enough modelled in all its details (please see references at this matter in the next chapters). Therefore, in this new light – given by the researches I could find of this researcher – I decided to try again and more on my field: adapting to my field certain researches in maths that I studied.

In connection with those studies, my attention was firstly kept by the model built on Maslow and Hertzberg that Ivan Kotliarov published (it obliged me also to a more rigorously remind on Maslow’s own pyramid).

Any analysis must today start from the principles of knowledge society. Here in, main issues are those of social and ecological approach. In our study, we try to put them in the core of our approach and remarks.

2. What criterion?

I will not describe Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see the scheme that is usually teach to students): it is well known and studied, mainly in faculties of business and economics. But from the very beginning, I will put the question: what criterion of choosing/selecting the needs considered by Maslow is on the ground of this classification? Can it be revealed? And what criterion for classifying/arranging them follows the hierarchy set up in Maslow’s pyramid?

The first answer sees a definitely individualistic approach – what is the most usual in economics. I immediately also notice that its validity is rather on short run.

Maslow was a psychologist, having also previous juridical studies. By my knowledge, he had not economic studies. In despite of it, his “economic formation” is seen from the conceptual “substance” of the entire approach: it may be because of the “education” made by the very consuming society we live in, when the commercial reasons are mastering all the fields of our lives, as a true “religion”, a very dominating and even aggressive one. (I would say that those “lessons from the life” bring not formation, but rather deformation (distort).)

Even if made by a psychologist (and jurist, as Maslow was, by his academic studies), the needs and their steps look like being made by an economist (this is the reason for the big success of the matter of needs’ hierarchy in economic business field: the economists took lustily this scientific building as a very proper warm bread just good for them!). They look like built in the usual economic approach, because the reasoning is actually seen from the angle of the dominant orthodox economic theory; when reading them, one can feel that the motivation concerned () is conceived at the level of the “animal-man”: putting sex on the same place (step) with water and food is meaningful in this matter; as well as putting love on another place (less important) than sex, after it. With all risks in that what concern my position in the minds of the reader of this comments, I have to recognize that my formation (education) was different from it: soul – including love – is preconceived in a first step by comparison with the body.

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2 When writing to me, he knew only certain issues/publications of mine on the topic (from 1994). On the topic, please see also Alexandru Jivan, Modern Services – a challenge for the economic theory and practice, Mirton Publishing House, Timişoara, 1996


4 One of the most usual forms, found in volumes for students, on Wikipedia etc.

5 See my ethical beliefs resulted from seeing relevant realities (like, for instance, [8] and the my next developments on the same matter, published in different occasions).

6 Here is a matter about education in family, because school comes after it, in time (and even in power of generating effects). I do not speak here about the “life lessons”, that are just experiences, received on conceptions already set, that can at least make nuances or corrections, but not create real grounds for an educated human being.
(including sex in the animal building of beings). Even when I am at the third age, I think that soul and human values prevail by report to the animal (body) ones. Or, at least, it should be like that: humans hardly tried – during their history which made them more humans (superior to other animal beings) – to gain such human characteristics. For instance, law condemns cannibalism, even in the very extreme conditions (even if starving); and laws are rules for human life and, also, instruments for education.

In the frame of the “economic moral” of our times, nothing is said in the set of Maslow’s needs about principles, human values (superior values) etc.: the approach is only of an animal nature, conceived for the animal-man, or even for homo oeconomicus, as already said. Important connections with educational system can be made.\(^7\)

I also dare to say that no uniform criterion (i.e. for all the steps) I found in this hierarchy of needs: it is not by hedonistic wishes and whims, it is not by humanistic or moral approach, it is not by religion (the hierarchy takes not into account differences between different cultures or religions of the world – bigger or smaller), and it is not at all by elevated culturally selected criterion.

It is true that personality, skills and abilities of individuals determine hierarchies between needs; knowledge and experiences accumulated can be added. But also do – very important and often forgotten by the hedonistic thought – culture and sensibility, religion and social trends and habits (very old or more recent but enough generalized or “in vogue”).

The needs on the steps number 1 and 2 could be considered as physical ones. The next two steps (3 and 4) are mainly social and relational; but the top one (5) is again psychological.

Needs in Maslow’s pyramid are going from the most material and the most immediate ones to more immaterial and to even more sophisticate. They look like being set for a normal average person, who (a) is healthy, and (b) is having a certain horizon.

a. It should be considered that the analyzed individual is perfectly healthy, because no word is said about the need for health! And it is so, even if, logically, health is a capital need. If the need for health can be seen (is realized by the individual), but is not satisfied (the health is not good), the individual is discouraged in all his/her actions and he/she even hardly goes upper to any other steps or levels of needs in the pyramid of Maslow; on the other hand, it also is true that, if being in good health, the individual is not very considerably encouraged; but he/she surely can go to any other possible needs levels.

b. The considered person should also have a certain enough wide horizon, because the level 5 of needs (talent, creativity etc.) is selected /pointed too.

The levels (or steps of needs in levels) or are set up in the order in which the individual satisfied (or imagine to satisfy) them: the different choose level for a need, in Maslow’s hierarchy looks like being given by how the average individual would comply with them, if problems with some of them (feeling of missing, of non-satisfaction)\(^8\) would occur. In conclusion, the criterion of the differentiations between different needs is the intensity of their claim for being satisfied: any need demands to be satisfied with a certain intensity and satisfying one lets the individual (permits to the analyzed subject) to go further to the next level of needs: in this order (succession) he/she is allowed to think at it, to be aware of the not-satisfied (or not sufficiently satisfied) need, to put its problem and the problem of its satisfying.

A first observation must be done: like in the case of health, even if not well pointed out in the pyramid (scheme) and even if not openly declared, in fact any need

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7 Developments are interesting also concerning the nowadays state of the high Romanian education system.

8 The non-satisfaction of necessity.
and any level of needs assumes that a minimal\textsuperscript{9} safety still exists, \textit{before} the first level needs.

3. A discussion on levels

Concerning the \textit{first needs level} we can besides observe that the individual approach is also extremely instinctual: the needs are aware (felt) \textit{exclusively at the level of physiological senses} (I dare to name it a “chaotic” world). And the \textit{criterion} is the \textit{intensity of the pressure (pain) brought about by the total missing} of a certain good or service: the intensity with which the need concerned “press” on the individual (but, I repeat, on the basis of a pre-existent minimal safety and health). The needs concern the natural environment (air, water): but the environment should be adequate (I mean clean and pure – a not enough underlined side of the matter). Those needs should be alleviated, because else (if the goods and services needed for satisfying them are missing), the feel is of pain, irritation etc.

I notice that shelter is here seen only like a sleeping and staying place, but not as protection: because else it would go to “safety” (second level needs in Maslow’s hierarchy).

Concerning the \textit{second needs level}, if once the elementary bents that result from the physiological needs (first level) are alleviated, an already more rational world is revealed: things begin to arrange themselves. After satisfying the body (the \textit{animal-individual}), the \textit{human-individual} can be concerned.

From the fact that the needs put on the first level are declared physiological needs and the second ones are declared psychological, it results that the approach concerns an individual who firstly eats, drinks water, sleeps, makes sex\textsuperscript{10} etc., and only after this (then), as a less important need, he/she thinks to set up a family, to get a home (house).

I would say that the need of sex is actually vital \textit{for the species}, but not definitely \textit{for the individual}: it is important, it is physiological, but not on the first level (\textit{i.e before all the needs on the other levels}). As an argument for this sentence, I remind what already said concerning the priority of safety; for other comments on the issue, please see \textit{infra} the chapter concerning safety and health.

Concerning the same matter of sex, I think it would be more suitable to speak rather about “reproduction” (that is, of course, manifested by the wish of sex); but I understand that, being a need of the species as a whole, the widened approach at the species level would run counter the individualist approach, and therefore it was not accepted in the usual dominant economic hedonistic view.

\textit{The criterion} for the second level needs would be the same \textit{intensity of the pressure (pain) caused by the missing} of a certain level of satisfaction: it is needed a \textit{sufficiently big “quantity”} of the concerned elementary good or service. The approach is also individual and on the same instinctual extreme assumption of needs that are aware (felt) also mainly by physiological senses.

We said “missing of a certain level” (and not “total missing”, like we said for the first level), because if we consider also here (at this second level needs), the \textit{total missing} (\textit{i.e.} there exists neither the necessary level nor the \textit{minimal} good or service), then this second level in Maslow’s hierarchy would take the place of the first level: because of the priority of safety we already shown.

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\textsuperscript{9} At least a minimal one: a certain safety should exist before beginning any discussion on any other needs (any other than the need for safety).

\textsuperscript{10} One could say that it is about the minimal sex, meaning a first level need (\textit{i.e.} the moment when the “animal-individual” actually cannot live without it, being extremely pressed to it, as a physiological vital need): because else it cannot be explained or imagined how this need is put on the very first level of a human superior being.
The third level needs seems to be some less pressing needs, like love: therefore\(^{11}\) this (more spiritual) need is put after the (strictly physical) one; sex is assumed being previous by comparison to love (thus, love is assumed only secondary, coming after sex); the only reason for it can be that sex could be much pressing, even perceived as painful if not satisfied, claiming to be alleviate). In this matter, I would say that things (hierarchy) are actually precisely reverse: sex should come after love.

From this order results that in Maslow’s hierarchy seems to take place a market approach and a possession approach: because the needs hierarchy is (i) putting in front or taking into account with priority that what can be bought\(^{12}\), in the same manner in what food has priority by report to safety\(^{13}\); and it is (ii) an approach focused on the possession criterion: having low state (at level no. 2), having lover or husband (at level no. 3), having professional competence recognized by the others (equivalent with a certain image or power in the society) – at fourth level (no. 4).

Needs like knowledge, peace, aesthetics, self-fulfilment, oneness with God etc. are put on a latest fifth level (5th), even if, for the seek of art and God, some could let food or other physiologic satisfactions. It is true that such priorities for such spiritual preoccupation or needs are possible, by report to food, only if the individual does not die by starvation, if he/she is in a normal or at least supportable state from the point of view of food and of other physiological needs. Here also a correlation with the priority of safety or health can also be invoked).

4. The issue of safety and connection with other famous approaches

At first sight, the criterion of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs seems to be the intensity with which the individual feels (perceives) those needs. But it is not this one, because if aggressed by (or in danger of being attacked by) a destructive force (indifferently of its source), any normal individual will give priority to reacting against this force (protect his/her self, run, fight against it etc., generally saving his/her self), and he/she will do so, indifferently how hunger, sleepy or sexually unsatisfied he/she could be. This very simple observation means that, in fact, the need for safety has absolute priority (and it is not only on the second step, like Maslow put it, and all other physiological needs are not more important than safety.

It should be no doubt that safety (in the second level of importance, by Maslow) is a priority need for any individual, rather than food, shelter, warmth or sex (in the first level, by Maslow): it has priority: to be satisfied (at least in minimal degrees) before the physiological needs on the first level of Maslow hierarchy, before life itself.

But besides, even the forth and fifth levels by Maslow (his highest level needs) look like more important in such cases (as described): if no social respect and achievement and actualization etc. (and therefore, if psychologically suffering occurs), the individual rather could give up and not fight anymore, neither for achieving psychological comfort and social wanted state, nor for physiological welfare (food, shelter etc.), and nor for safety – even accepting aggression and destruction. A minimal self respect (even if only resulted from ignorance or from not considering any such issue) has priority against physiological needs of the first level of Maslow's hierarchy: if any self respect is missing, the individual may renounce to food, to love and even to his/her life. The same can be said also about if the individual benefits of no belonging (being not at least minimally accepted in a social form): he/she could renounce to any fight and work, giving place to the disappearance of his/her body – and, with it, of the world what does not integrate/accept him/she, of the life that is not worth to be lived.

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\(^{11}\) Because it is less pressing.

\(^{12}\) Wares on the market.

\(^{13}\) Which comes from the society, from the state, from the family etc.: safety is less material and can be satisfied by services (immaterial), and not by strictly material goods, like hunger can.
means that certain psychological needs, if not achieved at a minimal degree, they can prove themselves more important than all the others, even than the minimal safety we spoke about.

The problem of the priority of safety by comparison to food and other physiological needs of Maslow was avoided in other famous approaches, like ERG theory of Clayton P. Alderfer and two factor theory of Frederick Herzberg. By reasons of space of the paper, those are not described too.

5. Involving the time and value matter

I am convinced that needs are not the same at the individual level by comparison with the society level and the whole species level. Here also the whole co-systemic level could be added (the planetary level). Differences also occur by the size of the period concerned. Here a few ideas will be respected on the time matter:

It is well known the optics of Marshall concerning the differences between economic decisions, depending on the time horizon concerned: as a reaction to the classical conception on value (considered to be determined by the efforts of the producer), the marginalist theory were explaining how, on the market, only the immediate utility for of the client matters. From the inside of the neoclassical school of economic thought, Marshal surpassed the narrow approaches and, introducing the time in judging events, he widened horizons of thought, including the long term besides the short run approach of marginalism. Thus the classical approach from the angle of the production costs came to bring a deeper analyse than the short view of the market could bring. The costs that have to be recovered were re-viewed as decisive for economic units’ choices and movements. Even if the idea of behaviour is considered mainly for short run decisions, in fact the determinant represented by costs and long term reasoning are at the ground of human acts: when the human individual’s acts are enough widened to take into account the long periods too. The evolutions of prices on the market on long time are influenced in the same manner.

The approach we underline in this paper means to go further, aiming at more widening horizons of thought – and, by consequence, of behaviour -, even in economics and in the economy, taking into account the widened approach of human society and common people that is consistent with our times. It includes also the need for interdisciplinarity in economic scientific analysis. On this line of thinking, in the quoted paper is shown that time horizon can go be further: “Seeing that the bear conditions for life are sacrificed for gaining more money, people will adapt and realize the need to change the set. It means a knowledge concerning the impact of economic activity on the environment, the impact of mankind on Mother Nature and, implicitly on its own future on a longer time that market can appropriately manage. … The choice is between some private short or medium run interests on one hand, and the whole human society’s and whole planet’s very long time interests, on the other side.” This approach is consistent with knowledge society principles and with recent European Union’s concern: in the European Union strategies were build on such principles and efforts are made in concern for the future.

On those three time sizes also the feeling and understanding of needs become different: in three dimensions. The analysis we made on Maslow’s hierarchy can reveal possibilities to see differences between the short-sighted (immediate) horizon, the long term view and the very long approach of any matter connected.

14 For explaining these issues, please see [10]
On this matter, references should be done to the first liberalists in the economic science: the French Physiocrats. Their approach concerning value creation is defining for the European values (even if later embezzled by the English classicism)\textsuperscript{15}. Physiocracy focused on the true genuine production itself\textsuperscript{16}: physiocracy generated a logical delimitation between being productive and living upon anything else other than own contribution (maybe only by consumption and destruction). Here from came the originally the meaning of “laissez faire” principle\textsuperscript{17}. If not following the principles of creation underlined by the physiocrats, progress is blocked.

The idea of recycling the physiocrats’ original concept of “productivity” was “borrowed” by the neoclassical economics: they declared all activities being useful. Thus, the essence of productivity was lost, in its original meaning. The attitude towards nature was also affected. Effects should be not taken into account only after being generated. The circumstances include very long-term effects, influences on climatic conditions etc. (which are, most of them, irreversible).

In this view I gave up the servicity approach. It is consistent with my approach on economics, based on service economy, where I put together “the theory of the producer” and “the theory of the consumer”. Certain observations on the different levels or categories of needs can be put in models, but they would be grounded on this new servicity generalized concept for economics:

I am very sure that product by itself is a service too: but – very important – it is not about the product by itself (per se), but about the process of manufacturing it and of putting it to the disposition of the client (may it be a trader or another corporate body, or an individual – natural person. I do not agree the approach of Jean Baptiste Say concerning the generalization of services as functions of material goods, saying that any material product gives services: because it would mean superposition between service and utility\textsuperscript{18}, which should not be done: it is not rigorously scientifically (that approach can be explained by the fact that, in the times of Say, the utility theory became already to appear, but was not yet developed – and it was not yet very clear set up; the marginalists/neoclassics later took it); This appearance and evolution process can explain the approach of Say, that I consider a misunderstanding – even if much assumed by certain economists: I declare it even if I know that it is also (already usually) spoken about the “factors’ services”. This I agree when it is about “labour’s service” (because it means the service provided by the workers, but I do not agree with “objects’ services” (“capital’s service” here included): in my opinion, serving is a human act; objects are useful (can be useful or not, more or less), but they do not properly “serve” (they are only used by people; may be even for serving other people). I think we should not “personalize” them (make them to be persons; even if they are robots!).

My view is better agreed with Bastiat’s service-value theory (another than labour-value or utility-value theories) – that is consistent with my servicity approach

\textsuperscript{15} Please see our research on the matter, in papers like [9] and also “Two Fallacies in Approaching the Current Crisis”, \textit{REBS (Review of Economic & Business Studies)}, [FEAA, Doctoral School of Economics, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iaşi, România] 3/2009, Special Issue, p. 85-104.

\textsuperscript{16} For developments on this topic, please see our research on the concept of servicity.

\textsuperscript{17} Because persons that are not productive and their choices could have other reasons than the natural good progress of things. It is the only foundation accepted by (the genuine, basic, physiocrat) liberalism.

\textsuperscript{18} Everything I theorized here in those last lines is developed in my book [5]. For instance, transportation services are performed when a man uses a car for transporting other people or other people’s stuff; in this case (1), the other people (the customer) benefits from the service “produced” by the performer (by the transporter, by the provider of transportations services), and not by the car: the car cannot transport by himself, alone, without the service provider (here I am “Marxist”: because Marx underlined it very much!); I have this kind of assuming the economic reality, in despite of the fact that the provider uses the car (the utility of the car: not its “services”); in another case (2), if the car is his own (owned by the man you are asking about), he serves himself by it (in the sense of Gershuny – the author of the self-service theory): as an owner of that material tool or object, he uses the utility of the car (and not its “services”).
6. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the dividing (distribution) of the human needs in hierarchic steps is like the inclusion (grouping) of human activities in economic sectors: it is usual, but without a (clear and obvious) criterion: there is not a unitary and beforehand thought and analysed criterion, but the groups can be only seen as resulting from a usage, and the usage became officialised.

Neither this social level is (not?) considered[,] nor the family level is not very plainly exposed (even if having children and sacrifices of the own person in the benefit of the children could be declared as being in the purpose of the accomplishment of “self actualization” – level 5, or being acts or work aiming at individual’s recognition and respect needed for “self esteem” – level 4). This individualist approach is seen, in despite of the usual prior attention paid by any normal father to his/her children, much before any comply with individual (other) needs: the care for children is a familial and social need (and even an animal/instinctual one), but in the pyramid we are debating is not clearly set; it could be found, only if it is considered at the 3rd level (“belonging – love”), together with friends and lover; but much after food, warmth, sleep, sex, stability etc. (less important). I know that when I was a child, my parents often were eating only potatoes that were boiled in salted water (and not just once they were gone to sleep hungry), for succeeding to secure a little better food for their children. I never thought and I will never believe that they did it either for their own “belonging-love” (level 3, containing also “family”) or for their individual “safety” (level 2, containing security of a home and family); there are human needs much superior to all the mean ones put in the front by the mainstream economics. Those are not isolated facts of altruism; but safety and health of the descendants, as well as everything could mean the surviving and existence of such delicate beings (including food and shelter for them) are quite very normal and represent much more then the own air, sleep and sex of the individual – even if that last needs are put on the first step of the famous pyramid of needs.

Concerning the individualistic character of the approach I spoke about, it is shown also by the fact that the attention is paid exclusively to the physiological homeostasis of the individual (i.e. maintaining to normal values of the concentration of blood, lymph, blood pressure), and not to other homeostatic topics (like, for instance, to the biologic homeostasis, i.e. maintaining of the biologic and ecologic equilibrium, in the biosphere and ecosystem).

The necessity of reviewing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs result: not only in searching its main criterion and nuances, but also in the purpose of better setting new and clearer criteria and, also, other levels for certain needs, new hierarchies better consisted with realistic criteria and better useful to widened analyzing purposes.

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See also [4], and Alexandru Jivan, “Responsabilizing and Servicity”, Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference Economy and Transformation Management, Université d’Avignon et des Pays de Vaucluse, France, University of the West, Timișoara, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Jean Monnet European Centre of Excellence, The School of High Comparative European Studies (SISEC), Timișoara, Romania, May 5-6, 2006.
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