

CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGES OF THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

The fundamental special feature of the contemporary historical process is globalization of various sides of social life. Globalization modifies traditional economic, communicative, political ties and relations in the society. This is a complex phenomenon brought about by the aggregate of objective and subjective factors, beyond unambiguous assessment. On the one hand, globalization opens fascinating horizons for scientific, technological, economic development, on the other hand, it leads to dangerous for the future of the humankind political, social, cultural metamorphoses. Understanding many aspects of globalization, its consequences supposes taking into account ethnic, confessional, culturological, value and worldview factors, and that makes interaction of philosophical, scientific and religious approaches inevitable.

Culture and globalization

It should be emphasized that even before globalization processes were activated in the second half of the 20th century, attention to the problems of cultural studies was considerably intensified. And that is not accidental. The culture's impact became evident in the nature of economy, legal, political systems of the society. It's evident now that there is no field of activities, there are no such social processes that originated, changed outside the culture's impact.

Culture is originally connected with humans and generated by humans. There is neither the society, nor humans without culture and outside culture. "Really, the man has become a cultural creature as he is now in the course of typical evolutionary formation. Processes of two types take part in human development, though they are fairly different in their rates but they most closely

cooperate with each other: slow evolutionary development and cultural development, which is many times quicker”¹.

Each culture is a whole, spiritual and material phenomenon embodied in the tribal community of people, a certain ethnos. We should agree with cultural anthropologists that there are no better or worse cultures, they are various. The nation’s own ideas, values, symbols, behavioral standards are formed in the process of nation’s historical development. Even similar geographic conditions and conditions of material life do not lead to unification of spiritual life forms, variety does not disappear. Notwithstanding the fact that communities of people may live close to one another for many centuries, they preserve their specific features. This does not exclude common features, invariants in different cultures that determine a possibility of interaction, dialogue of cultures, their assessment from humanistic and environmental positions. Each nation has its distinctive ideas of life, behavioral standards, symbols depending on natural environment, ethnic special features. They changed to a certain extent in the process of historical development, for internal and external reasons, however, there was no full unification of spiritual life forms, the variety of cultures was mostly preserved.

In my opinion, we should beware of the “technological” treatment of culture as an aggregate of means of activities thanks to which some or the other human goals are realized. Sure, culture originates in the process of human activities, but it does not follow that any product of these activities is culture. The focus of human activities is of principal importance – creation or destruction, support of life or its annihilation. The humanistic focus of human activities in this case is of priority importance. In this respect, the definition of culture by academician D.S. Likhachov is of eternal importance. In his opinion, “culture is material and spiritual life environment created by humans”, focused on “creation, preservation and reproduction of norms and values, *assisting elevation of humans and humanization of the society*”.²

¹ Lorenz K. Aggression (the so-called evil). Moscow, 2008, p. 4.

² Likhachov D.S. Selected Works: Thoughts about Life, History, Culture. Moscow, 2006

In this connection the attention is involuntarily paid to correlation of ideas of “culture” and “civilization”. I agree with the point of view that civilization is the highest step in culture’s development. Each society has its own culture, complex or simple, developed or undeveloped, but if culture became big, technologically rich and, for example, written language originated in it as well as cities, then such a culture really came close to the civilization level.

At the same time, the idea of “civilization” as Professor N.V. Motroshilova is justified to think, should reflect not only the level of scientific and technological process, the level of moving from primitive ways of management but also the extent of human freedom, human harmonious, moral and ethical development³. It seems in this connection that humanistic messages can be fully revealed at the level of civilization development of culture.

However, how is it possible to explain that contemporary culture reaching the civilization level, not only preserves elements of evil, destruction and cruelty in it but can also return to the barbarism level? This is certified by periodical recurrences of Fascism, aggressive nationalism, terrorist acts, human behavior during natural disasters, numerous individual and mass crimes against humanity in our times as well, in the 21st century.

Professor N.M. Mamedov⁴ explains some distortions of the humanistic essence of culture at its highest, civilization level. He singles out three aspects affecting inadequate development of culture. In his opinion, the first is related to human nature inherited from ancestors, natural instincts. The purpose of culture (socialization institutions) in this aspect is seen in “purifying” the archaic human nature, in particular, getting rid of “the aggressiveness instinct”. Let’s remember that already the thinkers of the New Times saw culture as the main means for correction of human natural vices and prevention of social cataclysms.

³ Motroshilova N.V. Civilization and Barbarism in the Period of Global Crises. Moscow, 2010, p. 131.

⁴ Mamedov N.M. The Human Nature and the Meaning of Culture.//Culture of Sustainable Development: from Idea to Reality. Baku, 2013, p. 50.

The second is related to limitation of theoretical bases of human transforming activities in every certain historical period. Hence special hopes on scientific knowledge, realization of noospherogenesis.

The third aspect is related to objective uncertainty in social and natural systems that is not eliminated in the process of cognition's development and can be relatively softened when forecasting the consequences of the taken decisions.

Generalization of culture's functions

Notwithstanding internal collisions of the cultural process itself, settlement of social and environmental contradictions is currently seen in the development of culture. Withdrawal from the traditional development concept, focused on economic growth was for the first time clearly outlined at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mexico City, 1982) held under the auspices of the United Nations. The well-being and prosperity of every individual were proclaimed the goal of true development. Culture was determined as the main backbone development factor, and improvement of individual's quality of life and personal merits were recognized as the final goal of development. The address to the states of the world was adopted at the Conference to guarantee such a strategy of national development when culture could become not just its inalienable part but its main foundation.

The generalized interpretation of culture was given in the Declaration approved at this Conference, it was more widely recognized in future. It is said in the Declaration that in order to coordinate various goals of the humankind, culture should be viewed in the widest sense as an aggregate of diverse spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features, characterizing the society or a social group. It should be acknowledged that besides arts and literature, culture also encompasses the way of life, the main human rights, the system of values, traditions and faith.

Such a presentation of culture excludes understanding development as the product of only technological and economic growth, characterizes culture as a uniting and creative force in the society.

The ideas of the Conference in Mexico City were developed 16 years later, in 1998 in Stockholm at the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development. It was emphasized then that cultural policies should not be autonomous, abstract activities but should become the determining factor for achievement of comprehensive social development. To put it differently, cultural policies were presented as an **important tool for social development's management by the state**, as an effective way for purposeful arrangement of the society.

However, there is still an unresolved issue of the extent of culture's manageability, as wide interpretation of culture in essence brings it down to the idea of the society and cultural policies to multi-level social management.

Contradictions of cultural globalizations

At the same time, the cultural process in the globalization environment started demonstrating its contradictory essence. On the one hand, unprecedented development of information technologies, communication means, penetration of common civilization universals into various social life structures started modifying and enriching national cultures. Globalization created unique opportunities for convergence of values, ideas, mindsets. On the other hand, there is a danger of national cultures' unification, their disappearance without a trace. Variety of cultures is considered the spiritual richness of the humankind and with good grounds for that, it should be supported in every possible way at various levels. The United Nations' concern with this state of affairs led to adoption of a number of documents, programs directed to preservation of cultural variety in the world. At the same time, special attention is paid to the fact that preservation of national cultures is related to the issue of human rights' observance. As national culture is the generalized embodiment of human rights in its spiritual world.

Mahatma Gandhi figuratively expressed the dialectics of the cultural process in his time: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my

windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any”.⁵

Globalization and multiculturalism

Preservation of the multi-faceted essence of world culture in the globalization environment becomes an urgent scientific-theoretical and social-political problem. In this connection, in my opinion, we should treat the policy of multiculturalism more attentively, we should eliminate the mist, artificially created in recent years by some West European statesmen around this extremely important civilization way for management of the dynamics of culture. Multiculturalism historically demonstrated its adequacy and effectiveness in multinational, multiconfessional countries. The consistently carried out policy of multiculturalism prevents conflicts on ethnic and cultural grounds, enriches socialization of individuals, creates tolerant spiritual atmosphere in the society, assists adequate perception of another culture. Humanistic principles of multiculturalism allow to raise above narrow nationalistic interests, dangerous manifestation of chauvinism and xenophobia.

Russia has a lot of experience in bringing ideas of multiculturalism into life. Multiculturalism is the basis of state policy in today's Azerbaijan. In 2008, the so-called “Baku Process” was launched on the initiative of the President of the Republic Ilkham Aliyev, with the purpose to determine the long-term program in cultural development, finding effective ways for inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogue. World congresses in dialogue of cultures are regularly held as a part of the “Baku Process” with the support of the United Nations, and last year such a large-scaled event as “Alliance of Civilizations” was successfully held.

Scientific centers for research of the bases and ways for bringing multiculturalism into life have been set up in the Republic. The works by Azerbaijani scholars dedicated to the multiculturalism policy, its humanistic, social value, respectively the ideology of sustainable development are fairly well known

⁵ Quoted by: Human Development Report 2004, p. 103.

in academic circles. As the Azerbaijani experience shows, the policy of multiculturalism strengthens trust in the society, strengthens social capital and that as a result is manifested in the development of economy, improvement of the standard of living and quality of people's life.

Establishment of culture of sustainable development

As K. Marx appropriately said, if culture develops spontaneously and not directed conscientiously, it leaves a desert after itself. And an assumption that it is necessary to control the development of culture, realizing this or that cultural policy is in principle connected with that. As the minister of culture for many years (18 years) working in the most difficult transition period, I fully agree with this thesis.

The global concern with security of one's existence becomes a prerequisite for the new cultural synthesis. Currently, the humankind finds itself with the alternative: either to preserve the already established type of activities – and die in an environmental disaster, or change it cardinally and preserve nature for the life of the future generations. As the second variant is the only acceptable, the humankind will have to comprehend the new realities and basing on them transform not only the established, mostly destructive type of activities but also the whole system of values. That's how the sustainable development concept originated and was adopted in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro as Agenda 21, the action plan for the 21st century for the humankind.

According to the sustainable development concept, the previous strategies, focused exclusively on the economic development, should be replaced by a strategy with the man in the center of it. The modern way of life, values formed in the period of industrial society, should be radically changed. That's the reason why it is necessary not only to use cultural traditions but also develop, promote the culture of sustainable development⁶.

⁶ *Mamedov N.M.* The Phenomenon of Culture and Sustainable Development // *Universum: Bulletin of Herzen University, St. Petersburg*, 2013, #3, p. 55.

The main indicator of sustainable development is the harmony between socioeconomic and environmental development. Consequently, the culture of sustainable development is a way of coordinated social and natural development, which provides for preservation of the fundamental indicators of the natural environment. If culture as a social phenomenon, “the creation of human hands” was always opposed to nature, the culture of sustainable development should become a new way for harmonious joining of the man and nature based on deeper understanding of its essence and reconciliation with it.

This requires regular replenishment of knowledge about the laws governing the functioning of the surrounding natural environment, forms and methods of activities in rational and careful nature use.

As we comprehend the problems and prospects of the contemporary society’s transfer to sustainable development, it becomes clear that such a transfer is possible in case of harmonious social relations, moral advancement of people, change of human features based on humanistic values and ideals.

A series of annual international conferences that took place in Baku under the auspices of UNESCO in 2011-2014 was dedicated to the issues of the culture’s of sustainable development establishment. The next big step in this direction was the Congress organized by UNESCO “Culture: Key to Sustainable Development” that was held in the city of Guangzhou (China). The Guangzhou Declaration “Culture and Sustainable Development” was adopted as a result of the Congress. The Declaration contains a call to make culture the nucleus of the sustainable development policy, and there are also ways to attain this goal offered. It should be acknowledged that the culture of sustainable development can be only formed based on purposeful activities. The education system determining development of the society, mass media, literature and arts can serve as the basis for a certain change and enrichment of culture.

Transfer to sustainable development is a very complex dialectical process, requiring efforts of all states, the whole humankind. This is the process called to

unite people, consolidate the world community. All leaders of the United Nations member states acknowledged the urgency of this process of pressing concern. But we are once again convinced that there is a big distance between knowledge, understanding and specific actions. We can only hope that Homo sapiens will have time to become the Wise Man and take all possible efforts for development of the cultural component of being and further intelligent, safe and happy life on Earth.