



CULTURAL CONFLICTS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

/different realities, new needs/

CALL FOR PAPERS

Context and new problem situation

The official documents of the European Union say on the occasion of the year of the inter-cultural dialogue that it includes "the whole variety of cultural differences inside and between the member states". The widespread interpretation of this quite broad formulation, however, is in fact usually very constricted – those thousands of publications and documents dedicated to the year of the intercultural dialogue as a rule speak of a dialogue between native cultures, nations, ethnies, traditions, religions, world churches and so on. In these documents we often see only a re-written version of an old multicultural programme which is focused on the great "world" cultures and religions or on the relations between cultural majority and cultural minorities within the legal framework of our national country. During the last 10 years the number of the subjects has been enlarged with problems of the powerful migration waves in West Europe and the fate of the immigrant communities in the receiving cultures, as well as with the aspects of the cultural foreign policy (the attitude of Europe towards China, India, the Arabian World, the "West Balkans", the Caucasus and so forth).

We believe that the restrictions which are hidden in such widespread concepts such as "dialogue" and "cultures" should be reconsidered. They reduce the cultures to the level of territorialized and stable worlds, and the "dialogue" between them is brought to a moral and politically benevolent act of co-existence on their border. In this contemporary world of globalization, medialization and cultural transfers this does not manage to reflect correctly neither the fluid cultural realities, nor the new forms of conversation between them. New concepts are needed and here we suggest those dynamic concepts which are already developed by the cultural theory. They are: cultural transfer, cultural situation, cultural hybrid and cultural conflict.¹

¹ We will here propose the following working definitions of these concepts:

- *cultural transfer* – export and import of cultural models, their adaptation and their ability to change the receiving context.
- *cultural situation* – temporary and variable constellation of cultural elements which cross the boundaries of the traditional national or religious cultures.
- *cultural hybrid* – a phenomenon of meeting, cultural transfer and mixing; it cannot be reduced to the territorial and traditional cultures and their identical logic.
- *cultural conflict* – social tension between actors who have a different cultural repertoire and thereby interpret situations differently. The cultural conflict has a double potential. On one hand in some cases it can lead to a real social and even

Contemporary cultural conflicts and possibilities for inter-cultural dialogue in the countries of East Europe

After 1989 the people from East Europe went through fundamental political, economic and social changes and took part in the globalizing world. This inevitably led to a new type of cultural situations and cultural conflicts. The influence which they had seems to us to be just as much important as the one of the stable societal (in the meaning of Will Kymlicka) cultures – national, ethnical and religious. We can point out in advance some of the aspects of a new conflict situation (they can also be aspects of a future cultural dialogue).

➤ The conflict of generations

For the first time in the history of humankind the young ones are those who possess the codes of the cultural literacy (in their case – the English language, computer skills, Internet, adaptation to mobile environment) in a much greater scale than the old people. This makes the experience and competence of the old generations (which are gathered during the old communist regime in the East) hard to be applied to the contemporary world; it excludes those people from the contemporary competitiveness and makes them marginal. Here is the origin of the situation in which “juventophobia” and “gerontophobia” occur simultaneously (though a situation concerning generations, it resembles the cultural conflicts between westies and osies in united Germany). What manifestations does this cultural conflict have? Which are the ways of solving this problem? Where are the possibilities for a dialogue between cultural-biographical situations of the generations and where is the place of the debate about the past in this dialogue?

➤ The conflict of mobile and immobile social actors and groups

Within the boundaries of the traditional national and religious cultures the incompatibility grows more and more between people and groups with “global” lifestyle and those with hybrid personal cultural repertoire; those who travel and communicate in a limited scale turn to be on the local side of a process called “glocalization” (the last part explains the appearance of a new nationalism in these countries). In the same time, in the countries in East Europe a new heterogeneous immigrant masses penetrate from China, Asia, the Arabian world, Africa; they can also be European settlers from England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Netherlands. What are the national and local distinguishing features of the tension between the global “elite”, the local “masses”, the new migrants and immigrants? Do these global

physical conflict, on the other hand, its aggressive potential can be overwhelmed by a dialogue, cultural meditation or negotiations.

elites with different national, religious and linguistic cultures form solidarity by developing new nets and alliances? What kind of conflicts occur there? What cultural factor is the new immigration stage? What are the relations between the national Diasporas and native countries and cultures? What are the new nationalistic formations? Is intercultural dialogue which can overwhelm this glocalizing tension possible?

➤ **“High” culture and popular commercial and consummative culture**

Isolated in the educational field and in certain elite circles, the high national culture has lost its position before the globalized media as the Gutenberg galaxy of books has been defeated by the new electronic forms of communication. We are witnesses how in East Europe during its period of transition a consummative revolution has taken place. There is a new attitude towards cultural products, new tastes and lifestyles have been created. At the same time a serious conflicts has occurred between “taste” and “gaudiness”, also between “real music” and “chalga” and so on. Is a dialogue between “high” and “popular-commercial” culture possible? What terms and boundaries are appropriate for this dialogue? Is the existence of these cultures possible only as a form of a conflict? What has to be the cultural policy of the state of the market and non-market culture? What are the hybrid forms which can gain the state support? How is the cultural legislation going to be reformed? What is to be done with the vanishing forms of high culture and the threatened with extinction minority of ex-cultural elites?

➤ **Intercultural tension between ethnical groups, religious groups, linguistic groups, national cultures in a period of globalization, mobility and medialization**

Everything that has been said until here does not replace the traditional forms of a cultural conflict or a possible dialogue between religious groups, traditions, linguistic and immigrant communities. Globalization and medialization, however, demand a new regime of these old and stable forms of cultural coexistence which are given another form and are made different. What is specifically new in the old cultures? How are the forms transformed when they are forms of an intercultural contact between ethnical cultures and religious minorities in the age of access, virtual reality, social and computer nets and consumer culture?

➤ **Additional problems to think about:**

- **Who are the possible social actors, mediators, interpreters, cultural operators in the new cultural situation in East Europe?** They should be able to mediate in the process of identification and resolution of cultural conflicts. Who are the people that already play the role of promoters of cultural dialogue? What good ideas are already put into practice?
- **What are the possible channels and places for an intercultural dialogue?** Which are the languages and tactics that can be used?

What are the role of the official European and national cultural institutions in this process?

- **Which are the deterrents to this intercultural dialogue?**

Conference format

We suggest that our conference should have two sections which respectively have to deal with:

1. Identification and analysis of a vast area of contemporary conflicts between actors with different cultural repertoire.
2. Discussion about the practical possibilities between them, as well as about cultural policies that frame the resolution of tension and conflicts.

Each section will have panels that will be modified according to the topics and problems submitted by the participants.