

## CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE – A NEW PARADIGM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract.** *The main goal of the present study is to provide a synthetic and personal perspective on some recent approaches to culture in contemporary society and the role of the humanities in higher education. The complex field of international relations can be more accurately and thoroughly analyzed from a cultural paradigm which provides continuity, coherence, authenticity, identity and long-lasting value. Culture is also able to significantly enhance the economic or political influence of a nation, representing not only the nucleus of a society but also acting as a fundamental pillar of public diplomacy. Cultural exchanges – endorsed by an informed understanding of the language, culture and civilization of a nation – provide the foundation for successful cooperation in any international exchange. Intercultural competence, as both an innate or acquired skill, is an important vector of cultural diplomacy or “diplomacy between cultures”.*

**Keywords:** *cultural intelligence, cultural diplomacy, humanities, transdisciplinarity.*

*“Cultural intelligence is the ability to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, and the ability to make yourself understood and to establish a constructive partnership across cultural differences. Cultural intelligence is judged on the results of the encounter, not on the participants’ intentions or thoughts. An intelligent result of a cross-cultural encounter is the creation of a shared understanding across all the participant cultures ...”<sup>1</sup>*

### *A Humanistic Approach to Culture*

Our critical analysis and interpretation of the role of cultural connections in establishing and strengthening international relations, either at the individual, institutional or community levels, relies on the fundamental approach to culture

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Plum, *Cultural Intelligence: The Art of Leading Cultural Complexity*, Middlesex University Press, London, 2008, p. 19.

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as a product of human creation<sup>2</sup> as well as a definition of culture as the “vital system of living ideas belonging to each period<sup>3</sup>. “What I call living ideas, or the ideas by which we live, are those that contain our basic convictions regarding the nature of the world and our fellow human beings, the hierarchy of values for things and actions: which ones are worthy of esteem, which ones are less so”<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore culture is not merely a social construct but it has a soul, it is a living, lived and recorded value, and the phrase “cultural soul” implies that culture emerges and evolves due to the individuals inhabiting a particular geographical or historical region<sup>5</sup>.

According to T S Eliot, “the term culture has different associations according to whether we have in mind the development of an individual, of a group or class, or of a whole society ... the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and the culture of the group or class is dependent on the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs. Therefore, it is the culture of the society that is fundamental and it is the meaning of the term ‘culture’ in relation to the whole society that should be examined first”. Furthermore, in his landmark “Notes on the Definition of Culture” Eliot calls attention to other meanings of the term culture, besides the three already mentioned: “We may be thinking of refinement of manners – or *urbanity* and *civility*: if so, we shall think first of a social class, and of the superior individual as representative of the best of that class. We may be thinking of *learning* and a close acquaintance with the accumulated wisdom of the past: if so, our man of culture is the scholar. We may be thinking of *philosophy* in the widest sense – an interest in, and some ability to manipulate, abstract ideas: if so, we may mean the intellectual ... Or we may be thinking of *the arts*: if so, we may mean the artist or the amateur or dilettante. But what we seldom have in mind is all of these things at the same time ... we must conclude that no perfection in one of them, to the exclusion of the others, can confer culture to anybody. We know that good manners, without education, intellect or sensibility to the arts, tends towards mere automatism; that learning without good manners or sensibility is mere pedantry; that intellectual ability without the more human attributes is admirable only in the same way as the brilliance of a child chess prodigy; and that the arts without intellectual context are vanity ... People are always ready to consider themselves persons of culture on the strength of one proficiency, when they are not only lacking in others, but blind to those they lack ... The person who contributes to culture, however important his contribution may be, is not always a ‘cultured person’”<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia Culturii*, Editura pentru Literatura Universala Publishing House, Bucharest, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Misiunea Universitatii*, Univers, Bucharest, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Mission of University*, quoted in Juan Escamez Sanchez, study on Jose Ortega y Gasset, text was originally published in *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education* (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 1/2, 1994, pp. 261-278. © UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000; p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Lucian Blaga, ch. “Matricea stilistica”, vol. “Orizont si Stil”, in *Trilogia Culturii*, Ed. pentru Literatura Universala Publishing House, Bucharest, 1969, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> T S Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949, pp. 19, 21-22.

In addition to the humanistic perspective, mention should also be made of the “vitality theory” launched and pertinently advocated in the 1930s by Nicolae Iorga and further applied to geopolitical studies, particularly the theory of cultural frontiers<sup>7</sup>. Occasioned by a thoughtful and informed dialogue, diplomat and academician Mircea Malița, on the one hand, and sociologist and scholar Dan Dungăciu, on the other, have drawn our attention to emancipation through culture<sup>8</sup>.

Raymond Williams, founder of cultural studies, whose writings on culture, society and the media are still highly influential, cautioned that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is partly so because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought”<sup>9</sup>. Such a statement should not be discouraging since it highlights the complexity, resilience, versatility and functionalist characteristics of culture. From an ‘ideal’ perspective, “the analysis of culture ... is essentially the discovery and description, in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order or to have a permanent reference to the universal human condition. On the other hand, a ‘documentary’ approach renders the analysis of culture as “the activity of criticism, by which the nature of thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention, in which these are active, are described and valued”. Moreover, a ‘social definition of culture will enable an analysis of “the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture”<sup>10</sup>.

To conclude this preliminary section of our study, let us recall Martha Nussbaum’s powerful argument in favor of and strong plea for the humanities nowadays to counterbalance the more pragmatic perspective and the pressures for growth and consumerism, which might lead to a crisis in education, as well: “Does global citizenship really require the humanities? It certainly requires a lot of factual knowledge, and students might get this without a humanistic education – for example, from absorbing the facts in standardized textbooks (assuming these are correct). Responsible citizenship, however, requires a lot more: the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to compare differing views of social justice, to speak a foreign language, to appreciate the complexities of the major theory and practice of liberal education in Western tradition ... The idea that one will take responsibility for one’s own reasoning, and

<sup>7</sup> Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungăciu *Sociologia și geopolitica frontierei*, Bucharest, Floarea Albastră Publishing House, 1995, pp. 131-135; on “spiritual frontiers”, cultural wax and wane, “conquest without domination”, theory of cultural frontiers, historical evolution is an increasingly interdependent phenomenon, defined by continuous dissemination and reception of influences – economic, political, cultural – incessantly; increasing vitality ... is accountable for cultural configuration; nations are communities with a spiritual dimension. Nicolae Iorga: “One may travel and conquer thousands of miles and still be dominated by the conquered ones”. *Ibidem*, p. 132. “We have attained tremendous achievements beyond our borders. This is all due to vitality”. *Ibidem*, p. 133 [our translation].

<sup>8</sup> Mircea Malița, Dan Dungăciu, *Istoria prin ochii diplomatului*, Rao, Bucharest, 2014, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, *Key Words. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>10</sup> R. Williams, “The Analysis of Culture” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. A Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited and introduced by John Storey, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1998, p. 48.

exchange ideas with others, in an atmosphere of mutual respect for reason, is essential to the peaceful resolution of differences, both within a nation and in a world increasingly polarized by ethnic and religious conflict ... Citizens cannot relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to those two, is what we can call the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of democratic education, in both Western and non-Western nations"<sup>11</sup>.

Martha Nussbaum – American philosopher, influential 21<sup>st</sup> century intellectual, ranked among the world's top 100 intellectuals by "Foreign Policy" and "Prospect" magazine, professor of law and ethics – amply elaborated her argument about the advantages of a liberal education, which currently plays a less than prominent role in higher education, in her book *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs Humanities*<sup>12</sup>.

### *Intercultural Communication and Cultural Diplomacy*

E.M. Forster often quoted phrase "only connect"<sup>13</sup> might well serve our scientific purpose of substantiating the need for connection at various levels, two of which represent the main concern of the present study: i.e. culture and education, with a view to overcoming contemporary fragmentation and the fallacy underlying the assumption that "I am right you are wrong" and replacing the obsolete view of the "either/or" perspective in any debate, by an integrative and interdisciplinary approach, as Professor Edward de Bono rightly noted<sup>14</sup>.

Most processes occurring in individual or social life are generated, mediated or influenced by cultural context and understanding, hence intercultural communication has become a prerequisite of vital importance for dynamic and valuable interaction in a multi-polar global world which can only be attained by means of an unbiased, complex understanding and awareness of other 'cultural grids' endorsed by an ability to accommodate different and differing "mental maps" a phrase launched and explained by Jaap van Ginneken in his well-regarded study *Understanding Global News*: "The first [mechanism] concerns centrality. There is a tendency to place one's own country in a central position, at least, in a more central position than it would be in others' maps and to group the rest of the world around it. Simultaneously, there is a tendency to make other countries and, indeed, entire continents peripheral ... The second mechanism concerns volume. There is a tendency to enlarge the surface of one's own country, to inflate it disproportionately in

<sup>11</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Skills for Life", TLS, April 30, 2010, pp. 13, 15.

<sup>12</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> E.M. Forster, *Howards End* "Only connect ... Live in fragments no longer".

<sup>14</sup> Edward de Bono, *New Thinking for the New Millennium* and *I Am Right, You Are Wrong*.

comparison to others. Simultaneously, there is a tendency to deflate other areas considered as irrelevant. The third mechanism concerns articulation. There is a tendency to render one's own country in great and characteristic detail, and to reduce other countries and continents to shapeless blobs. On the one hand, this is a very 'logical' result. On the other hand, it also betrays the collective narcissism in which we are all imbued"<sup>15</sup>.

"Mental maps" are thus subjective constructions and provide selective views of the world, stemming from a biased or distorted perception of geographical areas and inhabited spaces, meant to reinforce pre-established polarities, such as: East/West; North/South. "To portray meaningful relationships for a three-dimensional world on a flat sheet of paper or a video screen, a map must distort reality ... There's no escape from the cartographic paradox: to present a useful and truthful picture, an accurate map must tell white lies"<sup>16</sup>.

In his famous homonymous study, initially published in 1930 and of acute topical relevance nowadays, Jose Ortega y Gasset set forth a keen and pertinent analysis of the mission of the university with a particular focus on the role of culture which "should become the substance if University was as it had been in the Middle Ages", a system of clear, firm ideas about the world and humankind<sup>17</sup> summing up that the transmission of culture represents the third dimension of the university, in addition to teaching of the professions and scientific research<sup>18</sup>.

In his acceptance speech to the Romanian Academy, mathematician Solomon Marcus wisely noted that from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian culture enjoyed a certain kind of unity, and facilitated a dialogue with the sciences<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, relying on the premise that reality is transdisciplinary, Romanian physicist and philosopher Basarab Nicolescu advocated transdisciplinarity in higher education with a view to alleviating the fragmentation and the incessant proliferation of disciplines, as had occurred as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century; to attain an integrated education of individuals; substantiated by a "dialogue of cultures" – a sociological consequence of the process of human migration and mobility<sup>20</sup>.

In his outstanding study of historic importance, *The Trilogy of Culture*, and particularly in the third volume "The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture", the 20<sup>th</sup> century Romanian philosopher, writer and diplomat, Lucian Blaga warned against the fragmentariness of contemporary culture, which starts from the distinction between "minor" or "ethnographic" cultures and "major" or "monumental" cultures<sup>21</sup>. His argument is set in the context of urbanization and related social

<sup>15</sup> Jaap van Ginneken, J., *Understanding Global News*, London, Sage Publications, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Misiunea Universitatii*, Univers, Bucharest, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 25, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Acad. Solomon Marcus, "Singuritatea matematicianului", 2008, available at [http://www.acad.ro/discursuri\\_receptie/pag\\_dr.htm](http://www.acad.ro/discursuri_receptie/pag_dr.htm).

<sup>20</sup> *Doctor Honoris Causa* acceptance speech, apud Basarab Nicolescu, *Neobosit cautator de adevar*, Ed. Universitatii de Petrol si Gaze din Ploiesti, 2012, pp. 41-50.

<sup>21</sup> Lucian Blaga *op.cit.* "Living in the city means a fragmentary life within the multiple boundaries set by civilization. Living in the village defines a life integrated in the earth-heaven unity and aware of a fate emerging from eternity" [our translation].

changes that affected individual life, a theory which echoes Aldous Huxley's thesis that a remedy is required against over-specialization and in favor of a philosophy of life that addressed "the whole man", and for the growing discrepancy between 'man' and 'citizen', which is intensified by contemporary society<sup>22</sup>. Modern man's dilemma is that "in a society like ours the successful are those who live intensely with the intellectual and voluntary side of their being and as little as possible with the rest of themselves"<sup>23</sup>. The same Huxleyan essay, "One and Many" provided pertinent arguments to promote the connection between two kinds of knowledge which should necessarily be complementary instead of mutually exclusive, i.e. intellectual, scientific knowledge of things and direct, living knowledge of diversity.

To conclude, culture shapes as well as mediates communication in the endeavor to build bridges between individuals, communities and inhabited areas instead of emphasizing or deepening the divide: People are connected as never before. New opportunities are opening across the globe for exchange and cooperation. But these are also turbulent times – times of uncertainty and economic crisis, when societies are ever more diverse and vulnerable. This is why dialogue and mutual understanding are so essential. We need new forms of exchange between cultures, between societies and within them, on the basis of respect and equal dignity. Dialogue is the best way to strengthen the solidarity of humanity against the pressures of fragmentation<sup>24</sup>.

### *"Cultural Intelligence" versus the "Civilization of Illiteracy"*

One of the greatest challenges of our time is to transcend the dilemma entailed by the law of diminishing returns in cultural terms. Though the phrase has primarily an economic significance, it may well reflect the paradox of a paradigm shift from 'cultural intelligence' to a 'civilization of illiteracy'. The former concept is defined by the Danish scholar Elisabeth Plum, whose expertise is in cultural sociology, and who is the main author of *Cultural Intelligence – the Art of Leading Cultural Complexity*.

<sup>22</sup> Aldous Huxley, "Wordsworth in the Tropics" in *Great Short Works of Aldous Huxley*, p. 379: "What is needed is, as ever, a compromise. Life must be lived in different ways at different moments. The only satisfactory way of existing in the modern, highly specialized world is to live with two personalities. A Dr. Jekyll that does the metaphysical and scientific thinking, that transacts business in the city, adds up figures, designs machines, and so forth. And a natural, spontaneous Mr. Hyde to do the physical, instinctive living in the intervals of work. The two personalities should lead their unconnected lives apart, without poaching on one another's preserves or inquiring too closely into one another's activities. Only by living discreetly and inconsistently can we preserve both the man and the citizen, both the intellectual and the spontaneous animal being, alive within us. The solution may not be very satisfactory; but it is, I believe now (though once I thought differently), the best that, in the modern circumstances, can be devised".

<sup>23</sup> Aldous Huxley, "One and Many" in *Do What You Will*, pp. 35-36. "Instinct, passion, intuition are hindrances rather than helps to efficient citizenship of the contemporary world... Inevitably, for the more complicated the social machine, the more inhumanly and mechanically simple becomes the task of the subordinate individual, the more inhumanly difficult that of the commanding organizer".

<sup>24</sup> Irina Bokova, Director-General UNESCO, address on the occasion of the event "Dialogue of Cultures", 13 April 2013.



“Cultural intelligence is a broad concept which is related to emotional intelligence and social intelligence, but cultural intelligence is wider than either of these because it sees both feelings and human relations as culturally determined and not as identical across cultural boundaries ... Seen as a broad concept of intelligence, cultural intelligence is a set of abilities/skills which can be developed throughout life ... Cultural intelligence has three dimensions: intercultural engagement, cultural understanding and intercultural communication. This tripartite division follows the classic division into emotion, cognition and practice”<sup>25</sup>.

Similarly, Basarab Nicolescu resorted to the phrase “intelligence revolution” to define the current emergence of a new type of intellect stemming from and rooted in the balance between effectiveness and affectivity, science and arts or culture; hence higher education nowadays should educate both analytical and emotional intelligence, pleading for a unified vision of sciences and humanities<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, recent discoveries, particularly the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, point out that analytical intelligence is slower than emotional intelligence, highlighting the cultural and spiritual dimensions of science.

The latter is a concept coined by Mihai Nadin, the scholar and researcher of Romanian origin, and comprehensively dealt with in a dense and voluminous book *The Civilization of Illiteracy*, originally published in English in 1998 and recently translated into Romanian. What we now call the ‘information age’ and an increased focus, enthusiasm for and heavy reliance on technology in the knowledge-based society might push former preoccupations with “cultural matters” into oblivion.

“No other time than ours has had more of the future in it – and less of the past. The civilization we are entering is no promised land. It is a realm of challenge, with hurdles to overcome and frustrations to live with ... The literate heritage might not be perfect, but it protects from the often disquieting changes that we all – enthusiasts, pessimists, critics – experience. In the palace of printed books, we were promised not only eternal truth and beauty, but also prosperity. Well, prosperity is here, even if not equally distributed, but truth and beauty are increasingly elusive ... We are experiencing the conflict between forces corresponding to a literate structure of human activity and the emerging post-literate structure. One of the results of the conflict is that the visual has already surpassed the written, though not always for the better”<sup>27</sup>.

To endorse this previous statement about the visual overtaking the written, we recommend paying particular attention to Mario Vargas Llosa’s recent book *The Civilization of Entertainment* – originally published in Spanish in 2012 and subsequently translated into Romanian in 2016 – which warns about the decline of cultural values in their interaction with other phenomena of social, economic

<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Plum, *op. cit.*, Middlesex University Press, London, 2008, pp. 20-21.

<sup>26</sup> Basarab Nicolescu, *Neobosit cautator de adevar*, Ed. Universitatii de Petrol și Gaze din Ploiești, 2012, pp. 41-50 and Solomon Marcus, *Rani deschise*, vol. 1, ed. II, Bucharest, Spandugino, 2012, pp. 268, 314-315, 115.

<sup>27</sup> Mihai Nadin, *The Civilization of Illiteracy*, Dresden University Press, 1998, pp. vii-viii.

or political life, paving the way for the transition from an elitist culture to mass culture, whose most prominent characteristic is the dominance of image and sound over word<sup>28</sup>. Culture is a powerful and reliable companion to knowledge and it also shares an interdependent relationship with communication – i.e. communication keeps culture alive and culture shapes communication<sup>29</sup>.

Vargas Llosa concludes his collection of essays on cultural matters with the thought that education represents the major cultural issue of our time. In this respect reputed British historian Sir Keith Thomas also acknowledged the worldwide crisis in education and the widening gap between two opposing trends: consumerism and elitism, humanistic and pragmatic perspectives: “Today universities aim to enable students to develop their capacities to the full; in the process, they acquire the intellectual flexibility necessary to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy. But a university should not provide vocational training in the narrow sense of uncritical indoctrination in the rules and techniques of a particular trade. Institutions which do that are an indispensable part of the higher education system ... Advanced study and research are essential attributes of a university and some of that research will have vital social and industrial applications. But that is not its primary purpose, which is to enhance our knowledge and understanding whether of the physical world or of human nature and all forms of human activity in the present and the past. For centuries, universities have existed to transmit and reinterpret the cultural and intellectual inheritance, and to provide a space where speculative thought can be freely pursued without regard to its financial value. In a free and democratic society it is essential that that space is preserved”<sup>30</sup>.

Moreover, a decade before Mario Vargas Llosa’s book was published, other scholars lamented the decline of intellectual life at a time when the distinction between knowledge and information is even harder to identify, questioning whether we are trying to make ideas more available to large audiences or merely witnessing an expansion of mass education and popular culture. The advance of technology has led to a larger ‘market’ for ideas than ever before: And yet, contemporary society seems deeply hostile to claims of excellence, a canonical body of knowledge or high culture. High art, from opera to museums, and academic excellence, from A Levels to Oxbridge, are regarded as elitist, and deemed to exclude mass audiences. We seem to doubt people’s ability to cope with difficult ideas. Frequently broadcasters sideline documentaries, current affairs and ‘ideas programming’ to make way for TV shows more ‘accessible’ to viewers<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, *Civilizatia Spectacolului*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2016, p. 24. “How can one define the civilization of entertainment? It is the civilization of a world whose most prominent value is entertainment and enjoyment, and where distraction and merriment is the main preoccupation”. *Ibidem*, pp. 30-31 [our translation].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Keith Thomas, “Universities under Attack” London Review of Books, Vol. 33, no. 24, 15 Dec 2011, pp. 9-10, Web 24 March 2014 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n24/keith-thomas/universities-under-attack>.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.instituteofideas.com/> *Ideas, Intellectuals and the Public* – this was the topic of a three-day Conference hosted by Goodenough College, London and the Institute of Ideas, in June 2003.



Let us conclude our study by reference to a most recent speech delivered by Ana Blandiana commanding us to preserve and defend our culture as the essential means of survival and enduring civilization<sup>32</sup>. Despite overwhelming globalization and its inescapable effects, let us remember that cultures are resistant to integration, therefore the phrase “European culture” is self-contradictory concept<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Ana Blandiana, “Istoria ca viitor” speech occasioned by the acceptance of the honorary title of Doctor Honoris Causa in March 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Mircea Malița, Dan Dungaciu, *Istoria prin ochii diplomatului*, Rao, Bucharest, 2014, p. 27.