

CULTURES, VALUES, IDENTITIES – INTRODUCTION

The second electronic edition of the journal *International Relations*, in accordance with accepted rules, is entirely devoted to the particular triad outlined in the terms culture, value, identity. Taking into account the variety of forms in which these three phenomena appear, the title of this publication is written in the plural form. Looking from the perspective of the first decades of the 21st century, however, it is impossible to ignore or avoid the crucial fact of the cultural and axiological variety of the contemporary world, along with that concerning identity. This is a world comprised in turn of other smaller worlds, similar and joined to each other to a greater or lesser degree, or often also completely different and poles apart. These worlds, or to put it another way “spheres of culture and civilization”, remain with each other in ambiguous relations, mutually influential and with differing degrees of communication, some cases of which are intense, others measured or sporadic, and yet others which are fragmentary or absent. What is the reason for this? Which factors, elements, subjects and conditions decide the character, quality and dynamics of such relations?

Although the questions concerning intercultural relations may be multiplied, in this issue we would like to focus attention on three main areas around which one may seek answers to the issues outlined above, namely: the uniqueness of a certain culture (exactly what makes a given culture different from another), the group of values which dominates a given culture/cultures, as well as the identities resulting from the practicing or application of values. Why these values in particular? This is due to the fact that each of them remains in a direct relationship with each other and under the influence of a person, both in their individual life, as well as their collective existence. It is through this that such a relationship is, for obvious reasons, a reflexive relationship, one in which a person as the acting party

co-forms both the culture which contains values, and co-shapes their own individual and communal identity.

Culture as a “collective programming of the mind” defines and forms us as individuals, as well as members of society (or societies).¹ Indeed, he or she is not a self-contained entity as they need a creator, a person who acts, along with the fact that this occurs not in isolation but in cooperation with other existing persons. It is important to emphasise that culture is not a product of one person, place or time but that one may link with confidence certain cultural objects and artefacts with certain figures (creator, author/s), dates or geographical locations.

Values comprise the motor of human activity, a substance blending the will to cooperate with others. They constitute, at the same time, a cultural nucleus, stimulating the human mind, influencing the making of choices, decisions and actions. *Homo faber* is, by nature, inclined towards creation while owing both his individual and communal being to the community. We are therefore social, collective entities, the vast majority of whom are unable to function in isolation from other people. Group belonging (initially related to family, subsequently to peers, neighbours, society, nation or civilization), causes a common sharing of values, the (co-)forming of the identity of a certain individual – an identity, one may add, remaining in the process of continual development.

Identity, once treated as a static construct, has, through the influence of the ever-increasing speed of emerging changes in the contemporary world, become dynamic, free-flowing matter allowing continual transformation, in a similar way to how fluid post-modernity and the period following it have become. The manifestation of this may be observed on a social, economic, political and, of course, cultural basis.² The self-determination of the individual or community resulting from the experience of interacting with other people or communities is expressed in a direct form as a declaration of “who I am” and “who we are”. It is also expressed in the artefacts and relations which these objects (individual and collective) create among themselves, as well as the environment in which they function, employing them in a creative or anti-creative (destructive) manner.

¹ G. Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*, London 1991, p. 5.

² “Contemporary Transformations: Culture, Politics, Economy”, *Politeja*, 3 (20/3) (2012), pp. 3–9 (ed. M. Banaś).

Material and non-material goods are, at the same time, forms of the manifestation – in certain cases also a demonstration – of the identity of the creator/author, and through which kinds of values also define their culture.

The articles contained within this volume concern various aspects of human activity: language, music, literature, art, philosophy, education, society and politics. They comprise an example of descriptions, interpretations and the inspiring thoughts regarding the interrelations of values, identities and cultures and the rich variety within them. We hope that reading it provides the reader with many reasons to further reflect on the function of cultures, values and identities in the building, moderating, as well as the management of intercultural relations in which we ourselves are participants – subjects, recipients and (co-)creators.

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