

## CULTURAL OMNIVORISM AND UNIVORISM. AXIOLOGICAL LANDMARKS FOR A CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY

Cristina GELAN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Lecturer Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and Communication Sciences "Ovidius" University, Constanta, Romania, [crisdali@yahoo.com](mailto:crisdali@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *This paper aims to examine the concepts of cultural omnivorism and cultural univorism in the context of understanding the idea of "cultural mobility" determined by current socio-political phenomena. Considering that the current cultural consumption is already ostensibly reported to the concept of diversity, this mechanism determines certain power relations that legitimate the cultural values. The eclecticism and cultural cosmopolitanism fulfill an important role regarding this legitimacy. In this context, the problem facing the consumer of culture is that of determining a pattern of overall consumption, which represents a satisfactory way towards its goals of life and to his concerns and to legitimize his own practice, whether it undermine or no other social practices. We are thus witnessing to the birth of a symbolic field that functions as a cultural ecosystem. In this interpretation, the present study aims to identify the characteristics of cultural ecosystem and practices of cultural legitimacy in order to understand the mechanism of legitimacy of the cultural patterns.*

**Key words:** *omnivorism, univorism, values, cultural legitimacy, cultural ecosystem.*

### Cultural omnivorism and univorism in context of "cultural mobility"

Cultural mobility implies the differential ability to access, choose or consume cultural goods and services from a wide spectrum of cultural life. The movement in time of ideas, feelings, judgments and values both is performed in a linear manner or cyclic and sinuous. Thus, we speak of what we call trends, fashion, currents, styles and ideologies, all of which contribute to the formation of cultural life. This manifestation of culture means to adapt to change, to the external and internal environment and to the effects of the passage of time. Douglas Worts, for instance, believes that „culture is the living, changing dynamic of how we live our lives, individually and collectively, locally and globally, consciously and unconsciously” (Worts, 2011: 118). Which means that the human is active permanently in the process of decoding and interpretation of practices and values, involving tools, methods and techniques that are considered that would lead to repeatable and verifiable results and which can be measured. Thus, the human being is related to reality thanks to a cultural structure and all its grace differs from some of his peers. Belonging to a cultural structure leaves or other cultural differences.

In an attempt to captures how cultural differences are not openly, G. Hofstede believes that understanding culture is driven by its own values and practices undertaken by the community. In his vision, the hard core of culture is the values that are general tendencies to prefer certain situations others and dichotomous size: well- bad, beautiful- ugly, allowed - forbidden, moral - immoral, rational-irrational etc. These in turn can be

expressed in terms of preferences, tastes, judgments at the level of intellect and affect, related to contemplative and spiritual dimension of humanity, but also by attitudes and practices in the action, of movement, reaction or intervention, specific of the dynamic dimension of human being.

Regarding the practices undertaken by the community, in terms of Hofstede, they refer to the symbols (words, gestures, images with a certain sense), heroes (real or imaginary, which have qualities valued in a the culture) and rituals (collective activity considered essential in the social field) of a community, understood as fundamental benchmarks that help to structure its collective mind (Worts, 2011: 118). These fundamental benchmarks can be viewed as layers of culture in need of a decoding, recognition and understanding system and transmission of meaning, sense that is memorizing, reproduced and transmitted through socialization.

Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory about how the socio-economic structure which includes an individual finds its equivalent in a cultural structure (Bourdieu, 1999: 8 - 20). In this respect, P. Bourdieu distinguished between an elitist cultural consumption, for dominant class, and a cultural consumption of the masses, that the individuals placed in the lower structures of economic and of social and cultural capital. The author concludes that people with a cultural elitist consumption have a high cultural capital and those who prefer cultural products addressed to the masses have a lower cultural capital. The idea is that certain socio-economic conditions influence the capital

and cultural consumption and the distinction *elitist* - for the masses polarizes social life space.

Bourdieu considers that the education levels influence the level of cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1984: 50 - 52), in that it facilitates the accumulation of knowledge in the cultural field and by that contribute to learning and chiseling of skills decoding of various forms of culture. Therefore, the level and type of education helps to build cultural capital, which in turn influences the level and type of cultural consumption.

A study by Harold Wilensky (1964) on American society, and taken over in Europe, with relevant research in England (Goldthorpe & Chan, 2005; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) and France (Glévarc & Pinet, 2012) addresses the issue of a differentiated consumption of the culture and introduces concepts of cultural omnivorism and cultural univorism.

*Omnivorosity* concept was used in the sociology of culture closely with hierarchies in terms of cultural participation and as an indicator of broader socio-cultural changes. Interpretation of this concept points to the idea that there is a sector of the population in western countries who want a greater variety of forms of culture, and this reflects the emerging values of tolerance and undermines snobbery. Omnivorous cultural consumption is characterized by the consumption a variety of cultural products, as well as some different genres within the same category of cultural products. In terms of Bourdieu with the level of education of a person is higher, the level of cultural consumption is higher and is more likely as a type of cultural consumption are omnivorous. Although the forms of high culture is the preserve of the "elite", it does not reduce the incentive of some kind of consumption, also participates in a wide range of cultural activities, hence the term "omnivore" (Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Simkus, 1992). Omnivore is someone whose preferences beyond conventional boundaries. Omnivorous are considered to be people who generally have social status and economic best and whose repertoire of cultural practices are both those related to high culture and those related to mass culture (Manea, 2016: 300).

On the other hand "univorous" as people who focus their consumption practices in a particular field, that of popular culture or of high culture (Manea, 2016: 300). Moreover, cultural univores have a more conservative behavior in terms of culture consumption, their relation to the cultural products which it assesses as being worthy of consideration. Univorous consumers have a limited cultural consumption (Goldthorpe & Chan, 2007: 1 - 3).

Omnivorous have a higher taste for high culture acts (classical performances and art in general). They come from higher social classes and usually have a high level of education and income: "We also found that omnivorous consumers are placed in the performing arts symbolic space highest on the second axis, taste for fine versus folk performances, and between snobs and the rest in the traditional versus popular axis. That is, omnivores have a higher taste for high culture performing arts (classical and fine art performances) and a more popular pattern of consumption than snobs. Sporadic consumers attend few popular and folk performances, whereas the taste of popular consumers tends toward more popular performances and is less associated with folk performances, in comparison. Omnivores come from the highest social class: 'services' socioeconomic statuses, and have the highest level of education and income" (Sintasa & Alvarez, 2004: 478).

The dichotomy cultural omnivorous - cultural univorous brings certain specific respects in terms of culture consumption. For instance, certain forms of elitist consumption are no longer associated to snobbery (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Thus people in the upper classes (initially only associated with an elitist snob) consume or at least treated with respect, and cultural manifestations of the other social classes. Or dichotomy cultural omnivorous - cultural univorous positioned opposite of some perspectives either overly relativistic, who say that people choose strictly individual what they consider culture and what cultural products consumed or overly deterministic, which assumes that the class position (social position) requires a pattern cultural consumption homogeneous of the people from each social class (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005). Koen van Eijck (2001) believes that cultural omnivore involving at least the compliance with different forms of cultural expression to the values of our group. That means that this type of consumption does not manifest itself in a manner totally indiscriminate, without anon-selective appreciation of all forms of cultural manifestation. One reason for this is the fact that among mass cultural products (*mainstream*), some can be considered rather "elitist".

Mike Savage (2013) drew attention to the fact that the contemporary period creates emerging social classes and a cultural capital emergent associated on one hand with cultural consumption facilitated by new developments in the technological and virtual, and other activities of emerging social classes. For this reason, an approach to cultural consumption in relation to these new forms of cultural capital is needed to

identify the trends regarding consumption of culture.

Bryson (1996) analyzed and developed the idea that the omnivore might be culturally tolerant, showing not only that omnivores in the USA had wider tastes, though they were not appreciative of everything, but that they were also more liberal on racial and political matters, hence her connection between omnivorousness and ‘multicultural tolerance’.

### **Eclecticism versus cultural cosmopolitanism and legitimizing of cultural values**

The issue of legitimacy of cultural values in a world of increasingly diverse occurred owing to the scale that took her lately migration phenomenon, giving rise to a new axiological approach that revolve around understanding the idea of symbolic social space. The trends apparent opposites that determine the evolution of the contemporary world, on the one hand stronger extension of integration in the context of globalization and on the other the explosion of ethnocentrism through some of its dimensions most tense, generated a new variety of "cultural expansion". In this regard, D. Zait̃ note: "one of the root causes of globalization is "expanding" cultural, achieving a "coating" of a global way of looking at things, of symbols related to progress and wellbeing, because it is associated theoretically at least to the benefits of the development of the planet and, implicitly but not sure, individually, collectively, regionally or nationally" (Zait̃, 2001: 2).

The consequences of globalization on cultural life are reflected both in the distribution of cultural values between countries, giving rise to so-called global culture and in terms of the effects on the behavior of the leadership role that the interests they have influence worldwide actions, but also in terms of convergence in their beliefs about what is desirable, giving rise to ideologies. These consequences, however, due to forms of manifestation of ethnocentrism: "Ethnocentrism is the initial condition and the determinant of globalization. Globalization is, in fact, the manifestation of ethnocentrism in the sense of preserving culture and civilization (of a group, individual, at the extreme limit) by extension, expansion, domination, imposition, recognition or assumption (expansion and domination become while growing interdependencies and then integration planet). Between ethnocentrism and globalization can be identified common elements and more differentiation, both of which support the finding that the world is moving on the same natural exciting. The level of development achieved in various stages of development leaves its mark at the actions, methods and tools that try to achieve goals and objectives in the short, medium or long term. Culture, in the narrow sense and civilization, broadly, dominates and creates the potential to identify these actions, ways

and means and how they are implemented" (Zait̃, 2001: 5). We can therefore say that the manifestation of ethnocentrism contribute a part in preserving the specificity of ethnic and hence cultural ones, and secondly help to expand the ethnic and cultural specificity on other areas, which is achieved either by taking free or by persuasion, imposition or even aggression. Value patterns are born so and it legitimizes certain cultural values.

In a study from 1993, Halle questioned the theory on old stereotypes based on "cultural domination" or "symbolic mastery" considering that, in general, cultural preferences based "lowbrow" and are common to all individuals. Regarding other concerns that go beyond "lowbrow" which cover only a small minority of individuals, so-called luxury consumers (Holbrook, Weiss & Habich, 2002: 346). Therefore, exploitation of "lowbrow" of the human being is an important factor in terms of cultural legitimacy. We can understand in a psychoanalytic key the mechanism that determines the power relations that contribute to legitimize of cultural values.

Peterson, R.A. and Kern, RM (1996) and Katz - Gerro, T. (1999) and Shavit, Y. (Katz - Gerro & Shavit, 1998) theorized about the culture consumer preferences on products which constitute the symbolic space, concluding, based on studies that association of gender, ethnicity and religion are social coordinates that influenced cultural consumption, although the relationship between these determinants and cultural preferences are not relevant enough.

In the current circumstances the idea of cultural consumption is related to the concepts of cultural diversity and mobility, an important role in terms of cultural legitimacy returns of cosmopolitanism and cultural eclecticism.

Cosmopolitanism refers to the ideology that all human beings belong to a single community based on a common morality. In terms of cultural, cosmopolitanism implies an ethical unitary vision in terms of symbolic legitimacy and therefore determining a general model of cultural consumption.

Regarding eclecticism, it sends to the ideology that a person has a conceptual approach that is based on idea, styles or multiple theories, to obtain complementary perspectives on a subject or different theories apply in particular cases. An eclectic approach is not related rigidly to a single paradigm or a certain set of assumptions, but concerns paradigms or complementary sets of assumptions. Therefore, cultural eclecticism presupposes the existence of complementary perspectives that satisfy and legitimize the general patterns of cultural consumption.

Current discourse on diversity issues involves reporting to an eclectic perspective just by the nature of the types of specific approach. Today we are witnessing an ostentatious openness to diversity of discursive field. It is based on a hierarchy of opposition from social life events. So what it was different, open, fashionable and desirable, therefore eclectic, opposes of the unity, which is homogeneous, closed and backward, so cosmopolitan. These oppositions are based on a symbolic field that is accessed by individuals belonging to different communities and they produce social effects.

The ostentatious opening to the diversity works as a cultural capital. In this respect, Bourdieu spoke about the feeling of cultural traits widely recognized as desirable in certain circumstances, but they are unevenly distributed. For instance, the political discourse of openness to diversity is achieved by certain group whether social classes, nations or ethnic groups that are differently situated in the relations of power that they legitimize practices, and not infrequently interest some of them is to undermine those groups that are in conflict.

#### **Cultural ecosystem and cultural legitimacy**

Consumer concern about the current culture is to relate to a general pattern of consumption, which represents a satisfactory way of life towards its goals and to its concerns and to legitimize own practice. So we talk about the need to report to a symbolic field that functions as a cultural ecosystem and that legitimate practices and cultural patterns.

The concept of *ecosystem* was introduced in 1935 by British ecologist Arthur Tansley in ecology to designate a unit functioning and organization of the ecosphere consists of biotope and biocenosis and capable of biological productivity. Biotope represents all abiotic components present in a certain space that ensures the existence of creatures and biocenosis includes community of populations (micro-organisms, plants, animals) characteristic of a biotope, which is in specific relations: defense, spreading and feeding. For an ecosystem to be functional should contain three elements: those who produce - producer, those who consume - consumer and those who reduce - reducer (the latter, with some exceptions may be missing in some ecosystems).

The concept of ecological development (sustainable development) was introduced at the Stockholm Conference of 1972 in discussions about models of economic development and social and economic consequences of their short and long term. Since the 1980s, the term of ecological development has been replaced by sustainable development, which was defined by

the World Commission of Environment and Development (WCED) and was published in *Brundland Report (Our Common Future)*.

In 1987, the United Nations defines sustainable development "as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The concept of sustainable development is characterized by three fundamental premises: valuable medium, increasing of time horizon and equity. Sustainable development refers initially to three components, namely: economic development, social development and environmental protection. In 2001, UNESCO establishes the fourth component of sustainable development as cultural diversity, which is regarded as necessary to humanity as biodiversity is for nature. Later, along with social, economic, environmental and cultural diversity are talking about sustainability individual and personal development. Individual sustainability is an expression of social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability. Among the features of the individual sustainability include self-esteem, human dignity, freedom, responsibility to the future, which is at the same time also values that orients the sustainable social and economic whole.

Talking about a cultural ecosystem involves taking into account all the elements that interact with each other and their environment that provides interchangeable relations in a cyclic manner. The cultural biotope consists of all spiritual goods, present in a certain space that providing spiritual existence of a community. Regarding cultural biocenosis, it includes a community characteristic of a cultural biotope that is in specific relations, of creation, preservation and dissemination of spiritual goods. Cultural ecosystem functionality is dependent on factors that produce the cultural goods, as well as culture consumers.

The magnitude of the migration phenomenon that has taken lately has generated reconsideration in terms of understanding the idea of cultural ecosystem. For this it has brought changes both in terms of understanding the idea of cultural biotope and the cultural biocenosis. We talk in this regard about the insertion of elements or certain cultural patterns of cultural spaces in others, context where the need arise standing comparison with others by identifying differences and similarities. The intensity of contacts between different cultures, lately as a result of successive migrations East-West and South-North, has generated the need for knowledge of otherness, which became an imperative. Furthermore, effective communication and a non-confrontational contact with immigrants assumed mutual understanding and acceptance of the

values shared by others. Thus, the cultural capital required adaptability to cultural environment that brings benefits to individuals on multiple levels (Portes, 1998).

On the other hand, the spectacular evolution of the Internet in recent years, such as developing phenomenon of electronic media, led to the emergence of a culture of network - *network culture*, the way of thinking and organization based on binary oppositions (value – non-value, communism - capitalism, left - right) has been exceeded. Although Th. Adorno provides a general homogenization of society, due to the expansion media, it seems that the phenomenon has led to the promotion of diversity, to the multiplication general views about the world. In this respect, G. Vattimo wrote: "What happened, though, in fact, in spite of every effort of the

central capitalist monopolies and large, was rather that radio, television, journals have become elements of an explosion and general multiplications of Weltanschauungen, the worldviews" (Vattimo, 1995: 5). We can say that the phenomenon has generated a plurality of cultural ecosystems.

The idea of ecosystem, understood in terms of cultural, integrating an environmental perspective, but also an ethical thinking and behavior. For the culturally ecosystem involves the consumption of cultural resources and a predictable future of their regeneration. Spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, experiences of reflection, recreation and aesthetic that represent benefits which a cultural ecosystem generates.

### Conclusions

The ostentatious reporting to the cultural diversity and mobility determined by current socio-political and cultural phenomena generated the birth of new strategies to legitimize the cultural values. The producer of the culture and consumer also are in a position to meet their own objectives and concerns. They participate in a symbolic field that invest it with meaning and legitimates. Legitimacy is based on the cultural consumption and cultural participation.

Studies concerning identification of the level of cultural consumption, made in the European and in Romania reveals that the level of education of individuals influences the level of cultural consumption and cultural tastes of the population still need to be educated. Regarding cultural participation, an important aspect is closely related to globalization and how its consequences are reflected on cultural life as a whole, both in terms of distribution of cultural values between countries, a phenomenon that gave rise to the so-called global culture and in terms of the effects on the behavior of those who have the role of leaders, and the interests they have influence global action, or with regard to convergence in their beliefs about what is desirable, what gives rise to ideologies.

Current consumer of culture feels the need to relate to a general pattern of consumption, which to satisfy the aims of his life and his own concerns and to legitimize their practices. So we talk about the need to report to a symbolic field that functions as a cultural ecosystem and that legitimate cultural practices and cultural patterns.

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