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Delibasic, M., Grgurevic, N., Andriuskevicius, K. (2024), "Complexity of Mutual Influence in Relations between Culture, Institutions, Economy, and Civilisation Changes", *Transformations in Business & Economics*, Vol. 23, No 1 (61), pp.21-39.

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**BUSINESS & ECONOMICS**

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## COMPLEXITY OF MUTUAL INFLUENCE IN RELATIONS BETWEEN CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS, ECONOMY, AND CIVILISATION CHANGES

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Received: January, 2024  
1<sup>st</sup> Revision: February, 2024  
2<sup>nd</sup> Revision: March, 2024  
Accepted: March, 2024

**ABSTRACT.** *The subject of the work is to confirm the complexity of the relationship between the economy, culture, and institutions, concerning civilisational changes in the historical development process. The paper aims to point out the importance of culture for the sustainability of institutions and the economic system. It is based on three basic hypotheses: first, that the so-called "neoliberal culture" succeeded the post-socialist one in the period of the so-called institutional vacuum; secondly, that both were transitional, without consistency and a realistically sustainable long-term perspective, and third; that both were established hastily as a result of the same influencing factors, among which false promises, authoritarianism, elitism dominated, party totalitarianism and ideological dogmatism. The paper uses the descriptive method and the usual methods of economic science. In the conclusion, the verification of the set hypotheses was stated.*

**KEYWORDS:** culture, institution, economy, civilisation changes.

**JEL classification:** O17, O43, P37, E71.

## Introduction

*“It is a self-evident fact that there cannot be a human society without culture. The necessity of culture to humans is imperative. Culture in its most basic sense fulfils and harnesses the obligations of communal cohabitation. Equally imperative is the fact that culture is not an ad hoc construction of any one individual. What is manifestly obvious is that culture is a reality.”*  
Karimzadi (2019, p.39)

The importance of researching society as a self-developing, complexly organised entity, conditioned by the category “culture”, is growing. In many articles culture is seen as a phenomenon expressed in values, preferences or beliefs. In the sociological and philosophical and cultural literature under the influence of the “turn to culture” in recent decades, are dominating the understanding of culture as a sociocode, a complex, historically developing system, expressed in symbolic forms, through which are stored, translated and are generated knowledge and ideas about world, used in solving practical problems and adapting to a changing economic and social environment. In this sense, Gric (1973) notes that culture is “*a historically transferred system of knowledge embodied in symbols; a system of inherited representations, expressed in symbolic forms, through which people transmit, preserve and develop their knowledge of life and attitude towards it.*” Economic culture is a particular kind (subsystem) of culture, which incorporates a variety of ideas about the economy. And yet, the term “culture” hasn’t “settled” yet in economic studies.

According to Alesina and Giuliano (2015), the problem of many definitions lies in the fact that the institutions overlap too much with culture, because “norms” and “customs” are used in the definitions of both institutions and culture. They consider that the term “culture” is preferable to the term “informal institutions”, it is more appropriate and intelligible. They conclude that the correct incorporation of the cultural and value context into the economic system presupposes a shifting border in the cognition of economic reality. That allows us to consider changes in the economy and its institutional structure (Martono *et al.*, 2023; Tran *et*

*al.*, 2022; Dobrowolski *et al.*, 2022; Hussain *et al.*, 2021) as a manifestation of the cultural process and development of the value system as the nucleus of culture. Sustainability is a challenge for current and future generations in an effort to develop it in the spirit of maintaining a balance between its basic pillars: economic, social, and environmental (Matijová *et al.*, 2023), creating the need to analyse sustainability concepts (Streimikiene, 2023). In connection with the foregoing, some authors believe that when analysing economic processes, one should proceed from the existence of two fundamental levels of factor space, which are associated with subjective cognitive and structural determinants. The first level acts as an economic and cultural space, as a sphere of human consciousness (Li *et al.*, 2023; Gonos, 2023), in which symbolic ways of comprehending and evaluating reality are formed, on the basis of accumulated experience and the generation of knowledge, new individual and collective models and representations about the economy, the system of value coordinates, ethico-economic acceptable norms of behaviour and institutional forms. The second level characterises the institutional aspect of value-oriented interactions, which is formed on the basis of agreement on values, norms and rules regulating the status roles and functions of actors, as well as communicative practices in various spheres of economic activity. As Berger (1986) writes, “*economic institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but in the context or, if you like, in the fabric of social and political structures, cultural forms and, of course, in the structure of self-consciousness: in the system of values, ideas, beliefs.*”

Economic reality is a set of explicit and hidden forms of manifestation of power relations that arise as a result of interaction between unequal forces, superiors and subordinate subjects. In all societies there is a dynamic system distribution of power. Also, there is a certain relationship between the authorities and the institutions on which the construction and reproduction of institutions takes place. The greater the excess or lack of power in society, the more significant are the negative consequences of the imbalance of power relations and their deformation. The cultural and value compromise of various groups of actors and authorities arising in the course of communicative practices leads to the formation of universally recognised cultural context, which influences the behaviour of subjects, the creation and application of production systems, the quantitative and qualitative parameters of economic development, and the structure of the flow of investments. All of the above points to an imperative need for correct incorporation of the ethico-cultural context into the economic system, it is necessary.

Previously, culture occupied a special position (in socialism), since it was entrusted with the task of educating a citizen. Today, this function becomes purely decorative and serves as a screen for the processes of creation and circulation of capital, power relations and their distribution. The fact that culture today is placed in conditions of general competition in the same way as other spheres of life (under the influence of the neoliberal order) has led to the fact that, taken out of context, it is in a certain vacuum. This is an additional reason for research and defining its proper role and relationship with the economy, institutions and society in general.

## **1. Defining Culture**

Culture is a relevant concept in most social science disciplines. But it is a fuzzy concept without fixed boundaries, meaning different things according to situations. Theories of culture have become popular again in economics, political and other social sciences as they offer explanations for economic, social, political and institutional differences between states,

regions, ethnic groups and families. Huntington (1993) was one of the first to focus scientific research on culture, emphasising that cultural differences are the main driving force behind these differences, as well as international conflicts. Somewhat later (2000) he pointed out the importance of certain human qualities, such as thrift, purposefulness, diligence, education, organisation, devotion, discipline, etc. Culture (in the broadest sense of the word) is everything created by people (society) as a result of physical and mental labour (a set of spiritual and material values created by mankind). Culture (in the narrower sense of the word) is a process of active and creative activity for consumption and dissemination of spiritual values. But remember Williams (1988, p.7), who states that “*culture is one of the two or three most difficult words in the English language.*” Thus, the term “culture” is ambiguous. In addition, there is no doubt that this is a social, historical and anthropological phenomenon, which in this sense is explained (defined) in the literature in various ways in time and space.

Many studies show that cultural variables determine many economic and institutional decisions (Delibasic, Grgurevic, 2013; Delibasic, 2022). In this sense, one can consider the interdependent relationship between culture and institutions. Both are endogenous developmental variables that have been shaped and changed throughout history. Particular confusion in social literature is caused by the partial identification of the meanings of “culture” and “civilisation” (Petrunenko *et al.*, 2022). In everyday rhetoric, it is noticeable that the word “culture” refers to many things. C. Geertz (1973) believes that culture is “*a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited representations expressed in symbolic forms, through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about themselves and their lives.*” Boyd and Richerson (1985) define culture as “*decision heuristics or basic (practical) rules that have evolved to serve our need to make decisions under complex and uncertain conditions.*” These heuristics usually manifest themselves in the form of values, beliefs, or social norms. Guiso *et al.* (2006) define culture as “*the shared beliefs and values that ethnic, religious and social groups pass on unchanged from generation to generation.*” Akerlof and Kranton (2000) define culture as a phenomenon embodied in values and preferences, thus emphasising the role of emotions in motivating human behaviour. A definition that is consistent with much of the literature, and is rather narrow, considers culture as a set of beliefs, values, and preferences that can influence behaviour that are socially (not genetically) transmitted and shared by certain groups in a society. This definition requires further clarification: beliefs contain undeniable factual statements about the state of the world, the physical and metaphysical environment, and social relations. Values refer to normative statements about society and social relations (often understood as ethics and ideology), while preferences refer to normative statements about specific issues such as consumption and personal issues.

The collectivity of culture is also reflected in the mentioned definition, according to which it includes beliefs, values and knowledge received from others. Also important for our research context is the general and simple definition of culture by Haralambos and Holborn (2002, p.884) as “*the totality of a society's way of life.*” This especially provokes the differentiation of different societies, ranging from “primitive” to the so-called “network”. The totality of lifestyle is understood as the totality of values, customs, beliefs and practices that make up the life of a particular group. In the above definitions, which were chosen selectively, the subjective dimension of culture (behavioural models, internalisation) and its objective character (collective memory, social heritage) are noticeable. Kotler (2006, p.256) defined culture as “*a set of core values, beliefs, desires, and behaviours that a member of society has learned in the family and other important institutions.*” It is clear that culture has a collective

character, because one person cannot “own” culture of society, although he can accept (perceive) it or not. For “*culture is a universal human phenomenon, an anthropological fact and an essential generic feature of a person as a social and individual, spiritual and creative being*” (Skledar, 2001, p.167).

Culture in most models of social, economic and/or institutional reality can be considered as an important (main) independent variable that affects the economy and politics, and which can be measured on the basis of its various symbolic and behavioural traces (religions, rituals, family relations, structure families, various civic behaviour, etc.). Too many cultural interpretations probably influenced Kluckhohn's account (Geertz, 1973, pp.4-5), which includes the following definitions: a) common way of life of one nation; b) the social heritage that a person acquires from his group; c) a way of thinking, feeling and believing; d) abstraction from behaviour; e) anthropologists' interpretation of the behaviour of a group of people; f) warehouse of joint training; g) a set of standard reference points for recurring problems; h) learned (adopted) behaviour; i) mechanism of normative regulation of behaviour; j) a complex of methods of adaptation to the external environment and other people; k) sediment of history; and l) comparisons with a sieve and a matrix.

**Table 1. Factors of influence, elements of culture and level of culture**

Factors of influence		Elements of culture		
Information	→	values, knowledge, ideas, behaviours, language, communications, rituals, roles, attitudes, beliefs, manners, rules, routines, symbols, norms, education, atmosphere	→	<i>Level of culture</i>
Innovation				<i>The role of culture</i>
Tradition				<i>The significance of cultures</i>
Institution				
Politics				
Ideology				
Religion				
The power of the state				

Source: own creation.

Unlike “complex” definitions, there are both simple and narrow definitions, such as G. Hofstede (2001): “*Culture is a common mental software*”, i.e. “*collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from the others.*” Bozovic (2021, pp.37-41) correctly points out numerous errors in the definition of culture. He especially means the authors who “*understood culture as a supra-social and supra-individual system.*” In this sense, he (Ibid.) cites the study “The Science of Culture”, in which L. White considers culture as “*a concrete and autonomous 'size', as a supra-individual and supra-social value*”, which is the essence sui generis “*which can only be explained by itself ... The point is that it is not a person who controls culture, but vice versa, which led him to cultural determinism.*” Finally, Bozovic (Ibid., p.41) remarkably notes: “*Any definition of culture could rest on the idea of Jean-Marie Domenico, who argued that culture, 'which is not a*

*constant rebellion of the individual, is just another institution'. In fact, the creator-rebel comes to designate a crime against brilliant lies and ossified values. He does not reconcile either with a useless past or with a hopeless present. In the act of being immune to blindness of mind and fatigue of conscience, his free imagination, creative energy and new sensibility make the most sense. Then there are already reasons for abandoning dried-up patterns and old 'formulas' about culture and creativity. And the attempt to arrive at an indisputable, general and universal definition of culture remains so uncertain that we must ask ourselves whether we are thus approaching or moving away from the essence of culture and its transcendence."*

## **2. Culture and Economy**

Until recently, most economists ignored cultural factors in their analyses of economic phenomena and processes. In recent decades, the situation has changed significantly. Many researchers have accepted the fact that traditions and habits specific to certain ethnic groups, religions, and population groups seriously affect their economic results. Even the founders of classical economic theory, A. Smith and J. S. Mill believed that cultural factors sometimes have a much greater influence on people's behaviour than the essential pursuit of personal gain. K. Polanyi also believed that religion and culture are "restraint factors", which sometimes stand in the way of the laws of the market. One of the first economic papers in which culture was treated as an independent factor was written by Banfield (1958). He argued that the low rates of development of certain economies can be explained by cultural systems and traditions that have developed in different countries. Landes (1998) proved that there is a direct connection between the prosperity of the national economy and the cultural qualities of its citizens (economy, thrift, hard work, perseverance, honesty, and tolerance), while xenophobia, religious intolerance, and corruption cause poverty of the population and slow economic development "*Culture makes almost all the difference*" for economic growth and cross-country differences, pointed out Landes (2000, p.2).

The modern economy is exposed to significant geopolitical and geoeconomic influences and different (sometimes conflicting) views on the world of international entities. In this context, culture has become a specific "*strategic vector of socio-economic development*", believes Arrebola Castano (2016, p.95). Because it accumulates historical patterns of economic changes in different societies. In addition, it determines contemporary economic transformations, through institutional and other changes. Because of all this, there has been a sharp increase in the interest in studying cultural factors of economic development, whereby they are considered immaterial and valuable landmarks of the economy and material products of cultural industries.

Assuming that culture has a significant impact on the economy, the question arises: how can this impact be measured? The simplest method is, of course, correlations, which show that certain values and behavioural attitudes move together and are closely related to certain economic indicators. But correlations can be wrong: maybe it's an unknown (unexplored) influencing factor. Regression methods make it possible to see the contribution of each factor to economic change. But they do not explain what is the cause and what is the effect: whether values have changed due to economic growth, or vice versa. For this reason, the method of instrumental variables is used to solve the mentioned problem, i.e. the characteristics that are correlated with the indicator of culture, but not with economic growth, are sought. In this way, Algan and Cahuc (2007) made an important discovery about the

possible great influence of culture on the economy. They investigated the net impact of culture on gross domestic product per capita. Alessina *et al.* (2015) have proved “*that individuals who inherit stronger family ties are less mobile, have lower wages and higher unemployment, and support more stringent labour market regulations.*” Their results suggest that labour market regulations have deep cultural roots.

Although category “culture” is gaining importance in economic research, the term “culture” is still uncertain in economic studies, in many articles culture “*is seen as a phenomenon expressed in values, preferences or beliefs*” (Geertz, 1973). C. Geertz notes that culture is “*a historically transferred system of knowledge embodied in symbols; a system of inherited representations, expressed in symbolic forms, through which people transmit, preserve and develop their knowledge of life and attitude towards it.*” Of course, economic culture is a particular kind of culture, its subsystem, which incorporates a variety of ideas about the economy and economic behaviour. In addition to being an economic and cultural space, it can be observed as a sphere of human consciousness, it can also be interpreted with institutional aspect of value-oriented interactions. It is formed on the basis of agreement on values, norms and rules regulating the roles and functions of actors, as well as communicative practices in various spheres of economic activity. As Berger (1986) writes, “*economic institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but in the context or, if you like, in the fabric of social and political structures, cultural forms and, of course, in the structure of self-consciousness: in the system of values, ideas, beliefs.*”

### **3. Culture and Institutions**

The increased importance of cultural approach on the economy was dominantly influenced by institutional, and later by neo-institutional economic theories (in particular the theory of institutional change as established by North, 1990). T. Veblen, the founder of the institutional school considered that economics is more than allocating scarce resources among alternative uses. Economic decisions and activities do not occur outside historical, cultural and institutional contexts. Culture is pivotal in forming institutions and institutions are habits of thought that prevail in time and place. The influence of culture and informal rules is pervasive, according to D. North. Indeed, in his view (1994, pp.363-364), the reason why, throughout history, most societies have failed to grow is because they are trapped in institutional frameworks that do not create incentives to develop impersonal exchange. His views about the importance of culture and belief systems in the process of institutional change are closely linked to his views on path dependency. He regards the relationship between belief systems and institutions as intimate. Belief systems are the internal representation of reality, while institutions are structures that individuals impose on reality. North (1993) wrote: “*The language and mental models formed the informal constraints that defined the institutional framework of the tribe and were passed down intergenerationally as customs, taboos, myths that provided the continuity that we call culture and forms part of the key to path dependence.*”

After various conceptualisations of culture, it becomes clear that there is no unambiguous or general answer to the question of whether it is a system of behaviour, meaning, mental characteristics or artifacts, or a combination of all these. Different approaches can lead to useful results only in a specific, selective and / or subject-oriented intercultural analysis, which should reveal certain visible and invisible layers of culture, which in different ways and under different conditions can influence the formation and

evolution of institutions in certain societies. Much earlier, but much more relevantly, Parsons (1951, p.171) viewed culture as “*a stable and consistent normative pattern of value orientations*” that helps people make decisions and adapt to various social circumstances. He emphasised the “*congruence and logical consistency*” of these value orientations as a way of coordinating social interactions (Ibid., p.9). A culture thus defined will naturally exist at the level of well-defined groups such as nations, regions, ethnic groups, religions, political fluids (parties) and the like. What they all have in common is that they represent interest groups. Because of its coherence and logical consistency, culture tends to be the “social glue” and to be relevant to all kinds of social decisions (choices) and outcomes, even when, in DiMaggio's (1997, p. 264) terminology, “hidden variable”, which cannot be directly noticed or observed. Economists have measured culture in three ways (see Alessina, Gulisano, 2015): using survey data, looking at second-generation immigrants to highlight cultural influences, maintaining a constant economic and institutional environment, and collecting experimental data. According to Alesina and Giuliano (Ibid.), the problem of many definitions lies in the fact that according to them the institutions overlap too much with culture, because “norms” and “customs” are used in the definitions of both institutions and culture. When measurements are described and literature dealing with the interaction of culture and institutions is considered, culture is usually understood as beliefs, informal rules can be said, and formal institutes under the institutions. The term “culture” is preferable to the term “informal institutions”, it is more appropriate and intelligible.

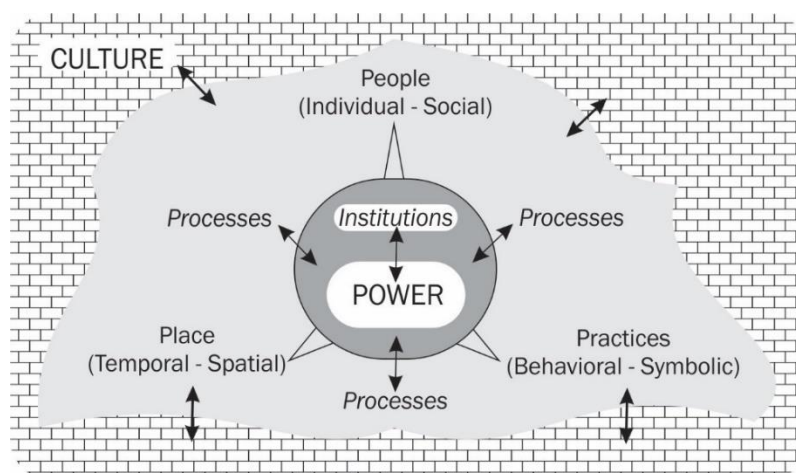
Recent research has focused on the co-evolution of culture and institutions (two-way relationships), rather than emphasising causality in one direction or another. A multiple balance is assumed, which is characterised by a combination of some types of culture and some types of formal institutions. The general idea underlying this approach, is that a state (or a region or an ethnic group) shares certain cultural values, which leads to the choice of certain institutions. In turn, certain institutions lead to the preservation (and transmission from generation to generation) of certain cultural values. This co-evolutionary framework applies to several cultural characteristics: cooperation, trust, family ties, individualism, and justice. The role of culture in social and especially institutional change is an important topic in the considered context of the post-socialist transition. Institutional reforms (Simovic, 2023) of the political and economic system were largely dependent on national culture (Elster *et al.*, 1998, p.19). The structure and position of institutions are largely determined by cultural patterns, which are complex products, usually including values, norms and behaviours. Institutions are “*articulations of culture and as such have a structure that more precisely defines character and position, and which, in a sociocultural context, may include a monopoly on a part of social practice*” (Ibid., p.11).

There is no doubt that economic actions (aided by institutional arrangements) to a significant extent are the result of culture (Beugelsdijk, Maseland, 2014, p.116) - it is because they are very strongly influenced by cultural patterns (Kokovic, 2005, p.228). It is clear that inherited culture must be distinguished from modern culture. In this sense, I have often written about the ideological influence of the so-called “neoliberal culture” in the transition period. It had its own negative consequences for society (cognitive and actional), since it “constructed” specific (neoliberal) images of the world - a “new coordinate system” (Berger, Luckmann, 1991), that is, a new reality, as “tools for adaptation”, (management, survival, etc.). North (2005) argued that culture is important for the historical process because it forms an artificial structure (beliefs, institutions, tools, technologies) that gives society the “keys” to dynamic success or failure over time. He sees culture as a set of ideas (beliefs) and institutions



(formal and informal), but also as a system of transmission of norms, ideas and values between different generations.

Causadias (2020) introduce a P-model (*Figure 1*), in which culture is defined as a system of people, places, and practices, for a purpose such as enacting, justifying, or challenging power. People refers to population dynamics, social relations, and culture in groups. Places refers to ecological dynamics, institutional influences, and culture in contexts. Practices refers to participatory dynamics, community engagement, and culture in action. Power refers to forcing others into compliance (power-over people), controlling access to spaces (power in places), and behaving as desired (power-to practice). We created the modified P-model of culture by the necessary inclusion of institutions as general regulators of behaviour, i.e. as mediators between all the elements that Causadias mentions in the P-model. “*The whole organises the parts and the parts organise the whole*” (Overton, 2010), but - through institutions. “*People create culture through shared practices in places, and culture shapes how people engage in practices and build places*” (Causadias, *Ibid.*) – also with the intermediation of institutions.



Source: adapted to Causadias, 2020, p.311.

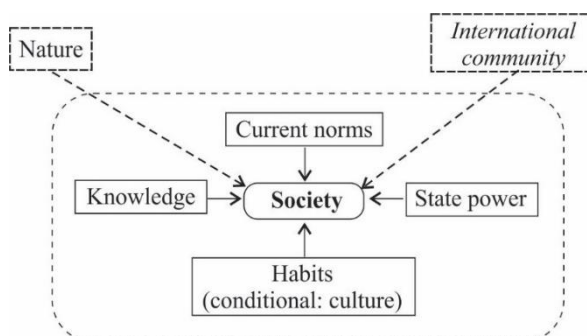
*Figure 1. Modified P-Model of Culture*

The latest study by Acemoglu and Robinson (2021) offers a new framework for studying the relationship between culture and institutions. Through the lens of the latest sociological research, they interpret culture as a specific “repertoire” that provides rich cultural responses to changes in the environment, as well as changes in political power. Authors believe that culture is a collection of various attributes and possible connections between them. Combinations of various features produce the so-called. “cultural configurations” that provide meaning, interpretation, and justification for individual and group actions. Cultural configurations also legitimise and support different institutional arrangements. However, changes in policies and institutions can cause changes in existing attributes, giving rise to very different cultural configurations. This example assumes that any set of relationships is possible and shows two cultural configurations. Acemoglu and Robinson (*Ibid.*) argue that “*cultural resilience may be the result of the dynamics of political and economic factors, rather than being the result of an unchanging culture.*” They distinguish cultures by how fluid they are, emphasising that more fluid cultures allow for a richer set of cultural configurations. Fluidity in its own way depends on how specific (as

opposed to abstract) and dependent (as opposed to autonomous) attributes in a set of cultures. They further note that “*a culture becomes more restrictive when it is less fluid (more programmed), i.e. because its attributes are more specific or dependent.*” Authors assumed that in reality there is a rich set of cultural configurations that permeate and complement each other in response to changes in politics and other factors (they are talking about the potential fluidity of cultural configurations). Institutions affect the evolution of cultural configurations, and politics affect both institutions and cultural configurations.

#### **4. Culture and Civilisation Changes**

Every society must be based on some system of relatively stable (primarily moral, cultural, and civilisational) views on the world, as well as on “axiomatic” foundations, which constitute indisputable truths and values. Every social order is changeable and transient, sooner or later, which depends on the dominance of its dialectical (rational, pluralistic, innovative, motivational) or mechanical (irrational, monistic, imitative, demotivational) paradigm. It is artificially and deeply copied and transplanted into our consciousness, through the appropriate ideology. Each historical period of society was characterised by a certain (more or less differentiated) developmental paradigm, which contained appropriate criteria and value systems. Development has always had a contradictory character, its positive and negative manifestations. It always contained elements of order and chaos, which existed in parallel and acted on each other. But they never (except in extreme situations: wars, revolutions, dictatorships, etc.) existed in their pure form, but in various combinations, whereby one or the other form always dominated. They intertwined and were mutually conditioned and dependent in a specific way. The level of dominance of order or chaos in society determined the degree of crisis in general and in certain areas, and consequently the specific rate of development. One of the most significant and strongest driving levers of modern civilisation is the mutual connection, conditionality, and dependence on the institution of market regulation (conditionally: economy, which includes private entrepreneurship), technological progress, and the institution of flexible and efficient state regulation. Exponential changes in the field of various technologies have enabled unprecedented virtual and online business connectivity on a global level. Many necessary conditions have been created for the realisation of the old idea of creating a more humane, just, and homogeneous “*world of different worlds*” (of different economies, politics, cultures, peoples, spaces, and civilisations). However, in the real world, paradoxically, there is a situation in which the possibilities of achieving economic growth based on the transfer of technologies are decreasing. It is indisputable that the future belongs to growth, which will be achieved exclusively based on knowledge and innovation (and not on growth in “innovation branches”). Societies that ignore knowledge, innovation, their production, and the production of goods in general are based on anti-development (“alternative”) strategies and paradigms. They are doomed to deepen and reproduce crises. Numerous studies have proven a positive correlation between institutions, development, and knowledge. Of course, it is assumed that knowledge does not operate in a social vacuum, but as one of the social contents (determinants, subsystems), in parallel with effective (current) norms, habits (conditionally: culture), and state power (*Figure 2*).



Source: created by the authors.

Figure 2. The Role of Knowledge in Society

New times require new ways of thinking and behaving. They should reduce their adaptation according to the achievements of civilisation for active inclusion in contemporary social and economic processes and flows. I never advocated a return to the old, but I did not forget to highlight some humanistic dimensions of the old. It is clear that socialism was not efficient and that its crisis initiated the transition in the period when “changes in the value system coincided with economic necessity” (I. Naisbitt). They affected that following negative factors: a) direct neoliberal (better to say: quasi-neoliberal) causes of the permanent transition crisis, which caused huge problems and deformations and created new dogmas, totalitarianism, and violence, with an uncertain duration; b) the ballast of the cult of personality<sup>1</sup> and statist traditions (as defined by N. Berdjaev), which contributed to the creation of quasi-institutional conditions and alternative institutions, thus enabling the introduction of a new elitist (to a certain extent and in a certain sense totalitarian) (under the guise of neoliberalism) order; c) great privileges of greedy and highly interest-oriented “reformists”, who postponed and ignored substantial changes (institutional and other), and therefore development; d) essential differences between rhetoric and practice, i.e., between the story of liberal democracy (which promotes the rights and freedoms of individuals) and quasi-neoliberal economic policy (which violates all liberal principles) and e) abuses of the state and its institutions (alternative institutions – Draskovic *et al.*, 2019, 2021), which served as a cover for the manifestation of expansive nomenclature interests and the non-market (grabbing) appropriation of its significant resources.

All of the above was carried out by the dominant application of the neoliberal “methodology” of double standards, sophistic exchange of theses and barren apologetic rhetoric. All neoliberals and quasi-neoliberals (politicians, economists and others, in and near the government) talked about being democratic, freedom-loving, free-minded, tolerant, development-oriented, pluralistic in everything, except for the following two things: a) they absolutise the alleged neoliberalism (they don't see an alternative to it, so they deny choice as the essence of democracy and economy) and b) they live in the state's manger (they abuse the state, which they ask to be minimal). From the “big gap between normative ethics and the moral ideal, a deep moral crisis, which encouraged the metastatic disintegration of society... and a drastically damaged conscience, which called into question the collective and personal identity”, which R. Bozović (2016a) points out, it is difficult to perform civilisational changes. Especially from the aspect of Kant's knowledge that “without freedom there is no morality”

<sup>1</sup> Instead of the “cult of personality”, a democratic society must affirm the cult of “personality” (of all individuals, not just one individual, the meta-individual), the cult of “I”, but not in a polite and daily political way, but in reality.

and Socrates' conviction that "*knowledge is the basis of morality*" (Ibid.). Without the application of universal social and civilisational regulators and principles, changes for the better are not possible.

Going back historically, people's way of life, views of the world, and civilisational changes were difficult and slow, mostly in local or regional frameworks. In the modern era, everything changes much faster, and certain changes have a global character. Some of them even threaten the survival of humanity. Distancing various development conceptions from monistic absolutisations and developing a pluralistic, integrative, and dynamic approach (for which I have always advocated) enables the analysis of civilisational changes that are the result of contradictory interaction and behaviour of social groups in social space and time (different positioning<sup>2</sup>), the uniqueness of the world view, the inequality in the status of social groups, the differences in their roles, the originality of the organisation of their social life, etc.), i.e. the result of a complex and multiple process of mutual influence of accompanying phenomena and processes. The development of society implies an extremely complex "intertwining" of cultural values and instrumental-institutional aspects. The institutional system in each period is based on a certain set of values (formal and informal). In addition, it must in principle support (provide) a certain "moral construction" of social practices. In turn, moral and cultural norms and values also influence institutional factors.

Based on relationships and/or participation in government, the advantages of the modern "elite" are formed, its privileges are consolidated, and their interests are networked. In the modern world, political and administrative networks (elite) become key players, although in principle the characteristics of their influence on public administration depend on the quality and strength of institutions, the socio-cultural environment, and the level of civil control. But, if such "elites" manage to achieve dominance in society, then they turn the functions of public authority into a fiction and a formality, which is essentially not related to the adoption of real solutions. This is how alternative institutions are created. These socially "invisible" coalitions function with the symbiotic participation of politicians and top state officials. In such conditions, the alternative-institutional access to resources has a network (clan) character, which expands the "grey" area of decision-making, in which there is systemic corruption, "holes" in legislation when making decisions, and rent-oriented behaviour of officials. In this way, the priorities of informal agreements and opportunities for undermining and destroying the system of responsibility are created, up to the complete loss of the basic institutional function - representation of civil interests.

Unlike geopolitics, which is a product of the mind (subjective factor), civilisational changes are the result of the laws of social evolution (objective factor). Society is a system that develops under the influence of the dialectic of the aforementioned factors. Reason significantly determines the course of history, and civilisational changes determine the course of social evolution. It is assumed that the subjective factor determines the contents of society (development of means for work, religion, culture, philosophy, politics, science, technology, morality, law, etc.), and the objective factor determines the forms (structures) of society (changes in political-economic formations and social consciousness). In this sense, two phases of society's development are distinguished: a) long phases, which represent the quantitative growth of knowledge and the changes caused by this growth, and b) relatively short phases, which represent qualitative or civilisational changes. Some authors believe that there are only

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<sup>2</sup> Originality is the formation of ideas, views, beliefs, and stereotypes of opinion in each social group, and their inequalities, which determine specific ways of solving vital life problems.

two civilisational transitions in history, and in the material realm: the transition from the ancient world to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism. In the spiritual realm, they were accompanied by transitions from polytheism to monotheism from monotheism to secular society, and in public administration from autocracy to democracy. From this aspect, the post-socialist transition in the countries of Southeast Europe can be evaluated as decadent (anti-civilisational). Other authors make a simplified distinction between traditionalist and technogenic types of civilisational development.

Many thinkers and scientists in the past asked the question: is it possible to establish a more just social order? The victory of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 marked the beginning of the first artificial project of the organisation of society, defined as “communism” (“socialism”). Another artificial model was National Socialism (fascism). These were dominantly ideological and party models, created by the (collective) mind, new forms of social consciousness and government of the state and people. They failed because they contradicted the laws of social evolution. However, their remnants (in partial manifestations) probably still exist today.

Analysing social evolution, the question arises whether (or: to what extent) a third artificial model of the organisation of society has been established, which could conditionally be called a “speculative” or “financial-virtual” model. It is essentially a sophisticated and modified neo-imperialism, ruled by high-interest, privileged, and hereditary bankers and oligarchs, with a huge concentration of capital and social power. The main lever of their power is money (capital), which, along with the neoliberal ideology, is used in a megalomaniacal way to manipulate the financial system, economy, politics, and technology, and thus society as a whole. In such a destructive system of numerous social polarisations, among other things, systemic and other corruption is used, which is legalised as “lobbying”. Democracy, culture, religion, morality, family, tradition, and national identity are ignored. I stated the motive and mechanism of the mentioned social trends. Mostly, many severe social consequences and critical global problems are known. However, I am not able to explain the wider social causes and laws of their existence. This is what A. Peccei (2013) tried to do in the preface of the book “The human quality” the following way: “The essence of the problem faced by humanity at the current stage of its evolution consists in the fact that people do not have time to adapt the culture changes that they create in this world.” Thus, civilisational changes are generally ahead of the development of culture. Of course, the relationship between culture and civilisation is extremely complex. Culture never passes from one form of civilisation to another suddenly, immediately, and completely, but slowly, unconsciously, and incoherently. As a solution, Peccei proposes a “new humanism”, which is characterised by three aspects: a sense of globality, a love for justice, and intolerance of violence. And yet, both people and events appear exclusively within cultures. The aforementioned three aspects are massively stifled and suppressed in various ways in contemporary practice.

There is no doubt that our era has crystallised a great difference between the achievements of civilisation and cultural values. Many of the results of our civilisation have no cultural significance because they do not contribute to the development of culture. The Nobel laureate A. Schweitzer (1923) explained it in the following way: “*Material achievements are not yet culture, they become so only to the extent that they can be put to the service of the ideas of improving the individual and society.*” The best example of this is war events, which constantly accompany the history of mankind, even in the modern period. The world order is constantly changing, unfortunately - with the presence and strengthening of war, violence, and/or blackmail narrative. In all of this, civilisational changes take place under

the dominant role of states and their power machinery. Because of this, a logical question arises: where is freedom and justice in all this and in this turbulent time (very accelerating dynamics)? And not only them, but also the much-propagated effects of the market? Looking through this prism, I do not share the opinion of many authors, who believe that the post-socialist (some use the term “post-communist”) transition is a unique process, without any precedent in history. Why should the awakening of nationalism, ethnic conflicts, religious fundamentalism, growing crime, war conflicts, and all kinds of divisions be something new that has not already been seen in history? I do not think that this is any kind of novelty, but only a difference in the historical and cultural specificity of the context, which is made up of international and local factors.

### **5. “Neoliberal Culture” as a Phenomenon in the Countries of SEE**

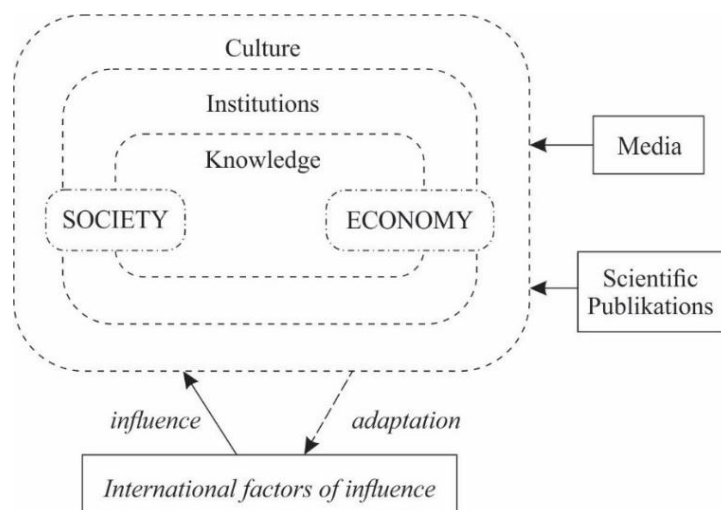
Under the so-called “neoliberal culture”, we mean very different implications of neoliberal policy in the field of culture, i.e. numerous negative changes in the system of value orientation of transitional societies. The mentioned cultural changes were conditioned by the specific forcing by the nomenclature of the authorities of such post-socialist phenomena as free market, dominance of private property, general deregulation, and minimisation of the role of the state. Such drastic changes in the value system in society inevitably led to cultural transformations (orders), which can tentatively be called the establishment of “neoliberal culture”. Of course, in all of this, it is impossible to separate the ideological discourse from the “cultural” one, although it is evident that the former had a hegemonic influence on the latter and not the other way around. “Neoliberal culture” appears to be operationalised and instrumentalised by forcing a “centring of values” around money, goods, consumption, technology, privilege, or celebrity (see: Hall, 2011, pp.722-723). In this way, neo-liberal forms and symbols of rationality imposed themselves as a specific culture (Couldry, 2010, p.12). It can be concluded that the materialistic and market-driven growth of cultural content has led to the dogmatisation and degeneration of culture and its spiritual-educational social essence. This is why “neoliberal culture” can be called a culture of non-market (privileged) enrichment.

If we look through the prism of neo-institutional economic theories of transitional environment for institutional change, we can conclude that culture and socio-cultural capital belong to the internal influencing factors (together with the path of dependence, the nature of public choice, and the nature of the nomenclatures authorities). External factors include globalisation, geopolitics, geoeconomics, and externally imposed ideologies, such as neoliberal, for example. There is no doubt that the dominance of a specific “neoliberal culture” in most transition countries (in particular in the countries of SEE) enabled the formation and strengthening of the so-called alternative institutions (from the shadows - Draskovic *et al.*, 2015; Grgurevic *et al.*, 2015). By building alternative institutions, “new elites” maintained and increased their role in the structure of social power for a long time. In pre-modern (transitional, post-socialist) societies, the elites retained their power mainly through a vacuum, patriarchal-clan network system. Thus, the elites controlled (enslaved and abused) all the most important spheres of society: culture, institutions, knowledge, and mass media (*Figure 3*). The elites replaced culture with a quasi-neoliberal culture<sup>3</sup>, institutions were

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<sup>3</sup> Many authors do not understand or carelessly and frivolously ignore the fact that the global world has long gone down the path of merciless neo-imperialist “culture” and competition, in all areas, in the literal sense of the word. The global project

abused, ignored and subjugated to alternative institutions, degradation and humiliation of knowledge and its replacement by mass ignorance, i.e. fake diplomas, independent media were supplanted by dependent media, etc. Such was the formula of the new (transitional) “slavery”.



Source: created by the authors.

**Figure 3. General “Shells” of Society and Economy**

Here, it is possible to include the views of Aron (1997) on the dominance of politics (or modern political systems) in society in our analysis of the ideological and political fetters of the modern transitional society. He proves this hypothesis by distinguishing between “constitutional-political systems” and “monopolistic party regime”, citing four main antinomies as criteria: between competition and monopoly, constitutionality and revolution, pluralism and bureaucratic absolutism, and states of various parties (pluralism) and party states (private state). It is clear that a consistent analysis and application of these criteria in individual countries with a transition economy allows us to easily conclude which form of the political regime dominates. At the same time, it is undeniable that the level of economic development, traditions and cultures greatly affect the nature of political institutions, i.e. on the possibility of creating and strengthening alternative institutions. However, the abstract study by Aron on the duality and/or ambiguity of politics (understood as a struggle for power and as a search for legitimate and best power) led to his idealistic understanding of institutions as normatively authorised rules of behaviour, the activities of which are aimed at common interest. If it were really so, alternative institutions would not exist anywhere. He writes about democracy and totalitarianism, “impulses of power”, “threshold of violence” and “degree of totalitarianism” (measured by the degree of comprehensive ideology), notices the difference between a legally legitimate source of power and the owner of real power ... (compare: Draskovic, 2023). However, he does not notice and does not explain their main consequences, among which alternative institutions occupy a key place. It is certainly positive that Aron (Ibid.) singles out and cites five factors of totalitarian rule: a) party's monopoly on political activity; b) ideology as the official “state truth”; c) monopoly on the means of violence and

with many of its tendencies (especially military conflicts and weapons) objectively threatens the survival of mankind with its anti-civilisational disregard for freedoms, foreign cultures and human rights, humanism, justice, equality, security, social capital, institutions, ecological balance and other sacred human values.

persuasion; d) submission to the state of the majority in their economic and professional activities; and e) politicisation of all activities, with police and ideological terror.

The most common and necessary “shells” (constituent elements, key areas, pillars) of any human society are culture, institutions and knowledge. In recent decades, they have been greatly promoted in scientific publications and means of mass information (see *Figure 1*). They have a civilisational, developing, imperative and continuous character in society. Throughout its history, every society has experienced periods when this character has been more or less undermined, threatened and underestimated. One of these periods was, of course, the so-called “post-socialist transition”. Undoubtedly, during this period, culture as the most general and broadest social “shell” was repeatedly violated and replaced by a primitive and narrowly self-serving *quasi-neoliberal culture* and ideology. In addition, institutions were ignored, abused and subordinated to extremely narrowly interested, so-called “alternative institutions”. Knowledge also was degraded many times due to its massification, privatisation, underestimation and subsequent debilitation of society (fooling people).

Observing through the prism of the mentioned study by Acemoglu and Robinson (2021), it becomes clearer why and how “*neoliberal culture*” (with all its vices and tragic manifestations) has established itself as dominant in most transitional countries, especially as a phenomenon in the countries of Southeast Europe (SEE). Namely, the sudden and unexpected shift of political power with quasi-democratic innovations, the recombination of institutional arrangements, alternative institutions and long-term accumulation of various cultural responses, along with an undisguised desire for change, allowed the formation of a specific post-socialist cultural configuration. It was quite visible, transparent, immoral and brutal, due to its main characteristics of that time: inconsistency, fictitiousness, insecurity, programming (low turnover), openness and dependence on the international environment, party dominance, memory determinism, general insecurity systems, etc. Of course, culture and institutions intersect and complement each other, which is why informal institutions (as a “cut” of their commonality) had a decisive influence on the alternative “development” of institutional mechanisms. This had an extremely negative impact on all sectors of society, including culture.

## **Conclusions**

It is too naive to expect that consciousness, conscience, morality, mentality, culture, motives and habits of people can change quickly, through some rhetorical and palliative changes (the so-called “reforms”). As a result, “reforms” failed in most transition countries.

Unlike culture as the most general social environment, which essentially consists of many subcultures, different teachings, and trends (multiculturalism, which does not have an authoritarian inner core), every ideology essentially strives for a privileged status of social dominance. This is precisely why the attempt to impose neoliberal ideology on transitional states as a new “neoliberal culture” was a big fraud. We believe that the mentioned expression can only be used in the context of criticism of neoliberalism, or quasi-neoliberalism, and not at all in an affirmative sense.

The quasi-neoliberal lust of “reformers”, in the desire to massively and globally affirm the alleged “neoliberal culture”, affirmed various elements of quasi-culture (non-culture). In this way, it paved the way for new shackles of totalitarianism, imperialism, violence, exploitation, primitivism, consumerism, nationalism, amorality, and poverty. All this was based on the privileged individual interests of the so-called “new elites”. It gave rise to great



problems and deformations, and in essence created a new dogma, a new elite system of privileges and, consequently, “new shackles”. It identified deep contradictions between individualism and collectivism, liberalism and dirigisme, legally unacceptable and logically incomprehensible private and group interests, irresponsible “games without rules” and organised “games with higher rules”, in which the main goals of the so-called “new elites” were interests.

Using descriptive analysis, along with other methods of economic science, in this article, we have verified all initial hypotheses.

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## **KULTŪROS, INSTITUCIJŲ, EKONOMIKOS IR CIVILIZACIJOS POKYČIŲ TARPUSAVIO ĮTAKOS KOMPLEKSIŠKUMAS**

**Milica Delibasic, Niksa Grgurevic, Karolis Andriuškevičius**

### **SANTRAUKA**

Straipsnio objektas – ekonomikos, kultūros ir institucijų santykio kompleksškumas, susijęs su civilizacijos pokyčiais istorinės raidos procese. Straipsnyje siekiama atkreipti dėmesį į kultūros svarbą institucijų ir ekonominės sistemos stabilumui. Jis grindžiamas trimis pagrindinėmis hipotezėmis: 1) vadinamojo institucinio vakuomo laikotarpiu postsocialistinę kultūrą pakeitė vadinamoji neoliberalioji kultūra; 2) abi jos buvo pereinamojo laikotarpio, neturinčios nuoseklumo ir realiai tvarios ilgalaikės perspektyvos; 3) abi jos buvo sukurtos skubotai dėl tų pačių įtaką darančių veiksnių, taip pat melagingų pažadų, autoritarizmo, vyraujančio elitizmo, partinio totalitarizmo ir ideologinio dogmatizmo. Straipsnyje taikomas deskriptyvinis metodas ir ekonomikos mokslui įprasti metodai. Išvadose patvirtintos iškeltos hipotezės.

*REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:* kultūra; institucija; ekonomika; civilizacijos pokyčiai.