

Cultural Values and the Crisis of National Identity

UNESCO defines *culture* as an “aggregate of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional traits, which characterizes a society or a social group. It includes, alongside with arts and literature, ways of life, basic human rights, systems of values, customs and traditions, and faiths”. This is the definition that helps to articulate the concept of cultural dimension of development.

Obviously, the concept of cultural dimension cannot be tackled as a usual one, as long as it represents the fundamental reference to measure and compare the importance of other factors. No development or modernization will be real and sustainable unless it makes allowance for and turns to good account the power of culture; unless it does not ignore the life style, values systems, traditions, faiths, talents and knowledge of the human community. The decision-making persons who neglect the cultural dimension will be punished by the generations to come. The famous Romanian writer Nicolae Iorga says that “without a culture banner a people is not an army but a band”. In other words it is culture that defines us as an entity, unites and inspires us and rallies us to progress and ideal.

The *modernization*, which does not take into account the cultural dimension, focussing exclusively towards external (foreign) models, shuts off the domestic potential of creativity and diminishes the resistance capacity of society against the sterile and or dangerous cultural influences.

And on the contrary, laying stress on the cultural dimension of development, favors synergies: including not only the adoption of concrete measures to improve the situation in the priority sectors such as education, communications, science and technology, agriculture, health, etc. It also implies encouraging the creativity spirit of local people to find proper solutions for the problems any society faces in its process of qualitative transformation. The example of Japan and other prosperous Asian dragons proves that one can eclectically choose the techniques and patters to be followed, providing they are assimilable from the cultural point of view.

The development of new technologies, globalization respond to the over growing needs of the society, to the relative importance paid to meet them, and to the desire to apply new, different solutions in practical matters, calling to the creative imagination, perspicacity, resourcefulness and experience of people. The implementation of new technologies often generates new social conditions, which, at their turn, form values and needs, thus catalyzing the progress.

The uttered goal of the human development is to improve the living standards of the population in a country. The issue is to find the most efficient and urgent methods and means necessary to attain this goal. The implantation of the European economic pattern, without taking mechanically over the value system it is based on, its proper adjustment to the local traditions, involving also the active and committed participation of citizens, inspires hopes, and not only in the Republic of Moldova. The economic success of Western countries, alongside with the political, cultural and military advantages, always fascinates, persuading other countries to plead for their model of development, for a western economic and social structure and especially for a western consumption and life styles, despite the local values and social and economic structures, very different in many cases.

In order to fairly and judiciously evaluate the pro-culture policies it is necessary to apply for help to other disciplines and sciences (not only sociology and economics, but also history, law, ethics, etc.). A conjugation of synthetic knowledge is required – not very popular in this part of the world – in order to objectively appreciate the components of public policies in favor of culture: their past and present, the vectors and core lines of cultural field, the agents and decision making bodies (State, judets, communes, domain partners of local public administration, (more active as far as opinions are concerned than far-reaching actions), trade unions, diverse clubs, sponsors etc.); the relationships between the Ministry of Culture as the main decision making body and other ministries and departments; the artistic education, the network for training the administrators and cultural amateurs...

Following from the socioeconomic configuration of our present evolution, all the aforementioned components are important due to their social impact.

It is up to each country and its decision making bodies to decide on how to make use of the cultural trumps from the perspective of modernization. But imposing the respect and public recognition of the importance of arts, culture and science as agents of human development, is an urgent imperative when the major task is to build a state starting from the reconstruction of economy based on modern principles, and draw at the same time the local population into profound political and social reforms. Culture is the essential spring necessary to open a new horizon of real hopes and perspectives for the young people, who are looking not only for a job good enough to assure a decent life, but especially for a system of reference and a mobilizing elan... Ended, culture is unable to immediately solve the urgent problems a society is facing. Its actions and results are lent and require time to get mature, but without the proper cultural instruments the task to improve the quality of life is almost impossible.

This is true especially in the case of our confuse and uncertain transition, haunted by tensions and threatened with anomy (lack of trust for the existing values, absence of clear and precise objectives, violent clash of interests and contradictory ambitions, disappearance of old standards and appearance of new indices and symbols) in all life spheres on the individual but also macroeconomic and social levels.

We feel on ourselves the effects of this phenomenon characterized, according to the Merton's definition, by a deep fault, a gap between the cultural goals of society and the means accepted by the community to reach these goals. Cynically laying stress on the principle "the end justifies the means" demoralizes the population, causing a disintegration of social relationships. The negation of positive norms and rules brings to the forefront the principle "everything that is not forbidden is allowed", thus giving everyone the freedom to set up his/her own frame of what is permitted. The mass movement of national and social emancipation gave birth to hopes, which did not come true and it is not known if they ever will. The labor productivity decreased dramatically (and not just because of the puzzled transition, halved reforms lolloping along, but also due to the old soviet heritage, which got the individuals out of the habit to work honestly, respect the work discipline, be professionally responsible and ready to take the risk of personal initiative and innovations). The transition tensions, lacking an anti-shock insurance, and not amplified at the spiritual and cultural level (let us remember that America got out of the big economic Depression thanks to certain

special programs launched to maintain the “moral health” of the nation, including a strong industry of film and entertainment shows, etc.) condition a poor functioning of economy and the negative character of social relationships. Both, individually (manifested through an apathy and indifference, a tendency of repliation and total isolation, or on the contrary through a violent, aggressive and unmotivated behavior) and socially (involving deviation, galloping criminality and immorality, together with a ferrous individualism and a wild thirst to satisfy all personal ambitions, taking as a guide the criterion “ after us, the deluge”) are disastrous. In this case one can find the strongest antidote in the generous offers brought forward by arts and culture.

Art and culture must be supported by the governments to realize the special role they have in the process of building a new society (not less valuable than the one of abolishing the old regime), to dynamically and positively solidarize, getting rid of negativism and the Phanariot attitude “ don’t disturb me and I won’t disturb you” and a total detachment from the public affairs (from Latin *res publica*). Today the state policy on culture must set up strict, objective, competent, and judicious norms and rules and assure their observance (regardless the rank, social status, party, ethnicity, confession!) in order to favor the total access to highly valued cultural and artistic achievements and stimulate creativity.

The cultural sector, fluctuant and hard to quantize, is very often marginalized compared to other sectors as for instance economy, justice, defense, health. In reality, elaboration of a coherent, fair and balanced cultural policy is one of the most complex priorities for the present government. It is not the question of the quantity of administrative resources – on this changing ground, the individual action of just one or several personalities may unleash events of far-reaching effects, while considerable sums of money could be thrown away without any social result – but of the capacity of competent bodies to formulate tactic decisions, which would stimulate synergies to bring forward concrete objectives, to fairly make use of all the money coming from the tax payers, to efficiently propagate culture, to respect the relationship between society, art and cultural patrimony, avoiding the elitism trap, art isolation, and catalyzing the emergency of “fan” and horizontal actions.

The organization of a power field in this sector in the Republic of Moldova is worth to be specified in order to objectively lay out the framework it is influenced by:

At the national level-

In the first place, the President of the Republic, executive leadership, their counselors in the cultural domain;

In the second place, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, the legislative body including a Commission on culture;

In the third place, the Ministry of Culture (with the Minister and two deputy-ministers);

In the fourth place, other ministries and departments, which have tangency with the cultural sector – Ministry of Education, Ministry of Ecology and Environment Protection, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection...

At the local level -

The judets cultural Departments (11 departments set up in the 10 existing judets and Gagauzia in accordance with the Law on administrative-territorial structure

of the Republic of Moldova), having as a task – management of cultural activities in territories.

Regretfully enough, this fracture in the evolution of society, the rather declared than real transition to democracy and market economy was not accompanied by a radical transformation of structures that organize the culture system. The rigid hierarchical structures of soviet origins are still in force; the former USSR labor legislation is still in operation; the complex heritage of the past fetters the initiative, experiment, and innovation. One can talk about culture only in the capital, while the rest of the country is kept in passivity and darkness. New models based on project financing together with subsidies and indemnities did not yet appear. The state ownership is dominant in the cultural sector. The economic conditions, which would favor the privatization (preserving the existing functions) of culture and entertainment institutions did not manage to materialize up till now. The interest of economic managers and investors, both local and foreign, in cultural structures and organizations is minimal.

The artists, authors and heroes of “cultural resistance”, change initiators and artisans have found themselves among its victims - unable to adapt to the new game rules, frustrated by the crumbling of old values and reference points, by the flagrant opposition between consumption/commercial art and the elitist esthetic art for art, shocked by the harshness of market economy rules (the Moldovan wild version), frightened and intimidated by the “freedom” they had fought for.

Under the present circumstances, when the state budget allocated to culture in a centralized way faces a year by year reduction (from 0,26 % in the 1996' GDP to 0,18 % in 1999, in the Western countries this index reaching the figure 0,90 % in Finland, 0,81 % in Sweden, 0,78 % in France), the law stipulations are dead stipulations. What kind of “favorable material and spiritual conditions insurance” and “a fair evaluation of input” one should talk about, when the average monthly wage in the cultural sector is 305 lei (274 lei at cultural institutions providing cultural services and 362 lei in institutions of artistic education, which came to this “performance” not due to the budget allocations but thanks to the parents who have to pay taxes, in reality being double tax-payers by paying the tuition fees too). In our Moldovan reality where the consume basket reaches the figure of 1054 lei a month, the aforementioned wages cover its cost only by 28,9%.

As far as the legislation is concerned, the general legal framework results from the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova adopted on July 29, 1994.

Art. 33 of the Constitution lays down that “the State contributes to the maintenance, development, and propagation of national and international culture and science achievements”, “the artistic and scientific creation freedom is guaranteed” and free of censorship, and “the citizens’ right to intellectual property, their material and moral interests that appear as a result of diverse types of intellectual creation are protected by the law”. Art. 32 “guarantees the freedom of thought, opinion and public expression through words, images or other possible means”.

The core principles of artistic and cultural activities are set forth in the Law on Culture, adopted on May 27, 1999. The Law on Culture stipulates these principles as follows:

“to ensure and protect the constitutional right of citizens of the Republic of Moldova to cultural activity”

and

“to set up the basic principles of the State policy on culture and the legal norms, which ensure the free development of culture.

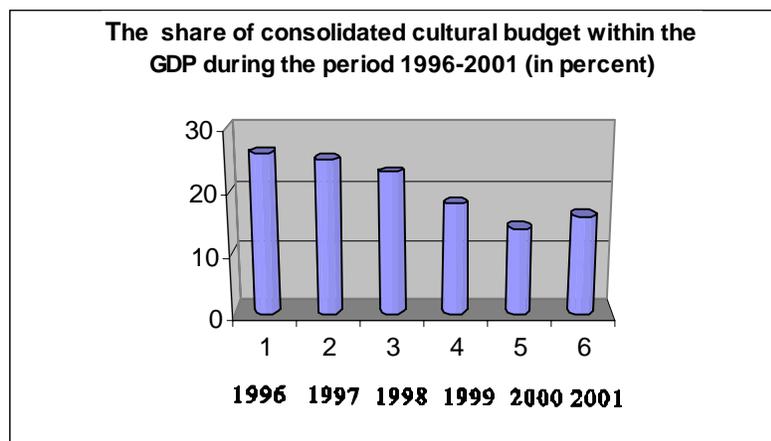
The Law on monuments, adopted on June 22, 1993 regulates the juridical regime of patrimony monuments (natural and cultural).

The Law provides for “works and activities meant to record, investigate, enhance the value, save, protect, maintain and restore the monuments entering them into the Monuments Register, increase the material resources, ensure monuments’ availability for research and education purposes. According to the Law, the protection activity should be exercised by the Parliament, Government, judets, municipal, city and village councils and their local executive organs (prefect’s and mayor’s offices)”.

The Law on Archives Fund of the Republic of Moldova (adopted on January 22, 1992), states the principles of activities aiming to complete, keep accounts, maintain, and use the Archives. No allusion is made to the imperatively needed Law on intelligence files of the former secret police and the soviet KGB, a law that would increase the danger awareness of ideological engagement.

Some other laws and juridical acts regarding culture have been adopted – the Law on audio-video, Law on libraries, Law on publishing activity, Law on author right and connected rights. In the drafting phase are the Law on protection of cultural patrimony held by museums, private collections, and religious institutions, the Law on collections and museums, and the Law on Theatres, Circuses and Concert Organizations.

Incidences in culture have other laws too – the Law on state language, Law on functioning of languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova, Law on returning to the Latin alphabet, Law on publicity, Law on children’s rights, Law on education, Law on tourism, Law on physical education and sports, Law on philanthropy and sponsorship, Law on local public administration, Law on public associations.



The actual economic context of the Republic of Moldova is extremely difficult, the GDP is facing a continuous decrease, causing an increase of budget deficit and external debts, the real incomes of the population diminished considerably, inflation is

evident – the capacity of public intervention to support the efficient financing of cultural activity is also under reduction, while the subsidy principles did not change much. The cultural institutions and organizations, artists suddenly found themselves in a very dramatic situation, and few are those who succeed in finding solutions. The others get into the trap of despondency, give up psychologically, resort to the “help” of alcohol, drugs, emigrate or leave their artistic jobs, a professional sphere where except education one needs to have vocation, talent and a special gift, something that cannot be found everywhere. With a few exceptions, the management of cultural institutions is doing the utmost to survive more in despite of the existing legislation than due to it. A real possibility to increase income would be to free the cultural products and services of VAT, and the implementation, to the advantage of Artistic Associations, of concrete destination stamps – the theater stamp, literature stamp, cinema stamp, etc.

Unfortunately, the third sector – extra-budgetary, which efficiently and preponderantly supports culture in Western Europe and many countries from the former socialist block (according to a survey carried by the European Council’s experts – in Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia) did not enough crystallize to engage as an active partner of the State in cultural policies. Very few of prosperous businessmen invest in or sponsor the cultural sector. Moldova is lacking a viable system of fiscal incitations (the Law on philanthropy and sponsorship is not functional). There is no active interest showed by those who have financial resources. So, the main source of culture financing is the so called “consolidated budget” that joins together the centralized budget and the local budgets, (which, by the way, make an over 50% contribution – 21,5 million lei in 1996, 27,9 million lei in 1997, 26,6 million lei in 1998, 21,9 million lei in 1999). The allocations from the Central State Budget diminish on a yearly basis – from 22,7 million lei in 1997 to 21 million lei in 1999.

Unfair is the difference between the subsidy level of cultural activities carried out in the capital of the Republic and the province: the financial allocations for the cultural institutions in territories reached the quota of 24.028 thousand lei in 2000 (2.400 000 Euro), out of which 2 953 000 lei went to the Chisinau municipal needs, and 500 000 lei to the Cahul and Orhei judets. The allocations distributed for the functioning of cultural institutions and organizations in territories, per capita calculated, constituted in 2000 11 lei (approximately US\$ 0,86 – less than 1 lei per month) in Tighina judet, and 2,5 lei (20 cents a year) in Balti and Cahul judets.

The cultural institutions, volens-nolens, have to look for solutions by themselves just to keep at the surface. They search for extra-budgetary sources and means (until 1995 only museums used to get supplementary non-budgetary income, selling tickets, organizing exhibitions and excursions). These sources, according to the Ministry data, are categorized as follows:

- 1) tuition fee/payment for the education (or the so-called contract based education) at artistic education institutions;
- 2) expertise services of art works;
- 3) room/space rent.

The money resulting from artistic/creation activity – outside country tours in the case of theaters and concert bands, selling of art works and tickets, in a reality of

constant pauperization of audience and art consumers and a chronic shortage of fixed funds and sources, properties, transport for tours, etc.

Under these circumstances, the relative liberalization of norms with regard to room rent, labor employment has opened the door to small and big defalcations. Very often the accent laid on infrastructure is to the detriment of creation. Economically artists are even less protected than formerly (with some institutions providing artistic services the number of security people and technical staff is several times higher than the artistic/creation staff). The patrimony works are considered and treated as if privatized and feoffs of chiefs and their families. An efficient and objective check of the situation is extremely difficult, if not almost impossible to be carried out. There are no real mechanisms to protect the artistic patrimony and culture institutions not only against the kitsch, bad taste, and mass culture of transatlantic origin, but also against voluntarism, incompetence, corruption, mean intentions, “buying for export”, in other words engagement of our prominent artists by foreign producers and companies for symbolic wages without assuring compensation actions. (In the case of theaters for instance, this fact destroys the repertory of a theater, the top plays, which are the collective work and intellectual property, disappear). The fixed and mobile means/assets and equipment are subject to sale and waste. Unique buildings are destroyed.

The sector under the Ministry of Culture administration includes public institutions of mass enlightenment – libraries, culture houses and clubs, cinemas, recreation centers, museums and exhibition halls, institutions of artistic education of all levels – primary, secondary and higher education – theaters, opera, circus, creation unions.

In the period of totalitarian soviet regime the freedom of creation and expression, declared by the Constitution, was a fiction like many others, all genres being subject to a severe and unbreakable censorship. Any civil legislation regarding the author rights was abolished. The publication of art and literature works was considered to be a recompense in itself, no negotiations were accepted. The emolument tariff for the author were the same in Moscow and Chisinau with a regional coefficient margin, which in fact leveled down the labor remuneration for outstanding writers with the one of humble and utile mediocrity. A published work – be it literature, music or other genre – was considered to be part of the common circuit, and then used without the author’s permission and very often without any recompense.

The Creation Unions monopolized the protection of author’s rights, insurance of social and health protection of Union members, organization of their leisure. Except that, under the circumstances of a general deficit, they provide the artists with studios, mass communication means, publishing houses belonging to political parties, etc. These artists’ trade unions used to be very strong, were part of the State apparatus and served as an instrument of ideological supervision to oversee the creation activity – while the unofficial creation/art was marginalized and often persecuted. Even the least obedient members of Stalinist Creation Unions have had access to mass media, were better paid, their works were regularly displayed. The frequency of work reprinting, life broadcasting, personal exhibitions and concerts, “made to state order” film/show setting and production, was not directly depending on the work’s esthetic value, the

prestige and popularity of author, but rather on the hierarchical position hold by the author in the Union and his/her relationship with the ruling party.

Today the paradigms changed radically. New laws on freedom of creation and expression have been adopted. Reality calls for a change within the Unions too. Some of them (like for instance the Writers' Union and the Union of Artists) manage more or less to restructure and keep on track. While others (as in the case of the Union of Theatre People, which declared itself more like a charity body than a creation organization) stick in the mud, and survive thanks to the budget allocations and room renting. The lack of financial means makes the unions to focus on how to maintain and protect the material, palpable results of creation activity rather than supporting the creators. There is no system of economic stimulation to support creators through different awards, creation stipends. And even the National Award in the domain of Literature, Arts, and Architecture, amounting to 5000 taxable lei, a little bit higher than the average monthly wage of state bank system employees, cannot assure a lifetime economic security to the prize winners. The Institute of Literature Awards (as well as other sphere awards), popular with England, France, even Russia and, the scholarship system for creators, offered preponderantly by Foundations and financial organizations (for example Finland offers from its state budget several hundred full-time scholarships, thus assuring a decent life to the beneficiaries for a period of 1 up to 15 years) would decongest the public investments and undoubtedly protect this human capital of great ethic and creative value, but decimated nowadays. What kind of culture policy are we to talk about when culture creators and producers are at or even beyond the threshold of subsistence level?

In spite of many problems they face today, theatres – 11 by number, 8 in Chisinau and 3 in province (Cahul, Tiraspol and Balti) take the studs to resist and function and to participate in and organize International Festivals...

Practically, all professional theaters in Moldova are state theaters, the Ministry of Culture taking the responsibility to finance them (although it finances them only partially and gradually less and less), openly supervising their activity, appointing the artistic and economic directors. In spite of all this, this functioning regime is euphemistically called "partial self-financing" – the budget allocations cover only 30-40% of necessity expenditures, the rest are supposed to derive from sponsoring, donations, room rent, etc. due to a very low purchasing power of the population the cost of tickets is also low – 10-20 lei. Specific means to subsidize the shows are necessary in order to stimulate access to culture of socially disadvantaged categories of population – disabled, children from vulnerable families, pensioners, etc. The State policy on culture should bring forward special educational programs for kids, deaf, mute, blind persons, and youth.

An alarming sign that should be taken into account is the sharp decrease of audience.

The inherited old wage system with its leveling standards has developed a huge gap between the creation labor and retribution. The welcomed by ones and hated by others transition from an imposed collectivism and a miserable fixed salary paid unpunishably behind time to a system of labor retribution more flexible and attractive based on agreement signing – requires time and preparation and a more optimistic economic situation.

Music has always played a special role in the cultural life of Moldovans, the folklore genre especially, without which life in itself would be impossible in this part of the world. This might also serve as a sign of artistic vitality.

The level of classical music, due to numerous music schools and primary, secondary and higher institutions of musical education of high level, is also elevated and enjoys a large international recognition.

The academic concert activity on the national level is provided by three institutions appreciated by the public and specialty critics – the National Philharmonics, the Organ Hall and the National Palace. The number of sold tickets decreased considerably. It is seldom that foreign singers come to give concerts in Chisinau. The countryside concerts are not practiced anymore. Many of our outstanding instrumentalists emigrated.

The festivals, formerly very popular and looked forward, have lost their prestige and do not solve the situation anymore. And the “coupling” of the Academy of Music (the former Conservator, where studied tens of musicians notorious all over the world) with the State University of Arts was a hard blow for the musical community, and it is not known if it will ever recover.

Despite the considerable efforts made by the museums (placed mainly in capital and few in other towns and villages) that are at the subsistence limit of existence, for the overwhelming majority of population they do not present any interest, as if they did not exist anymore. We do not have the tradition of visiting museums. They are not attractive to youth, pupils, and students. The number of visitors is constantly decreasing, in the countryside especially.

The network of public libraries in the Republic of Moldova is impressive due to their density. Out of 1377 actually functioning libraries, only two of them are subordinated to the Ministry of Culture (out of the 1417 libraries functioning in 2000, 28 have been merged or closed).

The National Library of the Republic of Moldova, the largest and most impressive one, the pilot-ship in the domain, carries a vast organizational and book and reading popularization activity. Although the general tendency is to adjust to the European standards, the libraries’ indices move downwards on a yearly basis. In 2001 the library collections reduced by 574 thousands books, the book loan – by 515 thousands copies, the number of users diminished by 229 thousand persons.

The infrastructure of folklore/popular culture in Moldova was and continues to be very important, orienting towards traditional culture and producing consumption goods specific to traditional handicrafts and amateur artistic creation. Very active is the Union of Popular Artisans. In rural settlements activate numerous amateur artistic collectives of popular/folklore music, dance, and theatre.

A couple of Song Festivals are regularly organized – “Vai sarmana rurturica” (“Oh, the poor little turtle dove”), “Nufarul alb” (“White water lily”), “La vatra horelor” (“At the “hora” abode”).

Cinematography is a sector of cultural industries that brought us fame and projected the image of Moldova all over the world.

Starting with 1957 and till the end of 80s, the “Moldova-Film” Company used to yearly produce 3-4 feature films, 4 cartoons, 25 documentary films, 12 news

magazines “Moldova Sovietica” (“Soviet Moldova”), 6 satirical magazines “Usturici” (“Sarcastic”).

The Moldovan Cinematography was an excellent example of implementation of Leninist postulate “out of all arts, the most important for us is cinematography”. Within about half a century, on Chisinau film sets have been produced and showed on Soviet screens over 165 feature films, 1900 documentaries, 50 cartoons (some of them got the success abroad, winning important prizes at international festivals).

The economic aspect of film production, (which is problematic nowadays), should not be neglected too. For instance, the film “Lautarii” (“Fiddlers”) produced by the famous producer Emil Loteanu with a budget of 820 000 US\$ was sold and showed in 60 countries, bringing an income of 14,4 million dollars. Vlad Iovita’s film “At the Gates of Fiend” made with a budget of 399 000 has brought a profit of 4,1 million dollars.

Therefore, cinematography production was and continues to be among the most profitable and long term industries.

Unfortunately, the village population doesn’t have the possibility to watch screen movies. In the Republic of Moldova a sustainable network of screen film showing/broadcasting is not functioning anymore. The few cinemas existing in our towns show mainly Russian films.