

## On the Economic and Cultural Coordinate of Globalization

**Ionuț Ștefan**

*Danubius University of Galati, Romania*  
*ionut.stefan@univ-danubius.ro*

**Sebastian Șoimu**

*Danubius University of Galati, Romania*  
*sebastian.soimu@univ-danubius.ro*

**Abstract:** This text represents a sequel to our demarche concerning the globalization phenomenon understood in the analytical theoretical perspective. The economic coordinate of globalization represents a highly important element for the theoretical outlining of the concept of globalization. The world's markets, especially the financial ones, represent the best proof that globalization encompasses a powerful economic component. In this context, the issue of the nation-state represents a new challenge for the theorists of globalization. Welfare, the certainty of the workplace, related to the phenomenon of global unemployment, represent only a few problematic concepts which require reflection, resemanticization and an authentic intellectual debate. The sovereignty of the nation-state is seriously shaken especially from an economic perspective. All the other conceptual components of globalization are directly influenced in that "multicausal logic" brought forth by Giddens, by this economic coordinate. The economic, as a semantic horizon which melts into the concept of globalization, may be related to another semantic horizon just as important, namely the cultural one. At a first superficial review, the two coordinates seem rather stuck in their strict specific identity, but, after a more profound analysis, the connections between them may be brought forth. Because we have mentioned the financial markets, which, at their turn, are instrumented by money, well, this economic instrument holds, in the first instance, a strong cultural charge. The most important forms of human behavior, namely the cultural ones, are directly influenced by the way the individual understands and interprets the concept called money. At the same time, we will not be able to overlook the fact that the most important states, from an economic point of view, the states initially making up G8, and then GX, are the states which "set the style" for the various cultural trends and courses at a global level. These two coordinates analyzed in this text are interconnected, making up a first semantic horizon of globalization.

**Keywords:** economic coordinate of globalization; cultural coordinate of globalization; Giddens; welfare system; nation-state

### 1. Introduction

One of the major issues arising in the context of the economic dimension of globalization is given by the vision according to which the economic globalization undermines the ability of the national communities to maintain a certain level of

social welfare, based on the reallocation of resources towards those who cannot provide a decent living for themselves under the conditions of the market economy. Thus, it is assumed that the development of the global capitalism involves a fierce competition, which, at its turn, supposes a certain cutting down of the expenses aimed at ensuring the individuals' welfare. Certainly, this "scenario" may be regarded as a pessimistic interpretation of the impact that the economic globalization has upon the nation-state. At the same time, we have to take into consideration its ideological fundament as well. However, we can first accept that the economic globalization truly implies the end of the welfare state and of the redistributive reforms, which tend to be replaced by a convergence concerning certain national policies targeting the market economy. Even more, it is considered that the exposure to the rigors of the global market does not create negative effects on the social expenses of the nation-state. For example, in a research conducted in 14 industrialized countries between 1966 and 1990, Garret and Mitchell (Garret, Mitchell, 1996) discovered that, at least for this group of states, an increased exposure to the entrance on the domestic market of the foreign capital and to the international trade did not put pressure on the welfare expenses.

The explanation of the two authors contains a two-stage argument. First, globalization increases the insecurity level for certain social segments, which leads to the increase of their expectations for a redistributive social support coming from the state. Second, the expenses for the insurance of welfare do not necessarily determine the disappearance of capital, because the countries with an increased social stability usually provide a safe environment for investors, as compared to the ones marked by instability. Therefore, the two authors conclude, the connection between the economic globalization and the social expenses is stronger in those countries in which there are powerful trade unions or labor movements and weaker right-wing parties. Or, this does not mean that the welfare state is not in crisis, but that the causes of this crisis are not fundamentally attributed to globalization. Despite such arguments, this pessimistic scenario concerning globalization finds new adepts. Thus, it is claimed that "the delocalization of production, simplification, cutting down prices, firings, the high performance economy based on high-tech deprive the consumption society of labor and throw its consumers out in the street. An unprecedented economic and social shaking is about to take place. Be it the construction of vehicles or computers, chemistry or electronics, telecommunication or postal services, retail trade or finances, in any place of the world where some products or services are freely negotiated, without taking into consideration any boundary whatsoever, the employees get into the apparently unstoppable whirlpool of the depreciation of their worth and of rationality. In the three years between 1991 and 1994 alone, in the German industry in the western part of the country more than 1,000,000 work places were lost. And comparatively, Germany displays a stable position at an international level. In the other OECD

countries – organization made of 23 rich industrialized nations and five other somewhat poorer ones - the number of the well-paid jobs decreased even more rapidly. Over 40 million people in the OECD countries vainly searched for employment in 1996. From the US to Australia and from Great Britain to Japan, the mass welfare is quickly withdrawing within those nations which make the leading platoon of the world's economy". (Martin, Schumann, 1999, pp. 166-167) Thus, if such tendencies may be recognized in the case of the developed countries, which may come up with possible solutions to put an end to them, it is very unlikely that in the case of the states in transition towards the market economy or in integration processes into various supranational structures (such as Romania or other countries in Eastern Europe) the same would happen.

## **2. Global Capitalism and National Economies**

Yet, there are also optimistic scenarios concerning the social globalization, which, at their turn, hold, subsidiarily, certain ideological grounds. Trying to promote the concept of "politics of the third path" (a synthesis between the elements of the social democracy and those of the market liberalism), as a response to the challenges of the globalized world, Anthony Giddens considers that, in order to solve the global social problems, a "new mixed economy" must be established. Giddens starts from the already existing versions of the mixed economy. (Giddens, 2001, p. 78) One of these involves a separation between the state and the private sectors, keeping most of the industrial sector in the public domain. The other version mentioned by the British theorist is known under the name of "social market economy", and Giddens underlines that, in both forms, the organization of the markets is subordinated to the governmental decisions taken. On the other hand, the new mixed economy tries to articulate a convergence between the interests of the public sector and the private's ones, using the dynamism of the markets and pursuing, at the same time, the public interest (Giddens, 2001, p. 100). Besides, the new mixed economy supposes the existence of a balance between the settlement and unsettlement of markets, both at a transnational level (globally), and at a national or local level, as well as a balance at the level of the relations existing between the economic, and non-economic, respectively, sectors of society.

Certainly, a dynamic global economy is marked by a high rate of commercial, financial, and other transactions, but also by the appearance of possible dissolutions or crises. From this point of view, a dynamic flow of economy is not compatible with a society in which the individuals are used with being given everything by the state, such as those societies generated by the "system" of general welfare (welfare system). From the same ideological perspective of the third path, Giddens supports a modification of the relation between the matters of risk and of social security, in order to build a society in which there should exist

“agents in charge of the risk coverage” in the governmental, business community or labor market spheres. This because the people from various communities, undoubtedly affected by the economic globalization, need protection when things do not work properly, as they also need moral and material capabilities to help them overpass such transient moments (Giddens, 2001, p. 101). The issue of equality also intercedes here, as long as, even in a globalized world, liberty and equality may come into conflict; so it cannot be claimed that equality, pluralism, and the economic dynamism are always compatible. On the contrary, Giddens claims, being determined by the structural changes of the economic and social globalization, the increase of inequality is not easy to confute.

On the other hand, the politics of the third path cannot accept the idea that a high degree of social inequality actually means economic prosperity, or that inequality is inevitable. Even so, equality, where it may be sustained, must encourage diversity, and not hinder it. As it may be noticed, in the optimistic scenario proposed by Anthony Giddens, reallocation still plays an important part, even under the terms of the social globalization, or especially under these terms. Besides, in a further paper, which aims to be an answer to the criticisms coming in response to the advancement of the concept of “politics of the third path”, Giddens will return to the importance of the nation-state as a global agent, whose part, among others, is also the redistributive one, of social protection of the disadvantaged ones (Giddens, 2000, p. 120).

Considering his ideological proposition a “globalized political philosophy” (Giddens, 2000, p. 122), Giddens claims that this type of politics is meant to promote global integration, since the progress of globalization, on all its coordinates, is more accelerated than ever. In this context, the author points out, the nation-states stay the most important actors on the international stage, although the profits of the large multinational companies are higher than the NGP of many states. And this because, “generally, the nation-states are much more powerful. The reasons are that they control their territory, while the corporations do not; they may resort to the legitimate use of military force, individually or by alliance; they are responsible, again, individually or collectively, for the support of a legislative apparatus” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 122-123). However, Giddens asserts, the global system cannot be analyzed at the level of the nation-states alone, as long as their sovereignty claims are questioned. Together with the powerful influence the global market and the new communication technology exert, there is also a “globalization from bottom to top” (Giddens, 2000, p. 124), which includes hundreds of millions of regular people, as well as organized groups of all types. Thus, there is the tendency to develop a global civil society, tendency proven by the rising number of the global non-governmental organizations; if, in 1950, there were two or three hundred such organizations, at the end of the century, their number surpassed 10,000.

The question which arises in the context of this optimistic scenario proposed by the principal of the famous London School of Economics and Political Science is the following: what type of global developments must the politics of the third path promote? At an abstract level, Giddens shows, the answer to this question is the same, whether we are talking about the national or the local level: a harmonious global order implies a balance between governments, economy, and the civil society. As long as these ties do not exist, the social society shall be unstable. The social problems generated by globalization are also due to the fact that in many countries and in some regions of the globe there is not any developed civil society yet, and the democratic structures are not consolidated (the reference to the Eastern European area is obvious). In the absence of the above, the chances for an effective economic development are scarce, which leads to an increase in the number of social issues.

The solution suggested by the British theorist to such issues concerns the encouragement of the international collaboration on several directions: the organization of the global economy, the global ecological management, the regulation of the limits of the power detained by transnational corporations, the control of the potential war zones, and the implementation of certain democratic structures. From the ideological stand of a new form of social democracy, which holds global connotations, Giddens' optimistic scenario brings as arguments the developmental stages of the global economy, as well as the solving of certain social issues which marked certain areas of the globe (Giddens, 2000, pp. 124-132). From this perspective, the economic globalization, examined at a general level, is considered a success, which is also reflected in the social plane, on the labor market and related to the individuals' welfare. The matter of the new mixed economy is how its positive consequences may be maximized, with a parallel limitation of its less fortunate effects. Among the positive consequences, very important is the increase of the work places on the global labor market, which was resented in the last two decades, despite the high unemployment rate in certain countries or regions. Besides, the global labor force increased, between 1980 and 1994, to 630 million people, a lot over the increase rate of the number of the world's population. In this period, Giddens shows, only the Chinese economy, for instance, generated around 15 million new work places annually. Despite the recent crises, the fast development of the economies in the Asian countries saved millions of people from poverty.

The improvement of life conditions is proven by the decrease of the infantile mortality and the increase of the life span; thus, the infantile mortality in South Korea decreased from 62 per thousand in 1965 to only 12 per thousand in 1994, while the life span increased from 54 to 71 years. As a researcher in the field of the social market economy points out, "what demonstrates the evolutions in the last 30 years is that the new global economy holds a huge potential, representing an

alternative to poverty and underdevelopment, and that to come is the transformation of more and more countries into dynamic elements of an expansive economy” (Rojas, 1999, p. 12).

However, the mechanisms of the global economy are, for the moment, inclined towards the rich states, particularly the developed democracies that, together with Russia, form G8. The group that is trying to reestablish the balance, formed in September 1999 and called GX, includes the countries in G8, plus China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, and South Africa. Giddens claims that it is possible that this new group become the most important institution from the point of view of the global economy, as it will also work with the International Monetary Fund. Such “global innovations” are important, as long as the distance between the rich and the poor countries is still large. But this, the British theorist shows, is not necessarily due to the economic globalization, but especially to the internal causes existent in various societies, namely authoritarian government, corruption, excessive bureaucratization, social tensions, and the low level of women’s emancipation. The author argues that the economic development cannot be analyzed in the absence of the references to the contributions that health and education, as well as civil liberty and politics, have brought to the individuals’ welfare. As such, the social capability measures development in terms of the freedom of speech, the right to vote and the lack of violence or political persecution.

The development of a country may best be accomplished by instrumentalizing the political and civil rights and by the investments in the fields of health and education. Moreover, the author claims that democracy is the best advocate against poverty, as no truly democratic state has ever experienced poverty and hunger. Without promising an ideal world, the optimistic scenario concerning the economic and social globalization seeks to demonstrate that, while - with an expression belonging to Karl Popper, - “in search for a better world”, the people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may develop a global social space in which poverty and inequality should be, if not completely dismissed, at least alleviated. After all, social inequality seems to be the most important problem in the context of the contemporary debates concerning the social-historic process of globalization. If we can no longer speak of the existence of a state of general welfare, and, by extension, a “global system of welfare”, does this mean that we are heading, at the beginning of the third millennium, towards a new era of inequalities? This question, which sends to the content of the second part of this chapter, practically tries to shape one of the greatest fears of the social theorists who purported to foresee or describe the effects of the globalization process.

### 3. Consequences of the New Global Economy

The social analyses which subside to the negative scenario mentioned in the previous section suggest either a fatality which invokes an ineluctable nature of the economic transformations, or a refusal attitude which attributes all the evils existent in the contemporary societies to the globalization process, which would nourish resorting to certain protectionist policies that the nation-state could no longer support. The general idea suggested by the pessimistic scenario seems to be that the economic globalization reduces the influence of the national governments on the economic activities of their own citizens, without being able to guarantee, at the same time, the maintenance of a social consensus concerning the desirability of the global intervention in matters pertaining to the domestic economy. (Holton, 1997, p. 95) Moreover, it is argued that the national governments have fewer alternatives in negotiating with the multinational companies, for example, if they are interested in optimizing the level of the economic growth and maintaining a certain living standard for their citizens. Accordingly, the fatality would be that the contemporary experience prove to us that a certain type of commitment as compared to the global capitalist economy and, thus, to the global market, is unavoidable for the nation-states. However, what is needed here is not a solution which would imply a “confinement” of the national economies following the pattern of the “communist world”, which sought the performance of a project according to which the planned economies could have resisted outside the global capitalist system. Such a solution actually caused a worsening of the economic and social problems in these countries, before the ‘90s, which finally led to the implosion of the system.

Today, China opened its economy towards the global market, and maybe only such states as Cuba or North Korea are still outside the global market. But the question is: what costs must the citizens of these countries bear? Certainly, the issue of the economic-social inequalities that the structural modifications of the global economy suppose does not represent only the privilege of the “problem-states”. On the contrary, the states with a developed economy are also confronted with such problems; the advantage is, however, that a dynamic economy allows for the implementation of certain solutions to diminish or attenuate inequalities. However, the question if our era is or will become one of inequalities remains. And this because, if the nation-states can no longer protect their citizens against the tendencies of the global economy, meaning that they can no longer offer certainties as to the work places and living standards (if such certainties existed, they were owed, some theorists suggest, to “the system of the providence states” after the war), it means that the idea of social contract itself must be redefined. Even more, the resemantization, even the reinvention of the social contract involves, it may be said, even a redefinition of the social.

In the sociological literature, as well as in the political one, it is suggested that the existence of a nation-state crisis in a globalization era practically involves a redefinition of the social, in tight relation with the appearance of new types of inequality, as well as new types of social exclusion. Faced with this finding, two perspectives are basically developed. The first one, belonging to Etienne Balibar and Robert Castel, understands exclusion as an extreme form of inequality (Castel, Balibar, 1992, p. 115). The second one, developed by Alain Touraine, showed that both exclusion, and inequality, represent processes that pertain to different contexts of the economic-social space. Continuing this idea, the following legitimate question arises: what kind of social-economic space are we dealing with in the context of the globalization process? As we have shown in the analytical framework of the conceptualization of globalization, we are no longer dealing with the space specific to modernity, reduced to the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. Under the terms of modernity, a protectionist pattern used to operate, with a certain degree of success: "As long as the economic space and the political and social ones overlapped, the protectionist project was enough to give meaning and consistency to the idea of nation." (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, p. 149)

In the context of globalization, however, the situation appears deeply modified, the consequence being that "the increasing dissociation of economy and the political suddenly invites us to reestablish the political contract among citizens in a more autonomous manner. The latter is no longer only the mechanical extension of the exchange and must find its principles more directly, in the affirmation of the common life." (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, p. 150) Or, a common life refers today not only to the local and national "loyalties", but also to the global relations in which a lot of individuals are involved, as well as various social groups. Moreover, common life supposes today that the law of the global market, having another kind of influence than the law of the nation-states, conjugated with the opening towards the world, dilutes every country into an undifferentiated ensemble, in which no national society masters its destiny. Although this situation shows us that, indeed, "mundialization separates the ones who adapt to the world from the ones who cannot do it and constrains us to show ourselves less solidary in order to deal with the opening of economy" (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, p. 125), this does not mean that we have to resort to some manicheist oppositions or reductionist schemes. Maybe the impact of the social globalization is felt more acutely, under the form of the various types of inequality and exclusion, because the postwar world, at least in the European space, got us used with thinking in the terms of the protectionist system of the providence state. The crisis of this system, generated by the economic and social globalization, does not however mean that solutions to solve the new social problems cannot be found.

The social theorists consider that, having arrived at a point when a redefinition of the social contract is needed, and, by this, of the social itself, three common aspects



are highlighted, concerning the relation between the economic and the social, the nature of the social rights and the definition of the social's "topics". In the case of the first aspect, the notion of "the third sector" is invoked, situated between the global market and the nation-state, which gets a more social connotation, related to the idea of integrating the individuals and communities on the global market. The second aspect concerns the reanalysis of the social rights from a contractualist perspective, rights and obligations standing out. Finally, the third aspect shows us the fact that the nation-state, providential or not, is confronted to a true revolution of its representations: "it must endorse individuals to an ever smaller extent and groups to an ever bigger extent". (Rosanvallon, 1998, p. 121) The last relevant aspect pertains to what Pierre Rosanvallon calls the ever more difficult "deciphering of the social" – the global communication techniques, as well as the sociological statistics, offer us plenty of information concerning the individuals, but tell us very little about groups and communities. Or, this is where the redefinition of the social must practically begin, under the new conditions of globalization, because inequality and exclusion, if and where they exist, are felt more acutely at the level of the social groups. Still, we appreciate that eluding the issue of the individual would mean approaching a holistic understanding of the matter in question. Therefore, we will opt for a neutral perspective, which should refer both to the social problems of the groups and communities, and to the ones which may be perceived at an individual level. This because a globalized society "is especially characterized by an astonishing reorganization of the differentiation manners, which are no longer just collective (expressed by income categories, study diplomas, etc.) but become more individualized" (Rosanvallon, 1998, p. 138).

Thus, the redefinition of the social starts from the finding that "the surplus needed by mundialization is only acquired by paying the price of a considerable, maybe unknown, deepening of inequalities" (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, pp. 126-127) According to this deal, the financial globalization would determine the deepening of the structural inequalities, as it leads to another division between profits and income, in the industrialized countries. Second, the globalization of the goods markets, worldwide, and not only in the rich countries, contributes to the explanation of the deepening of the dynamic inequalities. The consequences thereof are that unemployment and poverty rise among the workers with no qualification whatsoever or with a weaker qualification in the rich countries, while the same workers, but in the less developed countries, see their fate improve. Thus we note the existence of two types of inequalities. On the one side, there is, in the contemporary society, a series of structural inequalities (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, pp. 75-78), inherited from a distant past, partially interiorized by society, which are today worsened by the fact that the negotiation power of the employees or their representative instances decreased under the burden of mass

unemployment. On the other side, we have the dynamic inequalities, which, when they rise in intensity and persistence, determine, at their turn, a modification in the structure of society and in the representations that the individual makes of it. Here is the example offered by Fitoussi si Rosanvallon concerning such intracategorical inequalities (which come from the requalification of the differences within the categories so far considered homogenous), in order to highlight the way in which inequality creates the feeling of exclusion: "A higher education employee in long term unemployment does not live, for sure, their situation in relation to the diminishing of their income: they first feel excluded from the world of the higher education employees, without getting to believe that they belong to any other category. So, their identity is questioned as well." (Fitoussi, Rosanvallon, 1999, pp. 75-78) The conclusion is that globalization multiplies uncertainties, generating various types of inequality and exclusion. The map of the global inequality is, no doubt about it, a multidimensional one; it concerns both the geographical inequalities between the various countries and regimes, as well as other types of "classical" inequalities, among the "new" ones already mentioned: among generations, of the social contributions, the access to the financial system, daily life, etc.

But what the social theorists underline is the idea that such problems do not come from the fact that globalization occurs, but from the one that this process is not yet accompanied by any mechanism of international cooperation, which should emphasize its beneficial effects. Because there certainly are such effects, which induces the conclusion that the process must be encouraged, and not stopped. Globalization undoubtedly poses difficulties, because it emphasizes the inegalitarian tendencies which come forth even in the developed states, making the exercise of the political power more complex, but it does not involve giving up the economic growth. Thus, there is hope that an economic growth within reasonable limits may finally determine the attenuation of the social inequalities. From this perspective, Anthony Giddens considers that the politics of the third path may offer solutions to this regard. (Giddens, 2001, p. 103)

The main problem in which the British theorist is interested is the necessity to reform the "system of the general welfare", which implies three motivations. First of all, the current structures of this system have become obsolete, as compared to the global economic and social changes. The dynamics of inequalities is also different from the one of the modernity, as are the social risks which must be covered. Thus, on the labor market, the number of women increased, the relation between work and family life changed, the educational possibilities and needs changed as well, and the increase of the life span, as well as the proliferation of the medical treatments transformed the health systems, but bringing new issues into focus. Then, at least in what some of its aspects and certain countries are concerned, the providence-state can no longer be supported. Instead of creating a

higher social solidarity, under the new global conditions, the institutions of the welfare state may undermine it. For example, it is well known that the pension commitments of some states, such as Germany, Italy, or Japan, are practically unaccomplishable, even if there were not any changes in the demographic tendencies. (Giddens, 2001, p. 110) Other states reached a very high level of debts, so that budgets are spent mainly to cover them, and thus social services are out of the question.

These situations, Giddens shows, fuel the new social conflicts, such as riots of the tax payers, conflicts among generations, tensions between the ones integrated into the system and the ones left out. Third, the welfare system has its own limits and contradictions, which must be eliminated. The approach to all of these issues, which Giddens suggests from the ideological perspective of the politics of the third path, concerns both the aspect of the social equality, and the one of pluralism, underlining the importance of a “dynamic model of egalitarianism”. (Giddens, 2001, p. 120) This is focused, in the first instance, on the equality of opportunities, underlining that it involves, still, some mechanisms of economic reallocation. At the same time, the model tries to answer the changing influences manifesting in the inequality area. As such, the state must not only “react” to inequality and poverty, but also intervene in the life circumstances of the groups and individuals involved, when the case may be. The restructuring of the welfare system and, by this, the redefinition of the social, must be accompanied by several consequences - saving costs, where it is necessary, but also the reaction to the new global economic and social conditions. Besides, the economic and social policies can no longer be understood as belonging to separate compartments. In this sense, social expenses must be analyzed in the terms of the consequences they have on the economic area (this being one of the reasons why certain governments confer so much importance to what it is called “the policy of welfare through work”).

At the same time, the issues of social exclusion must also be examined, this examination being followed by a reaction going both from top to bottom and from bottom to top; redefining inequality in relation to exclusion, as Fitoussi and Rosanvallon suggest, is, therefore, consistent. Giddens’s conclusion is that, just like in other areas of the social policies, the matter of inequalities can no longer be solved today only at a national or local level. On the contrary, the matters pertaining to the global economy, as well as to the regulation of the power held by the multinational corporations, must be related to the matter of the inequalities. It is hoped that thus certain practical solutions to the practical issues of globalization will be identified, both from an economic point of view, and especially a social point of view.

#### 4. Technology and Creation of the Cultural Global Space

There are a few features generally accepted as characterizing “the cultural”, on which we may count to understand correctly what goes into the cultural dimension of globalization. First of all, culture may be understood as a sphere of existence in which people build the significance through the practices of symbolic representation. Although this assertion rather sounds like a hollow generalization, it allows us to make a few useful delimitations. Quite generally, if we are talking about the economic, we are interested in the practices by which people produce, exchange, and consume material goods; if we are talking about the political, we refer to the practices by which power is concentrated, distributed, and used within societies, and if we are talking about culture, we refer to the ways in which people give meaning to their lives, individually or collectively, through communication among them. All these are “dimensions” of social life and not completely distinct activity spheres: people do not pass from “sparing money” to “making culture” the same way they pass from daily work to recreational activities. If things were such, then we should assume that no one has ever extracted any significance from the activities they perform to earn their living. And yet, this thinking pattern is deeply rooted in the common visions on culture, which refer to the practices and products of art, literature, music, film, etc. (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 32)

All of these are important manners by which specific significances are generated, but they cannot exclusively define the cultural dimension. We must rather extract, from the complexity of the interwoven practices of the cultural, economic, and political fields, a feeling of the culture’s purpose: that of giving life a meaning. But all that may be symbolized is, in a broad sense, significant. For example, there is a great number of symbols attached to the economic practices, such as the technical language of the production process (for example, the technical specifications of a vehicle’s engine) or of the market (for example, the daily announcement of share prices). But it may be considered that these symbolizations do not reach the center of the “cultural” and that most of this area of the instrumental symbolization may be assigned to the economic, technical, and so on.

On the other hand, numerous symbolic representations in marketing are very cultural, although they ultimately have an instrumental (economic) purpose. Advertising texts, for example, although they belong to what Horkheimer and Adorno used to call, deprecatingly, “the industry of culture”, related to the instrumental purposes of capitalism, stay significant cultural texts. The way in which advertising texts are used is often similar to the one in which novels or movies are used. And this because it offers narrations (no matter how suspicious these would be, from an ideological point of view) on the way in which life can be lived, references to common notions of identity, appeals to one’s own image, images of some ideal human relationships, versions of fulfillment, happiness, etc.

This is the sense of the cultural dimension that we seek to underline along this study, the focus being on the sense as purpose in itself, different from the strictly instrumental senses. To use a little exaggerated expression, we may conceive culture, in this sense, as being the territory of the meanings “significant from an existential point of view”. (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 33) By this we do not intend to highlight “the issue of existence” as it is expressed by the ontological concerns of the existentialist philosophy or the formal religious reactions to the human condition. No matter how important they would be for the way in which people interpret their lives – and without taking into account the importance of globalization for the religious institutions - they are, we could say, existential discourses too specialized to capture what we intend to highlight in the idea of significant meaning from an existential point of view. To this we must add the famous expression “culture is common”. Of course, this expression has been initially used in opposition to the elitist acceptance of culture, as a “special”, refined form of life, only available to the few, through “cultivating” certain sensitivities. Therefore, culture is common, in the “democratic anthropological” meaning that it describes “an entire way of life”: it is not the exclusive property of the privileged ones, but includes the variety of daily practices (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 34). But what is important, this meaning coexists with the one according to which culture offers “personal meanings”: *“The questions that I ask concerning our culture are questions related to the general and common purposes, but also questions on the deeply personal meanings. Culture is common, in any society and in any mind”*. (Wallerstein, 1990, pp. 31-55)

The principle according to which “culture is common” takes shape as what is included in the problems of the existential significance that any man raises, usually, in their daily practices and experiences. It is not about the fact that some symbolic practices are more edifying than others, or closer to the essence of the human condition, or more concerned with the great questions of life. Nor is it about the cultural or aesthetical value in relation to certain cultural texts. Tao-te-king, Beethoven’s last quartets, or a painting of Picasso’s are not “cultural texts” to a greater or lesser extent than a TV series such as NYPD Blue, or a Pussycat Dolls album, or the feature reports on Princess Diana’s death, or the football magazines, or the most recent commercial of the Levi’s brand. All of these are cultural texts to the extent that people value them to understand their existence. And, of course, we must include in this approach of culture all sorts of practices, which do not depend on a relation between the reader and the text: visiting a supermarket, or the walk to the restaurant, a gym hall, a dance club or a park, the conversation in a bar or in the corner of the street. For the purposes of our discussion, culture refers to all the common practices which directly contribute to the development of the “life narrations” of people: the stories by which we chronically interpret our own existence, in what Heidegger calls “the throwing state” (*Geworfenheit*) of human

condition. If we approach connexity from this perspective, we are interested in the way globalization changes the context of building the meaning: the way in which it affects the sense of identity, the experience of the place and self in relation to the place, the impact it has on understanding, values, wishes, myths, hopes, and fears which developed around a topical life. The cultural dimension, therefore, comprises what Anthony Giddens used to call both the “exteriority”, and the “interiority” of globalization: the relation between the ample systematic transformations and the transformations of our most intimate and most local “worlds” in the daily experience. (Giddens, 2001, p. 29)

One of the reasons why, we believe, it must be insisted on this way of understanding the cultural dimension is that the discussions on globalization often consider “culture” as being something somewhat different, replacing it by the audio-visual technologies and the globalizing technologies, by which the cultural representations are transmitted. This tendency best stands out, probably, in the journalistic discourse, widely spread, on globalization, which often seems obsessed with the “ingeniousness” of the new communication technologies: the Internet, global informational line, etc. Yet, although the communicational technologies are absolutely essential for the globalization process, their development is not identical to the cultural globalization. In fact, the implications of their impact are both wide and narrow. Wide because they have a significant role – like technology itself and, thus, like transmitters or instrumental symbolizations – in all the dimensions in which globalization manifests. An example in this direction would be the ever higher integration of the global practices of obtaining the news and providing market information within the global economic trade. But the implications are narrow as well, because the mass-media represent only a part of the integral process by which the building of symbolic meanings manifests and only one of the forms by which globalization expresses from a cultural point of view. The mass-media and the other types of mediated communication become more and more significant in our daily life, but they are not the only source of globalized cultural experience. And, to an equal extent, not all it may be said about the globalization of the audio-visual and of the communication systems is directly relevant to the discussions on culture. Quite surprisingly, we can find an example of combination of culture with its technologies in the study on globalization elaborated and provided by Anthony Giddens.

Towards the end of a long discussion about the institutional dimensions of globalization, Giddens mentions “(...) another fundamental aspect of globalization which runs in the background of the various institutional dimensions (...) and to which we could refer as cultural globalization”. (Giddens, 2000, p. 75) But the reader who is looking for a theory of culture defined as a process of building the meaning will be disappointed: Giddens only discusses the way in which “the mechanized communication technologies have dramatically influenced all the

aspects of globalization". He underlines the importance of the totalized information for the global expansion of the institutions of modernity, and, significantly, takes as main example the instrumental context of the global financial markets. This, as well as the fact that the discussion about culture (on one page, at the most) is stuffed at the end of a long discussion about industrialism, rather shows an interest in the "dislocating" properties of the communication technologies than in culture, in the sense of social production of a significant meaning from an existential point of view. We must say that Giddens did not pay too much attention to the concept of culture in his paper on globalization and this may explain the hazardous mistaking of culture for the communication technologies. But this example illustrates the importance of a clear delimitation of the elastic and comprehensive concept of "culture" in relation to globalization. Certainly, it may be accepted that the cultural globalization is "fundamental" to globalization, but this may be analyzed in much broader terms than the ones offered by the mere analysis of the impact of the communication technologies - no matter how significant they would be for the institutional and systemic connectivity of our world. Next, we shall try to suggest how this may be accomplished.

## **5. The Role of Culture in the Context of Globalization**

Culture is important to globalization in the clear meaning that it represents the intrinsic aspect of the whole process of complex connectivity. But we can go even farther. We can try to understand to what extent culture really constitutes the complex connectivity. Again, there are so many right and wrong ways to approach this matter. An obvious risk is that we may make the mistake of conferring culture a certain degree of causal priority, favoring this dimension. We find such an example in Malcolm Waters' paper, who, after setting the standard distinction economy/politics/culture in the terms of a series of material – political and symbolic, respectively, exchange relations, claims somewhat provocatively, that: the material exchanges localize; the political ones institutionalize; and the symbolic exchanges globalize.

The conclusion is that the globalization of the human society is conditioned to the extent in which the cultural relations are effective in relation to the economic and political arrangements. We may expect that the political economy be globalized to the extent in which these ones are culturalized, meaning the extent in which the exchanges which develop within the framework thereof are accomplished symbolically. At the same time, we may expect that the globalization degree be higher in the cultural arena than in any of the other two. (Waters, 1995, p. 9) Waters' justification for the fact that he favors culture this way is, briefly, that, by their nature, the symbolic exchanges are far less restricted by the constraints of place than the material (economic) or political ones. For example, he claims that

the material exchanges are “rooted in the localized markets, factories, offices, and stores” simply because of the practical necessity or the cost advantage of the physical proximity in the production and exchange of goods and services. Unlike these constraints, which “tend to relate the economic exchanges to localities”, the cultural symbols “may be produced anywhere and anytime and there are very few constraints from the point of view of the resources involved in their production and reproduction”. (Waters, 1995, p. 10) Thus, culture is, intrinsically, more globalizing, due to the fact that the relations it involves may easily “expand” and due to the inherent mobility of the cultural forms and products.

But this argument is not very convincing. Because there is obviously a variety of examples – the impact of the multinational corporations, the international division of labor (involved, for example, in the production of vehicles or the clothing industry), the rising phenomenon of the labor force migration, the financial trade and the trade of goods, the importance of the agreements regulating the international trade and the importance of the control bodies, such as GATT, and, currently, the World Trade Organization) – which prove the globalization of the “material exchanges” involved in the economic relations.

Obviously, there are numerous cases when the production, exchange, and consumption of goods really stay relatively local activities, but a short walk to the nearby department store will quickly reveal how many of those products are not local. Certainly, it is true that any production must be located somewhere in the world. But this does not hinder the globalization process, as several well-known cases prove, such as the one of the intensive production of green peas in such countries as Zimbabwe for Europe’s exclusive use or the 17,000 mile voyage of the Australian parsnip to Great Britain to make the product available all year long. (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 36) Similarly, the idea that the economic exchanges take place freely, without any material constraint, could indicate a strangely idealistic view - for is it not true that symbolizations must, eventually, take a material shape, of books, compact discs, celluloid, electronic impulses on the television or video screens, etc.? Although, obviously, the electronically mediatized “products” are, from a technical point of view, much more mobile, all the processes of material production related to these various cultural forms certainly suppose constraints similar to the ones involved in any other form of production of goods. These objections question the plausibility of the quite extravagant generalization of Waters’ concerning the localizing and globalizing features of the various social spheres. (Tomlinson, Timisoara, 2002, p. 37) But, on a more careful examination, it is shown that he rather sustains a much more modest fact: simply that the economic sectors in which mediation has the greatest symbolic character or, in his words, which are “symbolized” - for instance, the financial markets – are the ones most subjected to globalization. This is a much more plausible idea, because it is obvious that the movement of some symbols, such as money, through electronic



means is much easier than the movement of some large quantities of root vegetables. But does this prove in any way the idea that, in the globalization process, culture plays a predominant part? This cannot be affirmed. At least, not in that meaning of culture that we have defined. Because, in this case, Waters is using culture focusing on the instrumental symbolization rather than on the construction of meanings significant from an existentialist point of view. We can agree that some economic processes get to be more strongly “symbolized”, but this simply means that they are more informationalized - the symbolizations used are intrinsic to the economic process - not that they are “culturalized”. If they were more culturalized, the processes and practices by which people nourish with meaningful recounts of their social existence would become somewhat more tightly related to the economic sphere. This may be so, but this argument must rely on something else than the debatable claim that the nature of the symbolic goods is “dematerialized”. Thus, it might be proven that Waters is right in that which concerns the general significance of culture within the framework of globalization, but for other reasons. (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 38)

The issue of understanding culture as a constitutive part of globalization depends on the way in which we conceive culture and its consequences. Culture is not a power which could represent the cause of social events, when we consider that the cultural processes equal the construction of meanings or a context in which events may be described in an intelligible way. If we think strictly in “causal” terms, we are prone to taking culture for its technologies. Which does not however mean that culture is not deprived of important consequences. It certainly has important consequences to the extent in which the construction of meaning inspires collective and individual actions, themselves bearing consequences.

The meanings are not produced by a completely separated interpretative channel, which, to put it that way, functions in parallel with other social practices without altering them. Significance and the cultural interpretation guide individuals towards certain actions, individually or collectively. Our actions, even if they are relatively instrumental, obeying a logic of practical or economic necessity often take place in the context of an ampler cultural understanding. Not even the elementary instrumental actions, which meet the bodily necessities, are outside culture, from this point of view: in certain circumstances (weight loss diet, religious fasting, hunger strike), the decision to eat or fast is a cultural one. We may understand the capacity of culture to bear consequences on globalization following the way in which the “local” actions of a cultural inspiration may have globalizing consequences. The complex connexity does not only mean the tighter integration of the social institutions, but it involves the integration of the individual and collective actions in the effective manner of functioning of institutions. Thus, cultural connexity introduces the idea of the reflexivity of the global modern life. The core idea of the reflexivity theories, as that of Giddens (Giddens, 2000, p. 45), is that the

social activities have a recursive nature: it may be said that the social entities indirectly act upon themselves, in various ways, in order to adapt to the information received concerning their own behavior or functioning. This idea is based on the inherent reflexivity of the human being: the ability of all people to be constantly aware that they are acting right during the development of action, “to constantly keep in touch with the reason in the name of which they act as an integrant element of action.” (Giddens, 2000, p. 39)

The social theories on reflexivity try to explain how this type of self-monitoring manifests at the level of the social institutions or rather at the level of the interconnection between the social agents and institutions. According to Giddens’ theory, this takes place within the framework of the “institutional reflexivity”: in the modern institutions, “the social practices are constantly examined and reformulated, in the light of the information on these practices, thus modifying their nature”. (Giddens, 2000, p. 41) As such, the modern institutions are, more and more, “entities which learn”, just like the human beings. It is precisely this reflexive sensitivity of the institutions as to the contribution of the human agents which marks the dynamism specific to the modern social life and defines the connexity between the multitude of the individual local actions and the global structures and processes at the highest level. In order to illustrate this idea, we can analyze a statement made by Giddens in relation to the “local-global dialectics”.

Giddens writes that “the local life habits got to have consequences at a global level. Thus, my decision to buy a certain garment has implications not only on the international division of labor, but also on the Earth’s ecosystems.” (Giddens, 2000, p. 41) How is this statement true? First of all, meaning that the global clothing industry is a highly reflexive institution, adapting to the options of a great number of actors expressing on the goods market by the cultural codes of fashion. If we are to think, for example, about the consequences of the cultural options of a group of teenagers, in a European commercial complex, on a Saturday afternoon, concerned with the look that they will have that evening, at the local club, we can notice that this unwraps a level of connexity leading to employment perspectives for a worker in the Philippines. And secondly, the connexity it involves is, actually, that the dressing options, just like any other consumption option, have global ecological consequences concerning the natural resources that they consume and the industrial production processes they suppose. Thus, a world defined by a complex connexity (a global goods market, international fashion codes, an international division of labor, a common ecosystem) ties a myriad of small daily activities, carried out by millions of people, to the destinies of other unknown people, far away, and even to the possible fate of the planet. All these individual actions take place within the cultural context significant for the worlds of the local daily life, in which the dressing codes and the little differentiations of fashion establish the personal and cultural identity. The first sense in which culture is

important for globalization is exactly the fact that these “cultural actions” get to have global consequences (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 39). Certainly, the complexity of the chain of consequences involves, simultaneously, the political, economic, and technological dimensions of globalization. But the idea is that the “moment of the cultural” is indispensable to the interpretation of the complex connexity. If we think about the cultural dimension of globalization, we also discover that globalization has an essentially dialectic character. The fact that the individual actions are intimately linked to the structural-institutional features of the social world through reflexivity shows that globalization is not a “unidirectional” process by which events are determined by the vast global structures, but involves at least the possibility for the local intervention in the global processes. There is a certain cultural policy of globality, which we can understand going further with the example of the ecological consequences that local actions have.

Although the capacity to generate consequences of the daily options related to lifestyle is not always recognized – most of us are not “ecologically aware” consumers when we do our shopping – there is, still, a tendency, in certain sections of any society, towards consumption practices deliberately ecological, which actually represents a manifestation of connexity. The famous slogan of the ecological movement, “Think globally, act locally”, suggests a political strategy motivated by a very precise collective cultural narration, referring to what “a good living” actually means. The strategy implies the mobilization of agents – ever more through some elaborated press campaigns – in the direction of obtaining some institutional changes at global level. (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 40) And if such a strategy is (sometimes) successful, this is due to the fact that it relies on and appeals to very general cultural inclinations rather than scientific-technical arguments related to environment matters. For example, the astounding victory of the Greenpeace organization over the Shell UK company in the matter of the abandonment of the Brent Spar oil storage and tanker loading buoy in June, 1995, was possible due to the mobilization of the public opinion - especially in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands - which directly threatened the “relations with the consumer” at the gas stations of the Shell company.

From the perspective of the ecologist movement, this victory may be considered a remarkable success of the social reflexivity. But, if we ask ourselves what lied behind the mobilization of the public opinion, it is very likely that it was something else than the actual problems of the campaign - which caused a considerable confusion. For example, it seems that many of those who boycotted the pumps of the Shell company thought that the intention actually was to sink the buoy in the North Sea – their “locality” – and not in the Atlantic. The members of the Greenpeace organization later admitted that they had been misled themselves concerning the real chemical composition of the substances on the buoy. Actually, after the campaign, it was stated that the press had been tricked into rendering the

event in a manner favorable to the Greenpeace organization and offering numerous images in which the ecologists were assaulted by the security personnel of the Shell company, in detriment of presenting some complex scientific arguments. The head editor of the British TV channel Channel 4 stated: "The images that [Greenpeace] placed at our disposal showed a few helicopters daringly flying within range of the water canons. Try analyzing that scientifically." (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 41) Despite all this, we may have another understanding of things if we think that this campaign appeals to the narrations of people's life rather than to specific ecological arguments, the terminology of which would anyhow not be understood by too many. Thus, the most significant aspect was, probably, the symbolic value of the buoy's occupation: a certain dramatization of the "fight" against the generalized threat with the degradation of the environment, which people feel like being part of the "world" of their own daily life. Thus understood, the strategy of the Greenpeace organization is, at least partially, cultural. It may be considered that even the matter of the scientific truth has a cultural importance for the maintenance of some trust relations generated among Greenpeace (or Shell), the press, and the public - both in the terms of information, and of misinformation. Today, the politics of the environment implies "the social construction of reality" - a press fight among the actors of the ecological protest, the actors in the business world, and the decisional factors, on a set of meanings which must be spread among laymen and which represent the framework of their reality. The politics of the environment is, therefore, a cultural politics, and its success depends on the degree by which it enters the relevant horizon of the local daily worlds. Thus, culture is important for globalization in the following sense as well: it marks a symbolic terrain of the construction of meanings as scene of the global political interventions.

## **6. Conclusions**

In the context of this study, we understood globalization as a real process, a continuum, together with its local, regional, and national implications. At one end of this continuous line there are the economic and cultural relations and networks, organized locally and/or nationally, and at the other end there are the economic cultural relations and networks which take shape at the wider scale of the regional and local interactions. We have specified, from the very beginning, that there is a high degree of connexity between the two dimensions of the globalization process, which we then treated separately. The analysis performed on the economic dimension of globalization revealed that the national governments have fewer alternatives in negotiating with the multinational companies, for example, if they are interested in optimizing the level of the economic growth and maintaining a certain living standard for their citizens. Accordingly, the fatality would be that the

contemporary experience prove to us that a certain type of commitment as compared to the global capitalist economy and, thus, to the global market, is unavoidable for the nation-states. We have obviously also considered the issue of the economic-social inequalities that the structural modifications of the global economy suppose, which today no longer represent only the privilege of the “problem-states”. On the contrary, as we have tried to prove, the states with a developed economy are also confronted with such problems; the advantage is, however, that a dynamic economy allows for the implementation of certain solutions to diminish or attenuate inequalities. However, the question if our era is or will become one of inequalities remains. And this because, if the nation-states can no longer protect their citizens against the tendencies of the global economy, meaning that they can no longer offer certainties as to the work places and living standards (if such certainties existed, they were owed, some theorists suggest, to “the system of the providence states” after the war), it means that the idea of social contract itself must be redefined. Globalization undoubtedly poses difficulties, because it emphasizes the inegalitarian tendencies which come forth even in the developed states, making the exercise of the political power more complex, but it does not involve giving up the economic growth. Thus, there is hope that an economic growth within reasonable limits may finally determine the attenuation of the social inequalities. During the current study, we have permanently referred to the interrelations between the dimensions of globalization, and we have also taken this into consideration when we have treated the cultural dimension of the process. Thus, approaching connexity from this perspective, we have been interested in the way globalization changes the context of the construction of meaning: the way in which it affects the sense of identity, the experience of the place and self in relation to the place, the impact it has on understanding, values, wishes, myths, hopes, and fears which developed around a topical life. The cultural dimension, therefore, comprises what Anthony Giddens used to call both the “exteriority”, and the “interiority” of globalization: the relation between the ample systematic transformations and the transformations of our most intimate and most local “worlds” in the daily experience.

## 7. References

- Castel, Robert & Balibar, Etienne (1992). *Exclusion et Inégalités Exclusion and inequalities*. Paris: Editions Esprit.
- Fitoussi, Jean-Paul & Rosanvallon, Pierre (1999). *Noua epoca a inegalitaților/The new era of inequalities*. Iasi: European Institute Publisher's House.
- Garrett, G. & Mitchell, D (1996). *Globalization and the welfare-state: income transfers in the industrial democracies, 1966-1990*. San Francisco: American Political Science Association.
- Giddens, Anthony (2000) *A treia cale si criticii ei/The third path and its critics*. Iasi: Polirom.

- Giddens, Anthony (2000). *Consecințele modernității/ Consequences of modernity*. Bucharest: Universul.
- Giddens, Anthony (2004). *A treia cale. Renasterea social-democrației/ The third path. Rebirth of social-democracy*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Holton, John (1997). *Globalization and the Nation-State*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Martin, Hans-Peter & Schumann, Harald (1999). *Capcana globalizării. Atac la democrație și bunăstare/The globalization trap. Attack against democracy and welfare*. Bucharest: Economic.
- Rosanvallon, Pierre (1998). *Noua problemă socială/ The new social issue*. Iasi: European Institute Publisher's House.
- Tomlinson, John (2002). *Globalizare și cultură/Globalization and culture*. Timisoara: Amarcord Publisher's House.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1990). *Culture as the ideological battleground of the modern world system*, in Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Waters, Malcolm (1995). *Globalization*. London: Routledge.