

Social and Cultural Values of Catalans – between Identity and Reality

Mariana Viorica BUDA

Abstract. The Culture of Region is one of the most powerful beliefs of Catalans, especially for those living in Spain. During the time, these beliefs transformed them in a community with very strong desire of independence. The aim of this article is to reveal which are the social and cultural beliefs that made them feel so different from the rest of the Spanish territory and which is the reality of Catalans. What does influence so much the culture of Catalans? What is their identity?

Keywords: *the culture of region, social values, cultural values, identity, minority, Catalan*

The identity saw by the eyes of culture has always been a challenging issue in the field of social sciences and has always been of great interest for the scholars. For this, national boundaries are traditionally the ones that set the scope. At the level of European Union, Spain represents a particular case for the fact that here we can speak about a great decentralization at the administrative level which supposes also a great split in the cultural values or even identity. The national culture level together with subculture or individual levels get more particular as we get closer to the individual. The aim of our paper is to put in the light the social and cultural beliefs of a specific part of Spain, Catalonia, and of its inhabitants, the Catalans, and to contrast that with the national culture. We will reveal that going through the process of decentralization of Spain, passing by the linguistic diversity and stopping to the day-by-day reality.

1. Regionalism in Spain. Catalonia

The end of the Franco's regime in Spain brought the so much wanted democracy and the recognition of cultural, linguistic and national differences for the people. The National Constitution from 1978, issued after Franco's death, still

effective today in the country, holds sacred the mention of linguistic, cultural and some degree of national pluralism.¹

It is commonly known that the Spanish Constitution guarantees the right to form communities with a specific right of autonomy. Decentralization and devolution were and still are the order words in Spain and this is the process that made possible the creation of the 17 autonomous communities. Cultural and linguistic homogenization among the 17 autonomous communities has never been 100% successful in Spain and the process is still decreasing. These communities have a lot of powers in Spain, and, furthermore, legislative, financial and administrative power, even if they have different powers from a community to the other. There are voices that say that the country could evolve into a federal structure, even if Spain is a centralized system.² But, even if Spain resemble to a federal state, it is not and maybe will never evolve to such a structure.

For the Spanish autonomous communities, the problem is that the Constitution doesn't mention exactly the limits of this autonomy. Even the way of expressing is quite vague: "after five years and following reform of their statutes, these autonomous communities will be able progressively to extend their powers within the framework of article 149" (Spanish Constitution, article 148.2). There are no others references explaining which these powers are.³ Practically, the official document that gives autonomy to the autonomous communities is the Statute of Autonomy.

There are mainly three autonomous communities in Spain that took a great advantage from the 1978 Constitution: Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia. And this is because of the fact that these three regions maintain even nowadays a regional language and the nationalist feeling is very strong. Our paper will focus on Catalonia only, because lately this Spanish region is more vocal and maybe more demanding than the others two or than the others autonomous communities of

¹ Enric Martínez-Herrera and Thomas Jeffrey Miley, "The Constitution and the politics of National Identity in Spain" in *Nations and Nationalism 16 (1)*, *Journal of the Association for the study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 2010, 6–30. Accessed January 5, 2021. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00432.x>

² Mariana Buda, "Catalan, Basque and Galician, Regional Languages at the Borders of Spain. The Culture of Region" in *The Image of the Other in the European Intercultural Dialogue*, Ed. Dana PANTEA, Ioan HORGA, Mircea BRIE, 2017, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://eiab.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Image-of-the-Other-in-the-European-Intercultural-Dialogue.pdf>

³ Michael T. Newton and Peter J. Donaghy, *Institutions of Modern Spain. A political and economic guide*, Cambridge University Press 1997, p.136

Spain.

The Catalan Statute of Autonomy provides basic institutional regulation for Catalonia, under the National Constitution from 1978, sure. The Statute defines the rights and the obligations of Catalans, of the political institutions from Catalonia, their competences and their relations with the rest of the country, but also the financing of the Government of Catalonia. The latest Statute of Autonomy dates from 2006 and it was approved by the Catalan citizens by a referendum where 74% of the people said “yes”.⁴

The most important specifications of the Statute are the fact that Catalonia is defined as a nation in the preamble of the text, the historical rights are mentioned as a basis for the self-governing, the role of Catalan language is consolidated in the region by its introduction as a main language in administration and by the obligation that everyone has to study it, the introduction of more rights and obligations for the Catalan citizens, beside the rights and the obligations that exist in the National Constitution, the consolidation of the competencies of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia, the creation of a High Prosecutor of Catalonia and the Council of Justice of Catalonia and also new competencies for the Generalitat and better definition of them. There is also mentioned an establishment of the bilateral relations between the Spanish Government and Catalonia, a better definition of foreign actions of Catalonia and the possibility of creation of delegations abroad for the Generalitat, and, another important aspect, in the Statute is mentioned the extension of powers in matter of financing.⁵ This document didn’t see the light of the day without controversies. Even if in the Preamble of the Statute Catalonia is called “nation” and this was approved by the majority of the political parties, in the opinion of the Spanish Government this denomination is rather declaratory than legal, because the National Constitution mentions the “unity of the Spanish people”. In this particularly aspect, the difference between identity and reality is the fact that the Government of Catalonia consider that the Statute of Catalonia is over the National Constitution. Also the majority of the population takes it like that.

In conclusion, the regionalization in Catalonia is a good idea for maintaining the diversity, the regional languages, the administration, but it should be established

⁴ Laura Chaqués-Bonafont, Mariona Tomàs. “Public Policies in Catalonia. From self-rule to shared rule?” in *Pôle-Sud*, 2014/1, no. 40, p. 54, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-pole-sud-2014-1-page-43.htm>

⁵ Parlament de Catalunya, “Estatuto de autonomía de Cataluña. Texto consolidado”, Preamble, p. 19, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.parlament.cat/document/cataleg/48146.pdf>

a more clear line between national regulations and regional power. This would bring out the Catalan identity and would make clearer the role of the state.

2. Collective, Social and Cultural Identity in Catalonia

The term culture, often misleading, is used to depict something as being refined or with superior, selected and valuable attributes, in other words, cultivated artifacts of a society. The concept of culture implies not only the shared *modus operandi* (valuing something highly) but also the shared values that underpin the *modus operandi* (a core value) and that there is a characteristic way of perceiving its social environment common to a culture. The concept of shared values resulting in shared behavior and artifacts can also be observed to other collectives outside one's own group or society. Briefly, the definition of the term itself, suggests the presence of a larger culture created by the various cultures that make up a society's whole culture.⁶ Or, culture according to Dahl is "an abstract entity which involves a number of usually man-made, collective and shared artifacts, behavioral patterns, values or other concepts which taken together form the culture as a whole".⁷

Is important to note that culture is not inherent or genetically transmitted, because is situated between human behavior and individual personality, thus culture-resultant behavior is subjective and modifies according to individual personality. The fact that culture is not directly linked to the individuals creates a problem in establishing how many individuals who share a culture make up a culture. For example, the notion of European culture suggests that people share common similarities despite different political, religious and language barriers. This is the reason why we can speak about cultural identity.

Collective and social identity are very closed terms, but still different. The collective (group) identity concept was first introduced by Freud, who says that the individual is always part of a group. His theory was later developed by other scholars

⁶ Stephan Dahl, "Intercultural Research: The Current State of Knowledge", Middlesex University Business School London, 2005, Accessed January 10, 2021, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=658202

⁷ Ibid., 1

like Jung, Fromm or Tajfel.⁸ The concept of social identity was defined in relation with the term “social categorization”. That means that the society can be seen by its individuals in function of their social attributes as gender, class, nationality, religion, profession, hobby and interests. These divisions predetermine the relationships between individuals.⁹ Some scholars place the collective and social identity on equality; others put the two concepts in the same group.

In other words, the identity is not something innate. All forms of identity are built throughout the life of the individual and it is always composed of a series of components. The concept of social or cultural identity determines people in a social, cultural and historical environment. And this is the situation in Catalonia. The identity became a powerful argument both for confrontation with groups from different social contexts and for association with different social, cultural and political grouping.

In Catalonia, the power that autonomous community has, influences people to feel different from the others of the Spanish territory. Having a language on its own, a flag that is different from that national one and also a better economy (due to the geographical position on the Spanish territory) increases the regional spirit. In Catalonia we can talk about an attempt to build a national identity using internal and external tools.

3. The tools of Catalan’s identification

The social-constructivist theory says that the knowledge of the world that we develop is influenced by the society and the majority of the things that we perceive to be a reality depend on our own assumptions. The perspective of socio-constructivism is that a lot of the things around us that we take naturally are actually socially built and, therefore, can change if the society changes. The theory of social constructivism states that any sense is created in social terms. In other terms, the social constructions may not be real, so the social constructions are an invention of

⁸ Diana Petkova, “Cultural Identity in a pluralistic world” in *Cultural Identity in an intercultural context*, Ed. Diana Petkova and Jaakko Lehtonen, 2005, p. 12, Accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/896244/Cultural_Identity_in_an_Intercultural_Context

⁹ Ibid., 13

a given society and therefore do not reflect the objective reality.¹⁰

In the field of International Relations, since the 90s, the culture and the identity receive a lot of attention and therefore academic works have been written on the influence of culture in the construction of identities. Alexander Wendt, a leading author in the field of Theories of International Relations, argues that identity can modify the aims, interests, attitudes of states, and thus is a defining feature of the policies followed by governments.¹¹ The relationship between language, identity and political power has also been studied in the light of the changes brought about by globalization and the media revolution. At the present time the rapid changes in societies but also the speed with which everything changes, condition the definition of our individual and social identity, as seen above.

Following these theories, the identity is a social construct that creates a person or a group's perspective in the society. The identity is constructed by language, cultural heritage, flags, the way of life and other factors. This identity is educated and cultivated through history and become the second nature of each individual.¹² In the case of Spain, Catalonia, the identity generates a conflict between the national government and Catalonia's government. It is because the identity creates a shared perception among the people. Furthermore, any material or symbolic threat made to this shared identity play an important role in initiating or sustaining a destructive pattern of intergroup conflict among different identities.¹³ Hubert I, Dermawan W. and Akim note in their research about the Catalan identity that even if the identity is not the initiating factor behind a conflict, its implication is inevitable and universal and will host much more issues. In this case, the identity can be explained on a larger scale, as a resource conflict between two parties who feel that they have a right over disputed resources because of their identity factors. It is the case in one of Catalan disputed sectors of interest from Spain, its economy.¹⁴

The conflict that exists in Catalonia, Spain, between the center and the

¹⁰ Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Câteva răspunsuri la întrebarea "De ce a avut succes socio-constructivismul ca teorie a relațiilor internaționale. In Direcții principale în studiul Relațiilor Internaționale în România. Coord. Ruxandra Ivan. Ed. Institutul European, 2007

¹¹ Alexander Wendt, "Social theory of international politics", Cambridge University Press, 1999

¹² Ignatius Hubert, Windy Dermawan, and Akim, "Catalan identity and paradiplomacy strategy in Catalonia's independence movement". In *Jurnal Politik Internasional* Vol. 22 No. 2. 2020, Page 317-337, DOI: 10.7454/global.v22i2.485, accessed January 22, 2022

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

periphery, is not only an internal one; it's already a culture and a way of life, a way of identifying. It also may be seen as a struggle between the center, which is the Spanish government and the periphery, which is the Catalan government. Miley and Garvía (2019), in their article about the conflict in Catalonia, explain that the Spanish government cannot fully enforce their majority rule over Catalonia without appearing to be tyrannizing their minority identity.¹⁵ So, in this situation, identity is used as a reason that the minority will use it in order to protect the survival of their identity.

In Catalonia may be observed how identity is something that has been long collectively own by the Catalans as a historical pride and mutual connection that unite them. This identity survived to many attempts of eradication from the Spanish government.¹⁶ Furthermore, this identity of Catalans helps them to bend together beyond location, education, occupation, and generation.

There are many attempts of drawing the Catalan identity and identification in the literature of political and social sciences. We would like to mention maybe one of the most important studies related to the Catalan identification, and this is the study conducted by Juan Linz and his collaborators a long time ago, during the transition to democracy's period in Spain.¹⁷ They use the indicator of subjective national identification that allows people to identify themselves on a scale, ranging from "Spanish," to "more Spanish than Catalan," to "equally Spanish and Catalan," to "more Catalan than Spanish," to "Catalan." This indicator has been used in many surveys¹⁸ in Spain in recent decades and it allows facilitating the ability to analyze the evolution of social bases of support for different national projects in Spain. A systematic overview of the evolution of this indicator would be an interesting instrument to measure the conceptions of Catalans regarding their identity. According to recent surveys¹⁹, the Catalan population is currently divided among

¹⁵ Thomas Jeffrey Miley, Roberto Garvía, "Conflict in Catalonia: A Sociological Approximation", *Genealogy* 2019, 3, 56. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3040056>, accessed January 22, 2022

¹⁶ Ignatius Hubert et al, p. 325

¹⁷ Juan, Linz, Marta, Gómez-Reino, Didier Vila, and Francisco Orizo, 1981. "Informe sociológico sobre el cambio político en España, 1975–1981". Fundación FOESSA. IV Informe FOESSA. Madrid: Euramérica, vol. 1, p. 35

¹⁸ Thomas Jeffrey Miley, p. 9

¹⁹ Josep Maria, Oller, Albert Satorra, and Adolf Tobeña. 2019b. "Unveiling Pathways for the Fissure among Secessionists and Unionists in Catalonia: Identity, Family Language, and Media Influence". Palgrave Communications, p. 45

some 20% who identify as exclusively Catalan, another 22.5% who identify as “more Catalan,” another 37.9% who identify as equally Catalan and Spanish, 6.9% who identify as “more Spanish,” and 7.6% who identify as exclusively Spanish.

Although there has been a proliferation of interpretations of the dynamics of Catalans identification, going from identity as a social construct to identity through language, flag and history or culture, from conflict between periphery and center or by the way someone perceive themselves, the question of Catalan identification is and will still remain of actuality in our field of study. There will be published other theories and studies regarding the subject and the Catalans will still be object of research for the scholars.

4. Politics and polity in today's Catalonia

The question of values is important to be discussed as well in the context of Politics and polity in a region. The Politics and the polity of a region or a country stress usually the general conception and the mentality of the people. That's the reason why, in this part, we will stress some important aspects related to the above mentioned subjects.

Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain, with the status of historic region in the Spanish Constitution from 1978 (Spanish Constitution, article 143.1). It is important to mention that in September 2005, the Catalan Parliament approved the definition of Catalonia as a "nation" in the preamble of the new Statute of Autonomy. So, the *Generalitat de Catalunya* is the institution in which Catalonia's self-government is politically organized. It is made up of the Parliament, the President of the Generalitat and the Executive Council or Government of Catalonia. The Statute of Autonomy gives the *Generalitat* of Catalonia the powers to carry out the functions of self-government. These can be exclusive, concurrent and shared with the Spanish state or with the directors. The Generalitat has jurisdiction in various matters of culture, education, health, justice, environment, communications, transport, commerce, public safety and local government. Catalonia has its own police force, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, although the Spanish government has agents in the region for matters related to border control, terrorism and immigration. Most of the justice system is administered by the Spanish judiciary. The legal system is uniform throughout Spain, except for the so-called 'civil law', which is administered

separately within Catalonia.²⁰ This being the framework, is somehow understandable why the Catalans identify themselves as different from Spanish and how this social and cultural value was created.

The relationship between Madrid and Catalonia started to deteriorate in 2010 when the Statute was overturned by Spain's Supreme Court for being deemed as unsuited to Spain's constitution.²¹ Enric Martínez-Herrera and his collaborator consider in fact that the fundamental ambiguity lies in the inclusion of the term 'recognize'²² in the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia. They say that "the term seems to signal a source of 'rights' and/or 'authority' that both precedes the constitutive moment and cannot in any obvious way be claimed to 'emanate' from an 'indivisible Spanish people' as such. Rather, it appears that this 'authority' emanates from the nationalities and regions themselves, who are thereby already constituted as collective subjects before the constitutive moment, rather than as mere parts of an 'indivisible Spanish people'".²³ In this context, on 1 October 2017, the Catalan Government supporting independence allowed an independence referendum to be held for the citizens of Catalonia. As a result, this referendum revealed that 90% of voters claimed to be independent from Spain. That was the moment when the Catalan Government declared itself independent from Spain. It was on 27 of October 2017. This faced a harsh crackdown from the Spanish government.

From that moment the conflict but also the discussions to solve it has reached a deadlock. Ignatius Hubert and his collaborators mention that "the Spanish government on one side argued against Catalan independence on the basis of sovereignty, while Catalonia argued for independence on the basis of its unique cultural heritage and identity which they believe are endangered by Spanish imposed rules. This deadlock leads to Catalonia finding different route to achieve their goals. One of them is through paradiplomacy [...] Historical precedence of Catalan paradiplomacy encompasses means such as institutionalizing their foreign engagement through regional bodies, sending delegations abroad to European intergovernmental organizations, and building

²⁰ Parlament de Catalunya, "Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia – Consolidated text", 2010. <https://www.parlament.cat/document/cataleg/150259.pdf> , accessed January 25, 2022

²¹ Ignatius Hubert et all, p. 318

²² Enric Martínez-Herrera et all, p. 8

²³ Ibidem

transnational networks in order to promote their interest abroad”.²⁴

In this conflict between Spain and Catalonia, we actually find two different parties, with two different interests, goals, powers, statuses and means. “When we consider the historical relations between the two parties as the background of this conflict, we can see that this conflict is one breaking point of a long-running series of tensions among them. This breaking point of conflict is increasingly fragile when we add the dimension of identity and international involvement through paradiplomacy into the conflict equation.”²⁵ , conclude Ignatius Hubert and his collaborators in their study about the Catalans identity that reflects very well also our opinion about the values of Catalans.

In the end, we can summarize that the cultural and social values of a region are very hard to be defined exactly because of the globalized world that we are living in and where the boundaries between groups become more and more blurry. In general, we can speak about political, territorial and economic integration due to cross-border collaborations and other type of projects and agreements, and it will be only a matter of time until social cohesion turns into reality. This type of integration doesn’t imply the loss of multi-culturalism or multilingualism; it just emphasizes the need for intercultural communication skills.²⁶ In our specific case of Catalonia, the cultural and social values are defined by a strong identity, reinforced during the time and the history and based on an organic wish of independence despite all benefits, rules, reality.

References

- Buda, Mariana. “Catalan, Basque and Galician. Regional Languages at the Borders of Spain. The Culture of Region”. In *The Image of the Other in the European Intercultural Dialogue*, Ed. Dana PANTEA, Ioan HORGĂ, Mircea BRIE. 2017. Accessed January 5, 2021. <http://eiab.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Image-of-the-Other-in-the-European-Intercultural-DIALOGUE.pdf>
- Castells, M. “La era de la información: economía, sociedad y cultura” (Vol. 3). Siglo XXI. 2004
- Chaqués-Bonafont, Laura and Tomàs, Mariona. “Public Policies in Catalonia. From self-rule to shared rule?”. In *Pôle-Sud* 2014/1, no. 40, accessed January 5, 2021. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-pole-sud-2014-1-page-43.htm>

²⁴ Ignatius Hubert et all, p. 319

²⁵ Ibidem,, p. 323

²⁶ Dahl, p. 19

- Dahl, Stephan. "Intercultural Research: The Current State of Knowledge", Middlesex University Business School London, 2005, Accessed January 10, 2021.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=658202
- Heller, M. "Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity". In *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 2003 7(4), p.473-492.
- Hubert I, Dermawan W, and Akim. "Catalan identity and paradiplomacy strategy in Catalonia's independence movement". In *Jurnal Politik Internasional Vol. 22 No. 2. 2020, Page 317-337*, DOI: 10.7454/global.v22i2.485, accessed January 22, 2022
- Linz, Juan, Marta Gómez-Reino, Didier Vila, and Francisco Orizo. 1981. "Informe sociológico sobre el cambio político en España, 1975–1981". Fundación FOESSA. IV Informe FOESSA. Madrid: Euramérica, vol. 1.
- Martínez-Herrera, Enric and Jeffrey Miley, Thomas. "The Constitution and the politics of National Identity in Spain". In *Nations and Nationalism 16 (1)*, *Journal of the Association for the study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 2010, 6–30. Accessed January 5, 2021.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00432.x>
- Miley, Thomas Jeffrey; Garvía, Roberto. "Conflict in Catalonia: A Sociological Approximation". In *Genealogy* 2019, 3, 56. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3040056>, accessed January 22, 2022
- Mișcoiu, S., *Câteva răspunsuri la întrebarea "De ce a avut succes socio-constructivismul ca teorie a relațiilor internaționale"*. In *Direcții principale în studiul Relațiilor Internaționale în România*. Coord. Ruxandra Ivan. Ed. Institutul European, 2007
- Newton, Michael T.; Donaghy, Peter J., *Institutions of Modern Spain. A political and economic guide*, Cambridge University Press 1997
- Parlament de Catalunya. "Estatuto de autonomía de Cataluña. Texto consolidado". Preamble. Accessed January 5, 2021. <https://www.parlament.cat/document/cataleg/48146.pdf>
- Parlament de Catalunya. "Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia – Consolidated text", 2010.
<https://www.parlament.cat/document/cataleg/150259.pdf>, accessed January 25, 2022
- Petkova, Diana. "Cultural Identity in a pluralistic world". In *Cultural Identity in an intercultural context*, Ed. Diana Petkova and Jaakko Lehtonen. 2005. Accessed January 10, 2021.
https://www.academia.edu/896244/Cultural_Identity_in_an_Intercultural_Context
- Wendt, Alexander. "Social theory of international politics". Cambridge University Press. 1999