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CULTURAL AND GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF GLOBALIZATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS OF LATVIA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE

Summary: The theoretical part of this paper reflects on the phenomenon of globalization. The authors of the article point out the methodological aspect of globalization studies and express the belief that globalization covers all spheres of humankind. Globalization causes problems which call for an investigation of its sources and conditions. A novel methodological approach which comprises both scientific as well as social aspects of this phenomenon is required to grasp globalization's main problems. It seems worthwhile to reconsider the traditional concepts of "socio-economical formation", "civilization" and "culture". The empirical part of this paper analyzes the results of a sociological survey conducted at the Latvia University of Agriculture with the aim to explain varying views on globalization held by its students. The survey included 273 students from all faculties and all academic years (8,3% of all full-time students). The results obtained in this survey reflect recent developments which shaped Latvia's present-day condition, taking under consideration the cultural and geopolitical aspects of globalization.

Key words: globalization, politics, consciousness, student opinion.

Globalization is first of all a process of world integration. It joins together all fields of human activities: economic, political, social and mental. Professor of the University of Warwick J. A. Scholte divides between five important features of globalization:

- Internationalization: here globalization is viewed simply as another adjective to describe cross-border relations between countries. It describes the growth in international exchange and interdependence. With growing flows of trade and capital investment there is a possibility of moving beyond an international economy to the globalized economy;
- Deterritorialization or the spread of supraterritoriality: here globalization entails a reconfiguration of geography, so that social space is no longer wholly mapped in terms of territorial places, territorial distances and territorial borders;
- Liberalization: here globalization refers to a process of removing government-imposed restrictions on movements between countries in order to create an open, borderless world economy;
- Universalization: here 'global' is used in the sense of being 'worldwide' and globalization is the process of spreading various objects and experiences to people

at all corners of the earth. A classic example of this would be the spread of computing, television etc.;

- Westernization or modernization (especially in American or European form): here globalization is understood as dynamics, whereby the social structures of modernity (capitalism, rationalism, industrialism, bureaucratism) are spread the world over, normally destroying pre-existent cultures and local self-determination in the process¹.

Not only integration is being viewed in context of globalization processes but also several features of differentiation of the world related to emergence and formation of some local identities. Thus globalization is the most complicated phenomenon of the scientific discourse. Nowadays it is reasonable to speak of a necessity of a new scientific discipline *globalistics* which would incorporate aspects of philosophy, economics, sociology, ecology, political science and even psychology.

Several complicated problems related to globalization can be distinguished in the modern society. First of all these are problems of economical integration, ecology, human rights protection, international terrorism, problems of preserving national cultures, languages and other. In order to successfully solve globalization related problems, firstly, the reasons of their emergence have to be revealed, and, secondly, the necessary conditions, which have to be taken into account in the process of problem solving, need to be uncovered.

As to the main reasons, several of them should be highlighted: scientific and technological progress in the field of material production; liberalization of politics; polarisation of the social field; insufficient rationalisation of the mental sector etc. The main conditions of solving the globalization related problems are: relative public consensus about the necessity of solving problems; highly-levelled education and science development; political balance; certain level of mass media means; emergence and development of global consciousness.

Taking into account these aspects, a global, human approach to solving global problems has to be developed. Working on such approach includes considering several principles. For instance, principle of biosphere protection, principle of harmonization of economic processes, principle of stabilisation of human population growth etc. Traditional approaches of 20th century used to view economic growth and growth of human population as necessities, but nowadays these for the society development quasi necessary factors have to be revised. In certain rate a continuous economic growth can provoke economic overheating, develop consumerism, cause serious damage to biosphere and expose to danger the whole development of human race as itself. Only a balanced society development, where anthropogenic borders of countries, universalism balance and variety are taken into account, can be considered.

¹ J. A. Scholte, *Globalization: A critical introduction*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 15-16.

Also the concepts of economic formations, civilization and culture have to be revised. If, according to Marx, the notion of social-economic formations emphasizes the economic basis, thus meaning the production relations, then in the civilization concept the emphasis is placed on social psychology, the creation of manhood (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Social-economic formation

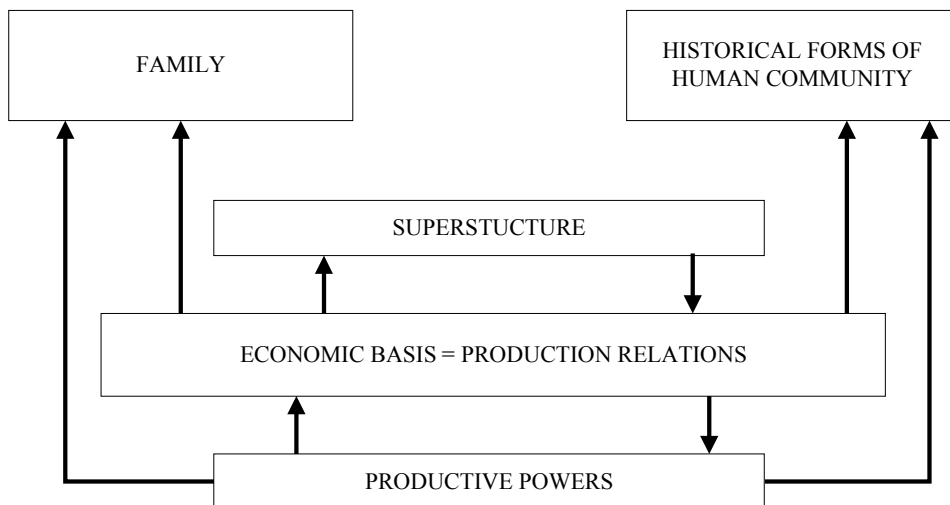


Table 2. Civilization²

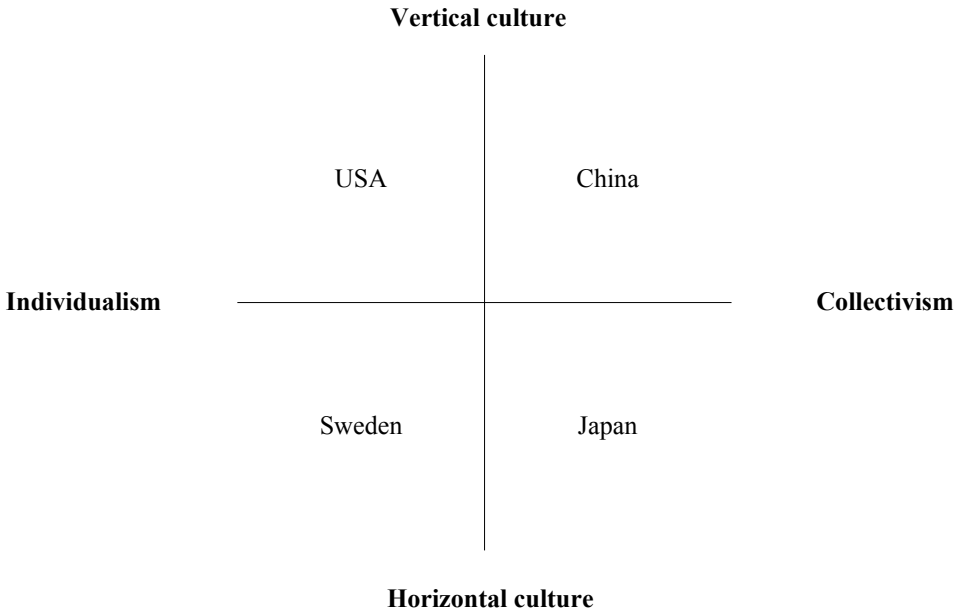
| Type and form of the family | ECOLOGICAL RELATIONS | ORGANIZATIONAL FORM OF THE ECONOMIC LIFE | Social-economic community |
|--|---|--|---|
| SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY | | | |
| Natural and demographic conditions of the particular society | Technical-technological basis of civilization | | Ethnic, historical development features |

In its turn the concept of culture does not fit into the schemes of social-economic formation and civilization, yet it substantially improves the set of methods in globalization research. Thereby it is productive to present the notion of culture in the horizontal and vertical cut of social relations.³

² С. Э. Крапивенский, *Социальная философия: Учебник для студентов вузов*, Москва: ВЛАДОС, 1998.

³ V. Bariss, *Tolerance kā demokrātijas vērtība*, Jelgava, 2008, p. 39.

Chart 1. Culture typology matrix



Vertical cultures perceive hierarchy as the natural form of social relations. Horizontal cultures admit the collective existence to be the natural form of social relations. Thus is, for example, Latvia, same like USA, in the aspect of culture placed in the sector of vertical culture and individualism.

In the process of globalization human spirituality gets more and more attention. Mental dimensions in globalization demands the consideration of human conscience. Here has to be said that conscience is not an abstract object which exists outside the human activities. Social conscience is the same as human's conscience. Compared to an individual conscience it only differs by the direction vector (intention) and other contents, since individual conscience is the reflection of individual being, but social conscience is the reflection of social being. Basically social conscience is related to globalization. Exactly the social conscience mirrors the globalization as such.

After the collapse of socialistic system in Eastern Europe certain changes in social conscience of people happened. First of all they were related to economic and political conscience. The economic conscience had to be switched from servant's conscience to master's conscience. In socialism people used to live apart from public property, however, afterwards obtaining this property, many did not know what to do with it and chose the way which promised easier options of getting money. It turned out that masters cannot live wholly without their opposites - servants. This is why it is necessary to connect these two phenomena in con-

science, though they exist connected in economic life. Also the attitudes towards competition and partnership have to be modified. They complement each other in economics, too.

In the last few years some essential world changes have happened. They require analogical developments of political conscience. However, the political conscience of people changes slowly. There still is a prejudice in conscience that politics has to control economics. Criticism against politicians whose inactivity has caused the slow development of economic life seems to be not only trendy but also pragmatic.

In order to find out students' opinion on globalization processes, 273 students were surveyed (April 2009, from the total number of 3291 full-time students, representing all faculties and years at the Latvia University of Agriculture. Problems of globalization were researched for the first time at the University; therefore students' opinion deserves special attention. All research output scores are presented in percents.

These are answers on question: Do the politicians of Latvian Parliament *Saeima* consider the factor of globalization?

- more than 2/3 of members of parliament do – 4
- less than 2/3 of members of parliament do – 14
- less than 1/3 of members of parliament do – 16
- abstain from answering – 66

It turns out that in their work the parliament members of *Saeima* pay little attention to globalization processes. In other words – they act so as if the globalization did not have anything to do with Latvia. During the period from 1 January 2004 till 18 November 2007 the parliament members of 8th and 9th *Saeima* mentioned the word *globalization* in their sessions only 14 times⁴.

Answering the question “Do the mass media cover the information on globalization sufficiently?” only 27% of respondents replied positively, the remainder of 73% replied negatively.

In transition from the communistic morality to the morality of a democratic, open society the contradiction between morals and virtue has almost completely been lost from the human conscience. Regarding the moral conscience, globalization activates moral freedom, responsibility, respect and tolerance. 51% of respondents consider these values *very important*, 34 % – *important*.

Regarding spirituality in aspect of globalization processes, the phenomenon of national cultures has to be mentioned. Globalization literature is dealing with the paradox of globalization – “borders between countries tend to lose their meaning, whereas the national questions are getting more important”. Concerning the development of national cultures the majority of respondents think that “globalization endangers national cultures” (64%). Only 36% of respondents think that “globali-

⁴ D. Hanovs, *Šeit, visur un tagad... Globalizācija Latvijā: konteksti, diskursi un dalībnieki*, Rīga: SIA „Drukātava”, 2008, p. 204.

zation does not endanger national cultures and creates new possibilities for their development”.

To the question “Does globalization have impact on mass culture in the world?” the majority of respondents gave an affirmative answer: 26% of respondents think that the impact is very big, 68% think that it does have impact, and only 6% of respondents consider the impact unimportant.

Environment aesthetization plays a great role in the spiritual culture. Nowadays a peculiar expression of Renaissance is occurring. Representatives of various civilizations and cultures unite in common experience, connecting on the level of world art masterpieces and taking part in different mass culture events. In many cases the beautiful unites people. Nowadays it is hard to find an idea which consolidates the masses. For instance in Latvia R. Lazda deals with this idea of environment adjustment according to the beauty principles⁵.

Beauty certainly unites people. When surveying students on beauty, we wanted to find out if students see any positive factors regarding beauty in globalization. It turns out the majority of respondents think that beauty unites people.

- Beauty unites people both in a particular environment, and in the whole world – 42
- Beauty unites people in a particular environment – 40
- Beauty does not unite people – 18

In the next table the general opinion of students on globalization can be seen:

Table 3. Students' opinion on globalization

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------|------|
| positive | 11,7 | 59,1 |
| more positive than negative | 47,4 | |
| more negative than positive | 17,4 | 20,3 |
| negative | 2,9 | |
| neutral | 20,6 | |

This data indicates that the majority of students (59,1%) regards globalization as positive. Only 20,3% or every fifth respondent regards it as negative. Almost the same number of respondents (20,6%) takes the neutral view, ie. neither they accept globalization nor reject it.

The respondents' opinion on globalization might seem more abstract, not connected to personal positive or negative examples. However, the opinion on EU and NATO is far more concrete and connected to personal experiences. The opinion on EU and NATO is also very various between respondents.

⁵ R. Lazda, *Latvijas mērķis*, Available at: <http://www.delfi.lv/news/comment/comment/article.php?id=24258639>, 18. 12. 2011

Table 4. Students' opinion on EU and NATO

| | EU | | NATO | |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| positive | 14,7 | 38,2 | 37,2 | 79,8 |
| more positive than negative | 23,5 | | 42,6 | |
| more negative than positive | 38,3 | 58,7 | 9,3 | 15,4 |
| negative | 20,4 | | 6,1 | |
| neutral | 3,7 | | 4,8 | |

The research shows that the positive relation towards NATO (79,8%) is twice as good as towards EU. This is due to the fact that Latvia's participation in NATO is less evident than in EU, if not regarding the military participation of Latvian soldiers in hot points of the planet. NATO ensures national safety and this aspect is particularly important, when considering historical experience of the past. The bureaucratic implementation of directives from Brussels and the global economic stagnation have driven Latvia to increased inflation, growing unemployment, economic recession and decreased standards of living. All these occurrences are often associated with Latvia's participation in EU and this has certainly influenced students' opinion.

In relation to the question if globalization has somehow influenced the personal life, the majority of respondents could not give an answer (68,9%) and only 15,3% gave a positive answer.

However, regarding the future many students bind their hopes to globalization processes, though mostly their life plans build upon purely mercantile interests. To the question "In future what globalization can bring you?" many respondents answered as follows:

- possibilities of intercultural interaction - 9,4
- possibilities of studying abroad - 11,9
- possibilities of travelling - 27,4
- possibilities of working abroad - 32,0
- shopping possibilities - 7,1
- other - 12,2

The output data shows that almost every third responding student is interested in working abroad and every eighth - in studying there.

In the process of globalization the possibilities of Latvia's cooperation with other economic regions of the world increase. Answering the question "Name the geopolitical partners of Latvia in global cooperation", the opinion divided as follows:

- EU - 51,3
- USA - 7,9
- Eastern neighbours - 21,4
- Southeast Asia - 9,7
- others - 9,7

Not surprisingly the respondents consider the EU to be the main partner in global cooperation. After Latvia joined EU in 2004, the economic and political connections have started to dominate. The second position of Eastern neighbours (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other countries of Commonwealth of Independent States) can be explained with the economic connections, where Latvia functions as the middle link between the East and the West. It is hard to explain why USA is the last one in this list although Latvia has established close economic and political relationship with them.

To the question “What hinders Latvian involvement in global cooperation?” the students’ opinions were manifold:

- Soviet past - 16,7
- economic backwardness - 24,8
- the underdevelopment of democratic relationship - 5,6
- incomprehension of global processes - 11,7
- national mentality - 12,4
- incompetence of the national government - 28,0
- other - 2,8

The data shows that the respondents consider the economic backwardness of the country and the incompetence of the national government to be the main barriers against global cooperation in Latvia.

Concerning the driving forces as catalysts in global processes, the students’ opinion divides as follows:

What are the catalysts of globalization?

- economic factors - 39,9
- political factors - 16,4
- geo-ecological factors - 6,6
- informative, technological factors - 26
- ideological, religious factors - 4
- culturally enlightening factors - 7,1

Students tend to see the economic factors and informative, technological factors as the main forces of global development.

Globalization develops in accordance with the development of globalization centres. As such centres count: Euro-American, Southeast Asian, and Arabic-Islamic. Basically students, who are living in Latvia, experience the influence of Euro-American lifestyle both in political, and in economic relationship. In a sociological survey the Euro-American centre was admitted to be the leading centre of

globalization by 77,3% of respondents. The expansion of Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese and other goods makes students to consider the influence of Southeast Asian centre, mentioned by every fifth respondent of the survey (21,2%). However, the influence of the Arabic-Islamic world in the processes of globalization is considered by students to be quite unimportant (1,5%).

Today as the counterweight to globalization the movement of anti-globalization has emerged. To the question "What do you think about the activities of anti-globalists?" students answered:

- positive – 9,5
- negative – 17,5
- neutral – 73,0

The high rate of the answer "neutral" is possibly explainable with the fact that the mass media poorly reflect the problems of globalization, including the movement of anti-globalists.

This sociological survey has uncovered not only views and evaluations of students in regard to globalization, but also some kind of incomprehension of these problems. Therefore the question whether a lecture course on globalization should be offered to students (of Latvia University of Agriculture) is important. This question was answered positively by 52,6% of respondents who think that such course should be introduced in every faculty of the university.

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Kulturowe oraz geopolityczne aspekty globalizacji z perspektywy studentów Łotewskiego Uniwersytetu Rolniczego.

Streszczenie: Teoretyczna część artykułu zawiera refleksje nad fenomenem globalizacji. Autorzy przedstawiają aspekty metodologiczne badań nad globalizacją i wyrażają pogląd, że obecnie obejmuje ona wszystkie sfery ludzkiego życia. Globalizacja powoduje różnorodne problemy, które wymagają badania oraz analizy ich przyczyn i skutków. Nowatorskie podejście łączące naukowe oraz społeczne aspekty staje się konieczne, aby pojąć owe problemy oraz skutecznie stawić im czoło. Warto przemyśleć ponownie znaczenie pojęć „formacja społeczno-ekonomiczna”, „cywilizacja” oraz „kultura”.

Empiryczna część artykułu zawiera analizę wyników badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych wśród studentów Łotewskiego Uniwersytetu Rolniczego, które mają wyjaśnić różne podejścia oraz opinie na temat globalizacji. Ankietą objęto łącznie 273 studentów ze wszystkich kierunków i wszystkich roczników (8,3% ankietowanych stanowili studenci studiów dziennych). Wyniki ankiety pokazują obecną sytuację na Łotwie uwzględniając kulturowe oraz geopolityczne aspekty globalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja, polityka, świadomość, opinia studenta.