CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA. A POSSIBLE MODEL FOR COMMUNICATING THE NATIONAL VALUE SYSTEM

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Abstract

The premise of this paper is that a model for communicating the national value system must start from a strategy aimed at the identification, the cultivation and communication of values that give consistency to the value system. The analysis concentrates on the elements of such strategies and on the implications of applying a value communication program on the identity architecture of the community. The paper will also discuss the role of the national value system in the context of the emerging global culture, where the individual has the power to create his/her own hybrid cultural model.

Abstrait

La prémisse de cette étude est qu'un modèle de sécurisation de l'identité d'une nation doit envisager la sécurisation de son modèle des valeurs par une stratégie dirigée vers l'identification et la communication des valeurs qui le rendent consistant. Quels sont les éléments d'une telle stratégie et quelles sont les implications de l'application d'un programme de communication des valeurs au

niveau de l'architecture identitaire de la communauté, tels sont les points centraux de la présente analyse. L'étude fait une analyse du rôle du modèle des valeurs dans le contexte de l'apparition d'une culture globale.

Keywords: cultural policies, national value system, communication strategy, identity, hybrid cultural model

Mots clé: politiques culturelles, modèle des valeurs d'une nation, stratégie de communication, identité, modèle culturel hybride.

1. Introduction

The national value system is increasingly relevant in an epoch where identities come apart and regroup under the pressure of cultural flows transporting ideas, behaviors, exhibits from different cultures. Maintaining those elements that build identity: language, culture, religion, is a must for ensuring societal security, which is indispensable to any political construct. The threats against the value system supporting the identity become risks leading to social insecurity. *"Different societies have different vulnerabilities depending upon how their identity is constructed"* (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 124), and the Romanian society, built on cultural rather than political foundations, is all the more vulnerable to threats against the value system. Culture unifies, makes the community homogeneous and creates loyalties. Consequently, *"[…] national identity is a central component of security, whether aligned with the state or not"* (Buzan 82, my translation). Actions building societal security will then be aimed at preserving the value system which permeates the community life.

As a result, national cultural policies should follow a project where the national value system would be correctly identified and communicated to the audience. *Identified*, because this identification process helps construct a correct

description of the system, and *communicated*, for it to be accepted in national consciousness. The institutional mechanisms for securing the value system will be developed based on the identification, the correct classification of vulnerabilities, risks, threats and on the appointment of functional actors in the securitizing process (officials in charge with cultural policies, cultural agents, information managers). A second stage of a cultural policy in the present political and cultural context should identify which values must be activated following the changes in the cultural context, and the final stage should harmonize the national value system with the European system and construct responses to the challenges of cultural globalization.

2. Redefining the role of the individual

National cultures need to reconsider the consistency of their own values and imagine adaptation strategies in a cultural space dominated by the idea of an emerging cosmopolitan culture, whose tendencies for hegemony are deeply inculcated in its program (see, for instance, Tomlinson's analyses, 2002, 2007). Although a global community is still very much a utopia, the impact of its promotion on the community's value system is undoubted. The coming into being of a cosmopolitan conscience would change dramatically not only the map of social relations, but also the way individuals interact with their own culture. Global culture brings about changes in the structure of communities' symbolic power and is a potentially insecure development for the community, because the individual is highly valued. One could claim that the term of "global culture" is incoherent, systemically inconsistent, over-simplifying, but the impact of the manifestations of global culture on communities is a reality. "The modern problem of the rupture of culture and society has become the problem of the plurality of culture(s)" (Connor 376).

The variety of social relations in this new historical context could be

consistently analyzed only from the perspective of a definition of culture as a system of culturally significant practices:

> *"an analysis of global culture does not require the identification of homogeneity, shared values or social integration. Rather it requires the identification of a set of practices that constitute a cultural field within which struggle and contestation occurs".* (Goodman, 335)

Following the interpretation given by Giddens in *The Consequences of Modernity*, Tomlinson understands modernity as institutionalization of cultural practices. It is not the Western way of thinking which is spread through globalization, but modern cultural institutions (Tomlinson 2000, 270). Identity is increasingly relevant in this context. It is not the manifestation of global culture as such, but the creation of cosmopolitan conscience which is interesting, as it changes dramatically the map of social relations. We are witnessing "a change of the geography of global cultural interaction" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 387, my translation), since reflexivity is increasingly significant (Giddens). The dystopia of global capitalist monoculture, the dystopia of westernization, the homogenous culture, the hybrid culture, deterritorialized culture (in Tomlinson's terms), "Davos culture" and the "faculty club" culture (Peter Berger's proposals), McWorld (Benjamin Barber's), McDonaldization (George Ritzer's) are processes of cultural globalization which evolve simultaneously and interact in a complex way, have their origins in the West and use the same linguistic vehicle – English, but, more importantly, feed on a common ideology that promotes cosmopolitanism.

Unlike national culture, global culture does not require absolute loyalty from participants in a culture. The individuals can have a dual cultural existence, within traditional culture and global culture as well. Global culture claims to offer freedom to the individual ("all sectors of the emerging global culture enhance the

independence of the individual against tradition and collectivity" – Berger 2002, 9). Pop culture is deeply democratic as to the cultural forms it promotes and the public it selects. The individual does not feel discriminated for lacking training in the norms of high culture and discovers that s/he can be part of a community of equals. Nor do the media that pop culture uses for promotion exclude a certain segment of the public: pop culture is ubiquitous, from street to media messages. Secondly, pop culture gains the loyalty of its public by offering it immediate cultural satisfaction. Some of the reasons why the individual joins the game of pop culture are: the immediate understanding of messages (generally, with a facile idea behind), the simplified form of the messages, the ubiquity of messages, the type of reaction demanded from the public (rapid identification of the cultural product – acknowledgement of the value behind the product – acceptance of this value), and its accompanying effect: the consumption of the cultural goods. Thirdly, the association of global culture with modernization transforms the consumption of the products – even in the sugar-coated form of pop culture – in an imperative.

The individual departs from the community and acts as an autonomous producer of culture under the pressure of consumerist culture. The reconstruction of identity is probably the most significant influence of global culture over local culture. Many of the identity traits are transformed into consumer goods, which can be launched on the market, traded and altered to answer the laws of the market: once their market value disappears, they can be sacrificed. Moreover (partly because of the ubiquity of communication systems), communities are forced to function in a social environment regulated by these norms, in a new "Empire" (following the proposal of Hardt and Negri who, in their book of 2000, suggest that a global civic sphere is being born, which is governed by media industries).

Pop culture gives the individual the power to create value and select a set of values to characterize him/her. Since pop culture brings about the decrease of the importance of communities' traditional values, it pretends it is liberating. The individual can construct his/her own hybrid cultural paradigm, putting together

those values from diverse cultures which resonate with his/her principles, values which may be more or less harmonized, but dramatically influence the cultural behavior of the individual, who feels freed from the pressure of the "official" culture. Pop culture comes with its own set of values, already simplified, tagged and self-explanatory, and with their own interpretation grid which attaches *significance* to values. The individual accepts the convention of this grid, since this form of culture does not bring about the obligation of final attachment, nor pretends to form a new cultural system for that individual who would no longer find himself/herself in his/her own culture. The popular culture is, very appropriately put, a consumerist culture, almost an "instant" culture, whose elements can be easily moved and recombined, following the rise and fall of values that build their prestige on the capacity to create cultural goods which answer the laws of the market. At the level of concepts, however, the alleged freedom of the individual proves to be quite limited. While analysts of consumerist culture frequently invoke the ideology of human rights, attributing value to the individual is made by virtue of a new anthropology – individuals are "autonomous, rational, resourceful, and acquisitive" (Hunter and Yates 339), "pragmatic ... self-directed agents" (*ibid.* 340).

3. How do cultural policies communicate the value system in Romania?

Which is the role of national cultural policies in this context? A first step would be to correctly identify the fundamental values from the core of the value system, which outlines the identity. A second would be to correctly translate the value system into cultural actions.

An argument in favor of the idea that in Romania the representativeness of cultural values still raises some eyebrows is the emotional approach of all cultural debates. A recurrent dispute on the "export" cultural model brings the challengers face to face: intellectuals blamed for their obsolete attitudes and the "extreme modernists". Nothing new so far. In any culture the negation of tradition can give

birth to innovating trends. Yet, when the dispute touches on the problem of redefining the value system, this is a sign that the public develops a different attitude towards contemporary culture. This is the perspective that I will use in the pages to follow to discuss the arguments given in the most recent "quarrel" on exported Romanian values: the "pink pony" scandal (taking its name from the star exhibit, the famous pink pony, now embellished with a swastika) and the scandal of Bochum, Germany exhibition. I will concentrate exclusively on the elements indicating a redefinition of cultural values' representativeness, not on the esthetic content of creations triggering the dispute.

In August and September 2008, The Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) that intends to promote contemporary Romanian art through the Program Cantemir, was attacked in the press for spending public money to organize exhibitions in New York ("Freedom for Lazy People!") and Bochum (together with the Association Danubium, as part of the larger event "Romanian Cultural Days in the Ruhr Basin"). The exhibits were considered to infringe on religious and moral norms and to be anti-semitic and non-artistic. The dispute then moved into the Parliament, which ordered an investigation led by the Parliament's Culture Commission.

The arguments presented by the intellectuals involved in the dispute are particularly interesting for this analysis. The institutional dimension is not to be neglected: ICR is, indeed, financed by the state and is an "official" promoter of Romanian values (which does not necessarily imply that it is a promoter of "official" Romanian values). Although the institutional aspect was greatly exaggerated in the dispute (for instance, the exhibition in Germany was only co-financed by ICR), still it allowed the rejection of the argument that an exhibition must only be true to itself and to art principles, in line with the following logic: an exhibition financed by the Institute should obey the criterion of representativeness, meaning that it should be an illustration of largely accepted Romanian values.

Moving away from the anger deforming the arguments of both sides and

leaving aside any arguments apart from sociological ones (although the conviction of the author is that those creations presented in the exhibitions are far from the harmony of high art and from morality), I assert that the Romanian culture still lacks a definition of cultural model (more precisely, of the *representative* cultural model). This triggers as a side effect the impossibility to construct those instruments that allow new values to be introduced in the cultural model and those strategies that could promote the Romanian cultural model in the country and abroad. I pleaded in another article (Ciocea 2008) that it is mandatory for the Romanian cultural model to become mature. The dispute of ICR exhibitions demonstrates that there is still no clear vision of fundamental and less important values in our culture.

For instance, moral or historical arguments (the imagery built by the two exhibitions would not correspond to the "traditional" symbols of Romanian culture, legitimated by works of art that stood the test of shifting cultural paradigms) are given an answer in line with cosmopolitan global ideology, whose arguments can be neither moral nor historical (since they reflect an ideology in the making, of cosmopolitan conscience). Such are the arguments of multiculturalism and plurality (all cultural groups, irrespective of the imagery they use, have the same right to express themselves as majority culture) in the Romanian culture, which is historically defined as a homogeneous culture. During the exhibitions' dispute these cosmopolitan arguments were asserted and fragmented in a series of discourses: the discourse of legitimacy, of dispute, of radicalism and of aesthetic arguments. The minority group seeks a "voice" in the larger culture – for instance, the online journal edited by ICR publishes an issue on the exhibition called "The pink pony replaces Miorița". The works of art are allegedly revolutionary:

> *Behind the pony there is a culture without inhibitions, ready*
> *to criticize, laugh at itself and question itself, which does not*
> *take anything for granted and which cannot be modeled in the*

> *name of the People or the Country or of Tradition understood*
> *as a standstill.* (Cercel, in *Observatorul cultural*)

The Romanian culture needs "a new soul": "What we need to conquer today is a cosmopolitan, emancipated, modern public, who are used to information transfer and multiplication" (Şuteu, the Director of ICR New York, in *Dilema veche*). Any form of art is valid and cannot be judged outside aesthetic criteria:

> *…the objection to the creation's lack of representativeness is*
> *irrelevant. The artist does not represent anyone but himself.*
> *His work is liked or disliked, reveals hidden meanings or*
> *bewitches through its intuitions. If representativeness does*
> *occur, this is the consequence of time-honored selection.*
> *(Boiangiu, in Dilema veche)*

The argument is essentially cosmopolitan, because it opposes the community's value system against a construction with unstable architecture, which gathers discourses and values from different cultural spaces.

A derived problem is that of the export cultural model. Derived, because traditionally the external public is exposed to "high" patrimonial cultural products, legitimated by time and aesthetic interpretations. The idea behind this tendency is that, since Romanian cultural manifestations cannot reach the critical mass to perform well on the market of cultural products, they must recover this handicap through quality. Consequently it is high culture, a synthesis of the Romanian cultural model, which is mainly promoted. On the other side, the "avant-garde" cultural promoters consider that the public must not be exclusively exposed to patrimonial works of art, but to live contemporary art:

> *… a neuter observer will easily remark how much we still*
> *concentrate on the patrimonial value of national culture*

representativeness. We do it because we are uncertain, because we experience an identity crisis, because we cannot free ourselves from the dense cobweb of arts as instruments of propaganda. (Şuteu, in Dilema veche)

The arguments of the opposing parties prove that not only do they have different perceptions on the value of art in general, but these differences also extend on the role of the public and of art. If in the traditionalist paradigm the public is mainly the receiver and is not expected to deny the value of a work of art, in the paradigm adopted by the "new promoters" the active public participates in the construction of value and, by the very act of being exposed to art, builds the art-like quality of the creation. While in the first paradigm elites were called upon to confirm value, in the new paradigm it is the public that fulfills this task. I have shown above that the individual approaches pop art without the fear of making mistakes in understanding it (which would happen without proper elitist education in the traditional paradigm). Pop culture is deeply democratic and proposes works of art which can be rapidly understood by the public – a culture with "instant" reception.

The premises of the new paradigm say that the context where the understanding of a work of art takes place has changed dramatically. The argument of global culture, of the cosmopolitan public, is often used. Global culture is built from fragments of diverse cultures, from works that illustrate the low layers of art (such as street-art), from "live" art which is itself diverse, fragmented, a mere mélange (which allows it to resonate with works from other cultural spaces).

A derived idea is that this type of art selects a different public from the traditional one, and this difference extends to the values it promotes and its composition. This public is not interested in the patrimonial value or in representativeness, but in individuality and uniqueness – which does not mean that the public is only touched by minor or eccentric art. One might however claim,

with some degree of correctness, that the cosmopolitan public is interested mainly in the hybrid works of art, as a sign of their own search for cultural identity (the pressure for such findings is exerted by the increasingly global culture). Just as the contemporary individual lives simultaneously in the given social space and in the chosen one (which is often virtual), s/he also has the freedom to build a personalized cultural space for him/herself (the freedom comes in part from the weaker institutional pressure of the traditional high culture). Since the commandments of contemporary culture are submitted to the market laws (the works of art are cultural goods with a certain market value), a creation will be valuable through the economic value it generates, rather than through its aesthetic value. From this perspective a controversial or a hybrid work of art are potentially more valuable than elitist or classical ones. The criterion of representativeness would then be less important than the criterion of relevance to the public.

This partial conclusion leads to other issues: if the criterion of representativeness no longer functions, how can the national cultural model still be asserted? The argument that the promotion of a national model would be obsolete no longer stands. On the contrary, in the hybrid cultural space it is this very difference, "the local color", which facilitates the reception and acceptance of the work of art (a secondary effect of this simplified reception is frequently used in the tourism industry, for instance, which encourages stereotypes as a way to fix the image of a country in the mind of the tourist).

As a moment in the history of cultural mentalities, the dispute on the two exhibitions will probably have its importance, since it marks not as much as a change in mentality, but a different construction of the concept of representativeness. The dispute on the principles governing the export cultural model, on receiving new values in the Romanian culture, on cultural policies and cultural management, will probably influence the construction of the cultural model. Whether or not these creations will finally be accepted as works of art reflecting a change in the mentality of young artists, a synchronized response to the

emerging global culture, is still unknown. The more interesting issue at stake is whether such disputes can help outline those fundamental and secondary values from the value system and the build-up of awareness that it is important to construct a self-regulating mechanism to help new values enter the system. Only the fine tuning of such a mechanism to re-assess the architecture of the value system can avoid the great ruptures insecuritizing the value system and, finally, the societal coherence of the community.

4. Conclusions

How should then the strategy of promoting the national cultural model be rethought? A first difficulty that needs to be surpassed is to establish the degree of representativeness of the works of art that will be selected for promotion. It is hard to establish an inventory of the fundamental values that allow the construction of coherent strategies in the field of culture. Yet the correct identification of fundamental values, their place in the value system and the cultural context that they help create is one of the premises for the success of cultural policies. If values are not accompanied by the proof of the role they have played in outlining the cultural specificity and by a permanent assertion of their legitimacy in the present, they cannot become fundamental values. Cultural policies should follow this "enrichment" of value perception by the community and should build their legitimacy based on precise historical moments when these values added consistency to the cultural model. Any cultural action which incorrectly identifies the importance of certain values in the architecture of culture or which fails to decode the characteristics of a cultural space is doomed to failure.

Functional cultural policies should first start from the creation of a proper context for the reception of meaning. In the case of Romanian culture, re-building the legitimacy of the value system in the present historical context might also be important. Another step would be to discover the means of creating values in the

Romanian culture, which are not limited to cultural actions (for instance, such an instrument was the program-language of the 19th century which renewed language as part of a program to re-educate social identity). The identification of actors who can create value (public and private institutions, cultural institutions, universities, NGOs, cultural networks) is as important, together with the choice of an institutional (directive, top-down) program or a mass program (where members of culture would be invested with legitimacy, as cultural actors). The exclusively institutional solutions to communicate the value model would not be fully efficient, since they would lack validation from the community. Nor would programs investing the community with the power to promote those particular values that better represent its identity resist without being confirmed institutionally. Nor would transferring these responsibilities to elites work, since such actions would promote the somehow dangerous idea that only elites can enrich culture.

An understanding of the natural mechanisms developed by culture in time to defend and promote the value system is consequently essential for creating the institutional mechanisms for implementing a cultural program. Constructing such mechanisms is the last step in outlining a functional strategy to cultivate contemporary values in Romania. Only then, starting from an organic program for Romanian culture, could we hope for the efficiency of cultural actions.

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