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CULTURAL – SYMBOLIC DIMENSION OF NON – REIMBURSABLE FINANCING

Ileana SĂDEAN *

National School of Political and Administrative Studies - Bucharest

Abstract: *The paper analyses from an anthropological perspective the cultural-symbolic dimension of non-reimbursable financing, having as starting point the study of the implementation of the Leader rural development model in Romania. During the research I reached the hypothesis that grants is a mirror of the values and cultural traits of the present society. Grant nuances more than the Leader philosophy itself with all its principles the vision of the present societies upon development and wealth. More than an economic mechanism, than a complete series of bureaucratic regulations, than financial flows, it brings to sight ways of thinking and acting, as well as the most intimate identity traits of the rural communities. The question I intended to respond was: which are the cultural behaviors, attitudes and symbols that are revealed by grant about the present society? Not the „philosophy” of the Leader model gets to be interiorized by the rural communities, but a way of „solving – their - problems”, of improving their life through “non-reimbursable” financing. My observations upon how people relate to non-reimbursable financing, which accesses it, what is its purpose and social and cultural impact, gave shape to the cultural-symbolic dimension of non-reimbursable financing.*

Keywords: *anthropology, grant, rural development, Leader rural development model*

Throughout six years I studied the implementation of Leader rural development model. After several research cycles, mainly using the method of participative observation, I reached to the conclusion that the force setting everything in motion is the *non-reimbursable financing* and not the set of Leader principles. Thus, the research objective became the cultural, anthropological dimension of the non – reimbursable financing.

Gradually applying the observation and the field work, I discovered that the non-reimbursable financing, more than all the other elements connected to the application of Leader model, is the cause and represents the “institution” on which its operation is based. More than an economic mechanism, than a whole series of bureaucratic

regulations or financial flows, it highlights insight and action means, as well as the most intimate features of the human being. It is not the “philosophy” of the Leader model who is interiorized by the rural communities, but the manner used to “solve their problems”, to improve their life through the strategy of non-reimbursable financing. *The question I intended to answer was: which are the cultural behaviors, attitudes and symbols which the non-reimbursable financing reveals about the current society?*

If we include the cultural – symbolic dimension of the non-reimbursable financing institution, we obtain the largest interpretative perspective, based on the Leader rural development model, about the functioning means of the society, about the nature of social reality, about the social institutions with which it interacts and which jointly represent “a

universe of the human behavior”[1]. A part of the social reality is symbolically reflected in the non-reimbursable financing.

As an anthropologist, one cannot have an objective position towards such an unlimited subject as the development. However, the reactions of all categories of social actors who were “challenged” by the non – reimbursable financing give a meaning to the significances of development, to the efforts to adapt and to the answers of the individuals to the external stimuli of that period. “According to Max Weber, in order to understand or explain an action, we have to take into account not only the objective conditions, but also their subjective interpretation by the participating individuals.” [2] All the empirically observed manifestations, combined with the theory associate into an accumulation of internalized symbolic representations of the world. Throughout research, an interference process was necessary up to the point where I found the common denominator between the anthropological perspective and the Leader development model, namely the **non-reimbursable financing (grant)**.

Through deductive logics, the gradually built hypotheses directed me towards a series of theories. Using the triangulation of data and information collection methods, I obtained several dimensions of reality. A series of intermediary conclusions resulted, which could not be reunited into a narration. The relevance of these conclusions was not my first concern, but the objectification of the issue, of the values and theories extracted from each of these conclusions.

One of the main principles of Leader rural development model is the “public – private partnership”, known as “Local Action Group” (LAG). From the perspective of another Leader principle, “of bottom - up approach”, the LAG is the answer to the question “**who implements the Leader development strategies?**”

The LAG has the task to elaborate and implement the local development strategy, to take decisions on the distribution of financial resources and to administer them. LAG’s authority and autonomy degree related to the vision on the development of communities is

questioned under the existence of constraint due to the financial dependency through the non-reimbursable financing. There are three main objectives financed at the level of each microregion under dependency relation, namely:

1. financing the elaboration of strategy, project necessary in order to become authorized LAG,
2. financing the LAG operational project which would implement the development strategy, and
3. implementing the development strategy, the LAG playing the role of administrator of funds, granting non – reimbursable financing within the Leader territory.

Without pretending to be a final objective of the research subject, it becomes “the following” after the analysis, *the study of the interdependency between the three actions within the context of the non-reimbursable financing*. Throughout the development of these projects, the following question appeared: is it possible that the non – reimbursable financing became extremely coercive and the preoccupation for the improvement of the life quality of rural communities remains on the second place? Everything seems to gravitate around the non – reimbursable financing.

Within the shift from the positivist paradigm towards the interpretative paradigm, I tried to decode the senses encoded in the phenomenon of the non – reimbursable financing, by studying the ***cultural – symbolic dimension of non – reimbursable financing***, where the human being is the central point. It became the main theme which founded and gave a new title to the research. The anthropological perspective is different and complementary to the other perspectives: economic, historical, political. Thus, I tried to highlight the cultural – cognitive elements of the non – reimbursable financing institution, represented by the anthropologists Geertz și Douglas, namely: the **shared conceptions, which represent the nature of the social reality and the frameworks through which the signification is produced**. “A social reality cannot be actually studied if we only perceive it through



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its material data, beyond the human being". [3] The anthropological perspective corresponds to this vision, which "is related to a certain professional way to look, perceive, understand and explain the cultural phenomena, or, in general, to provide an analysis about the "human" or "mankind" data of a phenomenon, analyzed in its particularity as part of the social – cultural reality." (Ion Highiduș) [4]

Using the comparative approach, I analyzed and interpreted the non-reimbursable financing institution, the loan, the traditional labor association institutions, the *gift institution*, whose correspondents are the fundamental values, constant and universal, however, with different valences according to the development stage of mankind, as *solidarity, welfare, power, etc.* "Under various symbolic disguises, all these forms corresponding to the eras where they manifest, hide the intrinsic to help and take care of the others, the avid seek of status, the acquisitive character, variables for mankind as a whole. [5] Apparently, due to the dynamics of the social changes and the context of the historical – cultural evolution, the *non-reimbursable financing* is not related to the above mentioned existential principles, but we actually find a part of each of them gathered therein.

The comparative approach of the theme contributed to the closer knowledge of the phenomenon studied by comparing it to other themes and theories from other regions and other periods or other particular contexts. The reciprocity, solidarity, progress and modernization are found within the *theory of gift, theory of exchange, theory of help, theory of forms without substance*. The manifestation of solidarity and the significances of gift are found in the non – reimbursable financing. Two perspectives are established: one related to accessing the non – reimbursable funds

where the potential beneficiary is the protagonist and the second related to the administration of funds, where the LAG is the main actor. When attempting to understand the functioning means of the non – reimbursable financing mechanism, focusing on human aspects, we must give a maximum importance to the concepts of *reciprocity, power, status, solidarity, exchange*.

Apparently, the non – reimbursable financing is not connected to the gift granted in the primitive communities, with power, solidarity or exchange. It is a hybrid between "gift" and "goods", namely it is a gift which encourages the consumption. The non – reimbursable financing allows you and even forced you, through the requirements related to the observance of certain quality standards, to consume more. Thus, part of money return on the market. Two perspectives are established: Theoretically and at first sight, it has a costless character, but in fact it conceals the "obligation" of return, characteristic to the gift, which many people ignore. The relation financier – beneficiary is created according to the model granter – receiver, discovering the symbolic and emotional dimension which established among restrained groups, among friends, relatives, fellows, subordinates - chiefs, colleagues. We are talking about an exchange where the financier, in view of "development", grants non – reimbursable financing, and the one who wants to participates to the "development" benefits from non – reimbursable funds. But what happens when obtaining the non – reimbursable financing becomes a purpose in itself? The relation between the LAG and the financier, the European Union through Leader – axis 4, is a formal one, based on economic growth, on efficiency and results. The financing behaves as a social formation. We

cannot see it, we cannot touch it. It can take different forms, sizes, structures. In the mechanism of the non – reimbursable financing, the power is transferred from the financier to the ones administering its funds. We can see the administrator, the neighbor who helps you, the one who lends you funds etc., but we cannot see the European Union. - What does it mean for people to receive financing ? In the rural environment, the social status, the power, the membership to a certain group, is modified upwards, following the award of financing for a project. It draws the attention of the others. On one hand, it is the hazard of the individual, and on the other hand, it confirms the capacity “to get on” and the access to information and knowledge. In the first case, it can be considered hazard, because it is the same mechanism we encounter in a competition, you participate to an auction of projects in which you compete with the others, and in the second case, it is considered that the one obtaining the financing is the one who holds the material, informational, financial resources and a rich relational capital, which grants him a strategic advantage in front of the others. In the process of accession to non – reimbursable funds, the beneficiary’s needs are seldom superposed to the financier’s objectives. The most commonly paradigm is the one related to achievement of money: “He was lucky”, “He got the money because he had money”, “he got money because he always manages to get along well”, “he had relations, this is why he got the money”, and we encounter the paradigm of success to a lesser extent: “he finally succeeded to do what he wanted to do”, “he had a successful idea”, “if he searched for solutions, he found them”. The issues in accessing the non – reimbursable funds draw out the “eligible” caste and they characterize at a certain point a set of values, beliefs, practices institutionalized throughout time which belong to a society. Max Weber saw the caste as being based on three factors: power, richness and prestige. There are few people in a village who hold all the three factors. Their attitude is to help the others to obtain financing, increasing their capital of power, namely recognition

from the others. Some of the difficulties identified in the accession of funds:

- lack of access to information of the individuals from the rural environment

- complicated procedures which the applicant of non – reimbursable financial grant has to follow;

- lack of money to insure their personal contribution

- high costs to prepare the documentation

- obligation to maintain the project objectives unmodified for five years

- observance of very high standards of quality and comfort.

The non – reimbursable financing symbolizes a game of power. You pay money in order to receive in exchange power and prestige. Most of the times, you reach to the point where you sell your freedom or to return more than you received. In the gift theory, you had to return at least the amount you received, without the possibility to refuse the gift. The ancient economy of gift became incompatible with the development of the market, trade and production, namely anti –economic and it disguised under various forms throughout time. The continuous adaptation at the context of life style, the shift from the moral economy to the market economy, opened a complicated path of naming the gift up to the non – reimbursable financing, but keeping the nature of human transactions and the principles governing these transactions in the archaic societies. Through a comparative approach, we can easier explain the functioning means of our own society. In the complexity of the notion of gift, important theoretical notions are highlighted, as the reciprocity, castes, gift exchanges, obligations, total social act which integrate moral, legal, economic, religious, familial, symbolical aspects. In the non – reimbursable financing, we decode the administration intention of all the individuals involved, but not to the same extent the development will of the communities, the main objective of the financier, providing the set of instruments – Leader model. Most of the individuals want to administer the non – reimbursable financing in order to obtain personal advantages, and the beneficiaries consider a privilege or a duly right without



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being forced to return. Thus, the applicants make the highest efforts before winning the financing, which provides power to the ones administering the financing, and the interest of the financer and the surveillance starts after the signature of the contract. The moral, unlike the place it holds within the gift economy, disappears, namely it is deinstitutionalized from the mechanism of non – reimbursable financing. There is a conflict and a lack of reciprocity between the efforts that the beneficiary (applicant) makes before winning the project and the rules and regulations which the financer imposes throughout the implementation of the project. The beneficiary believes that, the equivalent counter-performance in order to obtain money is fulfilled in advance, up to the reception of money, when there is no contractual relation between the two parties, and the financer only takes into consideration the project implementation. If the non – reimbursable financing is a purpose in itself, and the efforts to obtain it are very high, the beneficiary considers as an *abuse* all the rules that the financer imposes after obtaining the financing. "We have to elaborate papers if we receive the money", a beneficiary told me. In many cases, the beneficiary has no other purpose after the point where he obtained the financing, and the "cover by papers" and the "race to find supporting documents" become the basic activity of the project. From the perspective of the results, of the value added by the project, we can talk about **forms without substance**. Most of the times, the results remain only on paper. The evaluation of the results and the application means does not represent the analysis subject for our anthropological research, but it helps us to understand and interpret the aspects which are not seen, the symbols hidden behind the appearances. For

instance, the unrealistic elaboration of project documentations by exaggerating and overestimating the reality, especially in terms of describing the positive impact of the project, the establishment of indices to be reached and the estimated results in order to obtain a high score, confirm, on one hand, that the will to obtain the financing is higher than the execution of the project, and on the other hand, it explains the usage of "cover only by papers" and not of the unrealistic indices. The symbolic dimension, which characterizes the Human being and not the Beneficiary, relates to the efforts which were always made by people in order to obtain power, prestige, the money being the means through which you can reach them within the current society. When the financer's control institutions perform verifications, they are only interested by the "papers", by the logics of the supporting documents. After a week since the representative of a control institution verified the project implementation, namely only the papers, he asked the project manager: "and still, what is this project about?" Thus, throughout time, a reflex – answer established for the beneficiaries, "to have all the papers ready for control", without being liable about what is effectively executed. The long – term gains are, to a high extent, the same for the individuals administering them and for the beneficiaries, even if they are not well acknowledged, namely: the increase of power and relational capital, the affirmation, the accession to a superior caste, the image capital and the insurance of a new future opportunity by "**reasoned and diligent usage of current opportunities**". [6]

From an anthropological perspective, other than the perspective of Titu Marioescu in the theory of forms without substance which can be extracted from the analysis of the

appearances created, namely “let’s pretend we are doing something”, from the superficiality and artificiality of the development processes, we discover a completely different philosophy, of the “unfaithful prefect” from antiquity, which illustrates how we can use the fortune of rich people in order to share it to the others, and we will be rewarded. This paradigm releases us from prejudices and tries to make us see the things from a different perspective, the archetypal manifestations of the human being throughout two million years, namely the formation of the human being.

The concept of manager or administrator is known by the Christianity. However, they appear using other terms, as active priests, prefect, mandarin. The parable of the unfaithful prefect is a model of Christian management. Some theologians claim that it is the parable most difficult to be interpreted out of all parables told by Jesus Christ. At first sight or after a superficial reading, it may seem that the incompetence and dishonesty are praised in this parable. It is important what it is understood and not what it is told. The human self explains the behavior of people, regardless of religion, ethnic group, culture, civilization degree. There are many examples which we found in the reports on the implementation of Leader axis in all the Member States of the European Union, the ballast effect being encountered in many different countries and regions. The anthropological and religious perspectives are joint by the psychological perspective, approached by Jung, who stated that “every civilized human being, however high his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper levels of his psyche”. [7] Making the comparison between the biological organisms and the social man, existing a series of resemblances related to their functioning, as the biological organisms from Rommer’s law, the fundamental human features do not change along with the changes occurring outside, generated by the social, cultural, political and economic context, but they adapt in order to preserve their life specific character and not in order to benefit from new opportunities.

I used the parable of the unfaithful prefect because it highlights the fact that the

essence of the actual values is found beyond the superficial meanings or beyond the usual human mind. The fact that it the most difficult parable to be interpreted explains the non – compliant action of the universal man reported to the actual meaning, but especially due to this reasons it is legitimate on social, cultural plan and less on the divine plan which anyway does not belong to the world, to the human. To act in such a manner is the equivalent of non belonging to this world, with its meanings and purposes. At first side, namely in a human meaning, Jesus Christ encourages something that is contradictory to His actions and advices: **“You shall not steal!”**, **“You shall not lie!”**, **“You shall not covet!”**. Actually, the one who praises, for instance, the unfaithful prefect, is the Human represented by the “rich man” and not by Jesus Christ, the superhuman. Otherwise, if he would act “fairly”, the rich man, namely the master, would exclude him, he “would fire him” because he would not comply to the human order of things, but to the divine world, which does not belong to this plan of things that can be seen, but to the plan of things which cannot be seen, hard to be perceived and not understood by human in general. The evaluation made by Jesus Christ for this prefect is discovered in the expression **“unfair prefect”**. Despite all these, Jesus Christ found in the praise of rich man for his prefect something useful in order to teach his disciples and the ones who were listening to Him. This man praised the cleverness of the one who cheated him because he acted in a clever manner. In essence, as a memento on a metaphysical plan, Jesus gives them an advice: “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes”. The unfair prefect from the parable represents the administrator (LAG team) who was assigned the funds for the development of the communities. Similar to “the spiritual and material blessings enjoyed by Israel as chosen people, in order to bring the light of the redemption plan up to the edges of the earth, they were used by themselves in order to get rich and for self – accession” [8], the ones who manage the non – reimbursable funds in view



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of improving the life quality of people from the microregion use their privileged position of being the ones who share, using the benefits of the social power.

In this parable, the Savior warns us that there will come a time when we will answer for the gift we received. This is the same idea as in the giving and receiving ritual analyzed by Mauss, that keeping the gift becomes dangerous. The comparison with other times, cultures, areas helps us better understand the essential human manifestations, beyond the cultural particularities and specific features and social institutions established throughout time.

In the "business approach", when the administrators of the non – reimbursable financing firstly intend to obtain personal benefits following its management: relational capital, power and prestige in order to insure a better future for themselves and as a consequence only the benefits for the beneficiary communities, we can find elements similar to the ones from the loan institution, centered on the characteristics of money: "money is power". K. Marx stated about money that they "can buy anything. The universal character of this feature is the absolute power of its essence. Subsequently, money appears as being almighty." [9] This mercantilist idea appears throughout time, in expressions as: "the power of money", "the domination of money", "the sovereignty of the dollar", "money, the devil's eye" and in proverbs and household sayings: *When it is a question of money, everyone is of the same religion (Voltaire); I am starting to become famous: people come to ask me for money (Jules Renard); Money is the only touchstone of the human nature. (Vasile Alecsandri); When you have no money, the noble origin ends Euripide (Rhesus).*

There is another approach, according to which the non – reimbursable financing provided to the communities represents a manifestation of the solidarity spirit based on reciprocity, in which you are willing to give and to receive, also encountered in the traditional mutual aid forms, in the statutory organizational pattern of German vicinities, the theory of aid. Profoundly, both have the same motivation, but the expression forms are different, and paradoxically, the first approach represents a manifestation of fear, and the second approach is a manifestation of power. The cultural matrix built by the human being is presented to us. However, the profound manifestation in both interpretations is based on the human nature: the weakness of the human, the social being, the need of association, of recognition. Actually, it is connected to the dualist character of the human being: weakness – power, kindness – evilness, poor – rich, etc., and at the same time it can only be an active one, also existing in the other latent stage.

Thus, the two manifestations are explained. These human behaviors are connected to the ones from the principles of Leader model, related to "how" you should do the development and not to "what" you should do, to the organizational culture, to the type of management and values of the individuals with decisional power, especially the leader. Subsequently, the results and the impact are different from one LAG to another LAG, according to the "individuals populating" the LAG.

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