

THE EUROPEAN UNION CULTURE IN THE SOCIAL AMBIT

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1. Introduction

In 2004 Europe will become a reality of 25 countries with the widest enlargement of its history, adding to its body 10 new countries: Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Hungary.

It will be the realization of the dream, a radical change of our history, that will realize the premise for a global idea, definitive of those that will be the borders of Europe and the European reality of the future. With the enlargement the European Union will achieve an increase of the 20% of its population to forehead of a 5-6% income increase. It will represent therefore an effort, a political action, an investment in the economic dimension never seen before in the history. These countries will add to our community 25% more technicians, researchers, applied scientists, giving so the possibility to prepare the new scientific Europe of the human knowledge that is essential to build our future. Europe will open the way to the overcoming of the problems that the overwhelming greatness of the United States and the impetuosity of China and Asia represent, not in the protectionism or in the closing of the borders, but in the development of that great resource represented by its great human resource and by its culture.

An intergovernmental conference of the member countries has been constituted and is operating for completing a negotiation intended to reach a new Treaty, that will finally constitute a constitution for Europe. The text of the treaty is in advanced elaboration and object of a heated debate.

The agreement of the E.U. countries on the future European constitution will represent a political action of fundamental importance and historical value. We will finally have a constitutional paper that will institute and join Europe for a future political design that will allow the development of a participative and democratic life of the Union for a long period and will allow also to burden itself with the great problems of the globalization as well and to face them with unitary constructive spirit and a new political idea that is worthwhile to all the member-countries and favors their life and activities. The stages of the run of the only process of coming to the approval and the following acknowledgements of the aforesaid constitution in the 25 Europe countries, when not yet wider, appear today complex and of a not easily predictable duration, not only for the known historical-political precedents of the member countries, but for the correlated deficits of a harmonic generalized and generalizable European culture, whose achievement will lead to a real articulation of the times of such stages.

Culture pervades every form of knowledge and human activity, therefore, I have prepared this paper proposing to myself to limit my reflections to the aspects to which I am currently prevalently devoting my study pledge (the welfare state in the E.U.).

2. Cultural meaning

The history of the words and the meaning evolution of the concepts help us to understand how much the tools with which reality is observed and classified depend on the historical epoch and the social context in which they have been formulated and are tied therefore to the specific problems of which they represent an answer attempt. The same scientific concept of culture, whose roots are traceable in the new sensibility of the German thought of the end of the eighteenth century for the plurality and particularity of the forms of life of that time, assumes its history beginning, among the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when, even if in different moments, various social sciences - from sociology to psychology - come into play.

A new way is spread to look at the man and the society, with a more neutral look, more interested to describe the social reality as it is, than to prescribe as it should be and to reflect on the extreme customs' variety of the social norms, of the traditions that characterize the human societies.

It is really the customs' and life habits' difference, particular and tied up to a specific place, which forms the new content of the notion of culture that dilates therefore its own boundary: from the cosmopolitan universalism of the scholars the humanistic cultural conception made reference to, to the enormous variety of the customs and of the local habits. Culture, is besides no more applied to the individual, but it pertains to a collectivity, neither it represents anymore a normative ideal, but its meaning becomes eminently descriptive (Bèneton 1975). The expansion of the boundary and the centrality assumed by the customs also represent the denial from the dawning social science of the professed culture universality and unity. It isn't nevertheless, at least at the beginning of this run, the negation of the human race unity. Rather, the challenge launched by the social sciences consists of thinking the humanity unity through the cultures difference, or rather through acquired habits, instead through biologically determined «races». Anthropology is the social science that has tried to found its own disciplinary autonomy upon the culture concept, doing of this its own specific research object. It is owed to Edward Burnett Tylor, one of the founders of the anthropology as autonomous science, the first definition of the anthropological concept of the culture, here considered still as civilization synonym: "The culture or civilization, interpreted in its ample ethnographic sense, is the whole, that includes the knowledge, the beliefs, the art, the morals, the right, the custom and any other ability and habit acquired by the man" (Tylor, 1871). He felt the necessity to widen the application ambit of the culture term for being able not only to understand the modern science results or the Christian world beliefs, but also what could appear illogical from the point of view of the science or «not religious» from the point of view of the institutionalized Christianity.

This first Tylor's definition, of descriptive type, has influenced about half century the anthropological and sociological thought. In it you can enucleate the three main culture components and the three fundamental characters which were then retaken and as its own adopted by the emergent anthropological science in English and American ambits:

a) what individuals think; b) what they do; c) the materials they produce;

and more explicitly:

a) the religion, the morals and the right or rather those norm collections and of explicit beliefs, elaborated in more or less formalized way at theoretical level.

b) The customs and the habits acquired by the human being for living within a certain community. These represent the most innovative aspect of the new concept. There are, in fact, included in the culture also the ordinary actions that the individual carries out in the daily life, based on habitual and traditional rules, as the food preparing, as dressing up themselves, as using transport means, etc.

c) The artwork, or rather the products objectified by the human work that are no more limited to the «work of art », but they include the cult objects and those of daily use or rather that «material culture» that in the Tylor's definition is hardly delineated, but to which his successors did explicit reference.

In this definition the three main characters that constitute the culture are clearly pointed out, above all. First of all the culture is learned, but not all the observable phenomena are of cultural type. There exist physical features, demands and behaviours of biological and therefore of innate type. The hair colour belongs for instance to the genetic code, the feeding demand and of finding a shelter to the weather inclemency is a biological need of all the existing populations on the earth face. Analyzing as this really happens, the formalities with which the human beings assume some physical features, how they feed and build their own shelters, there becomes aware however of their great variability. It will be enough to think about the great variety of the constructions invented by the men, beginning from the available materials, and from the more or less wide range of their choices. Everything is result of the learning and not of a genetically programmed reaction, belongs to the culture. With this we haven't to conclude, that in the man everything is entirely the learning and culture product and that there aren't therefore limits in the invention of always new forms of the human being. Also in the man the genetic base structure has an influence on the individual and collective behaviour, particularly regarding the emotions, and such structure sets some objective limits to the transformation possibilities of the human life. It stays however the fact that in the human being the genetic structure always interacts with the dimensions deriving from the culture.

The term culture introduces many different meanings. In subjective sense it can be considered in fact as “paideia”, or rather as formation process of the human personality through the learning: in this case, the man that is «cultured» defined, is who, assimilating knowledges and cultural values, has succeeded in translating the scholarship in personal qualities. Culture can also mean, in objective sense, the encyclopaedic patrimony of the knowledges that have been accumulated during the history of the humanity. In the way, I here refer, the term culture assumes instead a specific etno-anthropological meaning, directed to point out the whole knowledges, world images, beliefs, values, behaviour models (uses, juridical costumes, norms), institutions, art and technical products, etc. that in a certain historical moment, steers through the direct or indirect learning the experience and the behaviour of the individuals belonging to a same social unity (group, class, community, global society, etc.) (cfr. Kluckhohn and Kröber 1952; Red 1970).

For a reasonable methodological distinction the concept of culture would have to be extended at least to the wide whole of the values involved in it. To define the culture is a very difficult assignment - culture is (as “politics” and “democracy”; Connolly, 1983) one of the concepts which are fundamentally object of confrontations. As they do, it invites to dispute as the contention belongs to their function. The concept treatments are reached through discussions on its uses in the several scientific disciplines (often neglecting the human sciences) or on some of its internal partitions (high/low, etc.).

A possible definition is the following: culture = collectively held meaning

It's here necessary to specify what we want to intend with the term “meaning” in the social analysis. The following three points allow through a combined elaboration of them to explicit such definition of the culture:

- values: things that actors evaluate, are they material or immaterial;
- understandings: the interpretations given by the actors to the things;
- the habits: the behaviour regularities routinely followed by the actors.

Culture isn't properly reducible to the individual notions - even if such notions are meaningful for their holders, and common to many other holders. It is also anything as collective conventions that as bonds are perceived by those individuals. Such aspect would be subtended by the above indicated term “collectively held”- implicating such words, that the meanings have widely to be known (Bislev, 1997).

When we apply cultural concepts to the social analysis, we are more often interested to the national cultures, in which the chances of the meanings consistence are not great in the whole “group” (Smelser, 1992). In such cases we have to do with meanings “collectively held”, to be intended only in the sense that they are dominant or very broadly shared or politically meaningful.

The three concepts don't exhaust the possibilities to subdivide the wide culture or meaning concept. They are indicative towards the cultural analysis, and should introduce improvements on the usually under defined concept of the culture - often used as a catch-all or a not specified filler of the analytical discrepancies.

3. The culture in the social ambit - the analysis methodology

According to the common opinion, the political and economic factors are the main generators of every kind of social development; it is undeniable, for example, that the general level of economic wealth is decisive in determining the possible level of the social services. The balance of the political forces determines the current tendencies in the social expenditure. But the constant work of the economic and political developments on the welfare state filters through a multitude of institutions, generally making impossible to determine a direct cause-effect relation among precisely defined political economy developments and welfare state changes. On the base of a more methodologically precise level it's probably more correct to say, that the social sciences can't imagine social developments not caused by political and economic factors.

The whole scientific establishment within the social sciences founds its work on the analysis of the “political and economic” factors - to constantly add with more serious models

ideological and organizational factors (Hall, 1993; Mann, 1993). As appears every generation has to add other new ones; politics and economies remain central.

The introduction of different factors from those political and economic has had different denominations, but the intention has always been of trying to understand the way with which the past behaviour and thought models influence the actual possible behaviour and thought ways - through models assimilable to the individual minds or to the binding nature of collective adjustments. It has been named path dependency, history, culture, ideology or institutions. What creates the great differences from country to country in its relative influence, is above all the way according to which the country is organized, and the way according to which its organizations are integrated in the institutional and general configuration of the state (Rokkan, 1970; Korpi 1983; Mann, 1993).

The regimes of the welfare state represent anything similar to an inclusion of "other factors". They are explications of history, of values systems and of ideologies - as the economic and power structures. The "other factor" is therefore better conceptualized as culture.

Culture is undoubtedly an important factor in the developments of the welfare state: both, values, meanings and habits are important elements to determine the choices of the programs of the welfare state. If we initially accept a definition of the culture as consistent of the three below mentioned elements, we can line up a certain number of evidences to support this affirmation:

Values – the good will to share the economic nation resources and the good will to pay for a great public sector are for the political actors essential attitudes, to be considered. As shown by the surveys of the respective positions, they broadly vary from nation to nation. Preferences are noticed in favour of the public against the private solutions, and also of the family against the individual responsibility and they hardly correlate with the welfare state types.

Meanings - the understanding of the causes of the social need, meanings in partnership with words as "unemployment", "responsibility" and with institutions as the state, the family and the trade unions; these meanings differ among the nations, and they are important parts of the dissertation in which the problems of the welfare state are debated and understood.

Habits - the tendency to join together in collective organizations and to take part to the public life in political parties and in the elections, the traditions for the support inside and outside the families, to establish businesses, to employ and dismiss; such usual behaviour models determine the structure of the needs that emerge and have to be guaranteed from the welfare state.

In analysing the culture there are more methods: behavioural methods or hermeneutic methods. The Parsonian approach aim to the methods of the behavioural analysis where the cultural factors are measured in terms of expressed attitudes or of acted behaviour. The alternative to the behavioural methods are the hermeneutic methods which aim to understand what actors are involved, to interpret the affirmations, the behaviour and the signals to draw the meanings in them expressed.

An hypothetical example is the relation between Catholicism and residualism. A behavioural analysis would require the working out of some form of Catholicism index (the prevalence of the Catholic church, the churchgoers number, surveys of the faith declarations, behavioural faith indexes) - and a residualism index (high proportion of the means-of-verification among the social benefits, low levels of the transfer incomes). Then the two indexes should be correlated, and the result would be assumed to demonstration of the causal relation: the cultures dominated by the Catholicism mind (or perhaps: they don't mind) to produce residualist characteristics in the welfare state.

A hermeneutic analysis of the same relation would investigate on the dissertation around the welfare state policies, and would ask the participants about their motives and the causes of their actions. Which values were retained relevant by the participants, which meanings brought to the problems and which are the possible solutions, how could be seen in the process the role of the habit and of the tradition? Did the morality of the family, the subsidiarity, the respect for the authority, the faith in the divine providence, the society conception as a net of families play a role in the behaviour decision? The found answers would be used for producing a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the process under investigation, and the

researcher would suggest an interpretation of the process in which to some factors would be granted more weight than to others.

Both the forms of the cultural analysis reserve their problems. The “behavioural” produces results that are generalizable; if both the indexes of Catholicism and of the residualism vary together, then some type of general relation awaited as confirmation in several instances can be postulated with a certain plausibility. At the same time it represents however a small progress in relation to the common reasoning of the materialistic political economy: the cultural variables have to be abstracted to work in the behavioural analysis. There is causality, but generally as interpreted correlation, as causality through the theoretical reasoning, however it is far from being proven in the analysis.

The “hermeneutic” form establishes the causality in a more satisfactory way – at the generality cost. If the participants express their behaviour motives and their perceptions of the choices in a way to sustain our hypothesis of a relation between X and Y, and the behavioural data don't contradict it, establishing any stronger notion than the causality in the field of human behaviour will not be possible. Parsons also, felt the need of an interpretation of the motives to complete the most structural data, to be sure that causality was really placed, including both the structural and motivational elements (Parsons, 1951; Alexander and Seidman, 1990). But as the level of the feeling and the personal thought is brought to enter the picture, generality naturally disappears.

To illustrate as the researchers cross this difficult choice, I've found the following two attempts of the methodological bridge crossing (Sven Bislev 1997). The first one, a brief paper of Katznelson (1988): postulating a lack of the analysis at the level of the social policy regime among macro - and long term at one hand and micro/short term on the other, works out an analysis of the concepts and the ideologies in the development of the United States welfare state - what he names the welfare state systems of values and beliefs. He works out therefore an order of very interesting distinctions in the analysis of the welfare state - different levels and precise statements of the distinction between citizenship and efficiency. It isn't however founded on empirical material of the usual behavioural kind, - and cultural analysis remains on the level of meaning, of the intellectual analysis and theory. In this brief paper, the limitations are evident but the approach available to be contended, isn't atypical for social scientists facing the cultural dimension.

Analyzing in a less limited context, the relation among the Christian Democracy and the welfare state, Van Kersbergen (1995) combines with true success the behavioural empiricism with the analysis of the ideas. He analyzes the Christian Democracy that is the democratic political expression of the Catholicism - in a certain historical and social context. Using quantitative methods, he finds correlations among the position of the Christian Democracy and several characteristics in the political systems of some European welfare states. Having empirically established a model of “social capitalism”, he analyzes the ideology of the Christian Democracy and discusses the model of social capitalism that the C.D. tries to establish. He continues therefore to find separately the Catholic elements in the ideology of the C.D., and to discuss the intellectual roots of relevant distinguishing ideas. Concluding, he is able of showing both, the empirical evidence of the existence of a catholic welfare state model, and the ideation evidence of the values and meanings which nourish the model. The first part gives generalizable evidence of the models of the welfare state, the second establishes a logic and cultural motive.

In the book of Van Kersbergen, the two methods are combined, by addressing the same historical object. Together they add evidence to his hypothesis on the existence of a specific model of Christian Democratic welfare state. Obviously the two methodologies are not fully integrated: there is no evidence that the intellectual ideas of the social Catholic tradition are active in the minds of the decision-makers builders of the institutions of the welfare state, or in the minds of the voting electors for the Christian Democratic parties. He intervenes in the sense to create a bridge on the methodological gap - but the gap persists: the separation among *ceteris paribus* and thick description remains.

Conclusions

The convergence of the welfare state almost constitutes presumably a bond by itself: the welfare state has a too much ample dimension to be considered only as a sector or a policy,

and it appears evident that the convergence of the welfare state is unthinkable without the convergence of the systems.

An analysis on the cultural convergence - or one aspect of it has been shortly devoted by researchers of the European Values System Study Group (Ashford and Halman, 1994). They compared two opinion surveys since 1981 to 1990, collecting and working out a congruous number of opinions or attitude dimensions in 9 countries of the EU - and they found that "there is a light evidence to support the point of view that the Europe countries are moving towards the greatest consent of their perspective". The existence of the new comparativism pointed out the disappearance of some forms of convergence of the thought: "In substance, from the nineties the idea that technology dictates only a unique optimal way to organize the production, pushing in this way all the countries towards common economic institutions and practices had clearly vanished from the scene" (Berger 1996, p. 4). And nowhere has been found evidence of the more ideologically favoured convergence idea of the fifties, according to which some social researchers believed or hoped that the first one and the second world could learn from each other. But in the eighties bloomed and still exist adverse opinions to the economic Berger orthodoxy, which reduces every social activity to examples of an omnipresent behavioural logic.

The Tinbergen's writings on the convergence (Tinbergen 1961) had "visibility" in the words of Heilbroner (1990), mentioned in Roland (1994): they expressed a vision of an important condition of the social affairs. Also the preceding and following debates on the convergence were inspired by a perspective of desirable social, however technocratic, developments. The recent economic orthodoxy, operating with ideas about optimal economic setups on the system level, escapes such visions; social negative collateral effects of rational economic policies are put aside apparently as inevitable costs of the evolution, sacrifices necessarily to be done.

In this way, the convergence thinking is still reaffirmed, primarily in neglecting the institutional differences: it is assumed that a valid model and society theory generally exist, and that on the long time term there won't be other possibility than to conform to it. The thought of the convergence of the modern economies goes over the theoretical orthodoxy, actively underestimating the negative effects of the market creation. This appears very clear in the situation of Eastern Europe. The social science had very little to offer for an understanding of the possibilities of oriental Europe after 1989, showing as the social science is dependent from determined institutional orders. This gave however a full speed to those theories that simply neglect the convergence problem, because they treat all the societies as instances of the same behavioural laws. Economics orthodox believes that Oriental Europe will follow a "J curve": relevant countries will suffer before, their production will fall, then it will begin the growth and, having they capitalistic and mature economies, each will evolve through the mobility of goods and factors. "Ceteris Paribus", it clearly means that, while the authorities attend the economic progress, a suffering load is being shouldered by a wide part of the present population.

In the European Union, the economic standard theory also supposes, that each at the end will improve and specialize whatever is for him convenient. To neglect the institutional differences would mean to neglect the history: European States have developed very different societies and an integration process of removing "barriers" to the integration without raising the social protection, would introduce catastrophic risks of social misery and social disintegration (Scharpf, 1996). The societies that expose themselves to the international competition, also expose some of their social and cultural values to the undermining influences of the foreigners that otherwise act. A sort of protection or compensation is therefore necessary if the social disintegration has to be avoided (Dore, 1996). In the Eastern Europe transition and in the European integration the policy makers didn't devote so much attention to the neocomparativists intuitions. Most part of the policies are done and introduced in the perspective of a unique best way or of general economic logic. The unique market and the monetary union are introduced as economic rationalities requiring precedence on all kinds of political and social instances. But arguments against the harmonization and integration rationality exist also in the economic theory, as: the free market will increase for some time only the wealth of some of the participants (Krugman, 1990; Streeten, 1996). According to an

innovative perspective, difference is positive for the development of new ideas (Hingel, 1993).

The situation of the two Germanies represents a very interesting case of the relation between the social and cultural change. The social change has been there almost fully completed, and the legal regulations and living material standards have now become very close, or as close they could be politically realizable in the joint Germany. But cultures still differ, reflected in the different behaviours in the political field, different micro-economic behaviours and different attitudes have remained (example reported in the IUT of Oct. 28, 1996: the westerners are tired to feed their brothers, and the Orientals miss of stability and of community).

Other difficult situations have revealed themselves and will impose solutions and orders not deferrable for their incidence and actual virulence and they reside in the problem of immigration, - of the legitimating pretensions of invasions or religious pushiness and restorations of backwardness conditions in total contrast with the even culturally goals achieved and pursued in the EU countries in terms of laity of the government systems, and of the social and technological developments, - of establishment of an unitary international state subject to the rule of law - of assumption of an European unitary representativeness for the common defence of the peace and of the territorial and social safety and of the liberty and democracy in the member states against every terrorist manifestation or war aggression and unitary representativeness in the supranational organisms and alliances as the UN and NATO - of the common acknowledgement of the education methods and of the professional education titles in the 25 member countries. Less difficult situations but not negligible are also introduced today at national level by the federalistic pushes directed to the emersion of isolationist tendencies in contrast with the harmonization necessities for the union realization first inside and then outside our countries.

The European Union Treaty expressly sustains: the cultural difference, the national social policy autonomy and the general policy subsidiarity, but it removes, at the same time, their institutional protection, in the way of a national state kept to national adjustments and sometimes enough powerful to protect them. In front of such barrier removal, will cultural difference persist? The welfare state can play as an example of such debate? These will probably remain open questions for several years while we will attend and survey the evolutions of E.U. enlargement, its Constitution approval and acknowledgement by the member countries and the following common agreement in the welfare state ambit.

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