

CULTURAL PHENOMENA AND PROCESSES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY – DETERMINANTS OF CULTURAL POLICIES

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Abstract

Cultural phenomena and processes in the contemporary society, influenced by the social development models and by the fact that the constitutive elements of the culture have become the decisive factors of social change, are the determinants of the cultural policies. They are centered on the active process of cultural globalization that emphasizes besides the assimilation of the European principles, also the preservation of the cultural dialog without identity loss.

Contemporary culture cannot be appreciated unless we know the main processes and phenomena that lately have generated impressive changes in the area of technology and means of communication. Due to these transformations we witness a change of the cultural paradigms, a mutation of values.

Keywords: Culture, cultural identity, cultural policies, national identity, (the) cultural crisis

Introduction

As a set of value systems that expresses aspects of the physical and social reality, but also the characteristics of the relations between these two realities, culture, social complex integrating spiritualism and intellectualism, goes in consonance with the current global macroeconomic crisis through an unbalance.

Cultural evolution, rather the development of forms throughout time is in continuous transformation. The specialization of functions and the progressive differentiation of culture are the consequences of the social, cultural and biological evolutions of modern societies. The elements of a culture can freely go from one system to another and the social systems live through a system of institutionalized values, in regard to which its members must be strongly united and attached and must adhere in their actions.

While developing as „zoon politikon” (social animal), we discharge and receive cultural information, we polish and give us the finishing touches as creative beings, defining individual and collective cultural horizons for us. Today it is unanimously accepted the idea according to which a society cannot exist in any of the historical phases of its evolution without a cultural minimum.

We do not find a society in the history of mankind that does not build itself a cultural structure centered on the legacy determined by the degree of evolution of the production forces specific to that society.

The new thinking of systems and the different forms of artistic expression existing in the contemporary culture are generated by the fundamental changes that took place in different areas of cultural creation, technical progress and political organization. Most changes happened in science and in the space of aesthetic creation, subsequently expanding in the technical and economic plane of civilization, planes without which one cannot understand the characteristics of the contemporary world.

By means of the individual and collective communication of behavioral models, acquired attitudes and reactions, it is obvious that shaping the human personality is conditioned by culture, this being the one where through social and cognitive experiences are preserved and affirmation mechanisms of the human being are set up.

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People's ability to form personal pertinent opinions that retrospect exactly to the given reality is achieved as a result of the received education, for the latter has as specific function to methodically develop and create the capacities, feelings and tastes of the individual. From a social and economic point of view, nowadays' culture is dominated by the confusion of the right and responsible choice to the confusion everyone experiments when he/she must choose the right way or option.

The frequent legislative changes in education have generated disorientation and confusion regarding the adequate construction of a social and educational curriculum, which led to the elaboration of culturally defective text books, to the fragilization of the spiritual horizon, to the alienation of the young generations from reading and to the emphasis of the advanced electronic technologies appropriation as means of information and culturalization. The educational environment is not however the only tributary of the cultural vulnerabilization of the young generation, for the family environment has a similar importance in forming and consolidating the complex system of cultural attributes, faiths, morals, feelings and perceptions.

Individuals give originality to each country or each nation and they have determined the elaboration of their own answers to the fundamental problems of mankind. These answers are just as many possibilities to progress in science, culture and civilization. The proposed and adopted solutions have made the difference, up to now, with specific contrasts being developed among individuals: starting from the attitudes they adopt regarding a certain activity to the each one's form of sensing certain norms, values or attitudes.

Development is also a cultural process not only an economic one and the density of cultural creation, especially the scientific one, has projected certain societies in the vanguard of contemporary civilization. The interest for the problems of culture is related today to the new models of social development and the fact that the constitutive elements of culture have become decisive factors of social change.

Contemporary culture cannot be appreciated unless we know the main processes and phenomena that lately have generated impressive changes in the area of technology and means of communication. Due to these transformations we witness a change of the cultural paradigms, a mutation of values. At global level there is a certain cultural competition between societies, competition in which everybody defends and develops their own interests by means of the creative contribution they bring to community.

National identity vs. cultural processes of globalization

The 20th century has determined radical changes in the area of culture, among which we can emphasize the extraordinary successes obtained in scientific knowledge, hence the major importance given to values of science, acceleration of cultural changes, the crisis of traditional values, the increase in intensity of creation, the rapid integration of cultural values in the system of social activities through mass media, the democratization of the access to culture, the expansion of mass culture, etc.

One of the most debated themes is the one of the relation between cultural and national identity and the processes of economic globalization, having special implications for the understanding of the European integration process. It is much insisted on the problem of cultural diversity. It is extremely important the recognition and awareness of the differences and identities between cultures, while trying to have an intercultural dialogue. The expansion of the European Union represents an opportunity to know the culture of different countries and an attempt for mutual understanding, beyond the economic advantages.

In the last years the academic researches as well as the ones ordered by big companies or international structures have dealt with identifying the role culture has in social development and what impact the cultural processes or phenomena have on individuals.

The visibility of culture as central factor of the development of contemporary societies is also favored by the globalization of the economies and the ascension of the means of production and communication.

The extraordinary development of industry, agriculture, transports, science, etc finds a correspondent in culture. Today we witness an unprecedented development of culture in all areas. The last decades have made available a huge mass of cultural values, statistics showing that in the world there annually appear hundreds of thousands of book titles, an impressive number of radio and TV programs are broadcasted, there are painted and shown plays as never before. We have reached a cultural explosion, especially in production and in distribution, the individual having facilitated access to all the cultural goods, being able to choose the manner in which he/she wishes to fulfill his/her cultural needs. Some cultural goods, like movies, TV programs or books are conceived to be only a result in an industrial production.

The cultural industries in The European Union – cinematography and the audiovisual, editing, music and arts – are an important source of income and places of work. The European Union has support programs for certain industries in the area of culture, encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the sole market and the digital technologies. Furthermore, it tries to create a dynamic environment for these industries simplifying the administrative procedures, facilitating the access to financing, contributing with research projects and encouraging a closer cooperation with partners from inside and outside the Union.

Cultural industrialization developed through the means of mass communication. Of course it had major advantages, but the tendency of product making and distribution led to self consumership. The multiplication of passions justifies the reactions to the industrialization of culture, the number of collectors, amateur artists or passionate in an area or another visibly increasing. A manner of interpreting these tendencies is the analysis of subjective participation of readers, spectators and listeners to the ideal and emotional making of contemporary art works. The convincing example is the Internet, which allows the production of large ranges of goods and by means of this channel the individual can easily consume culture. On the Internet we find cultural magazines and online bookshops, cultural publications and sites addressing the amateurs.

Contemporary culture also supposes at the same time the increase of the necessary of investments in different cultural areas, in auditoriums that need substantially enhanced improvements in regard to previous years or in libraries that must be fitted with modern and expensive electronic equipments.

In contemporary society we talk about mass culture as being the direct result of mass media action, professionals studying the audiences seeking „rather to impress the public opinion than capture it”, „to influence it rather than measure it”. The effect of this culture consists in the uniformization of the ways of thinking and behaviors, prevailing in this area the entertainment which keeps the individual outside the problems of society. Mircea Eliade emphasized the manner in which the whole mediatic system carries a series of wasted and unproductive myths in order to orient the community in a desired direction and to obtain invisible political effects.

Modern and urbanized societies are mass societies with urban agglomerations and compared to the traditional ones, they introduce a new style of life in which time is severely segmented. From this reason there also appeared the individual's social need to spend this free time carrying out cultural activities but amusing at the same time. Specialized cultural creations have a prevalent value system, yet when it comes to mass culture we notice an increased tendency towards the commercial side. The products of this culture must be sold and their production must be profitable.

This type of culture has become a reality in contemporary societies acquiring a more and more important role in current society. The success and attraction of the new forms of mass culture combine the informational and educational dimension with the entertainment one, becoming dominant forms in developed societies, which led to the expansion and penetration of this type of culture in societies with a peripheral economic and political statute.

Today there is also much talk about a rather classic opposition, namely, culture versus technology. The first assures the difference and the second one is seen as an agent of integration. Due to the technological explosion that clutched human community but also the way in which individuals have changed their priorities and concerns, it came to talking about the decline culture has, naming this phenomenon „culture crisis”.

The term „culture crisis” belongs to each person’s value judgment on culture at a certain moment, judgment that can be molded but that can be influenced at any moment according to the context we refer to. This crisis can be different, in the sense that it can exist at the creator’s level, the consumer’s but also the culture critic’s level.

Régis Debray highlighted two reasons of cultural crisis the world is going through, namely: the rapid increase of the population, but also local retirement which the technological globalization reactivates, according to a model of inverse proportionality. The more people start to resemble, the more individuals try to differ and this last effort is done through local cultures.

Cultural consumption does not represent such a recent phenomenon as one might believe, it has been debated for a long time, it is an ancient yet new theme, a complex subject that does not include only reading or the representatives of elite culture, theatre, library, museum, etc., but also the products of technology, TV, radio, PC, etc. In a world where almost everything can be quantified, culture and people’s adherence to it does not get rid of measurements. And in recession times, cultural consumption decreases. At least that is the situation of Romania, reflected by a barometer elaborated by the Centre of Studies and Researches in the Area of Culture, subordinated to the resort Ministry in Bucharest.

The cultural practices are studied by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) within the budgetary expenses of households. The first such inquiries were initiated in the 19th century by Federic Le Play. Besides the inquiries regarding consumption expenses, in the last years many inquiries were made regarding holidays or the spending of free time.

When making a technical analysis of the current development of civilization one can notice a close connection between industry and culture, some professional authors talking about an industrialization of culture or about the culturalization of industry. The industrial revolution eliminated from people’s life the aesthetic dimension that the hand - made world had. With the lapse of time, it was spread the conviction according to which technique and art irremediably separated. We can however notice the connection between artistic means and contemporary aesthetic conceptions, but also that absolute frontier where technique develops.

In the work „The culture consumers”, Alvin Toffler shapes the idea according to which the increase in the number of artists imposes a competition which implicitly leads to virtuousness. Toffler states that wages in art are very low. Referring to the "industry of culture" the author shows that there are two types of cultural institutions: the ones that act in the payable area (commercial books publishing, CDs production) and others that act as nonprofit institution (theatres, opera houses, museums etc). Of these types of institutions, the nonprofit ones are confronted with financial problems, they usually activate in deficit, while the ones in the payable area can be prosperous institutions.

One cannot say one culture is superior or inferior to another culture, but we can discuss the inequalities which happened in their development. Nowadays there are different possibilities of production, distribution and access to culture between various countries due to the economic discrepancies. The cultural development of poor countries cannot be limited to preserving traditions and folklore, as those are starting to become an exponent for different occasions or for foreign tourists.

„We need a huge amount of money to produce culture”. Therefore "cultural industry" is organized around various half - learned who present only a material interest for culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Synthesizing, we can state that in contemporary culture the generally human, moral or aesthetic ideals found a wide reflection, the individuals cultivating pride sentiments towards the national values.

Going through a period of mutual assimilation of the national and European values, but also the permanent exercise of keeping native - born values belong to an old principle of preserving the verticality of national culture. The cultural dialogue we should be suggesting to Europe, without concessions, without identity loss, without the sentiment of marginalization should come first in detriment of the assimilation of European principles as something compulsory preassigned, even though after Romania's adhesion to the European Union we have acquired its cultural policies' principle, that of absolute respect given to cultural diversity, with accent on the European common cultural heritage.

The legislation, institutional structure and adopted programs, initiated and made by Romania in the area of culture are in full agreement with the provisions of the Treaty on the European Community, as well as those of the Parliament and Council Decision regarding the starting of the Program "Culture – 2000", provisions that emphasized the improvement of spreading knowledge about the culture and history of the European states, preserving and protecting the European cultural heritage, developing non - commercial cultural changes and supporting artistic and literary creation, including that of the audiovisual sector.

The principles and objectives assumed by Romania in elaborating its cultural policies are respected just as in all European Union member states:

- *Cultural policy is considered a key component of the development strategy;*
- *Cultural policies promote creativity and participation to cultural life;*
- *Cultural policies consolidate the measures to preserve the cultural heritage and promote cultural industries;*
- *Cultural policies promote cultural and linguistic diversity in informational society;*
- *Cultural policies assure the increase of human and financial resources for the culture's development.*

The main objectives of cultural policies in Romania consider all the elements that configure cultural life - contemporary creation, cultural heritage and the dissemination of culture, they balance themes and make them compatible with the principles and objectives internationally identified, but also with the national demands and traditions. Thus, cultural policy in Romania is based on 6 main principles:

- *the principle of protecting the national cultural heritage, according to which the values and goods that belong to the cultural legacy have the quality of fundamental resources of knowing our past and present;*
- *the principle of creation freedom, according to which the freedom of artistic expression and public communication of artistic works and performances represents not only a fundamental right, but also an essential element of human progress;*
- *the principle of independence of cultural institutions, according to which initiating and carrying cultural programs and projects cannot be restricted or censored due to ethnic, religious, political criteria or to satisfy some group interests;*
- *the principle of value primordality, according to which it is ensured the creation of material and moral conditions, it is supported and promoted the application of specific evaluation and selection criteria, the affirmation of creativity and talent;*
- *the principle of equal chance to culture, according to which by means of the harmonization of cultural policies at national level with those at local level it is ensured the access and participation of all citizens to culture, as well as the development of the spiritual life of collectivities, in all their diversity;*

· *the principle of cultural identity in the world value circuit, according to which it is ensured the protection and valorization of cultural legacy, it is supported and promoted the introduction in the national and international cultural circuit of the values of national spirituality and is facilitated the circulation inside the country of the values of universal culture.*

The European Union proposes and develops important programs to preserve and valorize the intangible heritage. But the success and particularly the authenticity of the considered phenomena depend on the good intention, honesty and, last but not least, competence of those involved in such wide scope activities.

So that the European Union to be able to develop viable cultural policies we need to solidly know the past as well as to cultivate a respect for diversity. In this sense, *Romano Prodi* states the fact that in the moment in which Europe extends, comprising the great Slavic cultural traditions, more than ever we cannot let anything from the common European identity be lost and everything to coexist in a higher and more vigorous synthesis.

Europe is the continent of numerous national communities, with its own features, cultures and languages, a mixture of complementary identities in a vital way. *Constantin Noica*, in „De dignitate Europae” (1988), presents the cultural concept through the potential of constant evolution of a individuality up to the level of assessment and recognition of the general, the construction of that individuality that will obtain unity.

Preserving the national cultural identities, the heritage of identity values and identifying the values common at European level are the only forms in which the European Union will be able to keep the ideals it was founded for, proving that globalization can determine the ambivalence of the terms „European culture” and a „Europe of cultures”.

A political culture of the developed countries is supported by the United Nations (UN) by means of the General Declaration of Human Rights. The society is in continuous change and the change it displays sometimes brings unbalance and instability. Many times changes are benefic and necessary, but they should also be guided by the norms imposed by every culture.

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