

ROMANIA – CULTURAL AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

In the historical Romanian provinces, Moldova, Transylvania, Walachia, differences due to cultural history, the structure of ethnic, religious, but also neighboring peoples belonging to different cultures were outlined, over time. These cultural differences impact the conduct of their employees, bearing with them the cultural specificity fingerprint of the environment in which they live.

The research hypothesis consisted of the statement used in the title, that there are some cultural differences between the Romanian historical provinces, given the historical, ethnic, religious, etc differences among them.

Research shows that there are both similarities and differences among the three Romanian provinces. Three different areas of cultural proximity have been identified (cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance), but also significant cultural differences (in other dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, mercy and monumentalizing).

The research outcomes will contribute to adapting organizational practices of managers, specialists in marketing according to the cultural influences in the three Romanian regions.

Key-words: culture, cultural dimensions, Romanian regions, organizations;

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1. Introduction

The existence of strong regional culture, based on historical geographical, political, economic or cultural factors, has an impact on the behavior of enterprises, through the influence of the individuals who "designed" them.

There are differences between the old historical Romanian provinces in terms of history, ethnic and religious structure, but also in terms of the influence exercised by the neighborhood or the geographical proximity, differences resulted from causative factors of regional cultures.

The aim of the research is to identify the regional cultural differences so that they can serve the process of adjusting the organizational practices by managers. The results can also be used for marketing purposes as the dominant values of the individual as an employee remain the same as of a client.

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2. Operational concepts

National culture refers to the culture of a country, the country being defined as a "territory composed of individuals representing a political community, established on a defined geographical area, with a sovereign authority" (Meier, 2004, p.22). National culture has its own characteristics that transcend the sum of the cultures of private groups the nation consists of. It can be defined as a collective programming of thinking, which distinguishes citizens of a country from those of other countries (Hofstede, 1996, p. 21). It is taught in the social environment of an individual, being part of a human continuity that allows the accumulation of new human experiences and their integration, enabling a continuous evolution. The influence of national culture is significant because its elements are deeply rooted in the cognitive functioning of individuals and evolve in a very slow pace – changes being observed after several generations.

Regional cultures refer either to the diversity of cultures within the same country or to the similarities that may exist between geographical areas belonging, in legal terms, to several countries (Meier, 2004). Because we are interested in historical differences between the regions of Romania, we refer to the first sense when using this concept.

3. The research hypothesis and methodology

The research has as its starting point the **assumption** that the historical, ethnic, religious, etc. differences, manifested in the old Romanian provinces, lead to regional cultural differences with impact on activities, including those within the organizations, generating certain attitudes, behaviors, positions towards actions of individuals in general – but also considered in their position as managers or employees on the one hand and customers on the other.

In Romania there can be noted differences between determinants of culture, regions, so there will be, under the principle of social determinism (Drăghicescu, 1996), cultural differences among the three historical regions, Moldova, Transylvania and Walachia, resulting in specific ways of dealing with everyday problems as well as those expressed in business, the last being of interest to us. We say that the regional character of individuals and businesses is essential because we believe that the individual does not come into an organization disarmed in terms of culture, but he or she is the bearer of the social environment from which the person originates. Renaud Sainsaulieu evokes different types of cultural features in interaction among the functions of the company, while E. Mutabazi, A. Klesta, Y. Altman and Ph. Poiron talk about a cultural mosaic in action, referring to the influence of superior cultures, which has a deep and lasting impact on the behavior of parties involved and on their work (in Dupriez, 2000, p.95)

The novelty of the study lies in its topic, namely, the use of a cultural diagnostic tool to identify regional differences. There have been studies that outlined values, but these studies looked at the entire country (Gallup Romania, Interact, Doina and Alexandru Catană, GLOBE research, Professors Dumitru Zaiț, Panaite Nica, Luminița Iacob etc.). Although these studies have achieved results at a regional level, the results have never become public or have not been cited in the scientific literature. In addition, the new instrument created is based on seven cultural dimensions (not five) and, as far as we know, it has been applied for the first time in Romania.

The aim of the research is to identify regional differences, on the basis of cultural differentiation criteria (1) in order to be offered to company management and marketing for valorization.

The approach is an ethical one, quantitative, based on the collection and processing of data using VSM 08 tool (2), developed and validated by researchers at the Intercultural Institute of Management, coordinated by Professor Geert Hofstede, a specialist with a long and prestigious experience in the field of cultural studies (3). The Professor specifies in Values Survey Module 2008 Manual that this instrument, designed to analyze national cultural differences, can be also used at a regional level.

For the study we chose as a **method of research** the questionnaire-based survey (the VSM 08), on a sample consisting of employees of financial accounting departments of the State University of Romania. The fact that these employees were accessible played a major role in choosing them as the sample of our study. To make sure that the differences come only as a result of different regional cultures, it was necessary to ensure equivalence between the other possible variables (we "controlled" the other variables: type of job occupied by respondents, age, gender, number of years of study), which could have brought other differences that would have been wrongly allocated to regional cultures.

4. Cultural Differentiation Criteria (cultural dimensions)

Regional cultural differences are analyzed using the cultural dimensions established by Geert Hofstede and his collaborators.

The content of cultural dimensions (4) is shown below, using the guidelines set by the authors of the Manual mentioned before (5).

- **Distance power (high or low)**, defined as the extent to which members who have less power in institutions and organizations or in society, expect and accept that power is unevenly distributed;

- **Individualism** is the characteristic of a society in which relations between individuals are free: it is expected of a person to take care only of himself and his close family. On the opposite side is **collectivism**, which characterizes a society in which people are integrated into strong groups, closely united, even before birth, which continues to protect them throughout their lives, in exchange for unconditional loyalty;

- **Masculinity** is a feature of a society in which social gender roles are clearly separated: it is assumed that men are strong, tough and focused on accumulation of wealth; women are more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. **Femminity** is the opposite of masculinity. It is the characteristic of a society in which social gender roles overlap: both men and women are modest, sensitive and focus on quality of life;

- **Uncertainty avoidance (low or high)** is defined as the extent to which members of institutions and organizations in a society feel threatened by uncertain, unknown, ambiguous or unstructured situations;

- **Long term orientation** – focusing on the long-term or short term are the extremes of this cultural dimension which consists of sets of values that have consequences on certain time horizons. The values associated with long-term orientation are persistence, organizing relations based on social status, holding the feeling of shame, while those typical for the short-term orientation are: personal safety and stability, "saving face", respect for tradition, the reciprocity in terms of greetings, favors, gifts, etc.

- **Indulgence versus Constraint** is the feature of a society that allows satisfying, relatively free, certain feelings and desires, particularly those related to leisure, marriage, friends, shopping, consumption and sex. On the other hand, **coercion** characterizes a society that controls the fulfilling of its members' desires and where people feel less able to enjoy life.

- **Monumentalism** characterizes a society that rewards those who are, metaphorically speaking, viewed as monuments: proud and impenetrable. On the opposite side, the **Self-Effacement's** is typical of a society that rewards humility and flexibility.

5. Sample structure and the results of the study

As stated above, the sample was made up of employees of public universities of higher education in Romania, operating in the financial and accounting departments. The chosen questionnaire, VSM 08, was sent to be filled in Romanian, translation being provided by the research team using the method "both ways". Some questions were tailored to ensure a better understanding of the intended meaning, and others were introduced to adapt the questionnaire to regional research, as it was originally designed by its authors to survey the national cultural values. The data were collected between March-April 2007 during work hours.

After the statistical processing, the results, in terms of cultural dimensions, are as follows:

Table no. 1- Indicators of regional cultural values

REGIONS	MOLDOVA	WALACHIA	TRANSYLVANIA	ROMANIA
Cultural dimensions				
Power distance	85,45	83,8	78	82,41
Individualism-Collectivism	30,7	31,75	34,55	32,3
Masculinity	47	43,25	45,8	45,35
Uncertainty avoidance	80,35	80,2	47,6	69,38
Long term orientation	29	35,15	43,65	35,93
Indulgence	28,75	68,25	61,3	52,76
Monumentalism	51,60	36,15	37	33,6

One very important thing that needs to be stated and considered in the interpretation and use of data obtained is that the indicators are relative values, which can only provide a "measure" of the regional differences between these dimensions. Being relative values, these can not be compared with values from other studies because the condition of equivalence is not fulfilled (in matter of the sample, the conditions of administration, etc.), but they give us relevant results on differences

We also point the fact that the values Hofstede forecasted for Romania, for the first four cultural dimensions, show the following characteristics: high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance and a tendency towards femininity.

From the data obtained after processing (Table 1) the following can be observed:

1. A higher **distance power distance** in Moldova compared with Wallachia (Table no. 1), to which the difference is 1.65 percent; and Transylvania, against which the difference amounts to 6.55 percent;

A high level as to this cultural dimension can be observed in the case of all the historic regions of Romania. This indicates high power distance, meaning that people in organizations have a high tolerance to the unequal distribution of power.

Notably, however, is that in Transylvania, where we have achieved the smallest value for the power distance, it would be easier to implement participatory management practices, while in Moldova proper managerial style remains the autocratic one. Here, the manager-subordinate relationships are highly formal and subordinates are waiting to be told what to do and how.

2. **Individualism**, low overall, shows regional differences (3.85 percent between Moldova, with a value of 30.7 percent, and Transylvania, with a score of 34.55), according to Table no. 1;

These figures confirm the collectivism forecasted by Professor Geert Hofstede, yet we see a slight difference at the regional level which can be translated into increased targeting of individuals from Transylvania towards their interests, personal objectives. The appropriate management is the group management (Hofstede, 1996, p. 84), taking into account the relations and common interests in a subset of work force.

3. Differences in the index of **masculinity** are as follows (Table no. 1): between Moldova and Transylvania 1.2 percent, and between Transylvania and Wallachia from 2.55 percent;

These comparative values show the fact that in the Romanian regions the feminine values interpenetrate with masculine ones. A slightly increased tendency towards femininity is noticed in Wallachia. However, Hofstede notes that the development of this dimension, for all countries, is towards femininity. This is visible in Romania also, by the emphasizing concern for increasing the quality of life, increased interest in preserving the environment, concern for a beneficial climate at the workplace, growing number of civic actions with the purpose of providing social support. Yet, we need to stress out the fact that the questionnaire was applied in urban areas. Therefore, one would expect that Moldova and Transylvania (urban and rural population) kept a gender-based differentiation of roles and valorized male values better (gain, recognition, achievement, challenge).

4. Analyzing the level of **uncertainty avoidance** we find values very close between Moldova and Wallachia (80.35, 80.2 respectively), values that are at a very big difference from the ones in Transylvania (47, 6 percent);

These results show a very clear difference between employees in Moldova and Wallachia, on the one hand, and those in Transylvania, on the other hand, when it comes to the values generated by this cultural dimension. We observe, for the first two regions examined, the need for rules and security, but also high resistance to change and reluctant risk acceptance and assuming responsibilities. In Transylvania, the low level of uncertainty avoidance translates into initiative, risk taking, tolerance, achievement-based motivation, respect and belonging.

5. **Long-term orientation** varies within the limits of 14.65 percent (Appendix A, no figure. 5), with scores decreasing, as follows: Transylvania (43.65), Wallachia (35.15) and Moldova (29);

A noticeable fluctuation can be observed when it comes to the length of the focus. People in Transylvania tend to have a medium-term focus, the orientation in Moldova is

rather short, and Wallachia fits between the two. This cultural dimension is not about time itself, but it is about a certain type of subordination with effects in a certain temporal horizon. Perseverance, spirit of saving and concern for investment (from which benefit is obtained after a long time) are values mainly encountered in Transylvania and less appreciated in Wallachia and Moldova. The values which characterize the short-term focus (personal safety and stability, “saving face”, respect for tradition, the reciprocity in terms of greetings, favors, gifts) are commonly appreciated in the three regions, but there are regional differences in the degree of importance.

6. **Indulgence** (Table no. 1) is relatively high in Wallachia (68.25) and Transylvania (61.3) and low (showing coercion) in Moldova (28.75);

Relatively high values in Wallachia and Transylvania show people’s concern for satisfying their needs and the allocation of time for their fulfillment. Conversely, low levels mean people need to work hard and neglect their own needs. The difference is explained by objective factors, one of them being the fact that the lowest income per capita is in Moldova – according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in the 2007 Statistical Yearbook. With lower income, individuals in this region can only satisfy a part of their personal needs, first addressed being the common family needs. In many cases people have to spend more time working so they have less free time for themselves. Taking into account the lower labor efficiency and the increased level of uncertainty that induces emotional idea of being busy, we can deduct some of the causes that have produced these differences.

7. **Monumentalism** (Table no. 1) indicates new differences between Moldova (51.60 percent) and the other two regions, with values very close (Wallachia – 36.15 percent and Transylvania to 33.6 percent)

The higher level of monumentalism in Moldova suggests that there those who are intransigent and proud are rewarded. Values lower in the other two regions show an inclination of individuals towards flexibility and even traces of modesty.

Conclusions

Our study has identified differences at the regional level, differences which confirm our hypothesis. These differences were to be expected, if we think about the determinant factors of culture (socio-historical factors, ethnic structure, religion, neighborhood and relations with the neighbors etc.). What we tried to find out was the meaning and magnitude of these differences.

The results show both similarities and differences in terms of regional cultural dimensions. Three were the areas of cultural similarity identified according to the values resulting from the study:

- An area consisting of Moldova and Wallachia (similarity based on cultural dimensions such as: power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance);
- An area consisting of Wallachia and Transylvania (leniency and monumentalism based similarity);
- An area consisting of Moldova and Transylvania (masculinity based similarity).

Significant cultural differences appear when it comes to the following dimensions:

- Uncertainty avoidance – between Moldova and Wallachia, on the one hand, and Transylvania, on the other hand;
- Indulgence and monumentalism – between Moldova, on one hand, and Wallachia and Transylvania, on the other hand.

The benefits of this study consist in the fact that managers can use its results to take advantage of these similarities / differences, both in management (especially in Human Resource Management) and in formulating policies and marketing strategies.

Worth mentioning is the fact that quantitative approach is but a part of the research. This approach can only provide rather general information. In depth and subtle elements of culture must be researched using qualitative approaches. That is why we view this study as a starting point and not a problem solved.

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Notes

1. Cultural differentiation criteria = cultural dimension;
2. We have to authors' permission for it's use;
3. Results can be found at: <http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/index.html>;
4. First four cultural dimensions were identified by G. Hofstede using studies made at IBM branches; the fifth was the result of Hong Kong's H. Bond's studies of Chinese values; the last two dimensions were inspired by the researches made by M. Minkov;
5. Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov M., Vinken H. (2008), *Values Survey Module 2008 Manual*, <http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/ManualVSM08.doc>, with authors' permission