SOCIAL FUNDAMENTALS
OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract
The concept of entrepreneurship is multifaceted. The factors that influence it, its forms of manifestation, the goals pursued throughout the course of entrepreneurship cannot be restricted to the economic dimension alone. This paper attempts to underline the socio-cultural roots of entrepreneurship and to refine the concept of social entrepreneurship by highlighting borderline concepts. The reference sources we used here are those of interdisciplinary studies in the economic, social and cultural fields. The paper calls attention to the benefits of an integrated approach to social entrepreneurship.

Key words: entrepreneur, entrepreneurial culture, social responsibility, social goals

1. Entrepreneurial challenges

Though a highly debated concept from its onset in the 16th century, entrepreneurship can be defined as the action resulting in a new and innovative business or leading to the improvement of an already existing

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one. It is not always a small business, it does not always imply a new firm and it isn’t necessarily motivated by profit. It can be social entrepreneurship, purely philanthropic, sustained by donations and grants.

The main character here is the entrepreneur who may or may not also play the role of manager. The entrepreneur is the person who identifies and capitalizes on an economic opportunity, producing value for both individuals and society as a whole. Entrepreneurs emerge from among those people driven by the need for survival or wealth and they become leaders because they see potentially profitable opportunities and are well-positioned to take advantage of them. An entrepreneur may perceive that he/she is among the few to recognize or be able to solve a problem. Joseph Schumpeter (Schumpeter 1961) popularized the use of the phrase *creative destruction* to describe his view of the role of entrepreneurs in changing business norms.

The entrepreneurial culture is about recognizing opportunities and exploiting them, organizing resources consistent with the intended goal and, above all, it is about quality leadership (the ability to show initiative and to coordinate). The few available indicators for Romania place our national entrepreneurial culture below the EU average. For instance, opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (versus necessity-driven entrepreneurship determined by the lack of alternatives to ensure a decent living) is relatively low in Romania (2.1%) compared to the EU (4.5%) (SBA Fact Sheet 2010/2011). This indicates the need to refocus education on creativity and business simulations.

In any business, we can immediately and clearly identify one issue: that of „the big bet”. The most convincing „bets” are found at the crossing of changing contexts (be they technological, economic, legislative) which stimulate the demand for new products and services or for better ways of meeting existing needs. For example, the combination between the increased income of certain categories of population, the variety of health problems and the legal framework has stimulated the creation of private hospitalization services. In the North-Eastern part of Romania,
this opportunity was “seized” at once by Dan Fiterman (Arcadia Hospital).

Regardless of the source of opportunity, the clear understanding of the „big bet” anticipates the focus on the subsequent activities and the required resources. It is natural for entrepreneurs to try out several business models before choosing the one appropriate for them. A common mistake entrepreneurs make is to over-commit resources before projecting the beginning of the business decline; this commitment of resources amplifies the problems and leaves little time to solve them. This can be directly linked to a behavior that is typical of many beginner entrepreneurs: rashness.

The talent for innovation is coupled with the extroverted behavior and with the tendency to embrace risk. The ability to introduce new technologies, to increase productivity or to generate new services and products are the key to innovation (Schumpeter, 1961). Entrepreneurs are the driving force of economic change. Mark Zuckerberg, for instance, succeeded to create a new Internet business which information agencies had been dreaming about for 60 years: that of knowing what almost 800 million people – more than 10% of the world population - think, do, read, listen to, like, where they live, work, travel to.

Another challenge for the entrepreneur is related to family or social group support. Many entrepreneurs have a hard time delegating authority, particularly when it comes to showing confidence in other people’s capacity to undertake an activity at the same standards of quality as the entrepreneurs themselves. Empirical studies have shown that entrepreneurs possess strong negotiating skills and consensus-forming abilities.

Although certain personality traits are required, most studies agree that entrepreneurial behavior is dependent on the business and personal circumstances and influenced by changes in the economic environment. For example, countries which have healthy and diversified labor markets show a more favorable ratio of opportunity-driven rather than necessity-driven men and women entrepreneurs.
At times, for entrepreneurs, opportunity recognition is the easiest part of their undertaking. The challenge is to hold on to that opportunity. Some entrepreneurs fail to assess their response to increased customer demand before their competitors “dive in”. A rapid growth requires a careful mix of resources, organization, financial balance and management.

Another entrepreneurial challenge is about exiting the “game”. In the army, “a good general plans his defence and allocates the resources needed to perform one last assault before closing all military operations”.

With all these challenges in mind, we now have the relevant “ingredients” of value added entrepreneurship: opportunity, team (interests, backgrounds, competencies, personalities), resources (assets, patents, funds, connections) and, most of all, strategy (plan, competition, trends). The plan of action looks like a “battle plan” on the economy field and at the very least it includes answers to the following questions: What is your market? What are the market needs? How will your product/service address these needs? What and how will the market pay? What is the deadline for every stage of your business? What is your medium-term strategy? Who are your competitors? How good is your new business if you compare it to that of your competitors?

2. The social dimension of economic entrepreneurial initiatives

To understand the distinction between economic and social entrepreneurship, to adequately place social objectives in the list of organizational objectives, it is useful to look at the development of economics in relation to sociology (Swedberg, 1991, p. 14):

5. the period of political economy (end of 18th century – end of 19th century): economists were knowledgeable in more than the economic field; their works studied the activity of institutions, contained philosophical reflections; the view was that social phenomena influenced one another and could not be well understood if regarded separately;
6. the first clash between economic principles and the principles of social sciences (1880-1910): political economy turns into economics; there is a radical break from history and sociology;

7. mutual disregard and distortions in social sciences (1920-1960): economics develops separately and draws on mathematics, resulting in a series of successful analyses; the absence of connections with other sciences leads to distortions;

8. economic imperialism and changes in the approach to social sciences (1970-today): two trends in the development of economics become clear: the tendency of economics to grow separately and the tendency to approach topics which traditionally belonged to other social sciences; the expanding of economics in the social sciences has been described as „economic imperialism”; it is an age defined by interdisciplinary approaches, such as economic sociology, economic anthropology, intercultural management.

Economics tended to develop independently from other social sciences because it wanted to be acknowledged as a science. Thus, economics became mathematical, focusing on models that were deductive, with a high degree of abstraction and generality. At the opposite end, the cultural variables and social factors, so different in nature and so hard to fit in a typology, led economy researchers away from the elegance of the quantitative models and caused disturbances.

The development of interdisciplinary fields, like intercultural management for instance, implies recognition of the fact that the studies include elements from a multitude of disciplines: anthropology, sociology, psychology, economy, political sciences, law and health care (Hofstede, 1984, p. 278).

It becomes necessary to take an interdisciplinary approach to human activity, in general, and to economic activity, in particular (Etzioni, 1999). The relatively recent growing number of interdisciplinary studies of economy which led to the emergence of new subfields - economic anthropology, economic sociology – can be explained by the failure of economics to account for and find solutions to certain
phenomena: the persistent crisis of public health, the difficulties related to environmental conservation, the declining competitiveness of certain firms. The increased internationalization of business operations was critical in the development of intercultural management.

Some people saw the growing interest of social sciences in each other as caused by the oil crisis of the ‘70s, which reduced the gap between the economical, sociological, historical and political elements.

The development of these sub-disciplines was also a reaction to the limited manner in which neoclassical economics approached the impact of cultural and social aspects. Economics is often criticized because it ignores the role of values in human action (Kottak, 1997). Two distinct issues stem from this general criticism: on the one hand, economics has a narrow view of what motivates human action, ignoring ethical and social aspects, while on the other hand, the rational choice theory clearly has its limitations.

Neoclassical economists view man as a walking computer, cold-blooded and efficient. Individuals are able to set clear targets and find the best means to achieve them, even if this entails a comprehensive search and a complicated course of data collection and processing. However, real life shows they are not entirely rational: they have a weak memory, they are self-interested but also dedicated to others, unable to focus on one issue for too long or to calculate probabilities. These differences of approach between economic theory and sociologic theory (Table 1) were long-lasting.

Table no. 1. The neoclassical economic and sociological paradigms (mid 20th century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of differentiation/ Categories</th>
<th>Homo economicus</th>
<th>Homo sociologicus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept of the actor</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle of action</td>
<td>freedom of action</td>
<td>constraints of social structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for action</td>
<td>formal rationality</td>
<td>social rationality, customs, social values</td>
</tr>
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The differences, at times radical, between the two theories have raised and are still raising serious challenges when it comes to defining the cross-cutting terms. One of the most significant distinctions emerges when defining the actor. The analytic starting point of economics is the individual; the actor is not influenced by others, here we have the inception of the „methodological individualism”. In macroeconomics, this individualistic approach finds its origins in early British utilitarianism and political economy. By contrast, sociology views the actor as a socially constructed entity in interaction with other actors; the actor is part of a group and of society. Oftentimes, sociologists take the group and social structural levels as phenomena sui generis; while economists have a hard time turning homo economicus into a social being, sociologists have a hard time distinguishing the individual from the intricate network of social relations. Economic individualism need not be logically incompatible with a sociological approach; entire theories are built on the basis of individual action.

With regard to the principle of action – economic theory advocates for freedom of action; any constraints that could occur would be related to tastes and the scarcity of resources, (including technology). Once these are known, it is in principle possible to predict the actor’s behavior. The active influence of other persons and institutional structures is set to one side, the individual is free of prejudice or social constraints. Sociologists take such influences directly into account in
the analysis of economic action; they give a broader and more salient place to the dimension of power in economic action. It is also true that economists have a tradition of analyzing imperfect competition in which power to control prices and output is the core ingredient; still, the economic conception of power is typically narrower than the sociologists’ notion of economic power, which includes its exercise in societal (especially political and class) context.

Another area where the two theories diverge is the reason for action. In microeconomics, the actor is assumed to have a given and stable set of preferences; he will choose that alternative line of action which maximizes utility (for the individual) and profit (for firms). In economic theory, this way of acting constitutes economically rational action. Sociology encompasses several possible types of economic action: rational, traditional, affectual/irrational; rationality is regarded as a variable. The term „irrational”, implying negative connotations, was replaced with „non-rational”, referring to the influence of normative-affective factors. Psychologists have shown that the human brain is consistent with regular deviations that prevent an accurate thinking (cognitive limitations); also, there are emotional limitations. Economists traditionally identify rational action with the efficient use of scarce resources; sociologists’ view is broader, referring to allocation within the guidelines of other principles, such as communal loyalties or sacred values. Some of the views are not traditionally taken into consideration, not because they are undesirable, but simply because they are unthinkable. Rationality is regarded as a phenomenon to be explained, not assumed.

The arena of action also means something different to the economist; the market and the economic exchange are the main focuses for the mainstream economist, the remainder of society being regarded as a fixed universe which lies beyond where the operative variables of economic change really matter. Sociology views the market as an organic part of society which is always its main focus.
Despite the two paradigms’ distinct approaches and concepts and even skepticism and/or indifference, attempts to explain entrepreneurship by resorting to elements of both points of view continue to this day.

3. Economic and social goals of enterprises

A new integrated approach – that of sustainable development – has enabled the inclusion of social and environmental goals among an organization’s priority goals. Defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, the approach brings together the economic, social and environmental perspectives. As a result, we have actions with environmental and social goals (“viable”), actions with economic and environmental goals (“sustainable”) and actions which have an economic and social approach (“equitable”).

Organizations can be classified into different categories depending on the prominence of their social goals and the role of commercial exchange (Table 2).

**Table 2. Range of organizations by social goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of social goals</th>
<th>Role of commercial exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organization has exclusively social goals</td>
<td>No commercial exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization has exclusively social goals</td>
<td>Some commercial exchange; profits are dedicated to social benefit or in support of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization goals are chiefly social, but not exclusive</td>
<td>Some commercial exchange; profits partly benefit the entrepreneur and/or supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social goals are prominent among other goals of the organization</td>
<td>Commercial exchange; profit-making to entrepreneur and others is strong objective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social goals are among the goals of the organization, but subordinate to others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social goals</th>
<th>Commercial exchange; profit-making is primary</th>
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According to this classification, social entrepreneurship (typical of the first two categories, in a restricted sense) is different from corporate social responsibility and socially responsible investments.

Corporate social responsibility was defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as „the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as of the local community and society at large."

There are two dimensions to corporate social responsibility: the internal dimension and the external one.

In their direct relation to employees, businesses can consider the following socially responsible practices: to enhance the quality of life for employees, both on and off the job; to ensure health and safety at work; to restructure in a responsible manner.

In relation to all their stakeholders, businesses may choose to support the development of the communities in which they operate or to support local economic development by partnering with local distributors; also, they have a duty to observe the human rights stipulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to protect the environment and encourage global environmental performance.

Corporate social responsibility is associated with: responsible entrepreneurship, voluntary actions by companies over and above their legal obligations, activities that benefit employees and relevant stakeholders (including society as a whole) or the environment, positive contribution towards the company’s target groups and mitigation of negative effects on others (including the environment), as
well as regular rather than occasional activities (the focus on responsibility is clearly set out in the organization’s business strategy).

To outline their focus on social and environmental objectives, in addition to the economic ones, some organizations decide to set up their own corporate foundations. The benefits of such an initiative include increased visibility, consistency and frequency of social programs, higher control and enhanced coordination of the corporate social responsibility strategy, as well as more funds allocated to the respective activities.

Socially responsible investments refer to investors opting for a social responsibility-oriented investment fund which in turn chose to invest in companies demonstrating a certain level of social performance. Currently, there are many investment funds which provide socially responsible products, experts agreeing that social management and environmental risk management enhance a company’s market value in the short and long run. The managers of such funds encourage companies that promote social responsibility.

Similar to the above funds, there are other organizations that play a significant role in defining social entrepreneurship. Thus, through their social objectives and benefits, rural entrepreneurship, rural tourism, organic farming, co-ops or networks of small farmers and handicraftsmen stand at the crossroads between classical and social entrepreneurship.

Finally, a support for social entrepreneurship comes from the Local Action Groups (LAG) - public-private partnerships formed of representatives of the public, private and civil society sectors from a rural area whose purpose is to implement integrated local development strategies.

The developments of organizations which integrate social and environmental objectives among their organizational goals, as well as the concrete means of converging with the social perspective are directly influenced by cultural aspects.
4. The cultural side of business creation and development

An entrepreneur can create and develop a business only through and with other people. This entails a good knowledge of the human being, of *man*. We refer here to the fact that man, our cultural subject, leads a social life shaped by cultural norms received via a biological code\(^1\) (Table 3 provides a comparison between the biological life and the social life).

### Table 3. Features of man’s biological and social life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man’s Biological life</th>
<th>Man’s Social life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological code (endosomatic) regulating biological life, passed on genetically;</td>
<td>Social code (exosomatic) guiding social activity, passed on culturally – values,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic related to the chemical ties of a gene or nucleus; does not pass on acquired</td>
<td>Internal logic; passes on only acquired features;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains biological continuity; the links between the elements of the biological</td>
<td>Explains continuity of human life as a social creature; the links between the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matrix are inflexible.</td>
<td>elements of the cultural matrix are flexible enough to enable adapting and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>changing, but also firm enough to sustain resistance and inertia.</td>
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The social code-based cultural influence is the object of the present discourse which attempts to show that the variety of fields of cultural influence leads to differences among individuals. These differences can be viewed from two perspectives:

- on the one hand, there are the problems that can be caused by these differences and which need to be anticipated/prevented or solved, if
they occur (be they within the organization or in the organization’s interaction with the outside world);

- on the other hand, there is the possibility of valorization, as differences mean different views which means access to a wide range of solutions.

Next, we will talk about the levels of culture that influence the individual and about the consequences of the fact that the individual stands at their „crossing”. By consequences we naturally mean those that relate to entrepreneurship. We are interested to learn why an entrepreneur has to show awareness, understanding and empathy towards culturally-specific factors and how he capitalizes on these factors, perhaps to reach a competitive edge.

A first level that influences the individual is national culture. Specialists believe this field is what shapes us most. The cultural heritage passed on is acquired within the first seven to ten years of life and ensures a common basis for individuals living in the same country. We shall see next that cultural variability at a certain level and the diversity of possible permutations generate the cultural individuality of individuals in a society.

National differences can cause countless problems and we can easily determine that this is the area most difficult to manage by an entrepreneur. However, there are situations in which other levels can pose greater obstacles. For instance, specialists in the same field who are from different countries can get along better than specialists in different fields who come from the same country. Nevertheless, overall, the differences generated at this level have to be considered by any entrepreneur who enters any type of relation with people/organizations from another country.

Regional culture is another variation-inducing level (here we refer to regions within the same country or clusters of countries). Regional cultural differences are a result of historical, geographical, political, ethnical, linguistic, religious, economic etc. variations occurring over
time (Meier, 2004). The influence of regional culture depends on its scale in relation to the national culture.

Ethnicity is another level of culture which yields attitudes, behaviors, and positions towards our actions which in turn lead to new distinctions between individuals. The cultural specifics of this field have underlying common features: customs, language, territory, history.

Language is also a level of culture and a very significant one, closely linked to national culture and generating problems especially with regard to organizational communication (internal or external). The issue of language-culture relationship is interpreted differently by those who studied it. Generally, when language issues are discussed, one regards language as a system of communication which can be verbal and nonverbal. Saussure (1998) distinguishes between language\(^2\) (the capacity to use a system of communication/a tongue), langue (a system of signs internalized by a speech community, such as the mother tongue) and parole (the individual acts of speech). Levi-Strauss (1978, pp. 83-84) uses the two words alternatively, at times with the same meaning, other times regarding langue as part of language. With regard to the relationship between language and culture, he considered that:

1. Language can be treated as a product of culture (the language/tongue used in a society reflects the people's general culture);
2. Language is a part of culture (one element among others);
3. Language can be treated as a condition of culture (if it is structured in a manner similar to that of language).

Hence the double interdependency. In fact, Hall (1992) reaches the following conclusion: „Culture is communication and communication is culture“. Of course, the differences between tongue, language, and communication need to be addressed, but we can infer the nature of their relationship.

Religion causes yet another set of differences. The behaviors and attitudes of those who share different faiths vary widely. The same can be said about different ethnicities or races, but religion causes deeper mutations, influencing the individual to a much larger extent. The
connection between religion and the basic principles of capitalism was „disclosed” by Max Weber in his book called *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In his studies, Weber (2007, pp. 25-74) observed that „business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labor, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant”, which led him to make the connection between Protestantism and the capitalist spirit.

Religious, mythical, philosophical etc. discourses and practices relay gender-based values and norms related to our roles in society: permission - what a man/woman does (may do), interdictions – what is not allowed or appropriate for a man/woman to do, how to do things, etc. Certain behaviors acceptable for boys/men are considered totally inappropriate for girls/women. We are thus dealing with differences between the values of the two genders which reflect their social role.

Generation is another criterion for distinguishing between levels of culture with influence on individual behaviour. Hofstede (1996, p. 33) believes that generation-based cultural differences are often overestimated and that many distinctions in practices and values are actually normal age-related characteristics replicated by every generation. According to him, „nothing indicates that, for different countries, the cultures of current generations are convergent” (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, other authors talk about *age subcultures* (Stanciu, Ionescu 2005, pp. 62-63), distinguishing between elderly-specific traits and youth-specific traits. Authority is characteristic of the elderly, while flexibility and capacity to embrace innovation is typical of the youth.

An important factor that plays a part in the generation differences is technological advance. One must acknowledge that, at least in the last half-century, progress was remarkable, affecting life style, work approaches, etc.

Social class can also be regarded as a level of culture or a criterion for differentiating several cultures within a culture. Traditionally, it was defined as a person’s *rank in the social hierarchy attained on the basis of*
economy (income level, ownership, capital accumulation), education, occupation, system of values, mentalities, language and forms of expression, life style (Jandt, 2007, p. 16). Social class, in turn, influences individuals.

Professional identity, based on a secondary socialization, through which one acquires specialized knowledge in a given professional area characterized by a specific language and symbolic world, represents one other element that influences and differentiates individuals.

Organizational culture (enterprise culture) is yet another level of culture known to influence the individual seen in relation to his work.

The concept of organizational culture has known various interpretations. Jacques Elliot (apud Hoffman, 2004, p. 112) regards it as the „customary and traditional way of thinking and doing of things, which is shared to a greater or lesser degree by all members, and which new members must learn, and at least partially accept, in order to be accepted into service in the firm”. In turn, Edgar Schein, the „father” of the concept, „defines it as „a pattern of shared basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (ibidem). What is of relevance to the entrepreneur is that he/she can use organizational culture as a tool for capitalizing on the cultural specifics and diversity.

Whether we address diversity in all its forms or only that related to certain levels of culture, we need to point out some of its benefits and disadvantages, which the entrepreneur should manage maturely and wisely (apud Prime, Usunier, 2004, p. 317):

a) **benefits:**

- cultural differences allow for better problem-solving, especially when it comes to complex problems;
- multiple views help to better define problems;
- a wide range of competencies allows for a pool of creative solutions, from which you can pick the one that is most appropriate at a given moment, leaving the others as possible alternatives to be explored in the future (a genuine "solution bank");
- the interaction of differing individuals creates the basis for learning in a varied and more complex context, engaging participants to a higher degree;
- the fact that there are locals with first hand knowledge of their community improves actual working relations with the groups of clients/providers in a certain area;
- synergy is another potential benefit that can be reached by creatively combining the various approaches to problem-solving;

b) disadvantages:
- the inconveniences associated with diversity are especially related to issues of perception, oftentimes grounded in stereotypes (based on region, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, nationality etc.) which also affect communication; these stereotypes can "blow up", being exhibited in difficult or conflict-based situations leading to doubts and tensions, having a negative impact on the sense of group or team;
- with regard to decision-making, different views make it harder to achieve consensus;
- there will always be ethnocentric individuals aiming to impose their own way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

In summary, culturally heterogeneous groups can be effective to a greater or lesser degree. On the one hand, the entrepreneur must take into consideration and eliminate the sources of potential difficulty, through cultural awareness and education. On the other hand, a favorable setting for maximizing the benefits of cultural diversity ought to be created. External diversity should also be considered. For example, one way of making use of cultural particularities is to adapt to the customer's cultural profile through an adequate marketing policy.
Conclusions

The economic process has an irreducible socio-cultural component. A systematic consideration of cultural factors in the course of an economic analysis increases our capacity to understand economic phenomena.

Refining the social entrepreneurship concept and looking at the place taken by social objectives in the ranking of organizational goals could lead to more adequately tailored policies, to regulations that would boost the social role of enterprises and provide fiscal incentives to those engaged in social initiatives. The exchange of good practices among social entrepreneurs, socially responsible firms, corporate foundations and NGOs would only stand to gain.

Behind the technical language and grand theories is always human nature; people are exposed to the same problems that require collaboration in order to be solved. Understanding the different ways in which people think, feel and act can only help towards finding the desired solutions.

Notes

1. We do not intend to go into details about the social life of cultural subjects. We only point out that in their case too it is the biological code that regulates social life and provides them with the working tools corresponding to their social role (endosomatic tools, of course).

2. We note here the linguist’s view on the notion of language, which excludes the nonverbal dimension.

References


