

CULTURAL INTERACTIONS AND SOFT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

Essential future of social sciences at the present stage is their increasing interaction. It can be explained by the complication of the modern relationships, which in the on-going process of globalization includes more and more interactions of various cultures. Cultural differences as a barrier for effective growth and development of social units are often misunderstood and second-rate factors are promoted to explain the failures of success. In big degree this is result of the restricted approaches in which every branch of social sciences is trying to explain the problems on its own language neglecting the opportunities of the complex approach. Meanwhile it is just the multidisciplinary methodology which helps to shed light on the complicated nature of multicultural relations. In short run individuals are trying to improve their utility functions by increasing the number of values from other cultures. It is clear however that in some cases there can be a loss of cultural identity when the individuals change their value structure by increasing the share of global culture beyond the level needed to keep cultural identity intact.

Keywords: Social structures, interaction, globalization, multicultural relations

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I. INTRODUCTION

As a first step to such an approach there is a need of distinguishing between two faces of the social structures: one, formal, legally defined, which ensures the functioning of the social units according to the legal structure and other, hidden, not yet well known, but sufficiently powerful with its feedback and thus important for realization of any policy aim. This second one we define as soft social infrastructure, in which social capital is the main moving power. This side of the social interactions is not yet sufficiently studied and the importance of its role is still to be proved.

Another feature of our approach is to define some objective function toward which social units are moving. In our dynamic century we are facilitated by the concept of sustainable development reaching more and more distinct vision. From purely academic and political category sustainable development policy is at present imperative for all mature social units. To reach sustainability among the other problems the units certainly are to overcome the inevitable cultural differences emerging as a result of globalization.

The general interpretation of the problem is that while social unit is moving toward sustainability cultural differences are introducing perturbations which divert it from optimality; in our case reaching sustainability. As the cultural interaction as a matter of fact is interaction of various cultural values to find solution of this problem we need to see how cultural differences affect it. Taking into account the complexity and the controversial nature of the value systems in various cultures we simplify our task by analysing only those part of the value system which on one hand helps the unit to reach sustainability and on the other hand – prevents it to realize this aim. This simplification brings us to the famous Robinson economy consisting of two individual with various cultural systems. As an objective function we can assume creating sustainable way of leaving in the island. Now our heroes are to overcome their cultural differences to reach optimality of the unit.

II. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND HUMAN VALUES

The role the culture plays for the economic and social development is underlined by many scholars and international organizations¹, Fukuyama², Tabellini³. In some of our previous works we tried to outline the place of cultural capital in the implementation of sustainable development policy⁴ indicating its role in the formation of social capital and thus sustainable behavior of the social systems. Outside our attention remained however the problem of cultural coherence and integration in society, which was decisive for sustainability, when society included several different cultures.

There is a vast amount of literature devoted to cultural integration. Kuran⁵ presents a model of cultural homogenization realized by two mechanisms: behavioural adaptations motivated by coordination and preference changes shape by socialization and the need for self-consistency. Although this model gives very good ideas about cultural integration, we test next another approach – our aim is to outline a model in which Robinson and Friday do not seek to reach cultural homogenization. Rather they try to preserve the identity of each culture although as Kuran indicates “the efforts to keep existing cultures unchanged are in direct conflict with policies that facilitate social integration.”⁶ Our basic hypothesis of cultural integration is based on conservation of the local cultures and enrichment of individual culture of the members of community, so that they reach some sufficient level of self-consistency. Attractive for our aims seem the ideas formulated by some psychologists on self-consistency as a fundamental human drive,^{7 8} We base our preference adaptation

- 1 UNESCO, (2006) *Culture and economic development*, *Culture and UNESCO* http://www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html_eng/wcr1.shtml
- 2 Fukuyama, F. (2001) Culture and Economic Development (Cultural Concern Essay), *Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier Science Ltd. http://www.saisjhu.edu/fukuyama/articles/Culture_development.pdf#search='culture%20economic%20development
- 3 Tabellini G. (2005) *Culture and Institutions: Economic Development in the regions of Europe*.http://emlab.berkeley.edu/users/webfac/groland/e261_s05/tabellini.pdf#search='culture%20economic%20development
- 4 Danchev, A (2006) Cultural capital in the chain of factors influencing sustainable development” Fourth International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, EDUCULT, 12- 16- July. Vienna.
- 5 Kuran T (2002) *Cultural integration and its discontents*. USC Center for Law, Economics & Organization, Research paper No. C02-14, University of Southern California, Law School <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~whs/research/ci.pdf>
- 6 Ibidem.
- 7 Cialdini, R. (2001) *Influence: Science and Practice*, 4th edition, Boston, Allyn & Bacon.
- 8 Aronson, E. (1988) *The Social Animal*, 5th edition, New York, W.H. Freeman & Co.

hypothesis on this presumption. Extending the previous visions and for better analysis of the role of cultural integration we construct a model, which includes the following aggregations of culture:

/Global culture – culture universe for all countries: classical literature, art and music, the modern pop and Internet culture, etc.

/Local cultures - the native culture of the individuals participating in the social unit.⁹

The problem of cultural integration can be formulated as a transfer of cultural goods among individuals so that they keep their own culture enriching it with constructive or destructive elements of the other cultures. The effect of such assumption depends on many circumstances determining how the cultures interact among themselves. This effect may be different depending on the level of openness of the cultures. We may observe a rise in cultural integration if this interaction is positive or a rise of hostility if there is cultural disintegration. There are a lot of historic examples which show that the process of cultural integration can move in various directions and produce various effects. As Landmark Education indicates “Like gravity, culture is made tangible by its effects; it can be seen in the behaviours and practices of an organization’s management and employees. When two different cultures are required to work together, the effects, while often catalytic, can sometimes be disruptive and can undermine morale, productivity, and profits.”¹⁰

Cultural integration is not an instant process. Robinson and Friday relationships start and pass through several levels:

Cultural coexistence. In the beginning there is no exchange of cultural values among Robinson and Friday, they do not interact, and actually they remain isolated from each other.

Cultural exchange. Gradually they start to communicate and exchange some of the cultural values (goods) as for example celebrating basic national and religious holidays, participating in national social and cultural initiatives, etc. This exchange is normally selective in a sense that our heroes may accept or reject some values (goods) of the other culture. Normally there is some dynamic combination of both.

Cultural integration. Both individuals accept a sufficient number of values (goods) from the other culture and create a homogeneous culture. Although there may be some loss of cultural identity, at least there may be conservation of the own culture and enrichment of

the individual culture. Inevitably in long run it results in homogenisation. At this point we underline the short run aspects of the problem needed for quick adjustment to realise some short-run aims.

Various authors come to different explanations of the case. Most of the studies assume the creation of hybrid culture (as for example in US situation); we would like to study the case when the individuals preserve their own cultures adding to it values from the other cultures. There is no neglecting of homogenization, in our short run model reaching hybrid culture that is - joint culture for all individuals is a question of more remote future. Such an approach is motivated from purely practical reasons. In many social units – firms, institutions like universities, multicultural exchange is very intensive and there a need to solve short run problems of adjustment needed for the unit to behave sustainably.

Speaking in Economics language, in short run individuals are trying to improve their utility functions by increasing the number of values from other cultures. It is clear however that in some cases there can be a loss of cultural identity when the individuals change their value structure by increasing the share of global culture beyond the level needed to keep cultural identity intact.

The enrichment of the individuals with values from other cultures results first of all in a change of their habits. Such a behavior of the consumer lead to endogenizing of some preferences, in which, if we include the exchange of cultural values, it modifies the traditional utility function of the representative consumer as:

$$u_B = f(cg_{G1}, cg_{G2}, cg_{G3} \dots cg_{Gj} \dots cg_{M1}, cg_{M2}, cg_{M3} \dots cg_{Mm} \dots cg_{N1}, cg_{N2}, cg_{N3} \dots cg_{Nn})$$

All cultures are presented by the corresponding group of cultural values: values of the global culture as for example using Internet as $cg_G = \bullet_{i=j} cg_{Gj}$, values of the local culture the individual belongs to as $cg_M = \bullet_{i=m} cg_{Mi}$ and values of other local cultures as $cg_N = \bullet_{i=1} cg_{Ni}$. Going beyond the Robinson economy we may conclude that the sum of cultural values in a given group of individuals, which consumption has in long run endogenous character typical for a given community, defines the cultural identity of this group.

Despite our globalizing and highly informed world cultural identity is limited within some boundary of adoption of cultural values. If the number of cultural values of the global culture accounts for G, the values of the own culture M and the values of the other cultures N, we can say that the individual is keeping her cultural identity intact if the representative

⁹ In some of our studies we distinguish between the culture of minorities and the cultures of majority. This is however not an aim of the present paper.

¹⁰ Landmarkededucation(2006)*Culturalintegration*,http://www.lebd.com/display_content.jsp?top=165&mid=286

consumer adopts values n close to N , but much less than G and M . The loss of cultural identity is observed when the structure of our consumer includes n close to G and M and much less than N . Although the loss of cultural identity may be undesirable we need to confess that the process of cultural integration is as a rule difficult to manage and there are many cases when this identity is lost. For example Roma in many countries as for example in Bulgaria identify themselves as Bulgarians or Turks, which is an evidence of the gradual loss of their cultural identity during a long historic period. Thus, we may come to a situation, which the cultural integration is implicit, not explicit.

In such a model the process of cultural integration can be described by the following mechanism: The individuals normally adopt cg_N values, but at a given point of time they start to adopt cg_G and cg_M . This start is possible due to various reasons: rise of income, educational level, improvement of communication, better access to various media, etc. Cultural coexistence passes the stage of cultural exchange, when the exchange of cg_G and cg_M becomes a habit for the representative consumer and at some moment it starts to accept these values as her own cultural values. The process ends with cultural integration, when the representative consumer adopt an amount of cultural values very close to the amount adopted by the representative consumer of the other population group.

Actually there is a big variety of cases observed in the real life. The communication with the global and other cultures may result in a loss of part of cultural identity at the expense of enriching local cultures with elements of global or other cultures. Cultural integration is a process of interaction of local cultures with other cultures, which is expected to result in enriching of local culture due to increased adoption of new cultural values.

The preferences concerning the adoption of cultural values are endogenous to the community these values belong to and are exogenous to the other cultures. So the integration can be regarded as a process of indigenizing preferences to cultural values from other cultures. Important precondition of this integration is the adaptability of local cultures to other cultures, which is indicated by the amount of adoption of cultural values of other cultures. In this aspect *ceteris paribus* the cultural integration of conservative cultures with other cultures is more difficult than the integration with more open cultures.

III. SOFT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MODEL OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION

An important precondition for successful cultural integration is the improvement of interpersonal coordination. It means that the adoption of cultural values from other cultures is expected to result in improvement not deterioration of the individual characteristics of the members of the social unit. It is a well-known fact that such a process is the next precondition for improvement of individual qualities necessary for generating social capital of a good quality vital for the creation of soft social infrastructure.

Before we analyze this process we would like to mention that there is a vast literature on what social capital is and the interpretation of this category is often polar.^{11,12} As in our previous discussions we use the term social capital as figuratively speaking “the spirit of the soft social infrastructure, which produces positive social externalities”, which is narrower than commonly accepted but works well with the philosophy of soft social infrastructure.

Now the problem is to see how the quality of social capital helps cultural integration or vice versa - how cultural integration makes easier to improve social capital. In this two-ways street we expect improvement of the quality of social capital, which is to help sustainable behavior of the communities. As a result of the improvement in the interpersonal coordination it should result in least-cost solutions following the logic of the famous Coase theorem.

There are many difficulties in studying the features of this process coming mainly from the fact that social capital necessary for creation of workable soft social infrastructure is community, not individual quality. The individuals however need to have some personal qualities to be inclined to generate social capital with other people. Depending on many factors including the level of openness of its own culture the adoption of cultural values from other cultures may result in improvement or deterioration of the two basic qualities of the individuals necessary to generate social capital: the marginal propensity to help each other necessary for the horizontal association and the marginal propensity to recognize the leader mandatory for the vertical integration. Globalisation introduced strong perturbations in this

11 Dasgupta, P. (2002) *Social capital and Economic Performance: Analytics*, University of Cambridge and Beijer International University of Ecological Economics, Stockholm. <http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/faculty/dasgupta/soccap.pdf>

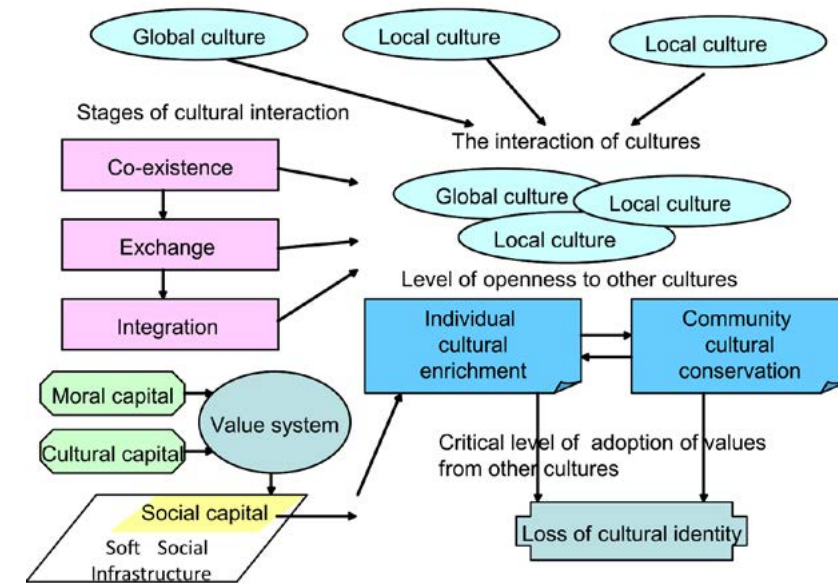
12 Grootaert Chr. (1997) Social Capital: The Missing Link?. In :”*Expanding the Measure of Wealth*”, Indicators of Environmentally Sustainable Development, Revised February 1997, Environment Department, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

process. In many cases the global culture publicizes violence, selfishness and other qualities, which may result in deterioration of the individuals' qualities generating social capital. There is almost unproved proportion – the more aggregate a given culture, the more detrimental for social capital qualities it generates. This can be very easily observed in urban and rural areas. As a result global culture may have the effect of deterioration of social capital and thus the movement of development of social unit away from sustainability.

Among the whole variety of factors influencing the quality of social capital, to simplify analysis we restrict ourselves in two basic factors – moral and cultural capitals. By moral capital of a community we will understand the set of values defining for its members the criteria of what is good and bad. Cultural capital following Bourdieu definition is “ the collection of non-economic forces such as family background, social class, varying investments in and commitments to education, different resources, etc., which influence academic success”¹³. Together with the other socio-economic and other factors, moral and cultural capitals are assumed to be the most fundamental factors defining the quality of social capital. It is clear how much additional work is needed to reveal the whole complex of the other factors influencing the process of formation of social capital in a given community.

We can summarize our vision in the model presented in figure 1. It shed light on various details of the link between soft social infrastructure and the exchange of cultural values. Its comprehensive completion requires much more efforts than one could mobilize with the modest academic capacities. Due to the technical restrictions we completely avoid any mathematical consideration and present only some basic theoretical considerations.

Figure 1. Model of the interlink between soft social infrastructure and cultural integration.



First of all of crucial importance is the state of moral and cultural capitals which determine the value system as social capital generating needs some level of human capital provided we include value system of individuals in it. However moral and cultural capitals affect not only value system but also the other aspects of human capital. Their study really requires multidisciplinary team combining problem of motivation (sociology), income (economics), mental status (psychology), etc. This is only a small fraction of knowledge required to complete the study. We need to add to it also the need of social anthropologists, historians, culturologists, etc.

Some phenomenological observations carried out during the last years allow outlining conclusions, which might be a guideline for future studies. The effect of the cultural interactions on generating social capital has very complicated nature difficult to explain with the standard approaches. Cases were observed when businessmen have much stronger positive informal relationships with people from other, often quite different cultures than with people of their own culture. It is difficult to say which mixtures of culture produce such effects as similar cases may be observed within teams composed of European and Asian participants. Religious differences especially among the educated people very rarely have disintegrative role; in most of the cases everybody has respect to the religious habits of the other participants.

The most decisive factor appears to be the moral capital, the vision of what is good and bad. Very often these differences cannot be observed in short run and directly as they have many implicit connotations. However as doing business is a question of incessant interactions

13 Bourdieu, P. (1986) The Forms of Capital: English version published 1986 in J.G. Richardson's Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, pp. 241–258. First published 1983 in German as Ökonomisches Kapital - Kulturelles Kapital - Soziales Kapital in Soziale Ungleichheiten, edited by Reinhard Kreckel, pp. 183–198. http://www.viet-studies.org/Bourdieu_capital.htm

moral differences can result in dissipation of the team after a period of time.

The next important integrative factor is the similarity in cultural interests. As a whole having common favourite writer or composer is a strong informal integrative factor, which may strike out all the other differences. Clearly such a factor can play positive role provided adequate quality of human capital exists in terms of level of education, level of tacit knowledge, etc. Such traditional indicators as income, age, gender are less influential and as a role are not barriers for successful cultural interactions. The final conclusion can be summarized in the following short form: time has come when social sciences reached sufficient level of maturity to include in their studies the role of informal relations. The more we concentrate our attention on it the more we are persuaded how powerful this instrument is. And how difficult is to manage it.

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