Cultural Change and Continuity in the Globalizing World

The concept of cultural heritage preservation has undergone a major metamorphosis during the Modern Era; however, recent changes may be defined as a transfiguration rather than a transformation. Volume, typology, and spectrum of cultural heritage, but first values and reasons for preservation of historic environment are subject to change. Our galloping world is seeking for change per se – for permanent ‘update’ and ‘upgrade’, with a highly rated value of ‘here-and-now’, and a priority given for ‘new’, ‘original’ and ‘unique’ features, including individual lifestyles. However, individualization (customization) is in fact strictly limited to leisure time activities, while work and other basic spheres of contemporary human life are under increasing pressure of uniformity and regulations, which are supposed to replace traditions and custom law, where social order is under request. However a structuring framework of traditions and cultural continuity is going weaker and weaker, thus culture started to be created ‘ad hoc’ – for specific needs of an organization or a social group – and therefore becoming a short-term phenomenon. On the other hand, the inherited culture constitutes the vast majority of any human culture; many sociologists in general identified culture as heritage.

Living in a such a world leads to a natural question: is there any chance that cultural identity and continuity (although declared as a top priority) will survive in a common life, or it will flourish exceptionally on specific occasions or in ‘reservations’? This question is extremely important, because human societies must accept rapid change in order to maintain or gain importance in a globalizing world, but on the other hand, they experience heavy uniforming pressure of globalization.

How do globalization affect specific characteristics of a local culture? A good illustration of such a ‘universalizing’ transformation of a distinct cultural context is given by a translation of Pater Noster, one of the main Christian prayers, into the ‘language of universal meanings’. The author Anna Wierzbicka, Professor of Linguistics at the Australian National University, who focused her work on the identification of the universal human concepts, created an original method – Natural Semantic Metalanguage – in order to make texts of a single culture meaningful in any cultural context with the help of linguistic universals. However, these ‘simple and universal human concepts’, change the prayer in such a way, that any Christian culture could hardly identify it at once.

Modern English (1970) text of the Prayer:

Our Father in Heaven, let your holy name be known, let your kingdom come, and your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today the bread that we need, and forgive us our wrongs, as we forgive those who have done wrong to us. Do not lead us into trial, but save us from evil. For yours the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Anna Wierzbicka’s transformation: I am thinking of You: You are someone different from other people, people exist because You want them to, You know all the people, You want to do good to all the people, You can do good to all the people, if You would not do good to all the people, they should not be able to live. As well I am thinking of You: people cannot see You, because You are someone different from other people, people can know You, when they want to do good to other people, just as You want to do good to all the people. I know: all the other people can think of You the same way, all other people are the same as me, therefore, when I am thinking of You, I want to think of other people. ²

What conclusion can be drawn out of this comparison? Cultural homogenization excludes objects from their context. Although meaning is a universal human cognitive activity, it always occurs within a cultural context and vice versa. Globalization changes the world rapidly, and physical structures of different cultures – their cultural environments – are extremely vulnerable.

Historic Settlements – Honourable Antiquities or Cultural Recourses?

From the anthropological perspective culture often is identified not only with human activities, but also with an environment as well: ‘Culture is man-made environment, continuum of things and events in a cause and effect relationship; the function of this external, man-made environment is to make life secure and enduring for the society of human beings living within the cultural system; thus culture may be seen as the most recent, the most highly developed means of promoting the security and continuity of life, in a series that began with the simple reflex’³. We may