A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN AND AMERICAN CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

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Abstract

Romania and the United States are different in terms of geographical position, language, culture, economy and from many other perspectives. The present paper aims at analyzing comparatively the Romanian and American cultural dimensions and the values they treasure. The values can shape the way people behave and act, and consequently they can influence the development of any country. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World we analyze whether there are only differences between the two nations or there are values they share.

Keywords: cultural dimensions, Romanian values, American values, cultural map of the world

1. Romanian values

Romanian families[1] place a high value on ***children***; their protection and well-being are considered to be parents' primary responsibilities. Considerable efforts are made to provide children with what they need. Parents' hope and pride are focused on children's successes. Interdependent and reciprocal relationships are encouraged among members of the Romanian family. Parents provide care for their children and in return, children are expected to be obedient and respectful and, in later life, to care for their parents.

Dedication to ***extended family and friends*** is another important value. A complex system of rules and obligations regulates each individual's relations and responsibilities within the extended family. For example, in many cases, grandparents assist parents in raising their children. During the communist regime, the social networks of friends were an important source of emotional and intellectual support. In the transition period accompanied by financial strain, this support has often become financial. In addition, in one-child families, friends often become substitute siblings.

Education is very important, with the school holding a central role in the life of children. During the school years, children are expected to perform well, and parents try their best to help them. Success in school is prized because of its relation with economic advancement. Therefore, play and the other leisure activities are usually subordinated to studying.

Religion has always been an important value for Romanians. The majority of the population (70%) is Christian Orthodox, with the rest divided among other religions (Roman Catholics 6%, Protestants 6%, others and unaffiliated 18%). Religion has been one of the strengths of families, providing them with spiritual sustenance. Many family practices and customs are related to religion. Rites of passage, baptisms, weddings, and funerals are rich in rituals, and they are celebrated with the extended family and friends.

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Other important celebrations are Christmas, Easter, and name-days. Many people are given saints' names, and their name-days coincide with the celebration of the patron saint's day.

2. American values

American culture[2] has been enriched by the values and belief systems of virtually every part of the world. Consequently, it is impossible to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, a few selected values are at the core of the American value system.

The one value that nearly every American would agree upon is ***individual freedom***. Whether you call it individual freedom, individualism, or independence, it is the cornerstone of American values. The concept of an individual's having control over his/her own destiny influenced the type of government that was established here, and individual rights are guaranteed in the United States Constitution (the supreme law of the land). While the American economic system may be dominated by large corporations, the majority of American businesses are small, and many are owned by an individual or a family. It is part of the "American dream" to "be your own boss," and being an entrepreneur is one of the most appealing ways to improve one's economic future.

Education is often regarded as the key to opportunity, including financial security. Americans take a pragmatic approach to learning, so what one learns outside the classroom through internships, extracurricular activities and the like is often considered as important as what is learned in the classroom. Consequently, lifelong learning is valued which results in many adult and continuing education programs. Americans have many *choices*. In school they decide their major field of study, perhaps with or without their parents' influence, and students even get to select some of their courses. These "elective" courses often confuse foreign students who may expect a more rigid curriculum.

Another aspect of American society that may bewilder non-Americans is the ***family***. The main purpose of the American family is to bring about the happiness of each individual family member. The traditional family values include love and respect for parents, as well as for all members of the family. However, the emphasis on the individual and his/her right to happiness can be confusing. It allows children to disagree, even argue with their parents. While in most other cultures such action would be a sign of disrespect and a lack of love, which is not the case in the United States. It is simply a part of developing one's independence.

Privacy is also important to Americans. The notion of individual privacy may make it difficult to make friends. Because Americans respect one's privacy, they may not go much beyond a friendly "hello." Ironically, it is usually the foreigner who must be more assertive if a friendship is to develop.

The rugged individualism valued by most Americans stems from their frontier heritage. For much of their country's history, there was a frontier. That experience greatly influenced American attitudes. Early settlers had to be self-sufficient which forced them to be inventive. Their success gave them optimism about the future, a belief that

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problems could be solved. This positive spirit enables Americans to take risks in areas where others might only dream, resulting in tremendous advances in technology, health and science.

The American frontier also created the American heroes: the self-reliant, strong-willed, confident individual who preferred action to words and always tried to treat others fairly. Many of these characteristics are represented by the myth of the American cowboy, and the more modern versions personified in movies by John Wayne and Clint Eastwood[3].

3. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. Culture in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture."[4] For Hofstede, then, cultural values are mental programs that are "partly unique, partly shared,"[5] "take both the person and the situation into account,"[6] and lead to "the same person showing more or less the same behavior in similar situations."[7] Through mental programs, culture is to human groups what personality is to individuals. Hofstede identified three levels of cultural values: universal, collective, and individual.[8] Universal level values are the most basic and shared of human mental programs and include expressive behaviors such as laughing and weeping. Collective level values are shared by some, but not all, people; "they are common to people belonging to a certain group or category."[9] Individual level values are the most unique and account for a diversity of behaviors within the same collective culture.

Hofstede's study identified four principal dimensions of culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance (UA), masculinity-femininity, and individualism- collectivism. These cultural dimensions influence individuals' communication and, therefore, will affect the functioning of any organization.[10]

Power Distance Index (PDI)[11] that is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Power and inequality, of course, are extremely fundamental facts of any society and anybody with some international experience will be aware that 'all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others'.

Individualism (IDV)[12] on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. The word 'collectivism' in this sense has no

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political meaning: it refers to the group, not to the state. Again, the issue addressed by this dimension is an extremely fundamental one, regarding all societies in the world.

Masculinity (MAS)[13] versus its opposite, femininity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The IBM studies revealed that (a) women's values differ less among societies than men's values; (b) men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine'. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)[14] deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man's search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth; 'there can only be one Truth and we have it'. People in uncertainty avoiding countries are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. The opposite type, uncertainty accepting cultures, are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible, and on the philosophical and religious level they are relativist and allow many currents to flow side by side. People within these cultures are more phlegmatic and contemplative, and not expected by their environment to express emotions.

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) versus short-term orientation: this fifth dimension was found in a study among students in 23 countries around the world, using a questionnaire designed by Chinese scholars. Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'. Both the positively and the negatively rated values of this dimension are found in the teachings of Confucius, the most influential Chinese philosopher who lived around 500 B.C.; however, the dimension also applies to countries without a Confucian heritage.[15]

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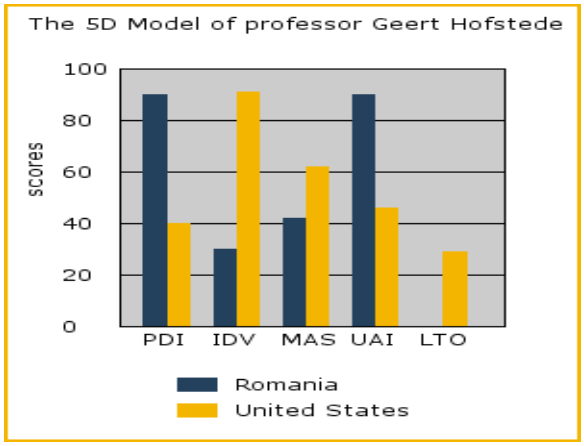


Figure 1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for Romania and U.S.

4. The cultural map of the world

The World Values Surveys were designed to provide a comprehensive measurement of all major areas of human concern, from religion to politics to economic and social life and two dimensions dominate Figure 2: (1) Traditional/ Secular-rational and (2) Survival/Self-expression values. These two dimensions explain more than 70 percent of the cross-national variance in a factor analysis of ten indicators-and each of these dimensions is strongly correlated with scores of other important orientations.

The Traditional/Secular-rational values dimension reflects the contrast between societies in which religion is very important and those in which it is not. A wide range of other orientations are closely linked with this dimension. Societies near the traditional pole emphasize the importance of parent-child ties and deference to authority, along with absolute standards and traditional family values, and reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. These societies have high levels of national pride, and a nationalistic outlook. Societies with secular-rational values have the opposite preferences on all of these topics.

The second major dimension of cross-cultural variation is linked with the transition from industrial society to post-industrial societies-which brings a polarization between Survival and Self-expression values. The unprecedented wealth that has accumulated in advanced societies during the past generation means that an increasing share of the population has grown up taking survival for granted. Thus, priorities have shifted from an overwhelming emphasis on economic and physical security toward an increasing emphasis on subjective well-being, self-expression and quality of life. Inglehart and Baker (2000)[16] find evidence that orientations have shifted from Traditional toward Secular-rational values, in almost all industrial societies. But modernization, is not linear-when a society has completed industrialization and starts becoming a knowledge society, it moves in a new direction, from Survival values toward increasing emphasis on Self-expression values.

A central component of this emerging dimension involves the polarization between Materialist and Post-materialist values, reflecting a cultural shift that is emerging among generations who have grown up taking survival for granted. Self-expression values give

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high priority to environmental protection, tolerance of diversity and rising demands for participation in decision making in economic and political life. These values also reflect mass polarization over tolerance of out-groups, including foreigners, gays and lesbians and gender equality. The shift from survival values to self-expression values also includes a shift in child-rearing values, from emphasis on hard work toward emphasis on imagination and tolerance as important values to teach a child. And it goes with a rising sense of subjective well-being that is conducive to an atmosphere of tolerance, trust and political moderation. Finally, societies that rank high on self-expression values also tend to rank high on interpersonal trust.

This produces a culture of trust and tolerance, in which people place a relatively high value on individual freedom and self-expression, and have activist political orientations. These are precisely the attributes that the political culture literature defines as crucial to democracy.

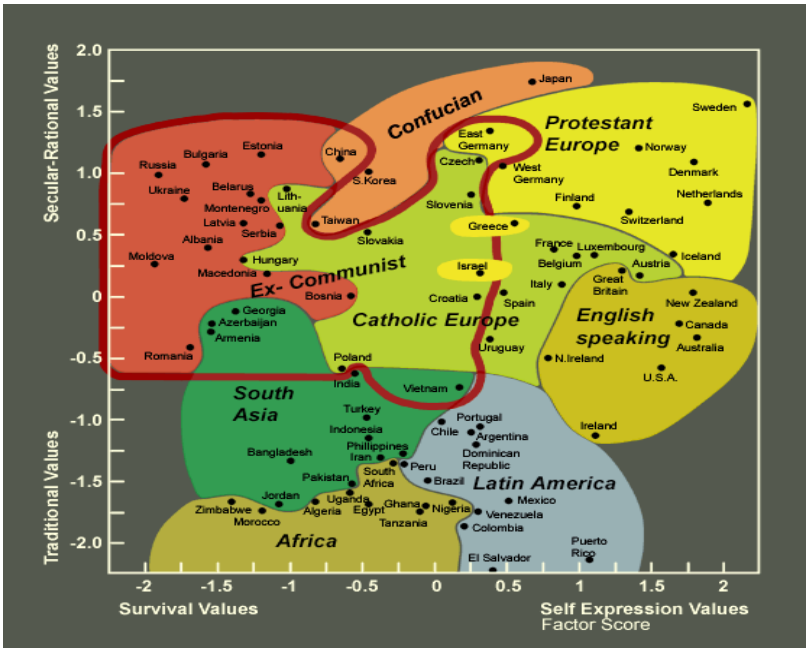


Figure 2 The Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World

Conclusions:

The high Individualism (IDV - 91) ranking for the United States indicates a society with a more individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others. The population is more self-reliant and looks out for themselves and their close family members.

The next highest Hofstede Dimension is Masculinity (MAS) with a ranking of 62, compared with a world average of 50. This indicates the country experiences a higher degree of gender differentiation of roles. The male dominates a significant portion of the society and power structure. This situation generates a female population that becomes

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more assertive and competitive, with women shifting toward the male role model and away from their female role.

The next lowest ranking Dimension for the United States is Power Distance (PDI) at 40, compared to the world Average of 55. This is indicative of a greater equality between societal levels, including government, organizations, and even within families. This orientation reinforces a cooperative interaction across power levels and creates a more stable cultural environment.

The last Geert Hofstede Dimension for the US is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), with a ranking of 46, compared to the world average of 64. A low ranking in the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension is indicative of a society that has fewer rules and does not attempt to control all outcomes and results. It also has a greater level of tolerance for a variety of ideas, thoughts, and beliefs.

Romania has Power Distance (PDI) as the highest Hofstede Dimension, with a ranking of 90 compared to a world average of 56.5. This Power Distance score for Romania indicates a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. This condition is not necessarily subverted upon the populace, but rather accepted by the population as a cultural norm.

Romania ranks rather low on masculinity (42) with the world average at 51 which indicates a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In this culture, females are treated more equally to males in all aspects of society. This low Masculinity ranking may also be displayed as a more openly nurturing society.

The Geert Hofstede analysis for Romania has a very high Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) of 90, compared to the average European countries' score of 74. High Uncertainty Avoidance indicates the society's low level of tolerance for uncertainty. In an effort to minimize or reduce this level of uncertainty, strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations are adopted and implemented. The ultimate goal of this population is to control everything in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected. As a result of this high Uncertainty Avoidance characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse.

Romania has a low Individualism (IDV) rank (30), as do most Latin countries (average 21). The score on this Dimension indicates the society is Collectivist as compared to Individualist. This is manifest in a close long-term commitment to the member 'group', be that a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and over-rides most other societal rules and regulations. The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Romania and the United States differ in all respects; maybe that is why the entrepreneurial spirit is more developed on the American continent. Mueller and Thomas (2001) found that entrepreneurial orientation was greatest in cultures which showed a combination of high individualism and low uncertainty avoidance.[17]

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On the cultural map of the world according to the World Values Survey, the United States is described as low in "Rational-Secular Values" and high in "Self-Expression values" and Romania is described as low in "Rational-Secular Values" and high in "Survival Values".

Societies near the traditional pole emphasize the importance of parent-child ties and deference to authority, along with absolute standards and traditional family values, and reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. These societies have high levels of national pride, and a nationalistic outlook. From this respect, on the cultural map, the United States is slightly closer to the traditional pole than Romania, but in both societies religion is ranked among the most important values.

The priorities for the American population have shifted from an overwhelming emphasis on economic and physical security toward an increasing emphasis on subjective well-being, self-expression and quality of life, while the Romanians are still on the Survival values side.

Basically, from the cultural perspective, the Romanians and the Americans are different in many ways, but, as it is illustrated on the cultural map of the world, they share a few common values: the importance of religion and parent-child ties, deference to authority, and the traditional family values.

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Notes:

[1] http://family.jrank.org
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_United_States
[3]Grouling, Thomas E., Ph.D., Assistant Director, International Center, Drake University, http://www.americanhospitals.com/questions/american/amervalues.htm
[4] Geert Hofstede, "Culture's Consequence: International Differences in Work-Related Values," (Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1984), p. 21
[5] Ibid, p. 15
[6] Ibid, p. 14
[7] Idem
[8] Geert Hofstede, 1984,op. cit.
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[10]William B. Gundykunst, "Cultural Variabilities in Communication: An Introduction," Communication Research 24 (1997), pp. 327–348.
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