

ROMANIA'S CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *Starting from Bordieu's theory on the connection between the economic, social, and cultural capital of society, the paper analyzes two variables of cultural consumption in 2014 Romania, namely the population's perception of national heritage and their attitude towards foreign cultures, in order to assess the effects of the accession to the European Union on the Romanians' sense of national identity. The study combines social theories with historical facts and statistical data in an attempt to show how Romania's Europeanization actually perfected the country's economic, social, and cultural disruption started after 1989.*

KEY WORDS: *cultural capital, national identity, cultural consumption, cultural decapitalization, globalization, Europeanization, diversity.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: Z13.

1. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBALIZATION IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

According to Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist at the World Bank and author of the best-seller *Globalization and Its Discontents*, the main reasons why globalization failed both to eradicate poverty and to ensure stability in the developing nations are to be found in the very institutions that govern it, namely the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, and their hypocritical discourse. As Stiglitz points out, the IMF and the World Bank have gradually deviated from their original mission at the date of their foundation in 1944, when they were meant to finance the rebuilding of Europe after World War II and to ensure future economic stability by preventing depression. For instance, if the IMF's initial objective was to pressure countries into stimulating their own economies by increasing expenditures, cutting taxes, and reducing interest rates, nowadays it does exactly the opposite. More precisely, the

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eligibility of a country for obtaining funds is conditioned by the application of economic policies supposedly meant to cut deficits, such as rising taxes and interest rates, which actually have a devastating impact on national economies.

Moreover, although they declaratively promote such principles as democracy, transparency, independence and equality of chances, there are several activities of the two institutions that contradict every point of their demagogic discourse:

- although a public institution, financed by taxpayers all over the world, the IMF never reports directly to the citizens, but to the national ministries of finance and central banks;
- the voting process in the two institutions automatically establishes the predominance of the powerful developed countries;
- taking advantage of the desperate need for loans of the poor and developing countries, the two institutions imposed free market policies and ideologies on areas that were not prepared economically, socially and culturally to adopt them;
- in the 1980's and after the fall of the Berlin wall, the IMF gradually seized the decision-making prerogatives and came to supervise the loaning activity of the World Bank, centralizing the control process further.

In its turn, the WTO, meant to provide a space for trade negotiations and agreements, is just as disconnected from (ad oblivious to) the specific national realities and needs. As Stiglitz explains, the trade ministries of the member countries represent the interests of the business community and act exclusively in the name of increasing profits. Thus, in the continuous clash between the exporters' need for new markets and the local producers' struggle against new imports, increasing prices and taxes burden the population, local economies are threatened to be swallowed by foreign imports, whereas social and environmental issues are completely overlooked.

These inflexible economic policies, characteristic for imperialistic colonization, are the ones that undermined the initial, well-intended globalization agenda. Their impact was devastating especially on the developing countries in transition from communism to capitalism, whose economic and social situation worsened as a result of foreign interference because:

- structural adjustment programs brought about excessive austerity and stifled growth;
- in the absence of adequate sequencing and pacing, markets were opened before strong financial institutions were established;
- in close connection with the above, jobs were destroyed faster than new ones were created, leading to unemployment and increased poverty;
- the economic policies benefitted the rich at the expense of the poor;
- the commercial needs superseded the concern for the environment, democracy, human rights, and social justice (Stiglitz, 2002, pp. 18-20).

2. THE PARADOX OF FREEDOM. ROMANIA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE EU

As we have shown in a previous study (Dumbravă, 2014), for the Eastern countries, the accession to the EU was charged with bitter historic irony, since the drastic criteria that conditioned their eligibility made them even less independent than

before 1989. For Romania, like for all the other countries in the former Eastern bloc, this loss of freedom involved far more than the dramatic changes in its economic, social, and political life. It also entailed the clash between national and Western patterns of thought and behaviour, and the collapse of an entire system of social and moral values.

It is essential to point out, however, that the paradoxical process of gaining geographical freedom at the expense of national sovereignty started immediately after 1989, when the borders suddenly burst and generated huge confusion in a population that was not at all prepared culturally and morally to face the 'outer' world. Under the circumstances, the elation of liberty and the fascination of the 'outside' created an excessively permeable social and cultural space ready to absorb everything that came from the West as necessarily superior to the local and the national. Hence, our rush to create institutions inspired from Western models, often misunderstood or misused, and our readiness to neglect our national heritage in favour of foreign cultural models that have no resonance with our identity as a nation.

European accession reinforced the space of forms devoid of substance and deepened our identity crisis under the pressure of foreign imports and the prerogatives of free circulation. Once again, it should be pointed out that it is our historically determined fragile sense of national identity that turns the otherwise beneficial transnational interaction into a potential disadvantage by mistaking blind acceptance for the embracing of diversity, and imitation for integration. At the same time, we should also be aware that, apart from its historical determination, the Romanian identity crisis has constantly been fuelled in the past 27 years by governmental indifference to national education and culture, which are precisely the motors of cultural sustainability.

Finally since cultural models are the most lasting in a society, being handed down from one generation to the other, they are also the most relevant for the direction in which that particular society evolves. Consequently, by analyzing the Romanians' attitude towards their national heritage in parallel with their consumption of foreign cultural products in 2014 and 2015, the next two sections attempt to outline an image of Romania's cultural capital 27 years after 'liberation' and 9 years after European accession.

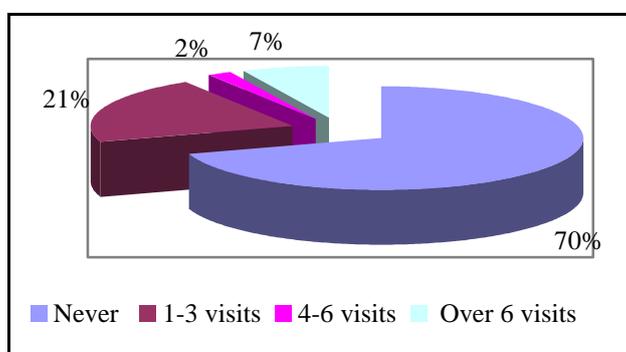
2.1. The Romanians' Attitude towards Their National Heritage

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005) defines cultural heritage as "a group of resources inherited from the past, which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time; a heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations" (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Identities/default_en.asp).

In this context, the population's attitude towards the national heritage is revealing both for the assessment of the patterns of thought and behaviour shaped through home and mass education, as well as for the prediction of the evolution of the society from the perspective of its cultural values projected against the background of global diversity.

Therefore, the findings of a sociological survey (Becuț, 2014) included in the *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014* outline a relevant image of the Romanians' cultural awareness and sense of national identity from the perspective of their interest in the national heritage.

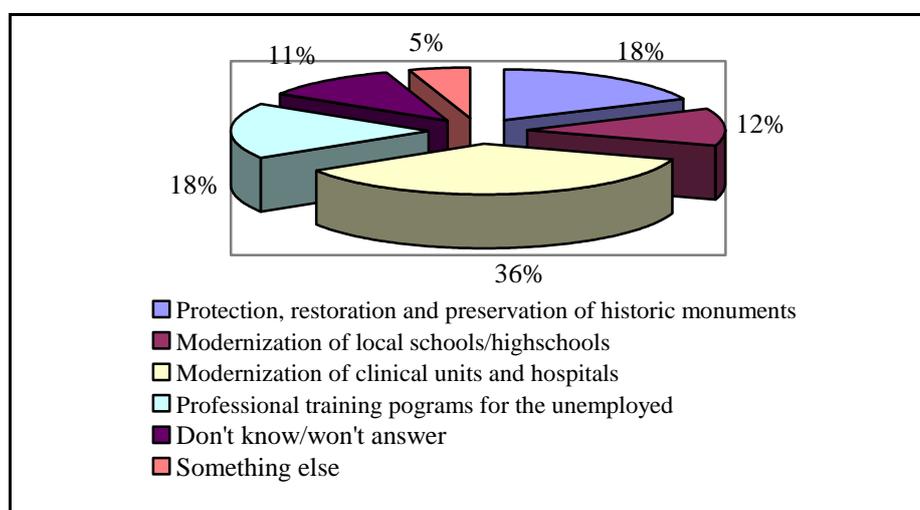
First, questionnaires applied on a national level revealed that 70% of the respondents had never visited a heritage site during the previous year, whereas less than one third had made fairly frequent visits, and less than 10% visited historic sites on a regular basis. The situation is shown in the figure below.



Source: *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 116

Figure 1. Population's visits to heritage sites

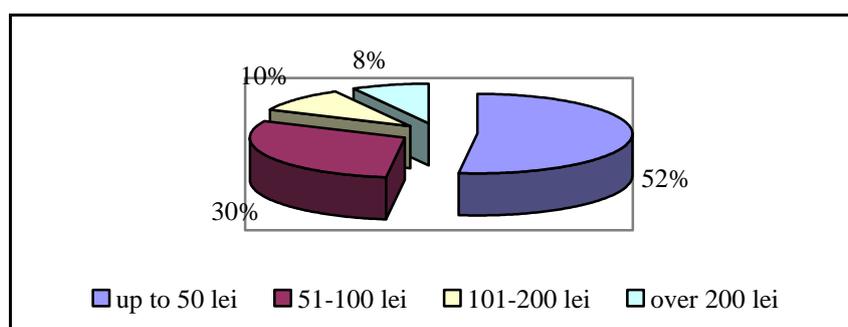
When asked about the allocation of the local budget, most respondents were of the opinion that public money should be directed towards the modernization of clinics and hospitals. This option is accounted for, on the one hand, by the disastrous state of medical services all over the country and, on the other hand, by people's tendency to pay more attention to the things that affects them in the most obvious manner. Equal shares of the interviewed persons would have preferred to direct the money towards either the historic heritage or to the development for training programs for the unemployed, whereas an almost equal percentage (16%) consisted of people who refused to answer, had no information on the topic, or expressed other choices. These findings (shown in fig. 2) are alarming because a low level of the population's cultural awareness is the major source of non-involvement in the preservation of national identity in an ever aggressive global context. Ultimately, the fragile sense of national identity determines the undiscerning absorption of foreign cultural patterns to the detriment of local and national traditions.



Source: *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 121

Figure 2. Population's preference for the destination of the local budget

As to the willingness of the population to contribute financially to the restoration, preservation and protection of the cultural heritage, 70% of the respondents declared they would agree to donate a certain amount of money for this purpose. The small percentage of the population willing to donate larger sums reflects the precarious financial situation of the masses. However, it is remarkable that, although in 2014 the net average salary was 1735 lei (approximately 385 EUR), and the minimum wage was 850 lei (approximately 188 EUR), more than half of the interviewees expressed their availability to donate up to 50 lei (approximately 11 EUR).



Source: *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 127

Figure 3. Amount of money the population is willing to donate for the cultural heritage

On the other hand, when it came to the availability to get directly involved and volunteer for the protection of national heritage, only 18% answered affirmatively (*Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 128). Since the middle-aged population consists of people who lived half of their lives in communist Romania, this result may

indicate the persistence of two fundamental patterns of thought specific to paternalistic regimes, namely the population's passivity, by virtue of which the state is expected to deal with social issues, and a possible aversion to volunteering, probably still associated in the collective conscience with the so-called 'patriotic work' to which everyone, from school children to employees, was forced to participate. On the other hand, the Western culture of volunteering has just begun to gain ground in Romania during the past few years, which are obviously not enough to shape consistent patterns of thought and behaviour.

2.2. The Romanians' Perception of Their National Culture and Foreign Cultures

Cultural consumption is an important clue of the population's attitude towards the national culture. As we have shown before, the decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain have been bewildering for the former communist countries, which were not able to keep pace culturally with the changes in every sector of their economic and social life. Moreover, the deceptive taste of freedom, the traumas of the totalitarian regimes and the fascination of what was outside the geographic borders determined in the population a deep desire to leave behind everything that had to do with the past. In this context, traditional culture was a collateral casualty of the people's impulse to sever all the ties with a disturbing past. The immediate result was the emergence of a new cultural geography, with patterns and traditions superimposed artificially on the national background, either obliterating it altogether, or generating kitschy hybrid models. However, it should be pointed out that this phenomenon is quite natural up to a point, and it does not constitute a major issue as long as it dwindles in the process of national maturation, during which nations gradually come to terms with their past and are able to regard diversity as a way of asserting their own identity.

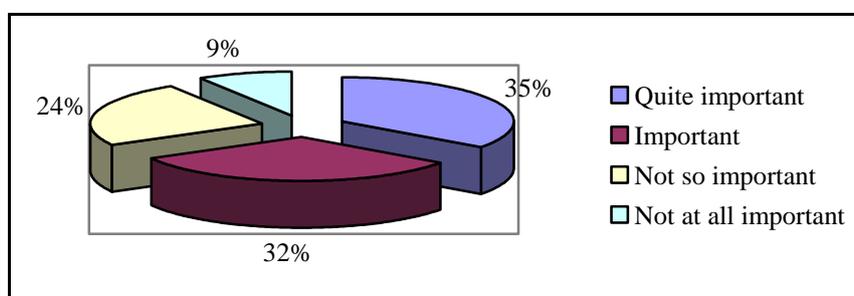
Unfortunately, this has not happened in Romania so far. On the contrary, the accession to the EU, with its pertaining population movement, economic pressures and media aggressiveness has reinforced the Romanians' tendency to neglect their cultural identity in favour of Western models. These models touch upon every area of social life, and reflect in a relevant way in the population's attitude towards their national culture and its products.

Thus, a study conducted by the European Commission reveals that 59% of the Romanians identified the EU with the "freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU", 17% associated it with cultural diversity and only 7% believed that the European space entails losing their cultural identity (Europeans in 2014, p.43). These results are primarily accounted for by the precarious economic situation of the country over the past ten years, which culminated with the 2009 crisis, when the rate of unemployment and the level of poverty surged and pushed thousands of people beyond the national borders in search for a decent life. Thus, people identify the West with higher earnings, better education, and social stability, paying less attention to the more subtle cultural aspects entailed by such immediate benefits. Unfortunately, these aspects are the ones with a deep, long-term effect on the society at large and on the sense of national identity.

In an attempt to measure these effects, sociologist Ștefania Voicu studied the Romanians' attitude towards culture in general, their interest in national culture, and their degree of openness to elements of foreign cultures (Voicu, 2014). Her findings are revealing for the present state of our cultural capital, as well as for our future evolution as a nation in the European and the global context.

As to the importance the population grants to culture (fig. 3), 67% of the respondents declared that culture plays a very important or important role in their personal lives, which is remarkable given the economic crisis that has afflicted the Romanian society in the past six years, determining the average people to focus on their economic and social issues rather than on their cultural needs. At the same time, it is equally relevant that, to a third of the respondents, culture has very little or no importance, which is actually the real warning signal for the present Romanian society and its future as a well-adjusted nation of the world.

In this sense, we should point out that this situation stems from the irresponsible policies of the successive governments after 1989, which have gradually eroded the country's educational system by allocating totally insufficient funds to its development. Thus, although each government proclaimed education as a priority and set a target sum equivalent to 6% of the GDP to be allocated to it, the actual funding has never been higher than 4%. Hence, a poorly educated population, some of which living on the verge of poverty, with total distrust in the state institutions, and unaware of, or indifferent to the cultural heritage and national identity. Unfortunately, since a society is made of its citizens, its sustainable development and cultural identity largely depends on its capacity to cultivate in each individual the respect for genuine values and the desire for self-improvement and self-assertion.

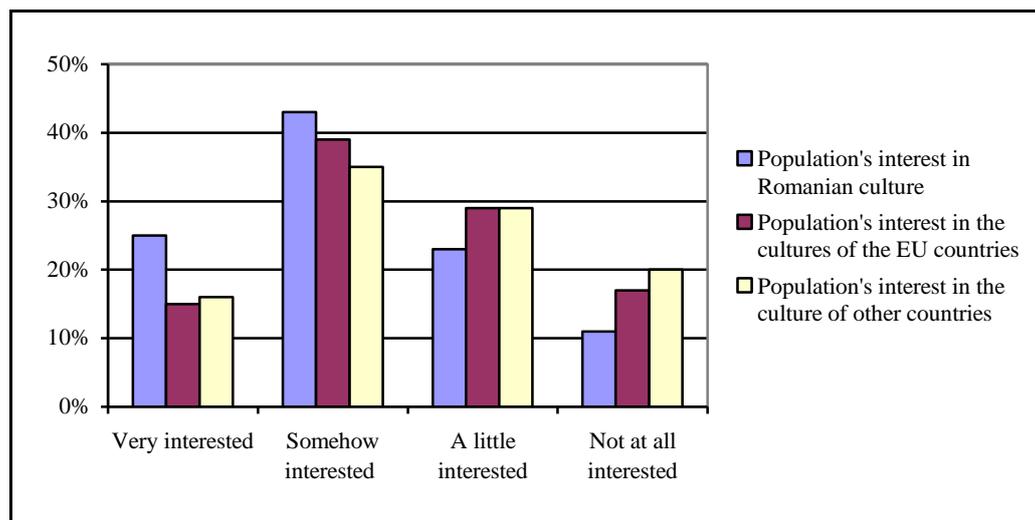


Source: *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 244

Figure 4. Importance of culture within population

Another major issue of the survey was the Romanians' attitude towards their own culture and their openness to the cultures of other countries, within or without the EU. Its findings (fig. 5) are again alarming because small percentages of the respondents fall in the category of 'very interested', whether it is about their own culture (23%), the culture of other EU countries (15%), or the culture of other countries (16%). At the same time, the majority of the interviewees (43%) declared themselves 'somehow interested' in their national culture, whereas approximately equal shares (39%, and respectively 35%) showed moderate interest in the culture of the EU

countries and of other countries. The percentages of the respondents with little interest were also approximately equal: 23% in the Romanian culture, 29% in the EU culture and 29% in the culture outside the EU. Finally, 11% of the respondents stated their complete lack of interest in the national culture, 17% in the EU culture, and 20% in other cultures.



Source: *Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014*, p. 245

Figure 5. Population's interest in Romanian and foreign cultures

The findings presented in figures 4 and 5 display a certain degree of symmetry between their two extremes. Thus, the total percentage of people who considered culture 'quite important' and 'important' (67%) is very close to the total percentage of people who are interested in the national culture, the EU culture and other foreign cultures (54%). Similarly, the total percentage of respondents who considered culture 'not so important' and 'not at all important' (33%) is approximately similar with the percentages in the categories of 'a little interested' and 'not at all interested' in the three types of culture. Another aspect worth mentioning is that the majority of the respondents declared a moderate interest in all the three types of culture.

Therefore, the consistency between the two charts supports the idea that there are two categories of people situated at the extremes of the Romanian society: one with a high degree of cultural awareness, as a result of substantial education, and most often with a financial situation above the average, and the other, almost completely disinterested in cultural refinement for different social or education-related reasons. The category in between consists of the majority of the population, whose moderate interest in culture, whether national or foreign, may be supported by a certain degree of education, family tradition, and a desire for expanding their horizon.

Apart from the above, cultural awareness entails two other important aspects, namely the people's capacity to go beyond the national borders and integrate into the

global world and, on the other hand, their ability to embrace diversity as a means of re-asserting their national identity.

As to the capacity to establish transnational relations, within or without the national borders, the major limiting factor is the knowledge of foreign languages. In this respect, the Romanians still have relatively reduced linguistic competence. Thus, a survey revealed that, on a national level, only 37% of the Romanians speak English, 22% speak French, 6% have knowledge of German, and 13% know other languages. However, their motivation to learn foreign languages is even more relevant than these alarmingly low percentages. In this sense, 51% of the respondents state that they learned a foreign language to be able to communicate on basic level during holidays abroad, 30% intend to use it at work or when travelling abroad for business purposes, and 28% see it as a strong-point in finding a job in Romania. It is worth noticing that the smallest percentages of the respondents learned a foreign language with a cultural purpose in mind, namely: to be able to understand other cultures better (24%), to meet people from other countries (21%), to be able to read books and magazines or watch films (17%), to study in another country (16%), or to feel more European (11%) (Cultural Consumption Barometer 2014, p. 245).

The second aspect of cultural awareness, namely the Romanians' capacity to embrace diversity as a means of national assertion, can be approached most effectively from the perspective of the people's cultural consumption. In this sense, we have analyzed the Romanians' film consumption in order to draw conclusions regarding their attitude towards the national and the foreign cultural products. For this purpose, we have relied on a national survey conducted by Romanian sociologists (Pălici & Iuga, 2015) and published in the Cultural consumption Barometer 2015, according to which 64% of the Romanians prefer American movies, whereas comparatively negligible percentages watch Romanian movies (17%), or European productions. These percentages are accounted for by the Hollywood advertising aggressiveness, the small number of national productions due to the precarious funding of the cultural sector, and the surge of technology that facilitates on-line access to virtually anything, from shopping to entertainment. Obviously, the age variable also plays a key role in this context, as the audience of American movies mostly consists of individuals aged between 18 and 35, whereas the viewers of Romanian films are middle-aged to elderly persons, who resonate with the film productions released before 1989 (Barometrul de consum cultural 2015, p. 201).

The situation is similar in the case of TV series, as 32% of the viewers prefer American productions, 19% watch Turkish soap operas, and only 12% watch Romanian productions on a regular basis (Barometrul de consum cultural 2015, p. 202).

The findings of this survey indicate the Romanians' low level of interest in the products of their national culture. The manifest preference of film consumers for foreign productions is justified both by the Hollywood model, which has shaped corresponding patterns of esthetic perception in the population, and by the incapacity of the new Romanian cinema to resonate with the national audience, even in the case of internationally successful productions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

By corroborating statistical data with the economic, social and historical realities of the contemporary world, we come to the following conclusions regarding Romania's cultural identity in the European and the Global context:

- the degradation of the country's cultural capital began after 1989, with the dissolution of geopolitical borders, as the Romanian society was not culturally prepared to face the challenges of the global world;
- as a direct consequence of the above, foreign models were adopted in every sector of the economic and social life, with a far-reaching impact on the population's patterns of thought and behaviour;
- European accession further enhanced Romania's economic, social and cultural disruption due to the drastic EU policies forced upon the society with total disregard of the particular national context;
- the outcome of the country's constant cultural decapitalization becomes visible in the diluted sense of national identity, with its pertaining manifestations on the level of the Romanian population, namely reduced interest in the national heritage and the preference for foreign cultural products to the detriment of the national ones;
- ultimately, since the cultural capital of a country is the basis of a strong sense of national identity, cultural decapitalization undermines Romania's sustainable integration in the EU as a nation capable of asserting and re-assessing its own values against the global background.

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