

HOW FUTURE MANAGERS VIEW SOCIETAL CULTURE: A CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON

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Abstract: *Our study aims at enriching the existing literature about the prospective managers' view of an ideal societal value system and the existing cultural practices in their society. The findings about the students' perception on cultural practices and their expectations about societal culture are helpful in imagining the societal culture in its dynamics. The research sample consists of 727 students in business and engineering on undergraduate and graduate levels from Romania and Slovenia. The reason we have chosen to compare Romanian sample with the cultural profile of the "average" future manager from Slovenia is the scientific curiosity of finding out if there are signs of cultural convergence of Romania with a previous communist country, and an older member of European Union. In doing so, our study will hopefully broaden the body of knowledge about the cultural convergence (or divergence?) between the former socialist countries joining European Union. The theoretical and methodological foundation is rooted in GLOBE international research project. Our findings revealed that at practices level, Romanians perceive significant higher Power Distance and significant lower mean value for Uncertainty Avoidance. At the expectations level, the Romanians and Slovenians are very similar in the desire concerning their societies orientation toward In group/Family Collectivism, Assertiveness and Performance Orientation, and record significant differences in all the other societal values. The fact that for all the cultural expectations the future managers assign different mean values than for the correspondent practices make us expect that they will act to change their cultural environments. Still, the cultural orientation of Romanian future middle managers will differ in many regards from the Slovenian sample averages.*

Keywords: *societal culture, cultural practice, cultural value, Romania, Slovenia*

JEL classification: *M14, M19*

1. Introduction

Starting from GLOBE international research project dealing with top and middle managers, GLOBE STUDENT project was initiated (2008)³⁴, aiming at targeting *future* managers, to be recruited mostly from today's students in business and engineering. One of its objectives is to determine the *profile* of future managers from their perceptions on and expectations about societal culture dimensions point of view. *The main research question concerns the similarities and*

differences between the Romanians with the average future manager in Slovenia. The reason we have chosen to compare Romanian sample with the cultural profile of the "average" future manager from Slovenia is the scientific curiosity of finding out if there are signs of cultural convergence of Romania with a previous communist country, and an older member of European Union. In doing so, our study will hopefully broaden the body of knowledge about the cultural convergence (or divergence?) between the former socialist countries joining European Union. Specifically, we will try to answer the following *research questions*:

1. Which are (if any) the significant differences between Romanian

³⁴ The project is co-ordinated by R. Lang from Chemnitz University of Technology. The data for Slovenia has been collected by D. Pucko and T. Cater (University of Ljubljana)

students perceptions of current societal practices and those of students from Slovenia?

2.How do Romanian students' societal values (expectations) differ (if) from those of students from Slovenia?

2. Theoretical background

As known, there is no single generally accepted definition of societal culture (Chhokar et al, 2007:3). Our study shares the definition used by GLOBE international research project: “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (House et al., 2002: 5). The GLOBE project distinguishes between *practices* (“as it is”) and *values* (“as it should be”). Values distinguishing a culture from the others are predictors for cultural practices, as well as for leadership features and behaviours in that culture (House et al. 2002). In all societies, the shared values become good predictors of *future practices*.

GLOBE project operationalised culture in nine *dimensions*: 1) Uncertainty Avoidance; 2) Future Orientation; 3) Power Distance; 4) Collectivism I (societal collectivism); 5) Humane Orientation; 6. Performance Orientation; 7) Collectivism II (in-group collectivism); 8) Gender Egalitarianism; 9) Assertiveness (House et al., 2002: 5-6). As the GLOBE researchers acknowledge (House et al., 2002: 6), the first six dimensions are rooted in cultural dimensions defined originally by Hofstede (1980), Future Orientation and Humane Orientation from Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961), Putnam

(1993) and McClelland (1985), while Performance Orientation from McClelland (1985). Short definitions of these cultural dimensions are given in GLOBE related book (House et al, 2004:3).

Our research compares the cultural foundations of prospective managers and leaders in Romania and Slovenia. The findings about the students' expectations about societal culture are helpful in imagining the societal culture in its *dynamics*. Accepting that values “high in centrality, pervasive, and supported by powerful sanctions and high consensus and supporters of these values hold positions of high prestige and authority” (Williams 1979: 34) are resistant to change, we also are aware that they change especially when one generation succeeds another (Keating et al., 2002: 637).

3. Methodology

GLOBE student project uses the section 1 (*as it is*) and, respectively, section 3 (*as should be*) GLOBE research *Beta* questionnaires (House et al., 2004) with some modifications required by the subjects' nature (students). Scales in section 1 ask the students to value “the way our society is” (practices), while scales in section 3 ask the students opinion about “the way our society should be” (values) using a seven points Likert scale. The surveys were carried out in either 2008 or the first half of 2009. The respondents are enrolled at the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Babes-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca) and Petru Maior University in Targu-Mures (Romania) and at University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). Table 1 shows the joint sample structure of our respondents, which gave us usable data.

Table 1: Sample structure

Country of origin	What subject area/ study path do you study?		Total
	Business/ Economics	Engineering	
Romania	166	261	427
Slovenia	150	150	300
TOTAL (valid answers)	316	411	727

Collected empirical data has been processed with SPSS 17. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out separately for Romanian and Slovenian sample. In comparing Romanian sample with the Slovenian one, the *independent samples t-test* was used, with 0.05 significance threshold.

4. Findings

The research findings concern: 1) differences between Romanian and Slovenian students' perceptions of current cultural *practices*; 2) differences between Romanian and Slovenian

students' *expectations* concerning societal values.

4.1. Differences in perceptions: Romanian vs. Slovenian students

Table 2 displays the significant differences between Romanian and Slovenian sample with respect of perceptions of societal culture *practices*, while the differences between the mean values of perceptions on cultural practices in Romania and Slovenia are displayed in Figure 1

Table 2. Significant differences in cultural practices: Romania vs. Slovenia

Cultural practice ("society as it is")	Romania	Slovenia	Absolut differences	t-test (sig 2-tailed)
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i>	3.49	4.19	- 0.70	- 11.617 (0.000)
<i>Future Orientation</i>	3.44	3.79	- 0.35	- 4.659** (0.000)
<i>Power Distance</i>	5.81	5.03	0.78	12.306** (0.000)
<i>Collectivism I (Institutional)</i>	3.78	4.04	- 0.26	- 3.920 (0.000)
<i>Humane Orientation</i>	3.83	3.97	- 0.14	- 2.204 (0.028)
<i>Performance Orientation</i>	3.66	4.05	- 0.39	- 5.089 (0.000)
<i>Collectivism II (in group)</i>	5.13	5.22		(0.175)
<i>Gender Egalitarianism</i>	3.99	4.13	- 0.14	- 2.427** (0.016)
<i>Assertiveness</i>	3.51	4.24	- 0.73	- 10.587** (0.000)

95% confidence; *two independent samples; ** equal variances not assumed

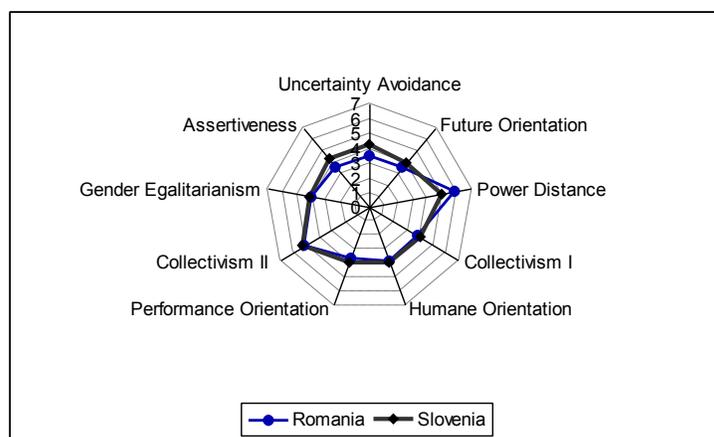


Figure 1. Differences in perception of cultural practices: Romania vs. Slovenia (mean scores)

T-test of differences between the mean scores (two independent samples) shows that the Romanians perceive significant higher Power Distance ($t = 12.306$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$) than the Slovenians (equal variances not assumed). Significant lower mean values are recorded by Romanians for (decreasing order): Uncertainty Avoidance ($t = -11.617$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Assertiveness ($t = -10.587$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Performance Orientation ($t = -5.089$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Future Orientation ($t = -4.659$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Institutional Collectivism ($t = -3.920$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Gender Egalitarianism ($t = -2.427$; $\text{sig} = 0.016$) and Humane Orientation ($t = -2.204$; $\text{sig} = 0.028$). The lack

of significant differences for Collectivism II (In group/Family) might be interpreted as a *convergence* in practicing tight relationships within membership group in both countries.

4.2. Differences in expectations: Romanian vs. Slovenian students

The data in Table 3 summarized the significant differences between the most appreciated cultural values by the future managers and leaders in the Romanian and Slovenia and the “spider” in Figure 2 reveals the differences between the average score of cultural expectations (values) in Romania and Slovenia.

Table 3. Significant differences in societal values: Romania vs. Slovenia (mean scores)*

Cultural value (“society as it should be”)	Romania	Slovenia	Absolut differences	t-test (sig 2-tailed)
Uncertainty Avoidance	5.10	4.55	0.55	9.427 (0.000)
Future Orientation	5.23	4.74	0.49	6.781 (0.000)
Power Distance	2.65	2.94	-0.29	-3.737 (0.000)**
Collectivism I (Institutional)	4.94	4.46	0.48	7.069 (0.000)**
Humane Orientation	5.41	5.08	0.33	4.887 (0.000)**
Performance Orientation	5.89	5.78	0.11	(0.068)
Collectivism II (in group)	5.70	5.69	0.01	(0.824)
Gender Egalitarianism	4.42	4.55	-0.13	-2.384 (0.011)**
Assertiveness	4.01	4.09	-0.08	(0.186)

*two independent samples; ** equal variances not assumed

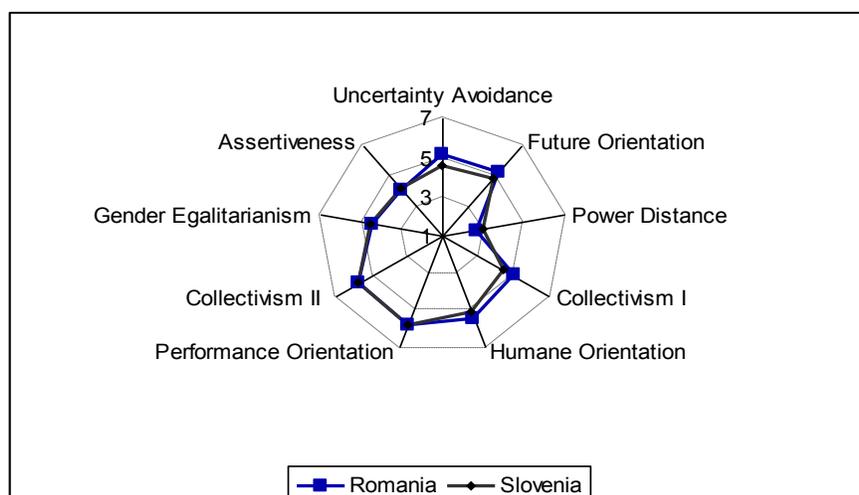


Figure 2. Differences between average scores of cultural expectations: Romania vs. Slovenia

As seen, there is no (or very low) difference between the mean scores ($p < 0.05$) of the compared samples expectations concerning Collectivism II, Assertiveness and Performance Orientation. Romanians expect significant higher Uncertainty Avoidance ($t = 9.427$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Collectivism I ($t = 7.069$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), Future Orientation ($t = 6.781$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$), and Humane Orientation ($t = 4.887$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$) than the Slovenians. The highest statistically significant difference is related to Uncertainty Avoidance. Significant lower expectations are recorded by Romanians for Power Distance ($t = -3.737$; $\text{sig} = 0.000$) and Gender Egalitarianism ($t = -2.384$; $\text{sig} = 0.011$). Given the mentioned findings can be argued that *some* Romanian cultural values (expectations) are convergent with the Slovenian ones (desire for higher performance concern of society, tighter relationships with the membership groups and stronger Assertiveness in defending/arguing own position). Even though the identified changes in cultural dimensions will occur in the future, we cannot speak about a *complete* harmonization of culture in the two countries under study.

5. Discussions and conclusions

The Romanians perceive actual cultural *practices* in their environment differently from Slovenians, with the highest difference for Uncertainty Avoidance (Romanians perceiving their society not being enough concerned with creating a stable legal, political and economic environment or with long term planning). Hofstede found in his research (Hofstede, 2002: 100) a very high level of Uncertainty Avoidance (mean score 6.16) in the Slovenian environment, while for Romania he estimated an index of 90 (http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php), suggesting that in the past socialist environment, the managers worked in a culture with a very high Uncertainty Avoidance. The GLOBE study identified a mean score of 3.78 for Uncertainty Avoidance for Slovenian

practice, and a GLOBE type study performed on 216 Romanian middle managers, got to an average score of 3.92 for this cultural dimension (Catana & Catana, 2011). This shows that the processes of transition to the market economy brought “turbulences” in the “traditional” way of heaving someone taking care of things (through central planning in the case of Romania). The lowest difference is recorded for Humane Orientation (Romanian mean value, higher). Based upon these findings, cannot speak about a convergence in cultural practices perception.

Both samples display higher mean values for all nine cultural dimensions at *expected* level, except Power Distance in both samples and Assertiveness in Slovenian sample. Our findings show the Romanians and Slovenians are *very similar* in their desires concerning their societies orientation towards In group/Family Collectivism Collectivism II), Assertiveness and Performance Orientation. These findings might reveal a certain *harmonisation* of cultures within the compared countries. The highest significant (positive) difference between the samples is recorded for Uncertainty Avoidance, showing the Romanians desire to increase in a higher degree than Slovenians, the level of certainty in their society, including the long term planning. The lowest significant (positive) difference concerns Humane Orientation, revealing that the two samples record the same trend, towards paying more attention to encouraging and rewarding fairness, altruism, friendship, generosity, kindness and promoting altruistic ideals. Significant (negative) differences are recorded in expectations concerning Power Distance and Gender Egalitarianism. These two expectations reveal other “avenues” towards increasing the convergence in cultural values and future cultural practices (if the subjects holding such values/expectations will become managers and transform them in societal practices). Although according to institutional theory, changes in the more culturally