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Perspectives on Globalization - Aspects of Cultural Diversity, Integrating Practices and Events

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Abstract: This paper aims at presenting the various views of the experts and researchers who studied the phenomenon of globalization, focusing on cultural diversity. Also the study contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon itself, providing a responsible and open approach. Our contribution shows how globalization is perceived in the Romanian society and answers the questions about the ability of a young nation, from the democratic point of view, such as Romania, to face the challenges coming along with the new status of being an European Union member state. It is addressing to students, teachers, and to all the other persons interested in the aspects that the phenomenon of globalization implies.

Keywords: cultural integrity; intercultural communication; collective mindset; cultural values

1. Introduction

Most of the researchers who have approached the theme of globalization claim to have assumed the task of illuminating and not proselytising, in the sense that this significant issue needs to be deeply understood, and not accepted tacitly without the discernment needed to evaluate advantages and disadvantages. "The goal is to illuminate, not proselityze", is stated in the introduction of the work "Globalization – What's New", which, in 2005 already raised the issue of a dramatic change in "the shape of globalization" (Weinstein, 2005, p. 2) at the beginning of the third millennium. The classical theories of Canadian McLuhan, with the famous phrase "the Global Village" are surpassed in the latest years by the critical studies of those who researched the phenomenon of globalization, seen in all its contradictory complexity, analyzed and discussed from different perspectives, with a special focus on the issues involved by cultural diversity.

2. The Latest Points of View about Globalization Phenomenon

If in a previous work James H. Mittleman spoke about "The globalization syndrome" (Mittelman, 2000) pointing out that globalization and Americanization are not the same and went deeper into the transformations and resistance to global cohesion, in a later study the same author pulled an alarm signal by the offensive interrogation full of connotations: "who governs globalization?". For

Mittelman the phenomenon of globalization pushes every nation towards involvement "in a dialectic, subject to increasing pressure from above, market forces and international organizations such as EU, and from below in the form of demands from civil society". (Mittelman, 2005, pp. 9 – 10) The author considers that we live in an era of "alter – globalization" (other– globalization, in which the only way to avoid the loss of control in managing autonomous institutions at the level of the nation is represented by "self – determination". (Mittelman, 2005, p. 94 – 95)

Thomas Friedman sees the globalization phenomenon as being strongly marked by the American influences at various levels: showbusiness and entertainment industries, addiction to fast-food (Big Mac and Coca Cola), high-technology. (Friedman, 2001). Resistance to cultural exchange leads to forms of stereotypy and prejudice (the fact that the Americans have tens of thousands of McDonalds' locations worldwide determined the Europeans to speak about "fast-food globalization" in depreciative terms, the same happening with the dressing conformity reduced to blue jeans; Chinese goods and services that have invaded international markets are stereotypically labelled as of poor quality. The last generalization proved to be superfluous in case of some traditional medicine practices or in the case of homeopathic products). The confined content of this paper does not allow an ample discussion about the profitable use of the so productive and cheap labour force by some renowned companies. There is a reversed sense of inclusion into the American culture of European or Asian influences such as "music crazes from Europe, passionate toy and game fads from Japan, medical interests from China and movie styles from India". (Stearns, 2010, p. 150)

The discussion about globalization also supposes common points with the cultural diversity subject. Cultural diversity is built on two axes intersecting only at the moment when nations in economic, political, social and cultural contact prove a maturity of the collective mindset. On one axis complex systems develop, encouraging and protecting the own culture, the ethos and identity roots. On the other axis certain mechanisms emerge, offering openness to the other cultures and creating a permissive environment for the acceptance of differences. Reciprocal respect and tolerance are the triggering factors of these mechanisms, which lead to a viable intercultural communication. Cultural diversity entails mutual aid, mutually profitable transactions at the political, economic and diplomatic level, conflict management, inviolability of citizen rights specific to each nation, sharing common values that do not impede on national identity values but which, on the contrary confer them better visibility. Cultures, perceived as living entities, are attracted to one another, they find points of convergence according to certain affinities. This is a cultural coherence mentioned by the authors of "Globalization and Diversity. Geography of a Changing World". (Rowntree, et alii., 2008, p. 433)

Globalization and implicitly, cultural diversity, does not mean herd conformity, homogenization and impersonality, consider those who do not perceive the phenomenon in question as a threat to own cultural integrity. For Peter N.Stearns, "contemporary globalization – or the contemporary phase, depending on how one views historical antecedents – involved two clearly novel elements: the global environmental impact and embryonic global protest – and a massive acceleration and expansion of more established patterns, notably in the areas of technology, language and culture". (Rowntree, et alii., 2008, p. 433) The same author invokes the disputes that can go on forever between the defenders and detractors of globalization, the latter circulating a bleak vision on what the phenomenon involves in itself, that is, the deterioration of a culture's defining particularities. Micheline Ray considers that "who says intercultural, starting from the plenary sense of the prefix *inter*-necessarily says interaction, exchange, openness, mutuality, objective solidarity". (Dasen, Perregaux & Ray, 1999, p. 166)

3. Aspects of Globalization in Romanian Space

If within the Anglo-Saxon academic environment the phrase "unequal world" (Armstrong & Anderson, 2007, p. 1.) is circulated, the Romanian academic world still hosts the question whether the scepticism with which Romanians were regarded by the other European states at the moment of accession has disappeared. Romanian Academician Dan Berindei, points out solutions to overcome an undervalued image which the Romanian people experience in front of other states. "We all have the feeling that we are not yet sharing the common table with equal rights, we still have roads to travel until we will no longer be the poor relatives. In order to achieve this new status we have to preserve our national consciousness, our dignity and pride and these can only be found in preserving and cultivating our national culture." (Berindei, 2011). Within the Romanian space, the phenomenon of globalization enjoys a major interest from the intellectual elite, divided, as in the case of foreign researchers, in pro and counter parties. Hostile arguments have a strong echo in the conditions in which they start from the assumption that everything becomes a show or some kind of goods, including tradition, moral principles and cultural values, in a process which burns stages, given the fact that not enough space for debate and time for analysis are offered to communities for assimilating the foreign offer. Once the privations and limitations imposed upon the Romanian society by the communism regime ceased and the new opportunities brought by the new form of democracy occurred the fear of the outside world took a new shape. If for the communists the west was a concern, now the problem seems to have roots in the phenomenon of globalization associated with the dissolution of identity. Mihai Goia sees in the "globalized or world man", a rudimentary individual, "centred only economically", subject to the risk of becoming the "atomized man living only for production and consumerism, emptied of culture, politics, sense, consciousness, religion and any sense of transcendence. Probably this is the last stage in the evolution of humanity, or "the last man"[1] Denigrating metaphor type titles of the most recent publications within the Romanian space, (Tiberiu Brăileanu, *Globalization. The No-name of Nothingness*, 2004; Paul Dobrescu, *Globalization Shrewdness*, 2010) show different scenarios about a future in which the states of the world will disappear and their place will be taken by the great corporations. Beyond the studies and researches undertaken in order to define it, globalization remains a real fact, developing under our eyes and getting us involved in its movement aimed at modernity.

Public opinion perceives the phenomenon of globalization as a profitable interaction for economic profit, but, in some cases, with less beneficial influences on the collective mindset. In the competition for conservation of certain privileges obtained following the integration into a complex structure, one example being the European Union, the Romanian nation might feel overwhelmed by its duties. A certain feeling of underestimation arises, in the sense of the pressure felt by the citizens who had to accept integration conditions sometimes difficult to meet. The standards imposed in the case of agricultural products (the precise weight or size stipulated by European norms), in the case of other sectors of economy, the financial obligations that created a dependence on the foreign trade were, nevertheless, concrete aspects that made Romanians aware and responsible and determined them to honor their duties very seriously. However globalization as a general phenomenon and EU inclusion in particular, configured certain positive common mental schemes. The exchange of information and goods, touristic openness, financial transactions at global level performed in a few seconds by complex information systems, represented for Romania spurs of discovering unsuspected abilities to be a consistent and trustful partner. One of the shortcomings was, however, the alert pace in which the

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[1] Goia, Mihai. Post-Cold War Globalization and Its Effects at the Humanitarian Level. http://www.arduph.ro, accesed on February 20, 2011.

stages of the globalization process came in turn for a nation with the experience of forty years of communism. This alert pace of the history in the last 20 years triggered the start of complex mechanisms of reclaiming the wasted time.

Moves have been made at the political, economic, cultural level for the openness towards the foreign space. Romanian diplomacy regained its true meaning, the economy knew other markets and trade was ensured both by import and by export, while cultural exchanges offered Romanians access to artistic values that were forbidden before 1989. After the integration in the European Union on January, 1st 2007, Romania becomes the country in which political leaders and members of numberless associations and non-governmental organizations focus, as a primary goal on their work agenda, on the promotion of intercultural dialogue, on the awareness of the importance our country can gain once the barriers are lifted - freedom of circulation, in the proper sense of the word, and connotatively, the opening of the local mindset for cultural diversity. According to the statements made by the researcher Gheorghe Popescu, in the context of globalization, "the process of preserving cultural identity has two important aspects: the danger of cultural homogeneity, the emergence or acknowledgement of a unique form of culture, the appearance of the cultural and psychological disintegration phenomenon, both for individuals and for societies." (Popescu, 2006). The speeding up of the globalization phenomenon is considered by analysts one of the causes for the negative transformations of Romania in the latest years: demographic decrease, incapacity of some professional categories to face high demands, the inefficiency of several sectors such as the educational sectors, migration of labour force with the highest potential, etc. It is obvious that the extremely fast pace of globalization had also negative influences in the Romanian space, having in view the fact that Romania's economy is considered to be very globalized.

4. Practices and Events which Lead to Integration in the Space of the Cultural Diversity

In Romania a population segment deeply involved in the promotion of cultural diversity is represented by young people who participate in and organize different events. In this sense, we mention projects such as "Youth for Cultural Diversity", "Cultural Diversity in the Library", and a lot of other events promoted by: the Committee for Cultural Diversity of the Association Cluj–Napoca – "The European Cultural Capital", by the School of Youth with Intercultural Initiative which organized in December 2010 in Bucharest "The Intercultural Coffee Shop". Youth foundations periodically organize events for the celebration of cultural diversity, such as the Foundation "Student Plus". Youth and student organizations promote discussions about cultural diversity in libraries, high schools and universities. Romanian youths participate in contests on themes about globalization and cultural diversity. We note here the National Campaign "Diversity – one more chance for the future", throughout the year 2008, within the programme "Fighting Prejudices and Intolerance by Cultural Dialogue". All these activities show the fact that Romania is open to intercultural dialogue, displaying in the public space proper methods of communication for diverse cultures.

The researcher Willem Mass studies the problems arising from what he calls "EU citizenship". He underlines the fact that "new actors" (European citizens) have been created". (Maas, 2007, p. 233)
These new actors on the global stage can express autonomously and can preserve their political and cultural identity only if governed by a number of multilateral agreements institutionalizing certain rights and obligations for an efficient cooperation. The studies realised each year by different specialised institutions in order to set up the international rank of globalization showed that our country was on the 36th place in 2007, out of 72 states. The indicators taken into consideration were:

economic integration, the individuals' contacts with other foreign citizens, technological development.[1] In 2008 Romania was one of the most affected countries by the globalization in E.U.[2]. In 2009 Romania was on the 39th place, out of 93 nations, and in 2010 was on the 30th in the Globalization Index.[3]

5. Conclusions

The study points out the idea that the concepts like "transnationalism", "cultural diversity", "globalization" enhanced their meanings especially over the last decade, having a particular configuration inside the Romanian space, because of our nation's special historical context. We refer to the totalitarian regime, which meant a period of four decades of socio-economic and cultural seclusion. This state of isolation left a long lasting mark on the collective mentality. In our country, the theorists and researches study the effects of globalization upon social life, with their important consequences in the economic and political domains.

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[1] http://www.9am.ro, accessed on January 10, 2011.

[2] http://www.ziare.com, accessed on January 10, 2011

[3] http://www.adevarul.ro, accessed on January, 10, 2011