

Globalization of culture in society



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Virtually all countries in the world, if not all parts of their territory, and all segments of their society, have now become part of the larger global system in a way. The ‘ culture of globalization” and ‘ globalization of culture” strives towards ‘ deterritorialization’ and ‘ re-territorialization’ of political and economic power in the era of borderless world.

The concept of global culture is today perceived as a spread of American values, goods and life style. As a matter of fact, the most visible globalization sign seems to be the spread of American hamburgers and Coke in almost every country in the world.

As we all know the world became smaller as a result of the increasing development of transportation and information systems, but behavior types, values and attitudes that govern human relations can remain unchanged. Technological innovation leads to business internationalization and individuals from all firm’s levels become involved in cultural interaction. Firms extending their activities at international level need to communicate in an effective way with foreign clients taking into consideration cultural differences that in many cases are very important.

In the past, managers that couldn't handle with culture challenge had the option of focusing on internal markets. At present, a company is obliged to keep up with international competition. In this global business environment, the idea according with culture is not so important is fatal.

Cultural differences are often subject of jokes, but culture incompetence can affect million of dollars or euros through wrong negotiations and weak relations with customers. The cultural risk is as real as the political risk in international relations.

As John Tomlinson said, “ in the centre of modern culture there is globalization; in the centre of globalization there are cultural practices.”

Observers of globalization are increasingly recognizing that globalization is having a significant impact on matters such as local cultures, matters which are less tangible and hard to quantify, but often fraught with intense emotion and controversy.

Generally speaking, issues surrounding culture and globalization have received less attention than the debates, which have arisen over globalization and the environment or labor standards. In part this is because cultural issues are more subtle and sensitive, and often more confusing.

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“ Today globalization has the ears of Mickey Mouse, feeds with Big Macs, drinks Coke or Pepsi and works on an IBM laptop...” (Th. L. Friedman, 2001).

In this context, the international aim of management is that of highlighting the cultural differences between countries and even in the same country between the different regions and then the establishment of some potential opportunities and problems.

GLOBALIZATION AND LOCAL CULTURES

The globalization of the production and distribution of goods and services brings many advantages for all countries offering them access to products that they would not otherwise have. But the changes brought by globalization affects the interests of some categories of people in some countries or regions. Because foreign products are usually cheaper, local farmers are disadvantaged.

Globalization is also increasing international trade in cultural products and services, such as movies, music, and publications. The expansion of trade in cultural products is increasing the exposure of all societies to foreign cultures. And the exposure to foreign cultural goods frequently brings about changes in local cultures, values, and traditions. Although there is no consensus on the consequences of globalization on national cultures, many people believe that a people’s exposure to foreign culture can undermine their own cultural identity.

Although we can talk about a globalization of culture, there are also a lot of cultural differences that should be taken into account by managers of

multinational corporations if they want to be effective in approaching foreign markets.

Culture has many elements but the most important are: language, religion, values and attitudes, habits, education.

When you enter on a foreign market you must know very well the language of that country, because otherwise you should lose a lot of money. It is not enough to have a product and sell it, it is necessary to know if the name of the product has a negative meaning in that market.

Religion is also essential when you are an international firm, because in Middle East for instance you can't sell pork meat or alcoholic products. The role of woman in business is also linked with religion in this region. That affects management in two ways: the firm can't use women as managers or in other positions in some countries and the role of the woman as a consumer or her influence on consumption process is different.

Regarding the values and attitudes of a country, there are some cultures with a strong context like Japan for instance in which there are a lot of fact hard to be understood by other cultures. Firms will gain only if they have a long term approach of Japanese markets. For example, Procter & Gamble had a long term perspective on its products and that was an approach in a Japanese style. Starting with the middle of 1970's, the company gained 20% of the market and made the word "pampers" familiar for Japanese mothers. For these results, the foreign firm has to accept to lose in the first years because the confidence of Japanese people is hard to be gained.

Changes in habits and customs should be carefully monitored especially in cases that indicate a limitation of cultural differences between people.

McDonald's or Coke phenomenon was successful worldwide but that doesn't mean that the world becomes identical with West countries and this is the case especially with Arabian countries.

Understanding the habits of foreign countries is very important in negotiation. All types of communication must be understood in order to negotiate abroad. Americans perceive the lack of action or silence as negative signs. As a result, Japanese negotiators wait for Americans to reduce prices or ameliorate other conditions.

Education is also very important in a culture. For instance, local recruitment will be affected by the availability level of experienced and trained staff. The international manager should be ready to handle with recruitment obstacles. For Japanese culture for example loyalty is very important and employees are seen as members of a large family – the corporation.

If you produce and sell technology, you must take into account the educational level of the potential consumers. Decisions of product adjusting are often influenced by the way in which the consumers are capable to use the product or the service in a correct way.

THE INFLUENCE OF U. S. CORPORATIONS ON LOCAL CULTURES

One of the principal concerns about the new globalization of culture that is taking place in the world is that it doesn't lead only to a homogenization of world culture, but also that it largely represents the “ Americanization” of

world cultures. The spread of American corporations abroad has various consequences on local cultures, some very visible, and others less obvious. For example, the influence of American companies on other countries' cultural identity can be seen with regard to food, which matters on two levels. First, food itself is in many countries an integral aspect of the culture. Second, food restaurants can influence the habits in societies where they operate.

The French are proud of having a unique cuisine that reflects their culture, such as crepes and pastries. Because of their pride in their cuisine, some French people are concerned that U. S. restaurant chains crowd out their own products with fast food. Some French people would argue that fast food does not belong to French society and is of lower quality than their own.

Moreover, restaurant chains not only affect eating habits, but they also influence the traditions in countries where they are located. Starbucks causes cultural concerns in Italy because of the association that Italians make between coffee and leisurely sidewalk cafes. Coffee in Italy is more than a drink; it is part of the way of life and Italian habits. While in the United States it is common for people to buy takeaway coffee for drinking in the street or office, in Italy people usually prefer to relax and chat with peers while drinking coffee. Coffee shops offer a personal, friendly atmosphere that many Italians believe a large chain could not provide. Similarly, many people would prefer to frequent coffee shops that are each unique, while Starbucks offers a standard formula.

Another example can be seen with the introduction of the McDonald's restaurant in China. In the past, it was not considered proper for Chinese children to buy food with their own money, as they were expected to eat what was put in front of them. Because of McDonald's marketing to children, however, kids developed an interest in choosing their own food when going to McDonald's. After some time, it became more of a common practice for children to buy their food with their own money.

We notice a phenomenon of McDonaldization in the world. McDonaldization is the process through which the principles of the fast-food restaurant become to dominate more and more sectors in the most countries in the world. This phenomenon affects all aspects of social life, not only the restaurants: education, work, health services, travel, spare time, alimentation, politics, family etc.

Some authors sustain that McDonaldization is a process of the cultural imperialism used by the American system to dominate other countries. On the other side there are people sustaining that McDonald systems adjust to local medium. McDonaldization is a transnational phenomenon. There is no doubt that McDonald's adjusts to local conditions, realities and tastes. This adjusting capacity led to the success of the system on international markets. But if it adjusts too much, losing its standard methods, it will lose its identity and that would affect its success.

McDonaldization influence the habits of societies as a whole; for example Japanese people didn't eat standing and didn't drink directly from the bottle till the American fast-food chain entered their market. This shows the great

cultural impact of McDonald's on the traditions of other countries. Despite the negative effects on local habits we don't have to forget that McDonald's also changed the sanitary conditions in local restaurants and increased the competition, leading to progress.

Concerns that globalization leads to a dominance of US customs and values are also present with regard to films and the entertainment industry. This is the case with French films in France, for example. Governments from countries like France have attempted to intervene in the functioning of the market to try to protect their local cultural industries, by taking measures such as restricting the number of foreign films that can be shown.

But if a government imposes domestic films, TV shows, or books onto its people, it limits their choice to consume what they prefer. Throughout history, cultures have changed and evolved. Globalization may accelerate cultural change. However, because change is driven by the choice of consumers, the elements of a particular culture will inevitably reflect consumer choice.

Although the United States may play a dominant role within the phenomenon of cultural globalization, it is important to keep in mind that this is not an entirely one-way street. Many other countries also contribute to global culture. Just as American popular culture influences foreign countries, other national cultures are influential within the United States.

Hollywood is a good example of an industry that integrates elements from more than one culture. Most people would think of Hollywood as something entirely American. However, while Hollywood dominates world cinema,

American movies are subject to foreign influence. According to The Economist, “ one reason for Hollywood’s success is that from the earliest days it was open to foreign talent and foreign money.” Many American movies are remakes of foreign films (Asian or European movies). Some examples would be Asian horror movies like The Grudge, The Ring, Shutter, The Eye and more other.

Many film-making companies, producers, and actors in Hollywood are not even American. Arnold Schwarzenegger is from Austria, and Nicole Kidman grew up in Australia. From this perspective, one may argue that Hollywood is a typically global institution.

However, one may also note that actors such as Nicole Kidman and Mel Gibson, upon arriving in Hollywood, were given language lessons to help them lose their foreign accents.

Hollywood producers had them do this largely over sensitivity that American audience might perceive them negatively if they appeared to be foreign. So while Hollywood may incorporate many foreign elements into its craft- especially behind the scenes-its public face is distinctly American.

GLOBALIZATION VS. ASIAN AND ISLAM VALUES

Some government officials in East Asian nations have proclaimed an alternative to the Western cultural model by declaring an adherence to traditional Asian values.

Asian values are typically described as embodying the Confucian ideals of respect for authority, hard work and the belief that the community is more

important than the individual. This is said to be coupled with a preference for economic, social and cultural rights rather than political rights.

Lee Thesis (a Singapore leader Lee Kwan Yew) claims that political freedoms and rights can actually hamper economic growth and development.

According to this notion, order and personal and social discipline, rather than political liberty and freedom, are most appropriate for Asian societies.

Adherents to this view claim that political freedoms, liberties, and democracy are Western concepts, foreign to their traditions.

The controversy over westernization has had major historical implications in the Middle East over the past several decades. Globalization is accelerating some people's concerns about the infusions of Western values in Islamic countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has likewise adopted an approach with the motto "modernization without westernization."

One such example is a Saudi police issue ban on pet dogs and cats. The police have issued a decree banning the sale of the pets, seen as a sign of Western influence.

However, in the past decades, owning dogs or cats has become a fashion statement among Saudis. Showing off a Doberman, pit bull or fancy breed of felines has become a status symbol. For conservatives, it smells of imitating Western trends, just like the fast food, shorts, jeans and pop music that have become more common in the kingdom.

Many governments around the world have attempted to protect their native cultures by imposing bans on what they declare to be foreign cultural

intrusions. For example, with regard to language protection, the Chinese government has attempted to protect the purity of its language by removing the use of foreign words. Authorities in China recently scrutinized the brands and names of over 20, 000 western companies, forcing them to change 2, 000 to more Chinese-sounding names.

But this is not specific only to Asian countries, all the other countries fighting to protect their language. France has attracted the most notoriety for attempting to protect its language from the immigration of foreign words.

The French Academy routinely scours the land for invasive words from other languages, most notably English ones. Words such as “ walkman,” “ talk show,” and “ prime time” have been declared unwelcome foreigners, and the government has attempted-with rather limited success-to replace them with French substitutes.

This movement demonstrates the extreme sensitivity of cultural issues, and the visceral reaction that many people have to what they perceive to be threats to their traditional ways of life.

In an interview that appeared in December 2005 in Asia – Pacific Perspectives magazine, the international economist Yonosuke Hara expressed his thoughts about the potential of a dynamic Asian economic model that could serve as a new regional economic system and could prevent the tendency to a global standardization.

According to Hara, „ the world will never become standardized through globalization. Asian societies have their own complex structures. In XXI-st century, the Asian economic model which is the product of its own history

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and social structure will continue. It is not necessary to undertake an economic system that alternate between joy and sadness on a profit basis and Asian countries should progress to an economic system valorizing long term profits through the production of goods and their distribution to the entire society.”

CONCLUSION

Efforts to protect local culture from the homogenizing effects of globalization are often tangled with other, sometimes questionable, motives, including economic protectionism and the political suppression of ideas. Because the topic of culture can, almost by definition, include almost every human effort, it is often difficult to draw lines around what are legitimate cultural activities, worthy of special protective measures.

Many organizations and groups have been formed at the local, national, and international level that aims to promote the protection of traditional cultures. Some aim to study the matter more deeply so that we may understand more clearly the implications of globalization on culture, and others are already taking on advocacy roles.

Globalization critic Jeremy Rifkin has suggested there may be a need to establish a World Cultural Organization to help represent diverse cultures and put cultural protection on an equal footing with the WTO (Rifkin, 2001). Another group, the International Network for Cultural Diversity, has made a similar argument for an institution to ensure that culture is being protected. The INCD has proposed that:

Governments must not enter into any agreements that constrain local cultures and the policies that support them.

A new international agreement should be created, which can provide a permanent legal foundation for cultural diversity.

An informal group of governments that has already been created to try to find solutions to cultural questions is the International Network on Cultural Policy (INCP). The INCP is an international forum through which representatives of member countries can exchange views on emerging cultural policy issues. One of the ways in which the INCP seeks to strengthen cultures is by advocating more cultural exceptions to the global trade rules of the WTO. Forty-five countries are members of the INCP, including Canada, France, China, and the United Kingdom, but not the United States.

In the coming years, efforts to protect traditional cultures are likely to play an increasingly prominent role in new trade agreements and within international cooperative ventures. Indeed, a “ global” effort to protect local cultures from “ globalization” would be a somewhat ironic development. But increasingly, local activists are trying to learn how to harness new worldwide forces to cope with the impact of international trends that have cultural effects.