

SOCIETAL CULTURE: A COMPARISON OF ROMANIAN, AUSTRIAN AND GERMAN STUDENTS PERSPECTIVE

Catană Gheorghe Alexandru

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca; Babes-Bolyai University

Catană Doina

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca

Our study compares the students' view on the existing cultural practices with their ideal societal value system in compared societies. For the purpose of this investigation, Austria and Germany were selected to represent Central European values since they are seen as a 'bridge' between Eastern and Western European societal values. The research findings are helpful in identifying signs of cultural convergence of Romanian societal culture with Central European values. In doing so, our study will hopefully broaden the body of knowledge about the cultural harmonization between newer and older members of European Union. As seen in the literature review section, such studies started only a few years ago. Comparison of Romanian, Austrian and German students' perspective on societal culture is performed for the first time by the authors of this study.

The underlying assumption of the study is that the future middle managers will mostly come from the graduates of business and engineering fields of study. The research sample consists of 1086 undergraduate and graduate students. The main research question concerns the differences between the Romanian, Austrian and German students' view on societal culture. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study is rooted in GLOBE international research project. Our findings revealed significant differences between perceptions of actual practices and expectations between the compared groups.

Key words: cultural practice, cultural value, Romania, Austria, Germany

JEL clasification: M14, M19

1. Introduction

Starting from GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) findings, GLOBE STUDENT project was initiated in 2008 (1). The present study is a part of GLOBE STUDENT project. While GLOBE project focused on present middle managers, GLOBE STUDENT focuses on *future* managers, to be recruited mostly from today's students in business and engineering. Based on this assumption, more than 90% of the sample was drawn from undergraduate and graduate students in these two fields of study. Our study is designed to reveal signs of cultural *convergence* of Romania with Central European countries. In doing so, our paper will hopefully broaden the body of knowledge about the cultural harmonization in a regionalized Europe. Specifically, we will try to answer the following *research questions*:

- 1) Which are (if any) the significant differences between Romanian students perceptions of actual societal practices and those of students from Austria and Germany?
- 2) How do Romanian students' societal values (expectations) differ (if) from those of students from Austria and Germany?

2. Theoretical foundation

It is well known that 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”), noticing that in all societies, the shared values become good predictors of *future practices*.

The GLOBE research assumes that shared values are incorporated in behaviours, policies and practices, measurable through nine *dimensions*: 1) Uncertainty Avoidance; 2) Power Distance; 3) Collectivism I (societal collectivism); 4) Collectivism II (in-group collectivism); 5) Gender Egalitarianism; 6) Assertiveness; 7) Future Orientation; 8) Performance Orientation; and 9) Humane Orientation (definitions of these dimensions to be found in House et al., 2002: 5-6).

A few studies focusing on students in business and engineering have been published since 2010 (see, for example, Čater&Lang, 2011; Catana&Catana, 2010). The present study is designed to compare the cultural foundations of prospective managers and leaders in Romania to their counterparts in Austria and Germany (referred to as the *A&G cluster*). We expect to find significant differences between the two samples, both in perceiving the cultural practices and their cultural expectations.

3. Methodological issues

GLOBE student project uses the GLOBE research project questionnaires (House et al., 2004) with some modifications required by the subjects’ nature (students). *Culture dimensions* have been measured using the scales in section 1 (*as it is*) and, respectively, section 3 (*as should be*) of *Beta* questionnaire.

The population of interest was defined as engineering and business students studying in three Romanian Universities, one in Austria and one in Eastern part of Germany. Although the German subjects come from the Eastern Germany, we assume they caught up very fast with the Western part of Germany, thus could be taken as having similar perceptions and expectations (at least) with the Austrian sample.

Table 1 shows the joint sample structure with usable data. The surveys were carried out in individual participating countries in either 2008 or the first half of 2009. Collected empirical data has been processed with SPSS 17. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out separately for the A&G cluster and Romanian sample. In comparing Romanian sample with A&G cluster, the *independent samples t-test* was used, with 0.05 significance threshold. The research results are briefly presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Table 1: Sample structure

Country of origin	What subject area/ study path do you study?			Total
	Business/ Economics	Engineering	Other	
Austria	148	110	54	312
Germany	162	133	40	335
Romania	166	261	0	427
TOTAL (valid answers)	476	504	94	1074

Made by the authors

4. Findings

Table 2 displays the significant differences between Romanian sample and the Austrians and Germans with respect to perceptions of societal culture *practices* (usable answers: Romania = 427; A&G cluster = 654). *Figure 1* highlights the differences in the mean scores of the compared samples for all nine cultural practices. Romanian mean values are higher than their A&G counterparts for Collectivism II, Power Distance, Humane Orientation and Gender Egalitarianism (the lowest difference). Higher mean values among the A&G cluster were noted for Uncertainty Avoidance (highest absolute difference), Future Orientation, Assertiveness, Performance Orientation and Collectivism I. *T-test* of differences between the mean scores (two *independent*

samples) shows that the significant differences follow the pattern given by the absolute values of differences between means. According to these research results, it is hard to argue that Romanian cultural practices are very similar to average A&G cluster ones.

Table 2. Significant differences between mean values: societal practice in Romania and A&G cluster*

Cultural practice (“society as it is”)	Romania	A&G cluster	Absolute differences	t-test (sig 2-tailed)
Uncertainty Avoidance	3.49	5.04	- 1.55	- 31.663 (0.000)
Future Orientation	3.44	4.72	- 1.28	- 24.219 (0.000)
Power Distance	5.81	4.97	0.84	17.165 (0.000)
Collectivism I (institutional)	3.78	4.40	- 0.62	- 11.661 (0.000)
Humane Orientation	3.83	3.43	0.40	7.506 (0.000)
Performance Orientation	3.66	4.46	- 0.80	- 13.142 (0.000)
Collectivism II (in group/family)	5.13	3.90	1.23	25.822 (0.000)
Gender Egalitarianism	3.99	3.84	0.15	3.316 (0.001)
Assertiveness	3.51	4.53	- 1.02	- 20.406 (0.000)

*two independent samples
Made by the authors

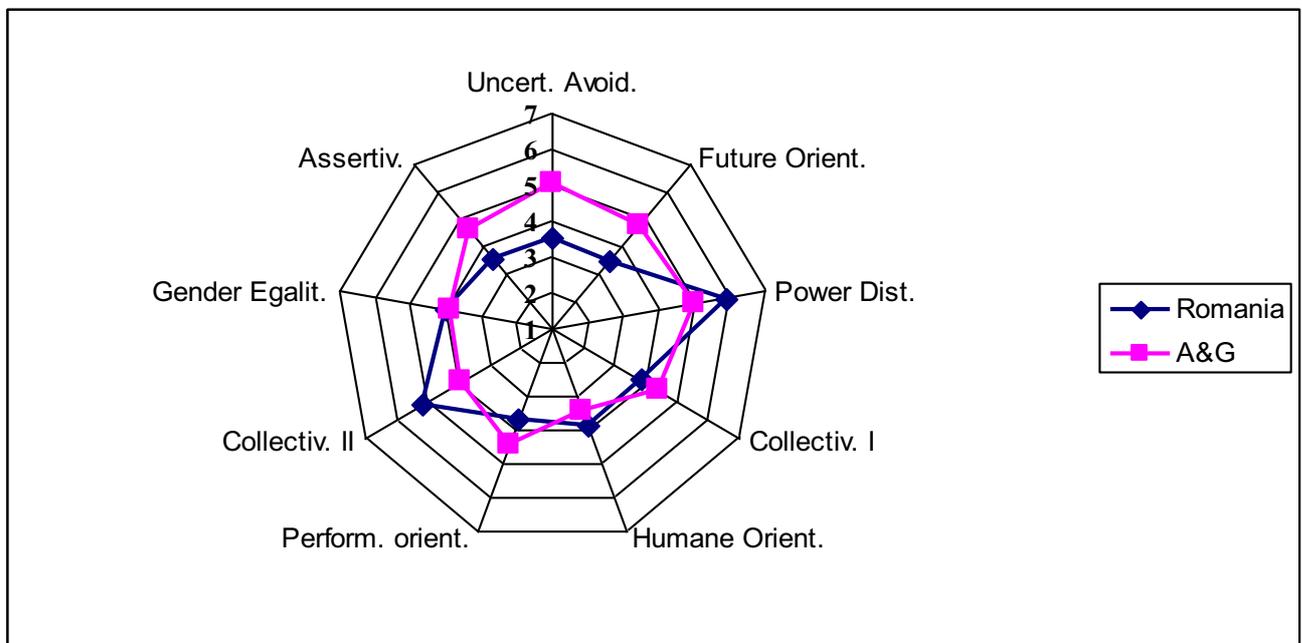


Figure 1. Differences in perception mean scores: Romanian vs. A&G students
Made by the authors

The data in *Table 3* compare the cultural values as desired by the two groups of prospective managers. *Figure 2* highlights the differences in the mean scores of the compared samples along with the nine cultural values. As seen, the Romanian students expect significant higher levels of Assertiveness, Uncertainty Avoidance, Future Orientation, and Institutional Collectivism than the group from Austria and Germany. Even though Collectivism II records the lowest absolute positive difference, it still shows that the Romanian sample desires a higher In group/Family Collectivism than the A&G cluster. The lowest absolute negative value between the two samples was noted with respect to Gender Egalitarianism. As for Performance Orientation values, the A&G cluster displays a desire for a higher concern of society in this respect. Finally, there is no significant difference in the expectations concerning the level of Power Distance and Humane Orientation between the two samples ($p>0.05$)

Table 3. Significant differences between mean values: societal values in Romania, A&G cluster*

Cultural value (“society as it should be”)	Romania	A&G Cluster	Absolut differences	t-test (sig 2-tailed)
Uncertainty Avoidance	5.10	4.40	0.70	13.658 (0.000)
Future Orientation	5.23	4.66	0.57	9.830 (0.000)
Power Distance	2.65	2.65	0.00	- 0.127 (0.899)
Collectivism I (institutional)	4.94	4.65	0.29	6.178 (0.000)
Humane Orientation	5.41	5.38	0.03	0.674 (0.500)
Performance Orientation	5.89	6.00	- 0.11	-2.358 (0.019)
Collectivism II (in group/family)	5.70	5.59	0.11	2.146 (0.032)
Gender Egalitarianism	4.42	4.59	- 0.17	- 4.941 (0.000)**
Assertiveness	4.01	3.13	0.88	17.552 (0.000)**

* two independent samples

** equal variances not assumed

Made by the authors

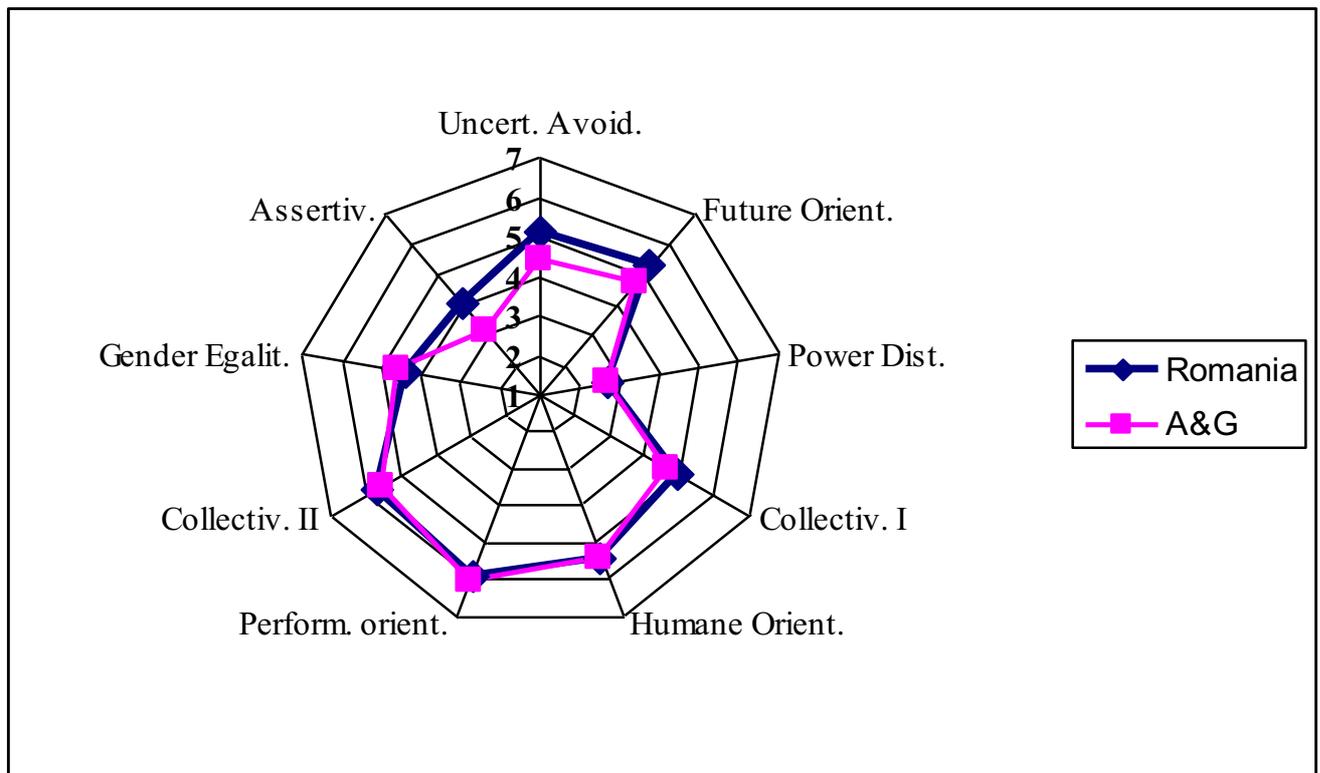


Figure 3 Differences in expectation mean scores: Romanian vs. A&G students

Made by the authors

5. Discussions

The prospective managers in Romania differ substantially from their “average” counterparts in Austria and Germany, both in *perceptions* and *expectations* related to their societal cultures. The highest significant difference in the Romanians’ perceptions when comparing with the A&G group concerns the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance ($t = -31.663$; $sig = 0.000$) showing the Romanians perceive their society as not being concerned with creating a stable legal, political and economic environment or with long term planning. Our finding contradicts the differences between the levels of Uncertainty Avoidance indexes displayed on the official site of Hofstede’s model: Romania 90 (estimated), Austria 70 and Germany 65 (<http://www.geerthofstede.com/media/651/6%20dimensions%20for%20website.xls>). Although Romania was not included in GLOBE related books (House et al, 2004; Chhokar et al, 2007), the level of Uncertainty Avoidance perceived by the students’ sample (3.49) allows us to include

Romania in “band” C-D of GLOBE study, close to Georgia (3.50), Venezuela (3.44) and Greece (3.39) (House et al., 2004: 622).

Could we take the Romanian students' desire to have a higher level of Uncertainty Avoidance than the perceived one and, in the same time, higher than the expectation of actual middle managers, as a positive signal? If it means a legitimate need for a more regulated and stable business and work environment, yes! The negative experience of the last years of economic crisis, with lots of jobs lost and blurred perspective of creating new ones might be an explanation for the subjects' desire for a lower probability of unpredictable future events that might negatively affect their life and so, for more orderliness, consistency, well-defined structures, formalised procedures and laws in their lives. But, if it is about a call for return to communism, i.e. to a philosophy of “taking” (“getting”) everything without “giving”/ “doing” something proactively, no, it is not a positive signal!

Related to the cultural dimensions as values, our findings show the Romanians, Austrians and Germans were highly similar in terms of their scores for Power Distance and Humane Orientation in their societies and this reveals a *certain degree of harmonisation* of cultures. While they are still significantly different, the ratings for Collectivism II suggest a possible trend toward harmonization in regard to this value as well.

On the opposite pole, the highest significant (positive) difference between the samples was recorded for Assertiveness ($t = 17.552$; $sig = 0.000$, equal variances not assumed). The concept of Assertiveness originates, in part, in Hofstede's cultural dimension of masculinity (House et al., 2004), including aggressive, tough and competitive ways people deal with others. Our finding suggests that the Romanian students have a desire to “catch up” with Western “masculinity” in terms of their competitive behavior.

This constitutes an important new finding since data concerning Romania were not included in GLOBE related books (House et al., 2004; Chhokar et al., 2007). According to data collected and analyzed by Catana&Catana, (2012) on 216 Romanian middle managers, the mean value of expected Assertiveness at societal level is 4.08 (very close to that of students sample: 4.01). The GLOBE research shows that “GLOBE societies are reported to be...very different in terms of Assertiveness values”(House et al., 2004: 32) and that “only the Southern Asia and Confucian Asia clusters' respondents indicate they want more Assertiveness, dominance and aggression in their relationships with others” (idem: 432). Based upon our findings, Romanians might be included among the respondents expecting higher Assertiveness in their societies.

Significant (negative) differences are noted with expectations concerning Gender Egalitarianism ($t = 4.941$; $sig = 0.000$) and Performance Orientation ($t = 2.358$; $sig = 0.019$). 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).

6. Conclusions

Our research findings offer specific answers to the research questions, specifically:

1. Romanian students perceive the present cultural *practices* in their environment differently from their counterparts from Austria and Germany, with the highest difference for Uncertainty Avoidance (much lower mean value). The lowest difference is recorded for Gender Egalitarianism (Romanian mean value, higher). Based on these findings, cannot speak about a major degree of convergence in cultural practices perception.
2. The *value* system hold by Romanians and A&G ones records significant differences, with the exception of the desire for a lower Power Distance and a more Humane Oriented societies. These common expectations, as well as the trend towards tighter relationships

in the family and groups of affiliation could signal future changes and a movement towards further *harmonisation* of cultural practices.

3. The fact that for all of the other cultural *values* (except Assertiveness in the case of the Austrians&Germans) the future managers assign higher mean values (that for the correspondent practices) lead us expect that they will act to change their cultural environments. Still, the cultural orientation of Romanian future managers will differ in many regards from the selected Central European sample averages.

4. The dissemination of our research findings among active managers, researchers, academic staff and management consultants may contribute to improving the management training of students and managers, and the management practices in Europe.

We are aware that our research findings have a few limitations. They are related to the sample structure (only two countries from developed Central Europe), assumption that business and engineering students will become a core part of the future population of managers, as well as comparisons with research findings based on different samples and in different periods.

Beyond the limitations, we believe that our findings offer certain insights into relevant issues for researchers, academics and consultants in management and leadership, as well as for today's practitioners. Future research should focus on studying cultural practices and value systems in directions like possible differences in respondents' relevant perceptions based on subjects' demographic characteristics. In addition, comparisons could be making with other countries taking part to GLOBE student project.

Notes

(1) The project is co-ordinated by Rainhart Lang from Chemnitz University of Technology. The Austrian data has been collected by Erna Szabo, from Johannes Kepler University Linz.

References

1. Catana, Doina, Catana, Gh. Alexandru. "Societal culture dimensions: a comparison of future and present managers in Romania". *Journal for East European Management Studies* (2012), under review.
2. Catana Gh. Alexandru., Catana, Doina. „Prospective leaders view on Romanian societal culture”. *Analele Universitatii din Oradea, Fascicula Stiinte Economice*, Tom XIX, nr. 1, Iulie, 2010: 639-644.
3. Catana, Gh. Alexandru, Catana, Doina. „Prospective managers and leaders view on Romanian societal culture and leadership styles”. In *Values and Leadership Expectations of Future Managers from Transforming Societies*, edited by Čater, Tomaz and Lang, Rainhart: 66-81. Chemnitz 2011, available at <http://www.tu-chemnitz.de/wirtschaft/bw15/forschung/schriften/doc/16.pdf>
4. Chhokar, Jagdeep S., Brodbeck, Felix C., House, Robert J. (eds.). *Culture and Leadership Across the World: The GLOBE book of in-depth studies of 25 societies*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2007.
5. House, Robert J., Javidan, Mansour, Hanges, Paul, Dorfman, Peter. “Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the globe: an introduction to project GLOBE, *Journal of World Business*, 37 (2002): 3 – 10.
6. House, Robert J., Hanges, Paul J., Javidan, Mansour, Dorfman, Peter W., Gupta, Vipin (eds.). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004
7. “The dimensions data matrix”, Accessed April 17, 2012. <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>; <http://www.geerthofstede.com/media/651/6%20dimensions%20for%20website.xls>