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Socio-Cultural Potentials of the CEMAC Zone for Sub-Regional Integration and Development

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Abstract. From its creation on March 16, 1994 in N'Djamena and the effective start of its activities in 1999, many hopes were placed in the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), made up of six States: Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. In this area of a total surface of around 3 million km², are living about 37 million inhabitants. Since the 1910s, many strategies have been developed with the aim of consolidating the process of integration and, increasing the wealth creation capacities of these states members. However, the populations, primary beneficiaries of any integration process, still have difficulties in detecting the impact of this process on their standard of living and on their life in general. This is because, the leaders of the CEMAC governments have not been able to boost development in the region with the political and economic strategies put in place. Culture being described as a factor that can contribute to integration, our article aims to analyze the socio-cultural elements in this area that can help to facilitate the integration process within the CEMAC. In order to better reflect the impact of the cultural factor in the integration process of CEMAC member states, the theories of transnationalism, functionalism and constructivism will form the backbone of this research work.

Keywords. traditional approach of peace, cultural heritage, festivals, integration, development, CEMAC

I. Introduction

Since 25 May 1963, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was created, the term unity has been a leitmotif for African leaders. The search for African unity is an objective assigned to the OAU by the charter that created it. Parallel to the existence of the OAU, African regional organizations were created. These creations are in line with the option of economic development of Africa, which is one of the objectives of the OAU. To better achieve this objective, the African heads of state adopted the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980. They committed themselves, among other things, to strengthening existing economic communities and creating other economic groupings in the regions of Africa so as to cover the whole continent (Okumu, 2009; Laporte and Mackie, 2010).

This desire has been translated in Africa, and more particularly in the Central African sub-region, by the creation and strengthening of economic organizations with an integrating vocation. These include the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC) in 1964, which was transformed into the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC) in 1994. In theory, the objectives of these organizations are to create an integrated

area with free movement of local products without tariffs or quotas, the introduction of a common external customs tax, the free movement of people and capital and the harmonization of national economic policies (Leke, 2012; Mattheis, 2016; Chimhanzi, 2015).

Since its creation, CEMAC has been a source of hope for the leaders of its constituent states. However, the reality we are currently facing is a kind of lethargy. The sectorial policies built up over the years do not seem to be bearing the expected fruit (Avom, 2007; Nguena and Nanfosso, 2014; Akum and Donnenfeld, 2017; Melo and Tsikata, 2014). The failure of regional integration in the CEMAC area is explained by some scholars as the consequence of essentially political and economic orientation given to the sectorial policies to the detriment of a social and cultural perspective (Ngaujah, 2003; Sabrina, 2021; Verheslst, 2001; Mbiankeu Nguena, 2019; Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2014;). While, taking culture into account as a catalyst to the consolidation of the community edifice has been demonstrated in other context such as Europe (Borg and Russo, 2005). Beyond the economic and political, the cultural aspect appears to be a necessity today for sub-regional growth performance. With the difficulties faced by the political and economic policies, culture can appear nowadays as the alternative to sub-regional integration, development and prosperity within the CEMAC zone. To build up a strong cultural orientation, the socio-cultural context and potentialities supposed to be addressed. This article proposes itself as a contribution to the identification of the socio-cultural elements found in the sub- region since pre-colonial period that can help to facilitate the integration process and the sub-regional growth performance. Thus throughout this article, developments will be done to answer the main research question of this article that is: what are the socio-cultural potentialities of the CEMAC zone for sub-regional integration and development?

II. Methodology

In order to carry out our study, we have relied mainly on archival methods that include a broad range of activities applied to facilitate the investigation of documents and textual materials produced by and about the organizations. In its most classic sense, archival methods are those that involve the study of historical documents; that is, documents created at some point in the relatively distant past, providing us access that we might not otherwise have to the individuals, and events of that earlier time. However, archival methods are also employed by scholars engaged in non-historical investigations of documents and texts produced by and about contemporary organizations, often as tools to supplement other research strategies (field methods, survey methods, etc.) Thus, archival methods can also be applied to the analysis of digital texts including electronic databases, email, websites etc. Archival materials provide unobtrusive measures of process for the study of contemporary organizations (Covaleski and Dirsmith, 1988; Jermier and Barley, 1998) and invaluable means of access in historical investigations (for the obvious reason that archival materials are among the few resources we have available for learning about past events). The examination of archival materials is thus important because they are ubiquitous, consequential and strategically useful. In this particular study, many types of archives are used: speeches of ministers, documents of cultural activities such as festivals and documents of cultural institutions. These archives were used along others documents (reports, books) produced on culture within the CEMAC zone. These documents were submitted to thematic content analysis. When starting the research we selected archives from the archives centre of Yaounde, documentary funds of CERDOTOLA (International Centre for Research and Documentation on Oral Traditions and Language Development), of the Ministry of tourism, of the Ministry of research and Innovation in Yaoundé. After visiting these various institutions, we found about 32 documents written on the various sub-topics of

cultural potentials in the CEMAC zone. All these documents were exploited for the production of this article.

On the theoretical level, we build up our analysis on the socio-historical approach, a method that goes along with the cultural analysis, and serves to describe cultural and actual facts. This approach therefore allows us to highlight the major socio-cultural potentialities in the CEMAC area.

III. Results

In the CEMAC zone, nowadays and since centuries or decades, there are many socio-cultural elements that can contribute to enhance the development of the area such as traditions for peace maintenance, cultural heritage, festivals, and various institutions working in the sector of culture.

III.1. Traditions for peace maintenance

It is no secret that Central Africa is a constant area of intra- and inter-state tensions that jeopardize the development of the sub-region (Akum and Donnenfeld, 2017). In the CEMAC zone nowadays, there are many conflicts: The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, the Anti-Balaka and Seleka conflict in Central African Republic, The Boko Haram insurgency that affects Cameroon and Chad. These tensions or conflicts that have lasted for years and which are difficult to solve for the political leaders who used diplomatic strategies and policies, would not have persisted if African cultural ethnic elements for peacekeeping such as joking alliances were summoned and actual. Indeed, since the pre-colonial period, across the various cultures of communities and people of Africa, are found traditional approaches of conflicts transformation and peace building. In the pre-colonial period, these traditions were frequently used to stop conflicts and enabled societies across the African continent to live in peace and even to be united in times of adversity. The African traditional peace approaches include approaches of conflicts prevention and, conflict transformation institutions such as the palaver tree, joking alliances or avuncular relationships (Celtho, 2001; Boege, 2009; Bolaji, 2011; Osei-Hwedie and Abu-Nimer, 2009).

The joking alliances and avuncular relationships can be defined as a relationship between two tribes or clans that involves a ritualized banter of teasing or mocking. There two main variations: an asymmetrical relationship where one party is required to take no offense at constant teasing or mocking by the other, and a symmetrical relationship where each party makes fun at the other's expense. The joking alliances are a traditional practice developed particularly in African communities to mediate and stabilize social relationships between clans and tribes (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). As a result to these alliances, dispute between these groups were forbidden, respects for the other being the rule, tolerance and heckling was the principle. People involved in joking alliances in various circumstances: when there is tension, competition, or potential conflicts or when a very nice relationship is experienced by two chiefs or leaders of community.

Concerning the Palaver Tree institution, it is an African tradition that allows dialogue to be re-launched and bridges to be re-established in the event of a crisis (Boege, 2009, Floerke Scheid, 2011). The use of the palaver tree presupposes not only the existence of conflict, assumed as such, but the age-old arrangement of procedures aimed at delaying the decision for as long as possible so that as many members of the group as possible are informed of the data of the debate and can take part in it. Among the Fangs, communication and patient consensus-building were probably high on the scale of political values. At least this seems to be the lesson of daily observation of village communities. The palaver tree was known as the place where people could meet and discuss issues relating to life in society that could have a significant

impact on the future of the family, the tribe, the clan, in short the community in general (Bourelle, 2019).

Adapting these traditions to today's contemporary world would be a boon for Central Africa, not only because it is an excellent means for promoting peace, but also because it would be an opportunity for the peoples of the sub-region to rub shoulders while preserving their identity. The advantage of the joking alliance is that it will prevent conflicts in the climate of cold war while the palaver tree will work for the reconciliation. Thus, in the CEMAC zone, despite their cultural varieties, and the existing conflicts, the populations will be able to live together in harmony. This ancestral knowledge is cement that binds and federates cultures, languages, religions and even communities. From then on, the notions of language and ethnicity are sublimated through verbal play and the practice of the phenomenon, to retain only the expression of commonly shared values such as solidarity, understanding and fraternity. It would therefore be a good idea for the States of Central Africa to preserve this heritage and launch its development.

Actually these traditions are no longer within the daily life of the CEMAC zone inhabitants, and violence is rampant in the sub region with lot of consequences, we believe it is time to resurrect these traditions for them to help the children of Africa as they did during the pre-colonial period. How can this be done? We believe that teaching on alliances and joking kinship could be created within the school and university curricula. It would be good to multiply cultural exchanges through exhibitions, colloquia, seminars, fairs, sports events, meetings of young people, women, workers, intellectuals, activists and leaders for greater mutual understanding. Furthermore, it is important that children, youths, adults, elderly, and women, in short, everyone should be involved in the design, development and implementation of this community project. By promoting joint projects between the member states of the CEMAC area, culture will serve as a bridge for better cross-border cooperation and, in the long term, as a means of economic development. This is because this traditional approach fits situation of state fragility, are credited with legitimacy, take the time factor into consideration, provide for comprehensive inclusion and participation, focus on the psycho-social and spiritual dimension of conflict transformation.

III.2. Cultural heritage and festivals

The CEMAC zone countries have weak economies. They do not have good growth performance. The real GDP growth rate in Central Africa rose from 1.1 percent in 2017 to an estimated 2.2 percent in 2018, below the rate for Africa as a whole. Despite having improved in 2018, Central Africa's growth rate remained below the 5.0 percent rate in 2011–13, which was slightly less than West Africa's 5.3 percent and East Africa's 5.2 percent over that period. Growth in 2018 was driven primarily by the recovery in commodity prices, particularly for oil, and by domestic and external demand (African Development Bank Group, 2019).

Given the economic weight of the tourist industry - currently considered the most important in the world, ahead of the automobile and chemical industries - great attention paid to this phenomenon of multiple dimensions and global consequences can help the zone to launch its economy (Haller and al, 2020; Manzoor and al, 2019; Creaco and Querini, 2003). Indeed, the CEMAC zone has so many touristic opportunities. In Cameroon, Chad, Congo or Gabon there are many opportunities for natural and cultural tourism. Talking about cultural tourism in the CEMAC area, the cultural heritage and festivals can be the base of a prosperous touristic economy. Indeed, the area is endowed with vast cultural heritage. Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values.

Cultural heritage is often expressed as either intangible or tangible cultural heritage. Using and invigorating our heritage places can also help local economies through employment opportunities and generating additional revenue, mainly through tourism. State Government, local governments, property owners and members of the community all have a role to play in ensuring that the valuable asset of our heritage is recognized, respected and promoted. As part of human activity, cultural heritage produces tangible representations of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles and that as an essential part of culture as a whole, cultural heritage, contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past. Cultural heritage consists of tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, movable and immovable assets inherited from the past. It is of extremely high value for the present and the future of communities and therefore sustainably preserving, managing and education around cultural heritage are essential for the evolution of people and their culture. Initiators of the South West cultural festival came up simply because they want citizens of this part of the country or region to show those things that make citizens of this Region unique and a forum to explain who they are. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects, it thus also includes our traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts on one hand. On another hand, in the other hand festivals such as the Douala art Fair, The Miss Me Binga Festival in Yaounde, The Congo biennial Festival in Kinshasa, The Elog Mpoo Festival in Edea, The Ngondo cultural Festival in Douala, The Nguon Festival in Fouban, The socio-cultural festival of Haoussa People in the Northern Cameroon, The international festival of Saharan cultures in Tchad, The Lubango Festival in Lubango are organized.

Up to now all this potential (traditional ceremonies, celebrations, monuments and historical buildings, etc.) is poorly valorized by state and private partners. To date, it has been noted that there is a lack of cooperation between these different sectors. Thus, a synergistic combination between the public authorities, the private sector, civil society and local populations would be appropriate for a better management of these touristic initiatives. The prospect of rethinking the community heritage requires the union of forces. The public authorities in general can support the projects with material, infrastructural and financial logistics, laws, regulations and many other facilities. They can offer sites, build access roads to these sites, carry out major development and urbanization work (water, electricity, hotel construction, etc.), provide substantial subsidies, etc. And, the private sector can play main touristic companies' promoters by injecting capital in order to develop the existing sites as well as those not yet explored. The civil society can also play a key role of guardian and engage itself to watch over the fact that tourism, by developing, does not undermine the preservation of the heritage itself. We therefore agree with J.F. Yekoka (2005,16) that *it "must be the vital source of information, experience and expertise in heritage and tourism management"*. At last but not the least, the local population should be part of this initiative as soon as it was shown in literature that not involving these population in the touristic projects is not good as précised by Onomo Etaba, (2005, 7): *"In fact, it is quite clear that if the local populations do not support the project; if they show a certain hostility to it; if they simply do not appreciate the presence of visitors on the ground, any spirit of sustainability is compromised or even excluded."*

The impact of tourism is such that innovative strategies are an absolute necessity in order to lay the foundations for genuine international, regional and local policies. It is therefore a question of highlighting cultural heritage, contributing to its conservation and making it an economic factor. It is also about encouraging ethnic groups to build on their assets, which can

be characterized by cultural infrastructures, traditions in music, gastronomy, language skills, handicrafts, etc. Given the contribution that tourism makes to the economy today, it would be wise for the CEMAC countries to make a general inventory and systematic classification of their cultural heritage, so that it is not only better known, but also better exploited, both at the regional and international levels.

What we are saying is that efforts to make the sub-region attractive and thus attract tourists are still embryonic. At a time when the sub-region is looking for additional points of growth, at a time when it is seeking to improve the living conditions of its population, the tourist activity can provide solutions to these problems, provided that it is considered as an economic sector in its own right. We can conclude with UNESCO by saying "cultural tourism is important for various reasons; it has a positive economic and social impact, it establishes and reinforces identity, it helps build image, it helps preserve the cultural and historical heritage, with culture as and helps renew tourism".

III.3. The actors and institutions dealing with cultural issues: CICIBA and CERDOTOLA.

Some institutions have been created in Central Africa with the mission not only to promote Bantu culture, but also to enhance it. An institution such as the CICIBA (International Centre for Bantu Civilizations) located in Libreville, Gabon has been doing this for 30 years now. Indeed, it is since January 8, 1983 that this center was created various activities have been carried out. . It is under the action of the President of this country (Omar Bongo) that this institution was launched. The original treaty was signed by ten countries (Angola, Central African Republic, Congo, Comoros, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Zaire and Zambia). Plus one observer state (Cameroon). Since its creation, the CICIBA has had as its mission to bring the Bantu peoples closer together through culture. The Article 4 of its statutes states that: "as a center for research, documentation, dissemination, animation, training and coordination, the center's objectives are to conserve, promote and preserve the authentic values of Bantu civilizations, the cultural heritage common to the Bantu-speaking and Bantu-cultured peoples from the north to the south of the equator, as well as to those of the Diaspora".

In 1988, like many other institutions in Central Africa, the CICIBA was abandoned because of for lack of funding. The States Parties, who were supposed to contribute financially, did not meet their commitments. It was in 2009 that, with the intervention of UNESCO, the construction of the center was launched, given the deterioration of the old building. In addition to CICIBA's work in this area, CERDOTOLA (International Centre for Research and Documentation on Oral Traditions and Language Development) is also active. As CEMAC member states belonging to CERDOTOLA we have Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and Chad. The creation of this center is the result of a long international and intergovernmental process of reflection and consultation of a diplomatic and scientific nature. The center was created in 1977. It is an institution for sub-regional cooperation in the human and social sciences applied to the knowledge of the traditional world, history, languages and the African cultural heritage. The mission of this institution is, among others, to encourage research on oral traditions and the development of African languages (this is done through the organization of competitions and the awarding of prizes in order to create a healthy emulation between researchers and men of culture), to contribute to the elaboration of endogenous cultural, economic and social models inspired by African civilizations, to develop means of collecting, studying, preserving and disseminating oral traditions and the development of African languages, etc. CERDOTOLA has so far carried out several projects aimed at promoting Bantu culture as much as possible. These

include: the Central African Linguistic Atlas Project (ALAC), the Sketch Language Project (ESLI), the Central African Thematic Lexicon Project (LETAC), and the "Fire and Star" project.

The Central African Linguistic Atlas Project (ALAC) mainly financed by Cameroon is a project which aims to create a minimum of documentation on each of the languages of the Central African countries and to draw up an inventory of these languages while codifying them. The results of this project were published and vulgarised in a book entitled "*Monograph of the linguistic review of Central Africa*". The Sketch Language Project (ESLI) whose objective was to produce books on phonology, grammar, anthropology of texts, and orthography in the various languages of Central Africa was carried out in various geographical settings of the sub-region and produced enough materials on the languages that have not been written down or are insufficiently known to the public. Talking about the Central African Thematic Lexicon Project (LETAC), it is a multilingual project which produced many documents such as LETAC CAR: "Sangol", LETAC Zaire: "Monokutuba", "Ciluba" and "Kiswahili", LETAC Cameroon: "Basa'a", LETAC Chad: "Sana Nyambay" plus "Masa" lexicons, and finally LETAC Rwanda: "Knyarwanda". The "Fire and Star" project especially targets the young audience (youths and children). Indeed, the project aims to transmit African values through the reading of tales that reflect African realities. Rather than reading "Alice in Wonderland", young people are called upon to read tales such as "The Hare and the Leopard", "the tales of the Massa community in Cameroon" etc.

Many other projects are on the table of CERDOTOLA's leaders and as long as the question of financing the center's activities will be resolved, they will certainly be realized. Among these projects that will surely be implemented in the near future are: the Monolingual Dictionaries Project (DIMO), the Special Lexicon Project which aims at improving the scientific terminology of African languages and the Creation and Translation of National Languages Project (CREAN).

From our research we note that these two institutions have in common that they are mostly funded by international institutions such as UNESCO, OIF, ACCT, etc. The various governments of the CEMAC zone do not invest money in the research and the promotion of the African culture. And, being primarily concerned by the issues that these institutions deal with, the leaders of the sub-region will gain by providing them with all the means they need, both in terms of human and financial resources for the a better implication of these institutions in the development of the culture in the CEMAC zone.

Conclusion

In fact, our article, which focuses on the cultural potentials of the CEMAC zone, has enabled us to show the various cultural opportunities abound in the sub-region, and their place in the development policies, strategies and interventions. Precisely, this research work highlights the fact that CEMAC zone has much cultural potential that can contribute to maintain peace and build up a strong economy. But these opportunities are not really exploited or poorly used for the integration and the development process of the sub-region while there are many actors and institutions working already on this particular question. Traditional approaches of conflict prevention and conflict management as the joking alliances and palaver tree are no more references for the CEMAC inhabitants who are now engaged in intra- and inter-state tensions that jeopardize the development of the sub-region. Furthermore, the vast cultural heritage that can be promoted as tourist destinations is not exploited. And all the gains that can be coming from the touristic industry are lost. Thus, the populations of CEMAC zone are actually passing through vulnerability while having some keys that can really help for the

economic and social growth of the sub-region in their cultures. We can therefore say that, the integration and development process in Central Africa are not successful because the leaders only emphasize and economic and political policies while ignoring the cultural aspect. Our article shows that it is the people through their cultural activities, actors and institutions that can enable the CEMAC region to revitalize its integration and development process. And to fail to associate them effectively with the integration process would be to miss the rendezvous with the emergence set for 2025. Therefore, instead of spending most of their time drawing up community conventions and directives that have no real bearing on reality and that will not be applied, sub-regional integration institutions should be more concerned with building a sub-regional integration based on cultural policies to recreate and strengthen this sense of community of destiny which already requires a latent state. We will conclude our remarks with these words of wisdom from the Africanist J. Devisse on Radio Cameroon in 1986 (B.D. Nizesete, 2001):

I think that the time has come when politics and culture must be reconciled on the terrain of sub-regional unity. I think that it is up to politics not to take the first step, but that it is up to politics to understand the cultural approach, that culture is everywhere in the world on the agenda because it is everywhere the only one capable of providing proposals for the future and projections for the future. But if politicians, technocrats and technologists are afraid of the cultural and refuse this vision, then it will have nothing at all in our eyes, and we will be heading for increasingly violent confrontations within and between continents. I deeply believe that culture is the only chance from this point of view to serenely confront a certain number of views and to enlighten the international debates within the black world, between continents and on the whole earth. So it is time to stop thinking that culture should be a small percentage of a budget, that it is a secondary factor in national life. For it is ultimately the heart of the future of all the nations of the world.

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