Modern Intercultural Space and Problems of Eco-philosophy

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Abstract—**The article is dedicated to the problem of formation of a wide eco-philosophical view of the modern multicultural world. The author stresses the importance and urgency of this problem in theoretical and practical terms. Special attention is paid to the characteristics of modern-day intercultural information space and the main areas of intercultural relations of the 21st century. The author reveals the significance of the cultural environment for solution of social environmental safety tasks and eco-philosophical simulation of the future.**

Keywords—cultural environment; intercultural space; cross-cultural relations; social ecology; ecophilosophy; environmental safety

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the world has changed beyond recognition, even within the same generation, due to the information revolution and globalization processes. In many respects, this change is largely connected to the intercultural space which holds the key to many problems including those that are economical, political, and socio-cultural. The famous researcher S. Huntington states in his most popular geopolitical tractate "The Clash of Civilizations": "Yet it is evident that the principal differences of civilizations' political and economic development are rooted in cultural differences [1, p.15, 22-23]. Researchers shall carefully seek out and examine the cultural, national and historical origins of current conflicts and issues.

In this sense, the topic of intercultural communications resonates remarkably with the other equally urgent issue of ecology which manifests itself increasingly in a completely new way (in a bunch of new meanings). Going through educational and scientific books, I often come across such concepts as *"social ecology"*, *"ecology of society"*, *"human ecology"*, *"ecology of culture"*, and *"information ecology"* along with the more conventional notions of "ecology" and "ecological problems". The unfolding situation satisfies a researcher with the claim for deepening the approaches in the spirit of the Russian scholar Y.M. Lotman: "Culture is the ecology of human society. It is the atmosphere, being created by the mankind in order to continue its existence, to survive" [http://www.zoomby.ru/watch/52031-academia]. Indeed, the concept of "ecology" in the past decades is constantly gaining a broader, socially-oriented meaning compared to the

original definition coined by the German biologist E. Haeckel in the 19th century.

The concepts of *"social ecology"*, *"ecology of society"*, and *"cultural ecology"* have additional shade of meaning and their content includes environmental problems arising in a society, brought to life by the social and cultural environment, the problems of the "second nature", created by the hands and minds of men.

All in all, the etiology of the word "ecology" *("oikos" (οἶκος) for "house" and logos (-λογία), for "study of")* doesn't limit it to the "environmental protection". "Ecology" literally means "the study of house". Ecology is designed to teach how individual tenants of our global "shared apartment" shall get along with each other and environment. The main task of ecology is to determine the admissible forms and borders of humanity-environment relationship in order to preserve (or recover) the centuries-old balanced environmental system and to ensure the co-evolution not only of humans and biosphere, but also of human society and noospheregenesis.

II. MODERN WORLD AS ENVIRONMENT

The environment is not limited to nature and natural objects. By the beginning of the new millennium, just 3-5% of the surface was considered to be "close to nature" and only 1% was in the "natural state". Unprecedented changes over the last century introduced unimaginable mobility to the human perception of space. Largely due to the modern means of communication, there is a significant rampant compression of space and time taking place since the end of the 20th century in rapid socio-cultural stream. These circumstances have destroyed the old ideas of the world, expanded them, and gave momentum to the search of the new semantic frameworks. Thus, we imply the semantic unity of social, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical, and biological processes with their natural environment. The space for the subject is the world around him, which is never neutral and senseless. He tries to make the world his own, comprehensible, close, and harmonious to live in.

This world, consisting of historical and cultural spaces, urban and verbal environments, mainstream values, and intercultural relations that are also included in an integrated ecological system, are responsible for an individual's *environmental safety* (i.e. the protection of individuals,

society, and state from the consequences of anthropogenic impacts). The socio-cultural environment, as well as natural and biological, shall be health-preserving. We are speaking here not only about physical health but also about mental, cultural and moral.

Moreover, one of the features of a human being, is the necessity of initial stay in the cultural field, without which one cannot realize the genetically inherent potential, form and show the best human qualities. Thus, socio-cultural environment - just as natural, biological - serves as a natural condition for the functioning of human and society. All of the aforementioned makes up the ecological space needed for self-realization and self-preservation of an individual and harmonization of one's relations with the world around.

III.   PECULARITIES OF THE INTERCULTURAL SPACE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The globalization process, covering all the spheres of society, manifests itself twofold, especially in the spiritual and cultural fields. On the one hand, there's economic, political, and cultural integration, leading to some unification and standardization of the norms and values in different communities, facilitating inter-ethnic and intercultural cooperation at various levels and promoting comprehensive expansion of international relations and communications. The path of modern societies' internationalization, until recently, was considered by researchers and politicians to be an objective need and, therefore, the most productive prospect for further development of mankind.

However, there is another distinct trend. The desire for unification that often leads to its forced establishment, as a result, is causing more and more attempts at resistance. Therefore, on the other hand, globalization is accompanied by the axipetal processes of cultural-ethnic differentiation, surfacing in the desire to be separate, to preserve one's own cultural identity and ethnocentricity. This is testified by the wave of movements for national and cultural rights or separation both in developed (Spain, Canada, UK) and developing countries (the African states, India).

This trend is ambiguous. Axipetal processes may be negative, fueling nationalism or even fascism, sowing ethnic hostility, causing mistrust and leading to disastrous consequences, pushing the world to the threshold of self-destruction. On the other hand, it would be a mistake not to use the positive potential of the said processes.

Intercultural space evolves into a turbulent information and cross-national environment, existing in the new century under the new rules. The old universal principles of modernity, building a clear vertical of "center-periphery", are being replaced by qualitatively new, "liquid" principles, showing many new emphases and expectations [2]. Under the new conditions inherent to the "postmodern" society, the mechanisms of cross-cultural dialogue and functioning within a intercultural space (i.e. the nature and principles of intercultural relations, communication channels) also undergo severe changes.

The "death of distance" (J. Urry) and formation of the "global village" designate the human society of the 21st century [3]. In the global human community, there is an emerging phenomenon, or, more precisely, the feeling of communion, having an ambivalent characteristic. On the one hand, people do not remain indifferent to the phenomena of another culture, trying to "live" with the fact of such coexistence, to learn and comprehend its norms; on the other hand, this feeling of communion motivates people to respond quickly to the events and changes taking place not only in their own cultural space but also in another one. Yet, it's not so easy to do in the social sphere that is constantly fluctuating, changing its dominant ideas and showing extreme mobility of own network connections and dependencies. The tragic social and national upheavals of the 21st century - the color revolutions, local conflicts, migration, accompanied by a violent break of the traditional cultural backgrounds, international political relations practiced from a position of power – conduce to building up feelings of distress and instability, the spread of eschatological views. The complexity, dynamism, and contradiction of social processes create the impression that the world is plunged into chaos, causing anxiety and permanent uncertainty within the "global village" dwellers.

There is a good reason for the continuing growth by 40% of the patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and depression in the last 15 years. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2020, mental disorders may enter the top five diseases that threaten with the extent losses of workforce, even surpassing in this sense the cardiovascular diseases [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/ru/].

Media and information technologies play an ever-increasing, sometimes decisive, role in the aforementioned processes. The impact of the Internet on intercultural relations are being investigated almost from the moment of its appearance and is often viewed from a positive standpoint. Online communications undoubtedly serve as the catalyst of globalization, in this case, the factor of globalization of intercultural information space, manifesting itself in the creation of rapid inter-ethnic relations and their sustainable support, the intensification of peer-to-peer contacts and rapprochement of peoples, the formation and discussion of the common standards of values, and permanent information support of socio-cultural processes. Possibilities for various cultural discourses and meanings representation, often quite discordant and even marginal.

The task for democratization of social interactions, including those intercultural, contributed to the development of the UNESCO "Information for All" program, emphasizing the discrete role of Internet technologies in promoting access to information in the modern-day societies. Yet, the Internet is not only the key to democratizing socio-cultural relations and overcoming the communicative barriers but also a certain menace.

In the kaleidoscope of events, the world is somehow slipping from the possibility to properly comprehend the current affairs, to find suitable spiritual support. No wonder we witness the "memorial boom", occupying the global community, trying to rely on cultural universality, distinct

moments of the past, national historical memory, i.e. on anything that may be called a spiritual fortress of society and national identity. These spiritual backbones help us to separate the truth from the lies, superficial and negligible from essential and substantial. After all, with the formation of the new information technology, the global media gained additional possibilities for controlling the spiritual potential of a society by directing the information flows.

IV. THE NEED FOR NEW APPROACHES

Nowadays, analysts of modern society as well as politicians often discuss financial capital, R&D capability, labor and natural resources as factors that play a major role in the social development. Yet, they often blank that in the absence of spiritual resources, all the other capital types may lie still, collapsing or even enriching other countries. We are talking about the spiritual and value-oriented resources of those involved in the fields of economic and political relations.

The imposition, through the wide-scale information flows, of certain information, alien ideals, alien cultural patterns and stereotypes, clumsy attempts to "correct" existing national mentality lead to the nation's spiritual crisis, which can be expressed in the lack of interest towards the own history, the neglect of own cultural traditions and heritage (e.g., language), the loss of traditional values. All of the aforementioned creates often a spiritual void and a lack of meaningful reference points. [4; 5; 6]. This "capital" will not enrich any country, but can put it on the brink of disaster.

The pathology of moral, spiritual, and socio-ecological space is indicative for the global community. Al Gore (USA) in his monograph "Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit", estimating the world-wide crisis of the philosophical thought, writes about the environmental crisis: "I've also come to a deeper understanding of the most frightening fact of all that we had faced in the past century: civilization can destroy itself. [...] It is the spiritual crisis of modern civilization, brought to life by its inner void and lack of a great moral purpose" [7, p. 12; 404]. In order to overcome this situation, we shall shape an eco-philosophical view of life, adding it to the familiar worldview. The Netherlands researcher G.Salmon expressed this trend the following way: "There is a new science, based on communication with a living reality. A lot of people doesn't feel themselves comfortable in the world created by the modern-day science as it disallows them to communicate with reality, understand the depth of the nature, its creatures and fellow humans. [...] If we want to save humanity, we must reduce the role of such science and create a "spiritual science", where cognition will be a form of love and a way to communicate with reality; the science, that works using the power of a heart" [8, p. 60-67].

It is time to get literally, and not metaphorically, engage in the creation of a science, concepts, of "ecology of culture", "ecology of souls", "ecology of language", "ecology of ethnos" etc. This is a task not only for philosophers and sociologists but also for psychologists, physiologists, doctors, cultural studies scholars, architects, artists, linguists and politicians.

It is necessary to set and develop a problem of eco-philosophy as a special sphere of environment cognition and eco-philosophical simulation of the future. This will allow to reveal the potential opportunities and perspectives for social control and use of the sustainable development models that are anthropo-ecological landmarks for the modern culture. Eco-philosophy will boost comprehension of cognitive and socio-cultural technologies, aimed at maintaining human nature, further health-saving development, and self-preservation. The range of eco-philosophical problems is incredibly wide – from the ecologically oriented understanding of values and modern science achievements, to creation of a new global landscape, allowing eco-humanitarian forecasting.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, spiritual sphere and intercultural communications in the modern world are found directly in the field of ecological problems, and their resolution shall be systematic. It is essential to gradually mold an "ecological worldview", an eco-philosophical view of the world which translates to a world of cooperation, universal human achievements, and shared history. In that world, each of the cultures will find its own worthy place to enrich the world heritage in the spirit of unitotality, as expressed by the Russian philosopher V.S. Solovyev. Back in the second part of the 19th century, this outstanding philosopher coined an idea of supreme harmony, binding the disintegrating world into one virtuous whole [9]. According to Solovyov, unitotality is a unity when each component element finds its own place and attains meaning by enriching everything else. The time has come to embody the idea of the Russian philosopher, to make it to the center of modern eco-philosophical outlook at intercultural communications.

The creation of appropriate technologies of eco-philosophical forecasting shall not only prevent the catastrophic consequences of reckless human behavior in the sphere of intercultural relations, but it will also improve biological and socio-cultural conditions for mice and men development on the Earth.

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