

# Cultural Imperialism. Tool for the Dissolution of the Belongingness Feeling

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**Abstract.** *The study is a qualitative approach on how the cultural imperialism affects the belongingness feeling of the Romanian youth. The main role in this phenomenon is attributed to the mass media. The methods used involve a pre-test, consisting of a focus group, combined with an experiment and a small survey, and further on, a series of interviews. The provided answers help at shaping a general image of how different generations, and especially the present young generation, perceive themselves in comparison to the Western values. This “inside-outside” approach of the subject allows making a sketch of the modern Romanian youth.*

**Keywords:** *cultural imperialism, mass media, Romania, youth, national culture.*

## Introduction

Cultural imperialism is a phenomenon that cannot be neglected, whether one embraces its massive effects or not. It is a variable present in the everyday actions and behavior and it constantly changes the life's equation. Many researches have been conducted on this topic trying to capture its essence and to define a specific pattern that might be found in the countries where cultural imperialism flourishes.

Curiosity is the main factor that has driven the present study into finding out how the situation takes shape in Romania. The hypothesis revolves around the idea that the feeling of belongingness of the Romanian youth is being dismantled by the cultural imperialism. The young individuals are the focus within this examination. The more mature generations already have a formed set of values and the probability of changing them is much smaller. The research starts from the premise that the national feeling is something rather foreign for the younger generations and that the main role in this rupture is attributed to mass media. Moreover, the main power that sets the trends seems to be the United States (US).

Given the amplitude of globalization, it is utterly necessary to monitor the development of younger generations and see how deep is the gap between these and the more mature ones, especially when it comes to the identification with the national element. Many cultures, not only the Romanian one, risk being “swallowed” by these global homogenous trends and lose their originality, together with their “followers”.

The empirical frame of the research consists of two phases. The first one includes a focus group, an experiment and a small survey, which serve as a pre-test for the methodological tools. The second one includes a set of semi-structured interviews with individuals on different age categories, varying from 16 to 55 years old.

### **Cultural Imperialism**

Before going deeper into the study, one must grasp the real meaning of this world-wide spread concept and unveil its many facets. What is cultural imperialism at a large scale? What concepts lie at its foundations? One of the authors that have dedicated a complete and detailed work to this subject, simply called *Cultural Imperialism*, is John Tomlinson. He marks the beginning of this phenomenon somewhere around the 60's, stating that “*the economic implications are the real ones at stake*” (Tomlinson, 1991, 3). Furthermore, he claims that the cultural factors are crucial in the political and economic world dominance. These are rather strong affirmations with which he starts his book, but it also gives a good sense of the true and enormous nature this form of imperialism has. In other words, cultural imperialism can be defined as “*the conscious and organized effort made by Western, particularly US communication conglomerates to maintain commercial, political and military superiority*” (Jin, 2007, 756).

Cultural imperialism, known as media imperialism as well and originating from the hegemonic theory of media effects, has received a great attention mainly due to the reaction of the Frankfurt School on the way mass media create deception or “*mass-deception*” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972 in Neyazi, 2010, 907). At the same time, the idea of American domination is widely expressed. Herman and McChesney claim that the American culture is transmitted through mass media,

particularly in the developing countries, the result being a cultural homogenization and a spread of consumerism ideas (Herman and McChesney, 1997 in Neyazi, 2010, 907). In 2007, Thussu has stressed that the North and the United States at its core continue to dominate the international media (Thussu, 2007 in Neyazi, 2010, 907). In the same respect, Herbert Schiller considers US and few European nations as a powerful communication industry that has forced global commercialization and Western imperialism (Schiller, 1976 in Jin, 2007, 754). Following the same idea, many authors claim that local and traditional culture in many countries is overwhelmed by slick media products (film, television, and news), especially from US (Tunstall, 1977 or Guback, 1984 in Jin, 2007, 754). For instance, the international exchange of television programs is defined as a one-way flow communication, from the West to the Third World (Jin, 2007, 756).

Raymond Williams, cited by Tomlinson, gives an insight over the structure on which imperialism is being built. He sees it as being a system created on both political and economic spheres. In addition, he draws attention to a rather interesting point of view, namely the fact that imperialism is mainly an American one. He warns that one should not think of the traditional, political form of “colonialism”, but to a much-refined mean of economic domination, that must be correlated with the global reach of capitalism (Williams, 1983 in Tomlinson, 1991). Uncovering more from John Tomlinson’s work and gliding forward through his concepts, one can discover something extremely valuable not only for the beginning of the 90’s, when his work first emerged, but also for today. He classifies cultural imperialism into four categories that shall stand further on and sustain this concept as its main pillars. The first one is cultural imperialism as “*media imperialism*”. It encompasses not only the unbreakable tie between the political interests and cultural aspects, but also “*the dumping of cheap television in the Third World*” and the tendency of market dominance of the Western news agencies. This way, the media become the main modern player in the Western capitalism. The primary objectives are dominating one’s culture through “mass mediated” content (Tomlinson, 1991, 19). Media globalization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century imply a global communication network (Thompson, 1995/2000 in Fuchs, 2010, 46). Thus, communication and the transmission of information are possible in real time and over distance (Fuchs, 2010, 46). The second category is cultural imperialism as a *discourse of nationality*. This section reminds that one should not be speaking about culture as a natural phenomenon. It is the creation of human beings. This form of imperialism shifts the pattern of thinking from a geographical perspective (with local and foreign cultures) to a historical one ruled by the antithesis of modernity and tradition (Tomlinson, 1991, 19). The third perspective reveals cultural imperialism as the *critique of global capitalism*. It tingles the most sensitive nerve, because it suggests that, rather than seeing the world as “*a collection of political entities*” defined as states, everything

turns into the “*political-economic system of global capitalism*” (Tomlinson, 1991, 19). Finally yet importantly, Tomlinson pictures cultural imperialism as the *critique of modernity*. Capitalism represents “*the inflection of modernity*”. It assumes that the homogeneity that spreads its tentacles in societies is fuelled by a “modern” way of life (Tomlinson, 1991, 19).

Maintaining this strong, yet intriguing course of ideas, the literature brings into light some nuances from Colin Sparks’ *Globalisation, Development and Mass media*. In the light of what Tomlinson stated, Sparks mentions himself the new paradigm - “*the imperialist paradigm*”. He describes his approach as an analysis of the connection between the developing countries and the developed ones. There is also interesting to put in balance what Tomlinson stated in 1991 and Sparks did in 2007. Surprisingly, there are no fundamental changes between the two views. Colin Sparks claims himself that “*the mechanisms are less overt, but at least as effective in denying the population of developing countries access to decent standards of life*” (Sparks, 2007, 81). He also introduces Andre Gunder Frank’s perspective on the subject. The author points out extremely well the “dark side” of the matter. This whole mechanism is based on processes that guarantee the development of Western countries and determine the less advanced one to struggle in a continuous circle of poverty. Developed countries cannot prosper, unless underdeveloped countries face misery and exploitation. The only solution for escape for these small countries would be the dissociation from the world market (Frank in Sparks, 2007).

Another author whose ideas point out important aspects in the long debate about cultural imperialism is Herbert Schiller. He mainly writes about the US communication industries. He considers these also instill into the “*military-industrial complex*”. The alliances of the business sphere and military forces seek to gain control over the international communication and place US as the dominant state in this web. Furthermore, Schiller is not so worried with the international effects the US media might have, but with the various ways in which they can destroy the human potential within US itself (Schiller and J. Phillips, 1970 in Sparks, 2007). After emphasizing the major worldwide impact Schiller does, Sparks takes further this idea and brings globalization into discussion. It mainly encircles networks through which a vivid circulation of symbols is made. The author believes that this immateriality of media products and its rapid circulation is the most representative for globalization (Sparks, 2007).

Some other authors, like Chalmers Johnson, define the modern *cultural imperialism* as a form of *neo-colonialism*. More precisely, this represents “*multinational corporations covertly supported by an imperialist power*” (Johnson, 2004 in Rowe, 2004). On the same note, John Carlos Rowe mentions, in his article *Culture, US Imperialism and Globalisation*, that imperialism together with the military power develop a “*culture of fear*”. This encourages the capitalist mechanisms to evolve and it engages people in

military conflicts. Moreover, he states that the high-tech tools are one of the major elements that help sustaining this status quo. They give the illusion of having access to the primary sources of information. People are being seduced by the perspective of detaining information and being able to manipulate through it (Rowe, 2004).

Within the same frame, Chambers (2003, 251) talks about "*a burgeoning hegemony of the English language*". Being detached by its original countries, like United Kingdom, Australia, or Unites States of America, the English language has become the *lingua franca* for non-English native speakers that use it in order to efficiently communicate at the international level (Chambers, 2003, 252).

Based on the above perspectives, this paper interprets *cultural imperialism* today as a constant struggle to limit all human needs, values and perspectives to the digital sphere. The Internet and the media offer great potential of control and access and the ones who manage to become skilled "shape-shifters" can be the ones who set the new communication trends.

Douglas A. Houston presents different scenarios the digital era might give birth to. He proposes three such perspectives with direct influences over cultures and he also shows we have an obvious tendency of humanizing the Internet. The first perspective refers to *cultural benevolence*. This concept is explained by a degree of appreciation and tolerance from people, regarding other cultures. Here, the author states that in order to prevent the contamination of fragile cultures, certain rules should be imposed for the technological exchanges between nations (Houston, 2003, 358). The second category is *cultural warfare*. Here are crammed all the activities that regard wars and conflicts. This comes as a counterpoint to the first category, because the Internet would allow the formation of ideological and cultural niches. Instead of more tolerance, people would actually be subjected to less tolerance and less sharing. It promotes a self-interested individual (Houston, 2003, 359). The third perspective and, maybe, the most controversial one, refers to the influence of the Internet as a *cultural creative destruction*. The essence of this point is that "foreign" ideas, values and norms substitute the local ones (Houston, 2003, 359).

Although predictions are not extremely optimistic, Francis Fukuyama emphasizes the benefits of the Internet. He sees it as a "*process of adapting to environmental shocks*". This, as he explains, is fundamental to maintaining an open society. Still, Fukuyama states that this access takes us beyond the local cultures and it might open the path to societies with "*extraordinarily scarce cultural and economic options*" (Fukuyama, 1999 in Houston, 2003, 6).

As expected, since the early 1990s, cultural imperialism is increasingly criticized. First, some scholars have argued that, within the global environment characterized by a large number of actors and media flows, the notion of Western media domination cannot be sustained anymore (Sonwalkar, 2001 in Jin, 2007, 755). There are an

increasing number of domestic cultural industries, all over the world, which aim to broadcast especially for the viewers that share the same ethnicity, language or cultural backgrounds, regardless of their geographical residence (Jin, 2007, 755). Second, there is a set of literature that talks about the underestimation of local resistance to Western dominance. Straubhaar emphasizes that, in some countries, there is an active resistance to the media content of Western products and that the “audiences will tend to prefer that programming which is closest or most proximate to their own culture” (Straubhaar, 2000, 4 in Jin, 2007, 756).

### **Romania and Cultural Imperialism**

Unfortunately, there are only a few studies conducted on Romania, about the effects of cultural imperialism. However, before understanding how Western cultures affect the local one, one must grasp the true nature of how the Romanians perceive the national values. Ciprian Vâlcan gives a few directions. According to his notes, there are two viewpoints of the Romanian culture. Although described as extremes, they give a good insight on the matter. The first one embodies *the radical skepticism*. The individuals belonging to this category are critical of all that is national, from the ethnical structure, considered to be inferior, to the national character. Romanians are seen as coward and servile and our morals thought to be primitive and barbarian (Vâlcan, 2007-2008). The opposite perspective brings forward *the national demagogue*. This category affirms that the Romanian people are unique and that the world tends to ignore its true importance and artistic treasures. Romania is somehow damned to “carry its cultural seclusion and poverty” (Vâlcan, 2007-2008).

Nowadays, the influence of cultural imperialism in Romania is beyond debate. We see it in the media content and in the way it creates our mindset. This is what drove the curiosity into researching how this affected the attachment to the national values.

### **Methodological design**

The present research aims to empirically investigate the way Romanians, especially young generations, perceive the difference between local and international culture. The main research questions are the following: How the concept of the West is perceived, especially in comparison with the view of the domestic context?, Are the imported values and symbols more important than the national ones?, and What is the mass media role within the globalization process? In order to give in-depth answers to the above mentioned research questions, qualitative research methods have been chosen. Thus, aiming to test the methodological instruments, a focus group has been conducted. Within it, a small experiment and a set of survey questions have been added. Based on these methods, a set of semi-structured interviews have been realized.



### *The analysis of the focus group*

The pre-test of the research consists of a focus group. Six young people were called, all with ages between 16-25. They have responded to a set of 8 main questions regarding the major topic analyzed and to a questionnaire. Moreover, the end of the focus group has been combined with an experiment, in order to see individuals' reactions to important names from different industries, major symbols promoted by the media.

The first question of the focus group refers to the countries individuals think about when they hear about the concept of the West. One of the respondents has said that *"First of all I think of France, Germany, Great Britain, but also Holland, because these represent the cradle of European civilization. And in the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries, they spread their values all around the world, from Asia to Northern and Southern America."* Countries from the Western Europe, such as France, Germany, and Spain have been almost constantly evoked mainly *"given their geographical position, but also because of the international literature. The novels are the ones which thoroughly speak about Western and Oriental influences and what countries are molded by them"*. However, Germany is associated with Hitler in one of the cases. France has been chosen *"because it is also a model of civilization which spread all around Europe and the world"*. On the same note, Belgium and Holland are brought into discussion *"because these are the only two countries I have not heard having trouble with the educational system"*. Interestingly, the respondent that has chosen Spain motivates this choice by claiming that it is at the physical end of our continent. Surprisingly, no one has mentioned US, as expected. In addition, the participants have been tempted to answer from a more geographical point of view, in contrast with the cultural influences. When individual have been asked why US is not perceived as a symbol of the West the answers were intriguing. While one individual claims that rather Japan is part of the Western countries, as *"the American culture goes all the way there and back"*, another respondent stresses that *"If we do not think from a geographical point of view, the Western culture is spread world-wide."*

Although the respondents wish to limit the boundaries of the West to the European ones, they still admit that the American influence is a major one, all around the globe. Moreover, at a non-verbal level, the participants showed a strong implication from the very beginning and during the time they talked, a certain vibe of despondence could be felt in their voices.

The second question focuses on the way *the participants perceive Romania in contrast to the Western image*. The opinions have proved to be extremely juicy in information. An interesting fact is that the answers have initially been critical in respect to the Romania's situation, but they gradually have become more positive on how the potential of this country could take shape. One of the respondents has portrayed the way Romanians built their image starting with the 90s: *"After 1990, the Romanians*

started to massively import a lot of cultural and linguistic elements, without genuinely assimilating them. This led to shapes without substance. We find ourselves in the middle, between the West and the Orient, but the Oriental influences can still be noticed." Furthermore, the respondent has firmly added: "But, the national element is still extremely strong. There is the national feeling present in our mindset." Regarding the everyday behavior, the respondent claims that the Romanian behavior is in contrast with the Western one: "I'm talking from maintaining the streets clean, to the way we treat the others. We have to work much more on that". The next participant completed this idea: "It doesn't really matter how you look at the world. Romania is down, compared to the Western countries. The systems are not working. You cannot build a sustainable and bright future, and as for the level of impertinence, it is extremely high". However, the general perspective becomes more moderate with the following answer: "Romania has different Western influences. It has always tried to incorporate them. But, good or bad, it has more Oriental influences. And there is a pretty big discrepancy between how Romania tries to be and how it really is." Starting from this statement, the next participant has added: "Romania is a poor country which is struggling to become like Germany or France, but it just cannot make it. Taking into account the fact we were under the communist sphere for so long, I believe we have not yet completely got rid of its influences." In the same context, the role of the mass media has been brought into discussion, as well. Considering that Romania has a great potential, one of the respondents emphasizes that mass media have a very negative influence on the way Romanians and Romania are perceived. Following the same pattern, another individual claims that "as for the educational system, it is not bad at all. Mass media is the one that makes you feel like a fool. They promote this awful image about us and the country. I have analyzed for a long time the possibility of leaving elsewhere. But, comparing myself to students from other countries, I reached the conclusion I'm much more prepared than they are. The difference is they are being told they are good and they can make it. We are not". Thus, although the respondents are aware of the shortcomings of the Romanian political, economic and social system, they agree that the potential of this country is bigger than mass media claim to be.

The third subject of the discussions was whether the respondents feel a more powerful attachment to the national values, or to those imported from the West. The responses are diverse and can be grouped in three categories. The first set of answers underline the importance of the local values. In this respect, one of the respondents claims that "I identify myself with them. I enjoy our literature or history". Although this individual admits that imported movies, various forms of entertainment and foreign music are liked, "I still like Romanian carols and poetry". Another opinion focuses more on the quality of people and of models. The individual believes that "we also have many people who deserve to be promoted. Unfortunately, some of them remain unknown". One of the reasons might be the lack of patriotism. The second set of answers emphasizes the major role of the West. Although the individuals are



aware of the richness of the Romanian values and history, they are not considered *"fancy"*. Thus, the youngest participant within the focus group claims *"I am afraid I'll have to choose the Western influences. I am talking about the movies, the music and the books. I am not keen on ours"*. Another similar answer appreciates the originality of the West. The individual stresses that although Romania has personalities that do memorable work, *"they all end up messing up everything. They become part of the mainstream"*. On the same level, the respondent prefers the West because *"they promote the original ideas. We only copy them"*. Third, one of the participants set the equilibrium within the debate. The main idea stated is that *"we should filter the local, as well as the foreign values. It is not wise to accept whole-heartedly everything. I prefer the local ones and I also believe we should remain open-minded and accept what is of good quality from the other countries"*. Concluding, although the young generation is sensitive to the local values, history and personalities, the Western influence seems to be more attractive and, sometimes, more qualitative.

The issue of development transition was another analyzed topic. Thus, the respondents have been asked whether Romania, on its way to becoming a developed country, should consider the West as a role model or should import foreign practices based on a selective pattern. All the individuals agree that Romania should not import every aspect *"We should reform our systems, through work and creativity"*. Even the youngest member states: *"We should import only certain practices. Because we have values of our own which we should exploit."* Another participant claimed: *"The Western European countries have a more stable economic activity. But we should not adopt models that have been used for so long by others. They are old. We need flexibility. We should apply only what fits to our system"*. The main elements that have been mentioned are *"capability"* and *"inspiration"*. Thus, while Romania is a very capable country, it only needs a little bit of inspiration in order to be capable of fulfilling its goals. Only one response detaches from the majority. Sustaining that any foreign influence would be bad, the person stresses that *"Our biggest issue is about who takes responsibility. Utopian as it may sound, we should find our own agenda of development"*.

Based on the aforementioned discussions, the problem of the media has arisen. In this case, the topic develops around the importance of mass media within the cultural globalization process. Moreover, the issue of who has influenced whom (US have influenced Europe, or the other way around) has been discussed. As expected, mass media is perceived as the major entity within the globalization course of action *"Media totally influences cultural globalization, from entertainment in all its forms, to advertising. US and Europe, as well as the whole industry, rely on media. And one of its principal objectives is to push us towards consumerism, for profit."*

However, within a world dominated by economic forces, the idea of self-control comes into discussion: *"The companies are the shepherds that lead the flock. The dogs which direct the masses are the mass media. It's our choice whether we listen to them or"*

not. *We are not obliged to do so.*" The direction of influence between US and Europe is not clear. *"They try to take the best from all the domains. And everything is done through the media and the symbols promoted. It's the main agent of globalization"*. Still, one of the answers revolved around US as the main imperialist power: *"Apparently, US takes charge of the media monopoly. The American values are everywhere, from television to the press and especially online. It seems like there is the epicenter of all the information and tendencies."* It seems to be a game in which the biggest and the strongest always win: *"The globalization phenomenon resembles a dog which tries to grab its own tail and it doesn't succeed. The big nations influence one another. Each idea was used and reused."* Thus, regardless of the way ideas or values are adopted, they are all transmitted through mass media.

Considering that media is the major factor within the cultural imperialism, the respondents are questioned about the most effective channels. The Internet seems to be the leader since it is used by a large amount of young people. However, the issue of credibility comes into discussion: *"The Internet can be extremely deceiving. Unlike television, anyone can have access and write whatever they like. It is not always a trustworthy source"* and *"being wide-spread does not mean it is also efficient"*. On the same note, television might be a more efficient manipulation tool as *"it covers more age groups than other means"*.

When talking about the advantages of globalization, the most used expressions are *"entertainment"; "chance"; "openness"; "new values"; "equilibrium between local and foreign cultures"*. The main disadvantages mentioned were: *"destruction"; "loss of local culture"; "no originality"; "same identity as everyone else"*.

Based on the questions within the focus group, one main conclusion might be the following. Although young generation is aware of the quality of Romanian values, they use to adopt Western values. One possible explanation is that mass media does not give any other alternative.

### ***The analysis of the experiment***

Within the focus group, the participants have been part of a small experiment. They have been separately shown different pictures with international and global-known brands and have been asked what values and associations they reveal. The table below presents the used images.

When seeing the first photo of the Romanian grilled minced meat rolls, the participants have associated it with *"local culture"; "1<sup>st</sup> May (The International Labor Day – the custom is to go out for a grill); "noise- from the grill and parties outdoors"; "cheap product"*. When shown the McMici from McDonald's, the first associated expressions are: *"import"; "junk-food"; "image created to be perfect"; "American-Romanian mixture"; "money"; "manipulation"*. For the second photo, the words used are the following: *"local culture"; "authentic popular costume"; "1<sup>st</sup> December (Romania's National Day);*

Table 1. The images used within the experiment



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5

*“Romania’s best side”; “simplicity”; “beauty”; “long-forgotten tradition”*. At the same time, the same clothing has been presented to the participants while being worn by a model.

The reviews are different: *“international”; “Romanian influence in the universal culture”; “two worlds which do not fit together”; “consumerism”*. The Starbucks third photo generates expressions as: *“American company”; “the mermaid symbol – manipulation”*;

*“brand”*; *“set of values”*. The fourth photo, related to an entertainment show that has been imported in many countries, has generated the following reactions: *“young talents promoted”*; *“different style”*; *“main purpose – advertising and money”*. The last photo, representing the logo of BBC, has released mainly positive reviews: *“latest news”*; *“world renown”*; *“major influence”*; *“objective”*; *“good PR”*.

The purpose of this experiment is that of analyzing the main words that come to an individual’s mind when seeing local or imported symbols. The respondents clearly succeed to make the distinction between the products that are national, authentic, simple, beautiful, but sometimes cheap, and the products that are imported, perfect, stylish, but still manipulative and luring to consumerism. However, although a more in-depth set of experiments is needed in order to draw a more generalized conclusion, one can conclude that young generation appreciate the national symbols, but aim to consume the foreign ones.

### *The analysis of the questionnaires*

Before ending the focus group, each of the six participants have had to fill in a questionnaire regarding the subjects earlier discussed. The purpose of this procedure is that of providing a more in-depth analysis and to check whether there is consistency between the opinions provided before, during the debate, and the answers written down after the discussions.

Asked what languages they prefer in the conversations with their close groups, the opinions were split. Three of the individuals prefer to use English. While two of them admit it is easier to express certain thoughts, the other three prefer Romanian. Moreover, two of the respondents claim that both languages are beautiful, but should be used separately. It is not good to interpose expressions (*“I prefer to speak Romanian correctly”*; *“I love to speak Romanian, but I also like to speak English. Still, I think the latter should be used only when speaking with foreign people”*; *“I do not prefer English, but some expressions come in handy”*; *“It mostly depends on my mood”*).

Another important aspect is that the respondents consume almost exclusively online media. When questioned what type of TV shows they usually chose, the options with the highest ranking are documentaries and cultural shows. Afterwards, there are the news bulletins and entertainment shows.

Asked how mass media portray Romania, 3 out of 6 responded have declared *“in a negative way”*. They motivated their choice by the need of sensational on behalf of the Romanian media. Moreover, the lack of professionalism could be one of the motives of the poor quality of Romanian media content. The other half of the individuals have responded *“neutral”*, because they believe Romania is portrayed with good as well as bad aspects. However, when it comes to the West, all of the respondents have chosen *“in a positive way”*. The motivation is that the media tries to present the discrepancy between the situation in our country and the other Western

powers. They have also stated that media acts this way from economic reasoning and because the West has stronger organizational culture.

When the participants have had to choose a country where they would like to live in, most of them chose other countries, like Great Britain, France, Australia, Hawaii, US or New Zealand. However, none of the explanations have revealed this choice as a result of something negative from Romania. These choices come as a wish to fulfill a childhood dream, the wish to read rare books, or to explore exotic fauna.

At the lifestyle chapter, 5 out of 6 individuals chose the local one. They see themselves more close to the national culture, because they respect the tradition and they feel like *"they are the last generation born in this spirit"*. Two of them state they could not get used with some other culture's customs. Nevertheless, two respondents acknowledge that even if they adopt the local lifestyle, there are Western values organizing their life and reflecting the *"modern pace"*.

Questioned if after all they experienced, they feel more attached to the national values or to the Western imported ones, most of them have chosen *"the national ones"*. Although there are some participants that consider they identify themselves with the Western *"directions"*, they still mentioned that *"the belongingness feeling exists and wherever you go, you never erase that longing for home"*. The ones that have firmly chosen the local perspective have invoked the same reason. In the end, all the respondents consider important that the national values must be preserved. Not only they consider the local values as important, but they believe these should be cultivated and intensely promoted.

### *The analysis of the interviews*

In order to get a better grasp of how younger and older individuals' opinions shape in respect with the cultural imperialism issue, a set of semi-structured interviews has been conducted. Aiming to emphasize the perception differences between generations, there are two respondents selected from each of the following age segments: 16-25, 26-35, 36-45, and 46-55. The questions used follow the same pattern as the ones from the focus-group. Thus, there can be vividly seen differences or similarities with the young group's answers.

The first theme brought into discussion refers to the countries associated with the West. One of the youngest respondents has chosen Germany, Great Britain and France. The main reason for this choice refers to the democratization and economic development level, and to their importance for the European Union and in the world: *"They have proved their power, uniqueness and had a decisive role in the cultural evolution"*. Another young respondent automatically associate West with the US: *"It's the main symbol of current cultural development"*. However, Great Britain, France and Germany are perceived as trendsetters as well. When talking about people between 26 and 35 years old, the discussion becomes much deeper.



Thus, one of the individuals claims that *“for the Romanians, West usually means developed, civilized, free, and democratic countries”*, like US, Great Britain, Germany and France. However, the role of other countries, like Denmark, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, or Japan, cannot be negated: *“They seem to be even more developed and more civilized than the first mentioned countries”*. The fact that Romanians tend to name countries from the West and Central part of the Europe might be the consequence of the way media portray the idea of development and the way they chose to select the information that sells: *“We know a lot of things about US, about Great Britain or about any other West-European country. However, we know almost nothing about Scandinavian countries or about the Far East. This is probably happening because they were usually impartial, neutral when it comes to international conflicts. And maybe more important, they are not countries that focus so much on consumerism and on marketing strategies, as it is the US example”*. Another similar opinion focuses on countries like Norway and Denmark as they *“are emblems of democracy, of well-behaved people, a level of education and living closest to perfection in Europe”*, Germany *“for its economic model, through the power of work and production”*, and Great Britain and France, *“countries with millennial history and tradition, democracy role model and historical reference”*. The 36-45 age group individuals point only towards the European land. Germany, France and Great Britain are named for their political, economic, military, and cultural accomplishments of the past, and *“Germany for its safety, uprightness and responsibility”*. The individuals between 46 and 55 have chosen Great Britain, France, Germany and US because *“their continuous socio-economic and cultural development offered them the statute of powers which constitute models to be followed”*. Moreover, they equal order, discipline, perfection, culture, education, wealth, well-developed economy, civilization and musical culture (as, for instance, Mozart, Strauss etc.).

The second topic discusses the way Romania is seen in the West. The youngest participants claim that Romania does not have a good image in Europe: *“Although it is an E.U. member, it is considered a mediocre country and its citizens are not treated the same way as others of the Union”*. The respondents underline the discrepancies within the country: *“It has amazing resources and ambitious and devoted young people who wish to change some things, but the corruption level is too high, the social problems are more vivid than ever and nobody tries to improve our national image. Thus, Romania is seen as the European slacker”*. The 26-35 years old group have similar reasoning pattern. Romania is perceived as a *“beautiful country, with a lot of potential, but without personality”*, a country with many resources but *“without the knowledge and means to become unique, appreciated”*, and visible. The respondent brought forward a paradox: although aiming to copy what the other countries are doing, Romania is appreciated by the foreigners mainly for its traditions and heritage. Considering Romania as a *“rare beauty”*, another respondent claims that it is poorly governed, *“without suitable*



*education and living standards*". The same pattern can be observed for the 36-45 and 46-55 year-olds groups. They consider Romania as suffering from a *"historical retardation"*, due to its communism heritage. In spite of its beauty and potential, Romania does not have the capacity of *"structuring some well-defined directions for the conceit of some efficient mechanisms for progress"*. Moreover, Romania is seen as a country in which people do not want to invest, in which ignorance is omnipresent. However, in a nationalist perspective, there are situations in which Romania is perceived as a country that must be respected by the West.

The third topic focuses on the youth attachment for the national *versus* Western values. Although almost all the responses tend to show the same Western attachment, few of them believe in the national attachment as well. The youngest individuals consider that young generations prefer *"the values and models imported from the West"*. Trying to understand this phenomenon, a respondent from the 26-35 years old group claims that this attachment is not necessarily to be blamed: *"If we pay attention to the context, we may say it is a natural change, it is a natural evolution. Having such a few perspectives during Communism, and having so many opportunities now, it is understandable why the traditional values and cultural elements are not central anymore"*. However, *"the rural areas might still be an exception"*. In a pessimistic and unhappy manner, all the other age categories admit the strength of the West influence, even in the youth desire to leave Romania.

Trying to reach explanations for this occurrence, the responses are various. While one of the youngest individuals claims that *"the young ones are raised to believe that only what comes from the West is valuable and has prestige"*, the other one still believes that there are young people that are interested in the national culture. One of the older participants refers to two possible explanations: *"First, it is the large impact mass media in general and the Internet in particular have on them. It is probably the first main period in which young generations have the possibility to know and to find out anything they could have ever desired. [...] Second, I believe the traditional values are becoming less and less important due to urbanization, to technological development, to emancipation, to the access to foreign information."* Another opinion is underlying the importance of role models: *"When not having strong, local role models, the young ones do not have valuable comparison terms."* In the same respect, the respondents of the 36-45 category name it as *"the classical phenomenon of acculturation"* or the phenomenon based on the *"need of variety"*. The ideas of needing new perspectives and of becoming bored by what is old are mentioned by the next age category as well. Moreover, one of the individuals stresses that young people *"prefer the West from snobbery and the insufficient knowledge of our own culture"*. Interestingly, the oldest respondents claim either that it might be that *"nobody taught the youth our own values"* or *"they realize this is the future"*.

When asked whether the Western lifestyle and mentalities should be adopted or not, all the respondents claim that Romanians should adhere only to those Western practices that fit and can be combined with the local values: *“the best way would be to combine the local element with some suitable western practices and, from this mixture, create a lifestyle and mentality which truly fit us”*. Either it is about creating a personality and individuality (*“It is good to desire to be better, to be like the best, but not without individuality”*), or about adapting and readjusting the existing values (*“The ideal strategy would probably be to select best practices and knowledge from the West and try to adapt and readjust them to the Romanian specificity”*), the inspiration from the West should be limited, *“only in certain domains”*, and only to those elements that help a positive development.

Based on the above discussions, the importance of media within the globalization process comes into question. As in the case of the youth, the older respondents admit that mass media have a major role in distributing global symbol and values. The two elements, mass media and globalization are perceived to *“go hand in hand. One could not be possible without the other”*. Mass media is perceived to be the tool used in order to help people know about *“the values, the products, and the way of life of the West”*. For the generation under 46 years old, the Internet seems to be the most important channel in distributing information. However, for the persons over 46, the TV still remains the main informational entity.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of globalization, the issue of *“Americanization”*, rather than globalization, has been brought into discussion by a respondent. Following this idea, the advantages of this process can be the following: *“the wide spread of cultural and scientific values of other countries”, “more diverse information about different countries, about people, about events, about products all over the world”, “new markets for development”, “technological progress”, and “new, viable models for a better life improvement”*. The main mentioned disadvantages are *“homogenization”, “the waste of individuality, personality and local culture and values”, “the phenomenon through which the world should become a single country”, “the loss of identity as a people”, “standardization”, and “consumerism”*.

Concluding, during the interviews, the respondents, due to their maturity, have given richer answers. These answers denote a broader experience with the Western influence of these participants and their capacity of seeing beyond the *“superficial”* aspect of the problem. Within this case, the US appeared as a key element from the beginning. The general opinion is that Western influence is happening, especially due to mass media. However, this influence, regardless its advantages and disadvantages, should be limited. A greater emphasis should be given to an autochthonous personality.

## Conclusions

Although being rather a first step in developing a more in-depth analysis, this research shows that, regardless of the age, cultural imperialism creates an extremely powerful influence. The main risk is that of losing the national identity. The more mature generations consider that the Romanian youth has probably already detached itself from the national values. However, based both on the focus group and on the interviews, the feeling of belongingness and patriotism still seems to be present in the youth's mindset. Although they are open to whatever good principles the West can promote, they also believe Romanians should try to preserve the local customs, cultivate what is of good quality and be proud of it. Thus, in respect to the presented data, the hypothesis is not fully confirmed. However, in a pessimistic perspective, one might think that the situation is going to change soon. As time shall go by and the future generations will become more and more drawn to the Western *mirage*, the national customs and values shall lose ground.

The present study shows that while Western usually means US or Western European countries, Romania is perceived as a beautiful country, with a lot of potential, but with no personality. On this level, Western values appeared to be more precious, more fancy and attractive. Although the respondents admit that the autochthonous values can be considered a national treasure, they are not sufficiently explored and promoted. This is mainly happening because mass media prefer to choose that information that appeals the majority and resonate with them.

Based on the presented results, the research perspectives are at least twofold. First, the number of participants within the study can be increased. Thus, much more valid and generalizable information can be obtained. Second, the methodological tools used within this study can be replicated either for a longitudinal analysis or for a comparative analysis between different regions of the country, or even for different countries.

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