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Cultural Heritage, Identity and Cultural Mediation**

Abstract: The alert lifestyle and phenomena such as: technological globalization, increasing migration, demographic decline in some part of the globe, changes in population structure, multiculturalism tend to isolate us from our cultural heritage. In the same time, postmodern revolutions lead to a growing need of the individual to clarify his/her individual identity and find a model to rebuild his/her fragmented world. Cultural heritage as a cultural and social process, a discursive construction has a formative effect on our personal, social and cultural identity. Inside this discursive process, transmission of memory from the past in a reflexive manner gives space for new negotiations, mediations, interpretations. In the cultural field, there is a shift towards viewing the heritage audiences as active agents in the mediation of the meanings of heritage. In support of this position, we aim in the present paper to investigate the role of cultural mediation in shaping the personal, social and cultural identity of a social actor.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural mediation, identity, belonging, sociability.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society we are witnessing two conflicting phenomena: the phenomenon of technological and communicative globalization and the strong tendency of fragmentation of the states from inside, on one hand and, on the other hand, an increasing regionalization and nationalist and populist tendency (Brăilean 2009, 83). Despite the tension between the process of globalization and the preservation of national identity, globalization does not have the effect of cancelling those identities, but it would be necessary to redefine them in a global and polycentric context. It is this interaction that gives a person's his /her cultural identity (Levi-Strauss 1983, 166). Moreover, any communication represents an important moment of culture, through its socializing effect, having a modelling impact on individuals, so that culture becomes communication and communication

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becomes culture. Culture and communication cannot exist without each other, a cultural phenomenon also functions as a communication process, and a mean of communication is also a manifestation belonging to culture (Hall 1959, 186). Although a paradox, culture covers everything that increases by sharing, through the word, as the purest form of communication (Gadamer 1998, 6).

If for modernity, knowledge builds reality (Kant), in the postmodern era, communication has this role. There is a fact that we live in a culture of communication (a new imperialism) and we have the mission to understand ourselves and the others and to seek the truth (Codoban 2013, 84, 95). Postmodern revolutions lead to a growing need to clarify individual identity, a problem faced by the educational system, in search of a model to rebuild our fragmented world. Such an integrative model should take into account the following dimensions: affective (I-subject), cognitive (rational self), social (social, collective self) and ideological (cultural and educational values) and respond to the needs of the individual. More than ever, it is necessary for educational system to relate to society in order to come up with viable solutions to the needs of the contemporary individual: to find his/her place in the world (the need for affiliation, acceptance and investment), find a sense (stimulation, experimentation and legitimacy); the need for autonomy and power (communication, consideration and structure) and the need for values (good, truth and beauty) (Pourtois 1997, 50-51).

The solution offered by some researchers for the crisis of globalization is simple: abandoning this project. Stiglitz argues that the real problem is not, in fact, globalization itself, only the management of globalization and, more specifically, the way of thinking anchored in particular and a parochial vision on society and economy. Social cohesion is vital to a functioning economy. Education, transparency, participation, inclusion are just a few of the answers that would make this project one with a more human face. Both globalization and regionalism force us to adopt comparative attitudes (Stiglitz 2017, 303-340).

At the same time, the alert lifestyle, increasing migration, demographic decline in some parts of the globe, changes in population structure and multiculturalism tend to isolate us from our cultural heritage (Skrzypaszek 2012, 1497). Hereby, we refer to cultural heritage as a cultural and social process, a discursive construction, through which we assign value and meaning to our surrounding space (Smith 2006, 13). As Skrzypaszek argues, the intangible heritage has an impact on formation of the personal, social and cultural identity (horizontal dimension), as well as the existential and spatial identity (vertical dimension). Within the vertical dimension of life's experience, reflexivity gives a renewed perspective on the transmission of

memory from the past, giving space for new “negotiations, mediation, motivation”. Reflexivity has a formative effect on identity, being oriented towards the present moment and the future.

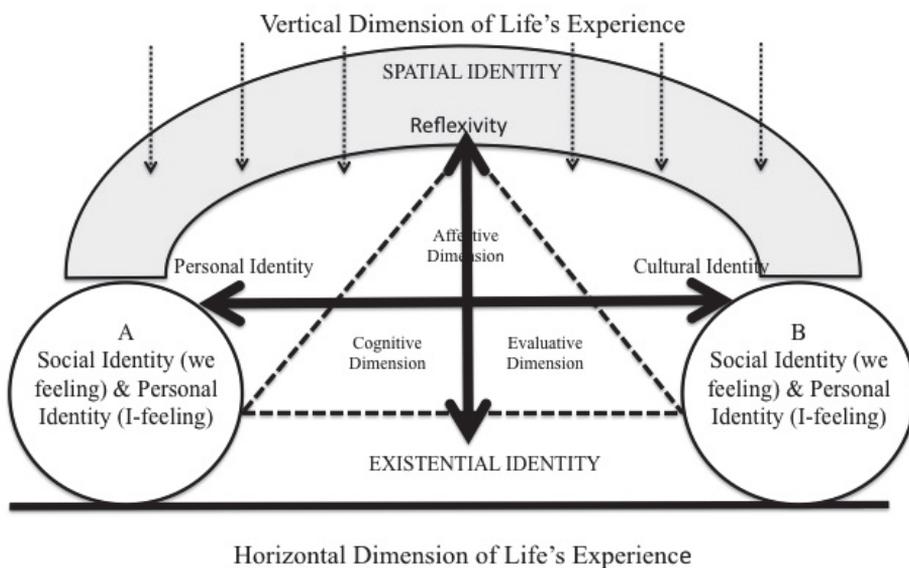


Figure 1. The Role of Cultural Heritage in Formation of Identity

Source: Skrzypaszek, 2012

According to UNESCO's manual for the management of the cultural heritage (Vujicic-Lugassy, Frank 2013), there is a shift towards viewing the heritage audiences “as active agents in the mediation of the meanings of heritage”. In this paper, we aim to investigate the role of cultural mediation in shaping the personal, social and cultural identity of a social actor, in relation with the cultural heritage.

2. The Role of Cultural Mediation in Facilitating Access and Active Participation to Cultural Heritage

The argumentation starts with the direct benefits of cultural mediation in the development of a democratic society, in the formation of reflexive and involved citizens with ethical and moral values, equipped with critical thinking, communication and presentation skills, and in the cultural sphere playing a key role in democratization of cultural policies, guarantying increased access and participation of all categories of audience to culture. On personal level, mediation leads to facilitating a person's encounter with him/herself, establishing his/her identity, equipping him/her with the skills necessary to meet with the other, recognizing the differences and then managing them, awareness of the daily political, cultural, symbolic and

natural practices, addressing discrimination and accepting diversity. The ultimate goal is to open our minds and hearts.

Before giving more arguments in favour of our thesis, it is important to clarify the concept of cultural mediation. In the Romanian space, cultural mediation is regarded as cultural management, but there are significant differences between the two concepts. Cultural management concerns the administration of a cultural institution and the management of the resources. Since 2006, the legislative framework specifically states that the management of cultural institutions should be achieved through a cultural project. In the same time, the legislative framework does not include performance rewarding criteria and specific requirements for the managers of the institution (Croitoru, Becuț 2015).

In contrast, cultural mediation was an umbrella concept, in France, in the '60s. In the cultural field, cultural mediation covered a wide range of activities, starting with the development of the audience and reaching community and participatory art. The term was later imposed in the 1980s in the world of museums and libraries, which had as their objective the transmission of knowledge and education. Here, mediation has been used in a classical sense, that of dissemination of literature, art and cultural heritage (Quintas 2014, 1-2).

As the concept mediation might suggest, cultural mediation does not necessarily imply potential conflicts. It is a form of cultural management that mainly aims at extending the public participation to cultural life and facilitating access to cultural spaces. Achieving these goals would hinder potential conflicts, bring peace to society and channel existing energies towards creativity, development and awareness.

Mediation is the symbolic representation of the dialectics between the individual and the collective. Society can only exist if each member is aware of the necessity of a dialectical relationship between his own existence and the existence of the community (belonging and sociability). Through mediation, individuals give a symbolic form, translate into language, political and institutional structures, and fulfil their social contract. Forms of mediation are born in public space, because here is where dialectics is possible between collective forms and singular representation. Public space is, by definition, the place of cultural mediation. Here, identities and cultures are mixed and confronted, often appearing as an antagonism between the two ways of its habitation: between the one who lives and feels that it belongs to that space and understands its signs and the one who experiences a feeling of rejection, a true exclusion. Lamizet, based on Lacan's central thesis, on the stage of the mirror, claims that in the public space, one is always confronted with the identity of the other, in comparison with which he is structuring his own identity (Lamizet 1999, 9-11).

From a philosophical point of view, cultural mediation represents the relationship between the subject and the world. This concept tends to become a marketing concept that brings in a fixed form: the transitory, the fugitive or the contingent, with the risk of forgetting the nature of social relations (transcendence and the transmission of information in a symbolic form). The concept of mediation lies at the intersection between two axes: a horizontal one, which corresponds to interpersonal relationships, and a vertical one, which reflects the transcendental relations. Therefore, mediation as a social project can not only create ephemeral ties, but must also contribute to producing a sense that engages the community. The symbolic, aesthetic and pragmatic perspective of the cultural democracy is that of a heritage that is also transmitted by the involvement and expression of those whose words have not found yet the places of enunciation and reception (Caune 2017, 195).

Practical activities in the field of cultural mediation raise the difficulties faced by those who conceive the cultural strategies when it comes to public involvement: issues of intentionality, if we have a pragmatic perspective and problems of structuring the action from a sociological perspective. We come to the understanding and explanation of an action of the public by exploring intentions, whether explicit or not, and the many factors that lead to a decision. In the broad sense, cultural mediation means the activity of each actor who participates in a cultural event (meeting) by creating the event or as a public who loves culture, being considered a content partner, a cultural mediator who helps to disseminate culture and cares of its circulation. In a narrow sense, the field of cultural mediation includes cultural professionals, public or private cultural institutions, regional or local urban authorities, cultural societies or creative industries, cultural education departments and cultural centres (Dufrière, Gellereau 2004, 199-206).

Nowadays, culture means participation, conversation and contribution. The various actors participate in the conversation, comment on the content, distribute it and become ambassadors. Cultural managers become moderators, mediators between the demands of different audiences and the demands of sponsors, politicians and those working in the creative industry. Cultural institutions, instead of providing something, education or simple dissemination of information, are heading towards a culture of sharing, where the cultural mediator must ensure that the moment of sharing, that meeting stimulates civic imagination (Holden 2006).

The action taken in the cultural mediation process aims to raise public awareness, contribute to the reception and transmission of information, stimulate and facilitate the expression and participation of individuals. Cultural spaces become meeting spaces, where people with certain information meet people who have other information. There are raised all sorts of questions about: sustainability, access to education, discrimination, inequality,

etc. The role of cultural institutions is to help the public manage the pressure generated by the ambiguities present in the cultural space by facilitating access to interpretations rather than providing pre-defined solutions.

Active participation or engagement becomes a key concept in communication, especially after switching to popular Web 2.0. Through active cultural participation, we understand a situation in which individuals are not confined to passively absorbing cultural stimuli, but are motivated to put their skills at work. Thus, individuals are challenged to expand their ability to express themselves, to re-establish their expectations and beliefs, to reconsider their social identity (Sacco 2011, 5-6). Access and interaction is not equal to participation; these are just its condition of possibility. Active participation involves a decision-making process and an equitable and balanced character in power relations (Carpentier 2011, 27). By increasing active participation of its audience, cultural institutions become institutions of reflexive knowledge.

Postmodern society needs reflexive citizens. Instead of providing ready-made solutions for its public, cultural institutions should encourage and support the development of critical thinking and reasoning for its public, processes that later help citizens make informed decisions, increase their degree of awareness and the level of active participation, with the ultimate goal of creating a culture of sharing.

3. The Role of Cultural Mediation in Shaping Identity

The identity of a person implies belonging to a particular space, area, region, town or village. One of the first questions addressed to a new person is: “Where are you from?” hoping to integrate the position of the interlocutor into a familiar setting, no matter where on the globe or by who is the question addressed. This tendency to identify a person’s place of origin is actually our desire to get landmarks (culture, ethnicity, nationality, etc.). Locating a person in the geographic space gives the opportunity to the questioner to recognize possible resemblances and to differentiate between the newcomer and the others.

Starting with 2007, the new member states of the European Union from the former Communist bloc, Romania included, were faced with the challenge of assuming a European identity. Politicians, philosophers, historians and cultural anthropologists were inclined towards the following solution: it was necessary first to clarify the concept of individual identity, to assume a European identity.

It is appreciated that the twenty years of financial, social and cultural experimentation in the Central Eastern European laboratory have led to the establishment of a permanent feeling of unhappiness, to which was added

the feeling of failure (Brădățan 2012, 2-5). In the years of Romanian communism, many Romanian citizens had put their lives at risk in their attempt to escape from the country to the welfare of the West. As a paradox, for some of the Romanians, as Pascal Bruckner¹ recently said in his visit to Romania during a conference, also run away from the responsibility of membership in the European Union. In a future Europe of regions, openness towards understanding of history, culture and society is of major importance. The direction of propagation of identity change is possible in a bottom-up approach. The post-communist governments in Romania, in their intention to create the new identity, gave an instrumental role to culture, and the results oscillated between two extremes: a strong affirmation of national identity or a rapid internationalization. The Romanian cultural administration was inspired in its action by the cultural policies of the 1970s and 1980s in France, but confused art with socio-cultural works and artists with socio-cultural workers (Rațiu 2009). Furthermore, the national Government does not pay too much attention to regional identity; instead it focuses on economic regionalism (the existence of the eight regional development agencies, a precondition of our accession to European Union).

Returning to the discussion about European identity, despite crises of all kind, of linguistic, ethnic and national diversity, culture is the dome that brings together all European states, whether members of the Union or not. In order to counteract the growing disparities, at the level of development among the Member States, in 1985, the European Union decided to award a prize to one city in Europe, a different city each year, for cultural performances. That was the starting point of the European Capital of Culture title. The prize was originally awarded as the City of Culture.

Jacques Delors, then President of the European Commission, stated in Strasbourg on a presentation about the European Commission's policy, held on January 17-18, 1989, that "no one can fall in love with the common market". In 1985, when he had been appointed to office, he mentioned that one of the challenges of the European Economic Community was civilization. In that context, there was a need to reaffirm the European values and merge the aspirations, sometimes contradictory of his contemporaries, into new constructions. Over four years, that challenge was still present. Delors referred to Fernand Braudel, a lucid observer of the integration movements of the early 1960s:

It would be wrong for human nature to serve only harmless sums; they seem to fade when they are put together with the impetuous enthusiasm, though not always unreasonable, the enthusiasm that has mobilized Europe in the past. Can a European conscience be built on figures only? Or is not consciousness exactly what the figures might fail to surprise, the consciousness that can develop in ways that cannot be calculated?

As a result, Delors believed that it was time to put “some flesh on the bones of the Community and to give it “more soul”². In a similar note, the founder of the European Union, Jean Monnet, said that if he were to start the project again, he would start with the culture. Thus, the prize that initially rewarded cultural performances became a cultural mediation program, meant to open the community to new forms of art, co-creation and engagement of new audiences.

The European Capital of Culture legislative framework has changed several times since its origin: new objectives, as well as new selection criteria and a chronological list of countries selected to hold the title, set a few years before, have been added. In 2006, EU introduced, in addition to the initial criteria, two new criteria: the European dimension and the highlighting of the collaboration between the city and its citizens. Why had been necessary a European dimension of the project? First, it observed the cooperation of the candidate city with other cultural operators, artists and other EU member cities, secondly, it emphasized the richness of cultural diversity in the EU and, thirdly, its purpose was to bring together the common features of European cultures. This criterion had, as a central objective, to raise awareness among the population of a given country about the cultural diversity in Europe³.

The first title of European Capital of Culture had been designated to Romania in 2007. Sibiu 2007⁴ summed up 337 projects (2062 events), covering all forms of art under the slogan “A City of Culture, A City of Cultures”, making visible the multicultural and multilingual character of the city. The positive, immediate effects of holding the European Capital of Culture title were: an increased visibility of the city, the positioning of Sibiu and its surroundings on the international map as a tourist destination, the doubling of the number of tourists compared to the previous year, a new face of the buildings, the increase of the sense of local pride, to which we could add the economic advantages.

Following Sibiu, in 2016 Timișoara was designated the European Capital of Culture. There is an unprecedented event in the history of the European Capital of Culture program, since 1985, when two cities, which are close (146 km between Timișoara and Novi Sad), have won this title. Moreover, if we consider the other city, which holds the title of European Capital of Culture in 2021, Eleusis of Greece, the focus is on the Balkan region. Being born in the Balkans has a special connotation, sometimes “sweet” and sometimes “bitter”, as the name itself (“ball” means honey in Turkish and “kan” blood).

The concept of the cultural programme for Timișoara 2021, “Shine your light! Light up your city!” is centred on audience engagement. It is a

metaphor of a journey that offers the opportunity to move from loneliness to belonging, from dark areas to the light. The traveller passes six stations, on eighteen routes, under three territories. The territories are, in fact, the sum of the challenges encountered today in Europe, namely: People, Places and Connections. Passivity is a major issue in today's Europe. The cultural strategy presented aims to work with emergencies to reactivate this passive civic energy. The cultural program wants to create an environment that stimulates and generates a proactive civic engagement. The slogan "Light up your city!" has the role of motivating the inhabitants of Timisoara to turn their eyes towards the city they live in and engage in its transformation. Reflection and development of attachment towards a place are sources of motivation and drive for renewing someone's identity⁵.

The year 2018, the celebration of the Centenary of the Great Union, it is a good opportunity for us, the Romanians to self-reflect. Apart from the festivity, which seems to dominate the public space, perpetuating the beliefs of the "Romanian exceptionalism" (Mihăilescu 2017), reflecting on our identity and history, from here, in direct connection with what is happening in the world, would lead to a more realistic image of who we are. An exploration of our identity, through the mirror of the other, would guide us to the more authentic self. Individuals are not always aware of their value system. Until we are in a position to interact with others, we may not realize that they think differently. Values influence norms: how do we expect others to behave and how they expect us to behave. Identity is not something static, frozen in time. Someone might have a multiple identity (local, regional, national, European, and so on). Meanwhile, the others: Muslims, Asians, Africans, immigrants, refugees, Gypsies – are now an integrant part of Europe, not just physically, but through their ideas, concepts and lifestyles.

4. Conclusion

Cultural mediation process facilitates access to the experimentation of cultural heritage, for those who live a feeling of exclusion, create a space for their voices to be heard and search in the same time to identify the motivation and drive of the passive audiences in order to actively engage them in the experimentation of cultural heritage. The ultimate goal of cultural mediation is creating a culture of sharing and development of reflexivity and empathy in the audience. The process of reflecting on the treasured memory from the past has an effect on readjusting our identity, in accordance to a certain space and contemporaneous time.

Notes

- ¹ Conference on *Europe facing the radical Islam and the Russian Empire*, 6th February 2018, Babeş Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.
- ² Jacques Delors's presentation, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/59acf3b9-04e2-4dc2-a031-dd1b7e9c6c32/language-en>
- ³ No 622/2006/EC, Decision of European Parliament and Council.
- ⁴ Sibiu CCE 2007, <http://www.sibiu2007.ro/>
- ⁵ *TM2021 Bidbook*, Timișoara – European Capital of Culture Association, 2015.

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