

**Cross-cultural compromises, multiculturalism and the
actuality of unzipped Hofstede**

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA AND CLASSIFICATIONS		
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Abstract

Cultural background of identities calls for upholding of values, but realities of multicultural interactions require cross-cultural compromises. Compromises begin already with the introduction of the term multiculturalism, which served both as a platform for cross-cultural urban policies in major western cities and for a non-class analysis of a new class structure. The unexpected result of the popularity of the concept of multiculturalism in urban policies is its managerial application in knowledge intensive organizations. Multiculturalism in inter-organizational uses justifies empowerment, learning organization and attempted emancipation of corporate citizens. Robustness of Hofstede's model of national cultures' dimensions lies in his correct prediction of the evolution of hierarchic bureaucracy, while weaknesses result from the extended scope of dimensions, which require "unzipping" and from excessive reliance on the nation-state led process of socialization. Unzipping, already started in research communities (both friendly, unfriendly and neutral with respect to the author of "Culture's Consequences") is being slowed down by Hofstede's precarious institutional embedding in academic communities. De-nationalization is accelerating due to the new integrating processes of regional globalization.

Key words

Multiculturalism, Hofstede's dimensional model of culture, evolution of hierarchy, nation-state and socialization, unzipping dimensional clusters, embedding in academic communities

Motto

"The world at large and the social worlds of most societies in it are affected by global (as distinct from nationalizing) forces that can be called 'multicultural' in the sense that peoples of different and often incommensurable cultural affinities live in sufficiently real – or, at least televisual – proximity to each other as to be well aware of each other, and their differences – often to the point of open civil, or, even armed, conflict." (Lemert, 2003, 298)

1. Brief history of a multicultural society

The concept of a multicultural society is a relatively new one and has been originally employed by urban planners, social workers and professional politicians concerned with the ghetto-like developments in major cities of western Europe and of the United States. Processes of economic reconstruction and growth after WWII have increased the numbers of immigrants into western Europe, while the USA, which have always been a country of immigrants, also had to deal with increased levels of both legal and illegal immigrants, especially in the aftermath of local armed conflicts of the Cold War. Gradual development of electronic mass media and the emergence of satellite links and world wide web did confirm the prediction of Marshall McLuhan about the coming of a “global village”, whose inhabitants share gossip and news in real time. Originally, the concept of a multicultural society had an ideological ring: it was supposed to reflect a growing concern of the left and liberal city planners, politicians and social workers about recognition of immigrants and their children by the rest of society and about their successful integration in spite of persisting income and educational inequalities. In other words, it has been introduced to defuse the original distrust and hostility, and to prevent a virtual civil war. Danger of social unrest and clashes between foreign immigrants (competing at the job markets with the poorer sectors of the indigenous population) and various groups of the host societies, often along the racial or religious lines, has loomed large in social and political imagination. Some of these immigrants had lost their jobs when the oil crisis of 1972-1974 ended the long period of economic growth, while their children never found any jobs whatsoever. Children of Gastarbeiter had to work harder within western European educational system (to make up for lower educational level and linguistic skills of their families), acquired inferior education (compared to their local counterparts, who had easier access to the welfare state), and have been negatively stereotyped, which further reduced their chances for landing jobs. They formed visible clusters - of Turks in Germany, Moroccans in the Netherlands, Algerians in France or Pakistanis in Great Britain. Their street gangs, incidents of conflicts with neighbours or schoolmates and teachers, their criminal networks and their exploits have been particularly often depicted in the media, which created and sustained negative stereotypes about the abovementioned groups.

The term “multicultural” society has thus been a theoretical reflection of a politically motivated recognition of a cultural difference between members of the new underclass from Europe’s inner cities and citizens of European nation-states “included” in the ranks of citizens and covered by state welfare programs. The term “multicultural” has also been an ideological label designed to appeal to public authorities and citizens at large, exhorting them to respect these differences and to mobilize for fairness in housing, job hunting, educational chances and political representation (without, however, admitting that a new underclass is emerging and that left political parties chose not to prevent it).

It has been used, for instance, in the early 1980ies by the red-green coalition from Frankfurt am Main's city hall, where the "reds" (social democrats), the "greens" and former student rebels in their ranks – Joschka Fischer or Daniel Cohn-Bendit – tried to cope with social inequalities and rubbed shoulders with young social scientists pursuing "critical theory" around Habermas (cf. Honneth, 1996) or with ambitious young politicians looking for a viable model of cultural policies. The representatives of "critical theory", whose founding fathers focussed on dangers of ethnocentrism, were looking for a theoretical concept, which could increase tolerance for "strangers" in host societies and found it in the idea of an "identity" (which bears many similarities to Hofstede's "software of the mind"). According to them, identity is first shaped by individuals within their own culture ("frame of reference"), and subsequently it is acknowledged and recognized within other cultures ("respected"), or not. The representatives of the newest generation of "the Frankfurt School" in social sciences are aware of the multicultural context, in which identities of members of complex societies emerge – and of the dangerous position of those, who remain unrecognised, negatively stereotyped, excluded from membership in social networks and ultimately "scapegoated" and rejected.

When reconstructing the context, in which the term "multicultural" had been introduced to the political and theoretical debates, one cannot fail to notice that it had relatively little to do with the nation-state's nationalist ideologies of an "imagined community" (cf. Anderson, 1983) connected by a single language, territory and history, sometimes also religion. It had been introduced in order to deal with the subculturally constructed identities of the second generation of "Gastarbeiters" in crime-plagued urban ghettos. They could not be the "we's" of their parents cultures of origin (because their parents have already adopted to the host country's culture) and they found out that the shaping of "me's" in generational subcultures of inner cities does not always result in the acceptance and embedding in local community (the Dutch use the term "inburgering" which can be translated, literally, as "citizenating", "turning into a citizen").(1)

2. Democracy behind the factory door; contract with honour.

Dimensions and consequences of culturally constructed identities look differently, when viewed from the point of politicians dealing with discriminated minorities in the hearts of the European cities than when viewed from the point of modern industrial and office complexes built by a multinational corporations in protected suburban locations all over the world. Does this shift of the point of view require theoretical adjustment of our concepts? With the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural identity we begin to view cultural "softwares" from a politician's position, marked by fear of a civil war rather than from a CEO's position marked by managerial desire to meet the targets (e.g. increase profitability to satisfy shareholders). Does this shift of our focus prompt theoretical revisions, does it require a new, more critical glance at Hofstedian theoretical framework, which had originally been designed to guide organizational, managerial interventions?

Geert Hofstede's popular version of "Culture's Consequences"(1980), namely "Cultures and Organizations"(1991) has two subtitles: "Software of the Mind" and

“Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival”(Hofstede,1991). The first subtitle reveals Hofstede’s original “embedding” in problems of multicultural workforce within a globally operating, multinational corporation. The second subtitle demonstrates his awareness of and sensitivity to the problems faced by politicians concerned about social stability in face of persistent inequalities and conflicts. Hofstede is very much aware of the moral responsibilities of a business manager, an organizational leader, a public office holder. Both of these subtitles are significant since they signal two major influences exerted by the world’s most famous Dutch engineer and social psychologist on the entire field of organizational sciences, managerial consulting and multicultural politics.

The first subtitle stresses Hofstede’s fundamental assumption that all “identities”, which individuals design, assemble and employ in their activities are composed of elements acquired during their socialization (because this is how a cultural software of an individual emerges). What makes one tick, ticked already in patterns of cultural heritage transmitted as acculturation went on. This assumption is followed by another one, which assigns a privileged status to the “national” hue of individual cultural identities. Since the abovementioned socialization is to a large extent conducted by smaller and larger institutions and organizations coordinated by nation states (a dominant form of organization in the past two centuries), these components of individual identities are tinted (although not necessarily tainted). Bureaucracies of nation-states maintain and manage cultural heritage, prefabricating the building blocks of individual identities, and thus exerting a dominant influence upon individual creation of cultural softwares and “identities”.

Differences between two components of individual identity from different national cultures are not “visible” (as are differences in language or folk dances), but have to be investigated and reconstructed. They can be plotted on a model of national culture, which has four (later five) dimensions. These dimensions are relevant for shaping individual’s interactions and for the choice of organizational forms. They have consequences for a preferred design of organizations within a given nation state and for the performance of individuals socialized within national culture. If, for instance, individuals have been socialized in a low power distance culture characteristic for a given nation-state, they are likely to believe that superiors and subordinates should consider each other as existentially equal. They are supposed to treat these organizational hierarchies, which assign them unequal roles, as useful fictions, which can and should be changed. They expect that the asymmetry of power and influence will be addressed, for instance by their managers. These managers should consult their subordinates before making decisions, which will influence everybody. If, to the contrary, an individual has been socialized in a large power distance culture, those forms of management, which require consulting subordinates, will not work, since employees will expect to be told what to do by their superiors, who are supposed to “know better” and to deserve to be obeyed by subordinates.

Hofstede quotes approvingly a similar conclusion drawn from a comparative study of a French multinational in France, in the USA and in the Netherlands. The author of this

study, Philippe d'Iribarne, attributes a much more vivid emotional experience of hierarchical differences in France (as compared to the USA or to the Netherlands) to a difference in national tradition. In France, this tradition follows a "logic of honor", which regulates the relations between essentially unequal social strata or classes across all kinds of interactions. In the other two countries, this national tradition follows a "logic of contract", which regulates the relations between essentially equal partners in specified exchanges.(cf. d'Iribarne,1989) What matters is that following the logic of honor, we take inequalities between interacting parties for granted, while following the logic of contract – we assume their equality. Hofstede then introduces the next four dimensions (individualism/collectivism, femininity/masculinity, uncertainty avoidance/unavoidance and long term/short term orientation), operationalizes them in a questionnaire, which allows researchers to survey attitudes and finally to plot the results of these surveys on diagrams. National cultures plotted on a diagram according to their position on five dimensions cluster around certain points in five-dimensional space. Different positions of national cultures allow researchers and managers to predict expectations, which individuals brought up in various national cultures will have with respect to the style of management, idea of fairness or organization of work and assignment of responsibilities, etc. Hofstede's results, and results of numerous surveys, which replicated his own studies, allow – at least theoretically - to generate hypotheses about consequences of any given national culture's positioning in a five-dimensional space for a success or failure of organizational forms, managerial styles and policies of human resources departments in organizations. This cautious provision – "at least theoretically" – is caused by the fact that we are not dealing with a direct causal bond. Another variable intervenes between "national cultural software" and "organizational HRM policies", namely an individual internalization of values and beliefs, and partly individual, partly social choice of norms to follow in actual behavior.

3. National matrix of core values and domination of western nation states

The theoretical construct of Hofstede, a model of national culture as a collective programming ("software") of an individual mind, is theoretically developed by postulating a connecting variable between a position of a national culture in Hofstede's theoretical five-dimensional space and a "visible" cluster of organizational designs. This variable must be "distilled" from individual behaviors and statements on the one hand and linked to an "invisible" core of postulated, reconstructed values and beliefs on the other. Thus what we are explaining are different organizational designs (e.g. more or less rigid hierarchies) and different organizational behavior (e.g. measured in average efficiency, productivity, innovativeness, etc.) of individuals with different cultural softwares in their heads. What we are explaining different organizational designs and individual behaviors with? With values and beliefs in clusters and rankings tinted by national socialization, which we managed to capture and compare thanks to the theoretical concept of "dimensions" of a national or organizational culture. The five-dimensional space of dimensions of national or organizational culture is a scientific "net". This net allows us to catch some, not all levels of culture (but at least those levels, which are relevant and salient for individual identities and organizational behavior).

Hofstede warns against, for instance, using his value survey questions in order to discriminate between influences of subcultures focused on gender, generation, social class and organization.(Hofstede, 2001, 464)

Positioning of national cultures seen as species of fish caught in our net is not random. Since positions of national cultures along some dimensions are correlated, we can draw a multidimensional “map” of nationally shaped cultural softwares. The position of fish in the net provides a starting point for understanding “what makes the fish tick”. By finding out what the core values and beliefs in a given national culture are, we are able to predict “culture’s consequences” – i.e. organizational forms, which will best “fit” individuals with this particular cultural software in their heads, or expected types of individual behavior, which will fit some organizational forms better than the others. The sequence can be reversed: by gathering data on dominant organizational forms and dominant types of behavior in a given country or organization, we can reconstruct values and beliefs (which are more difficult to investigate than behavior and artifacts). In a famous and succinct definition, which, together with a robust set of empirically confirmed predictions, allowed a new sub-discipline of organizational sciences, namely the science of cross-cultural or intercultural management, to emerge and establish itself in academic environment, Hofstede summed the role of cultural dimensions up in the following way:

“The main cultural differences among nations lie in values. Systematic differences exist (...) with regard to values about power and inequality, with regard to relationship between the individual and the group, with regard to the social roles expected from men and women, with respect to ways of dealing with the uncertainties in life, and with respect to whether one is mainly preoccupied with the future or with the past and present.”(Hofstede,1991,236)(2)

Let us note that this assumption – “the main cultural differences among nations lie in values” can be maintained only within a relatively stable and relatively “synchronized” nation-state system of sovereign states, which allow their respective civil societies to search for the most successful organizational forms in family socialization, political governance and business activities. It is thus clearly an assumption, which at the time it has been first made, did not hold for the central-eastern half of Europe, namely the one behind the so called “iron curtain”. Within the state socialist system of the Warsaw pact countries no amount of differences in national cultures could influence the organizational choices in political governance (socialist nation states were in fact single-party dictatorships subjected to direct control from Moscow). Neither were there differences in business corporations; all economic planning has been performed by top state bureaucracies, which managed all enterprises as the property of the state. The Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Russians, Bulgarians or Lithuanians did not cease to have national cultures, but these cultures were artificially and violently prevented from influencing the organizational forms in political and economic activities, thus making Hofstede’s assumption invalid outside of the European Economic Community.

The second subtitle of “Cultures and Organizations” stresses the necessity for individuals with different cultural software to cooperate and to facilitate survival of increasingly complex and networked societies (nation states) and organizations. Instead of remaining

prisoners of our identities, we should be able to see them as flexible and mutable, thus helping social and cultural evolution with our self-reflexive input. We should reflect on our own identities, compare them to identities of the others, try to defuse predictable conflicts and dampen shocks - ultimately working out a common design for more desirable organizations and for less lethal identities – suitable for tolerant and cooperating individuals. The second subtitle thus refers to a potential application for theoretical knowledge about a link between core values of national and organizational cultures and individual and collective constructs (among them “identities” people are referring to when answering the questions in researcher’s questionnaire).

Hofstede notices that acceptance of his framework for recognizing and dealing with cross-cultural differences is heavily biased towards the “universalist”, “individualist”, “Western values” as exemplified, for instance, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (an artificial, internationally negotiated construct, imposed by the coalition of the strongest nation-states on the rest of the world in the wake of WWII) and its acceptance by the intergovernmental and other international organizations. Nevertheless, he thinks that this biased (but aware of its own bias), historically embedded, but tolerant, “open” view offers a good starting point for further negotiations:

“Increasing the respect for human rights is a worthwhile goal for a multicultural world”. (ibid.,245)

Non-western (and some western) critics of Hofstede may agree that this is a valid point, but they do not necessarily agree that patterning emancipation after the Enlightenment project is the only game, which should be played in the 21st century towns.

4. Critique of Hofstede’s theoretical framework: western bias

Criticism of Hofstede’s theoretical framework, which has become more frequent in the past decade, has been increasingly focused on an in-built western bias. This pro-western bias manifests itself not only in constructing a general four-dimensional model with those dimensions, which can be discerned from the Western European point of view (but not necessarily – for instance –from a Chinese one). It has also been demonstrated by selecting exclusively western researchers (either from Western Europe or from the USA), who gathered and processed empirical data. If any local culture contained dimensions, which were salient for individual identities but “invisible” to those unacquainted with the natives’ “tacit knowledge” and thus “unplottable” in four-dimensional (later five-dimensional) cultural space “made in the West” – they went unnoticed or were labeled as aspects of these assumed four dimensions, not independent factors in their own right. They may have been disregarded (e.g. high context vs low-context or shame vs. guilt typologies), thus continuing the colonial tradition of imposing a single model of culture and rationality on all cultural communities. This bias comes so naturally for a western researcher who takes it for granted that scientific knowledge is simply produced in the high-tech labs of the West, that most of us ignore the fact that:

“more marginal regions in the world are not simply producers of data for the theory mills of the North”(Appadurai,2001,5).

Identities are always an indigenous product and should be studied by researchers familiar with local cultural softwares (Roberts, Boyacigiller,1984) – very much like climbing unknown mountains is safer with native guides accompanying the expedition than without them. Multicultural world requires self-reflective examination of cultural bias at all times and going beyond a “sophisticated stereotyping” (Osland, Bird, 2000). One of the ways of doing it would be to network enough experts in local cultures in research platforms and projects to make sure that no relevant and salient characteristics of cultural softwares or individual identities go unnoticed. Hofstede notices this problem, but directs his critical warning to those replicating his studies and, more generally, towards those, who are using his dimensional model of culture as a paradigm:

“The IBM-based questionnaire is not necessarily the best instrument for detecting the essence of cultural differences in other populations. Researchers studying national and ethnic culture differences (...) may borrow some of the IBM questions, but they should primarily develop their own survey instruments aimed at the particular populations studied and based on empathy with the respondent’s situation. Sample in-depth interviewing and participant observation are ways of acquiring such empathy.”(Hofstede,2001,465)

However, even if researchers heed his warnings, they still leave some crucial parts of their bias unexamined. Both western and non-western researchers tacitly assume that economic development through the establishment of market economy and political democratization through the construction of parliamentary representation are universal criteria of measuring progress. Lawrence Harrison’s “The Cultural Values and Human Progress” project at Harvard is a case in point:

“We define culture in purely subjective terms as the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in society. This book explores how culture in this subjective sense affects the extent to which and the ways in which societies achieve or fail to achieve progress in economic development and political democratization.” (Harrison, Huntington, 2000,XV)(3)

Criticism of tacit “eurocentrism” shall thus not be limited to those who scrutinize Hofstede. It should be expressed not only with respect to the five-dimensional model of culture. It should be applied en bloc to most representatives of western social sciences and to most models offered by them. In case of Hofstede’s theoretical framework, an argument about “pro-western bias” is directed both at the methodological bias (conceptual categories have been obtained by empirical generalizations from Western European sociohistorical research, disregarding non-European sources) (4) and at the ideological bias, namely at the universalist claims of the ideology of modernization. This universalist bias also has a distinctly Eurocentric ring to it. It is legitimized with the “unfinished

Enlightenment project” and expressed in an European vernacular. The latter is imposing the western “mix” of “market plus parliament” as the only truly universal and legitimate goal for all human societies, east, west, north and south.

The first, methodological thrust of criticism we shall deal with below. The second has often been quoted by African, Asian and Latin American authors, who claim that genuine economic, political and social development in Africa could only be engineered if the hidden injuries of colonial rule – lasting well beyond the formal political dependence – were duly noticed, properly acknowledged and jointly removed. However, they are not being noticed – hence, for instance, “deracialization” and “detrribalization” as major strategies of accelerating modernization of African societies remain “invisible” and “unthinkable”:

“What would democratization entail in the African context? It would have entailed the deracialization of civil power and the detrribalization of customary power, as starting points of an overall democratization that would transcend the legacy of a bifurcated power. A consistent democratization would have required dismantling and reorganizing the local state, the array of Native Authorities organized around the principle of fusion of power, fortified by an administratively driven customary justice and nourished through extra-economic coercion.” (Mamdani,1996,25)

The same argument has been expressed very elegantly by a contemporary western philosopher concerned with identity, multiculturalism and recognition:

“We finally get over seeing modernity as a single process of which Europe is a paradigm, and (...) understand the European model as the first, certainly, as the object of some creative imitation, naturally, but as, at the end of the day, one model among many, a province of the multiform world we hope (a little against the hope) will emerge in order and peace”. (Taylor, 2004, 196)

While this criticism of tacit biases of the western research culture and its record in justifying political and economic inequalities is certainly justified, Hofstede should not be singled out as its only target. To the contrary, it may be claimed that he has contributed to the increased sensitivity of the differences and honed our intellectual instruments for searching them, recognizing their nature and subjecting them to non-hostile uses. His refusal to bow to academic hierarchies (which prevented him from developing a “school” embedded in a university system) demonstrates that he has been committed to the overcoming of the most painful inequalities in our organizational interactions not only in thought but also in deed.(5) Incidentally, it has also meant that in spite of a tremendous *intellectual* impact upon global research and teaching communities, he had remained academically marginalized in his own country. A research institute he had co-founded (Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation – IRIC - at the Tilburg University) had just gone bankrupt as of the present writing and no

clearly identifiable Hofstedian school emerged as a result of an *institutional* impact upon academic institutions.

5. An in-built conservatism of dimensional model of culture

An in-built static and conservative nature of the dimensional model, which presupposes a relative stability of core values and beliefs in national culture, making it impossible to trace and report changes brought about by the development of countercultural values and beliefs around sub-national identities (age, gender, race, profession, organization) has often been criticized. Another wave of criticism swept academic communities in the wake of advancing supra-state processes of regional and global integration due to political, economic and cultural (mass media and multi-media related) processes. Therborn's "audio-visual Americanization" and the increased popularity of English as a second language among European high school students are cases in point (Therborn, 1995), as are studies demonstrating respondents identifying with age or gender communities rather than with the national ones (cf. Gooderham, Nordhaug, 2002). The latter authors also claim that they have found many instances of convergence of European national positions on Hofstedian dimensions when replicating his research in the late 1990ies:

"The notion of a largely convergent Europe is given more impetus when one looks at the findings for the Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism dimensions. France differs significantly from the mean country Finland in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance. Beyond that there are no significant differences. Clearly this is a very different Europe from that which Hofstede mapped."(Gooderham, Nordhaug,2002)

Integration and institutional harmonization on regional and global scale and a rapid growth of communication technologies might, according to these critics, have brought about accelerated cultural convergence, not necessarily along national lines.(6) Identities are being constructed in changing circumstances and with broader frames of reference due to the integration processes, national frames either do not hold or hold for a shorter period of time and in a more limited range of contexts. **What matters is that growing interconnectivity across former social barriers undermines a stable pattern of socialization (family, school, workplace), which might suggest that the dominant position of the national culture becomes undermined** and socializing functions are "taken over" by a number of new agencies and networks, platforms and associations, for instance, by the web:

"If we see the Internet user as a social being, the outcome of Internet use is affiliation, with money coming from membership fees rather than content.(...) web tools are developed to create social connections rather than links to information."(7)

The main change in contemporary processes of identizing, as compared to the mid-20th century, is a slow erosion of a stable pattern of socialization and linear career pathing. Our culturally determined softwares are not “produced” in four major “chunks” – at the socializing assembly lines of family, school, work place and political sphere (as Hofstede assumed in “Cultures and Organizations”). There are a number of processes, which undermine the smooth transition through these phases of identity formation and disrupt a mutual reinforcement of identities under the protective shield of nation-state and its specialized bureaucracies.

For instance, families change, shrink and limit interactions between family members (especially if parents are immigrants with little command of a local language, while children acquire education in the host country and become aware of their parents’ limited cultural resources, which further limits family socialization). Family members pursue their different trajectories, with children leaving their parents at an early age or staying in the same household but virtually never interacting in a meaningful way with other family members, for instance parents (they maintain meaningful relations with members of their peer groups and maintain full connectivity via e-mail, mobile phones and regular meetings). Popularity of “walkman” or of a personal, mobile phone illustrates the separation of these trajectories even if children stay in the same household, even if they are physically sharing the same space. Their communication lines do not require contacting other family members nor do they involve cooperating with the others to make communications possible. Technology contributes to the evolution (and weakening) of family interactions. Walkman, an invention designed to protect the others from audio environment of a single listener, became an instrument of individualizing consumption of cultural contents at the family level, further isolating family members from one another, as each family member was free to separate himself or herself from the rest of the family in listening to a different radio station or a different compact disc

Another example of a weakening of control exerted by nation state over socialization and acculturation of individuals is the growing presence of multicultural labor within a single organization (an individual socialized into his or her organizational roles cannot take the cultural software of his or her fellow-employees for granted) and an appearance of multinational organizations with strong corporate culture with distinct HRM policies (an individual socialized into organizational culture of a multinational does not necessarily acquire values of this multinational’s country of origin) and general convergence of organizational cultures as a result of an increasing cooperation and competition on a global scale. The emergence of an organizational culture by design and the proliferation of the corporate universities indicate a new variant of privatization processes, namely the privatization of educational activities, which, in turn, increase the influence of an organization upon individual cognitive development – at the expense of the nation-state, whose bureaucracy has to step back and deregulate some areas of education (thus an MA or MSC diploma is still a monopoly of state owned or state recognized universities, but an MBA is not). All this means that we cannot taken for granted that cultural software is shaped within an individual mind in clearly defined contexts, under a standardizing and supervising control of nation-states. If not – then the influence of national culture can, indeed be declining, and the influence of innovation-seeking multinational professional

and other communities may be increasing (leading, in turn, to the relative growth of non-national identities and thus suggesting a necessity to modify Hofstedian theoretical frame of reference).

6. Methodological biases and the perspectives of unzipping.

An in-built methodological bias, which is linked to the choice of an attitude-survey questionnaire as the basic source of data, has also been questioned on a number of levels, including the suitability for culture study and reliability of respondents (cf. Tayeb,1996), the influence of occupational, professional or organizational culture (McSweeney,2002) and the “zipping” up of sub-dimensions (Boski,2003). For instance, when investigating the uncertainty avoidance dimension, and comparing the results of House’s “Globe” project studies with the results of studies replicating Hofstedian approach, we find that either the Greeks emerge as the least uncertainty avoiding nation (Hofstede) or the Swiss (House). The undersigned subscribes to the view, first expressed by Pawel Boski, that, if the Hofstedian dimension is methodologically “unzipped”, we discover clustering together of different themes, perspectives and levels of reality or desirability. Let us begin with three themes; a degree of closing of individual mind (Is one open to new ideas and a challenge of progress or does one prefer to stick to the tested, more “conservative” ideas?), an individual “escape from freedom” (Is one avoiding situations, which call for initiative and creativity or does one actively search and pursue them as windows of opportunity?) and an internalization of organizational culture (Does it contain many detailed checklists and rules, which structure my action or is it more flexible and open in characterizing the objectives, which allows me to take liberties?). Which theme do we focus on? Second, we have to distinguish two perspectives: whether respondents try to avoid uncertainty with respect to goals and leave means less strictly structured or the other way round (they see to it that means are always transparent and available, leaving them free to tackle all potential goals). This explains the extremely opposite classification of Greeks and Swiss in Hofstedian and Housian studies (cf. House,2004). The Swiss and the Greeks are placed either very high or very low on uncertainty avoidance scale (differently in each of the studies). Apparently, bureaucratic over-regulation allows to focus on goals and take the organized set of means for granted (the Swiss), while administrative chaos forces to fix the goals and concentrate on accessing and using the means, which have to be extracted from inefficient bureaucracy (the Greeks).

Another variant of the same criticism is provided by those researchers, who question Hofstede’s assignment of a position along the individualism-collectivism dimension to a particular link to a willingness to either compete or collaborate:

“Contrary to commonly shared beliefs, certain aspects of collectivism are positively related to entrepreneurship, and some individualistic tendencies help intensifying cooperation. Also, values, more than the norms, seem to mostly affect behaviors.” (Ferrara, Roberson, 2004).

Finally, investigating values and beliefs with attitude surveys researchers have problems with distinguishing between reality and desirability (values actually referred to and operationalized by respondents into norms or counter-norms in real life situation versus values they see fit to declare, but not necessarily to follow, especially in some specific circumstances, hence they do not translate into norms, which can be defined more flexibly depending on a particular context). Identities are played with and values promoted and demoted in individual and collective identities, with norms treated much less reverently than values by most individuals.(8)

Hofstede dealt with some criticism leveled against him both in the latest edition of his fundamental study “Culture’s Consequences” (Hofstede, 2001) and in articles with refutation of counterarguments (cf. Hofstede,2002). In spite of the increasing criticism of his theoretical framework, it is still the most widely acknowledged, accepted, improved upon and used approach towards studying, classifying and managing cross-cultural differences in sciences of organization as practiced in schools of business, which share all the biases Hofstede has been charged with. Some of these biases are gradually coming under critical fire – not only in Hofstede’s writings – and are presently being questioned as a result of a self-reflective critique of critical representatives of academic communities. In other words, the representatives of the academic communities are ready to re-engineer their (our) identities, responding to what is perceived as too narrow, local, exclusive and evolutionarily “obsolete” identity. While doing so, they also notice that they are not alone in contemporary society, that re-identizing has become a common occurrence in increasingly broad groups of populations. How does this re-engineering or re-inventing of an identity proceed?

First, it is being acknowledged that these “biased” theoretical concepts have emerged within the western cultural tradition as a result of managerial revolution of the past century and thus reflect the “managerialist” bias criticized by the representatives of critical management studies. Second, these biased theoretical concepts have emerged in the period of a global domination of a western European nation-state (perceived as a privileged form of governance) and thus reflect a relative dominance of national culture as nation-state’s ideological legitimation. This domination is being increasingly often criticized by critics of global world systems and of neocolonialism. Third, they have focused on nation-states and business enterprises as the main actors in globalized markets and thus reflect the bias towards post WWII, Cold War world order as the most natural governance infrastructure. This tendency to see frozen state alliances (Cold War) and business corporations as the only counterparts of nation-states is being criticized by anti-globalists. There is thus a close fit between Hofstedian approach to cultural identities and the research, teaching and consulting context of business schools with academic standing, all of which developed in the “western” world. National and organizational identities still form the core frame of our personalities, sensemaking and identifying, but we experiment with other identities (personal in life-styles and professional in career pathing) in changing configurations and in varying proportions. A relatively local club of fans share the fortunes of their football clubs all the time, but as all other citizens of a nation-state they join real and virtual ranks of “nationally identified crowds” for the period of

international championships, be it only once in five years and only at the time of the major televised games.

In spite of the continuing, if undermined, core position of national and professional identities, it is also becoming clear that Hofstedian frame has to be reviewed and critically developed in order to face the honing of identities resulting in extreme subjectivities at the individual level and a cultural evolution of identities (age, gender, professions) at a collective one. “Unzipping” the theoretical concepts of dimensions and tracing context-bound changes in the ranking of values should contribute to a better understanding of individual and organizational identifying. The self-critical “unzipping” of Hofstedian dimensions, interestingly enough, is mostly undertaken by researchers who identify with his framework (Boski, Ferrara) and by the representatives of the older academic disciplines involved in the analyses of business management (Ritzer, Mirowski). Hence critical economists, who study science as an “outcome of an interactive network of cognitively challenged agents” and ask “what will happen to the university once research and teaching are spun off as separate privatized self-contained endeavors?” (Mirowski, Sent, 2002,58) Hence critical sociologists, who study the “macdonaldization of science” and “the globalization of nothing” (Ritzer,2004). Hence critical studies in recent history and philosophy of science, whose authors trace the influence of political ideologies and institutional governance structures in shaping contemporary science during the Cold War (Fuller,2000, Amadae,2003).

7. Final comments

In all these areas (critical science studies, historical studies of academic communities and professional associations, etc.), as in cross-cultural management studies, there is a growing awareness that socializing into personal identities has been individualized and “privatized” among new, different agencies, which an individual encounters during his or her, increasingly more complex and non-linear “career pathing”. Every organizational form gets re-engineered, re-invented, re-juvenated, re-structured, re-designed – far too quickly for an individual to adjust himself or herself to it, let alone become socialized into it. These changed conditions of individual socialization are probably responsible for the relative decline of the national culture’s influence upon individual “identizing”, which is not as standardized and does not accompany a standardized “career pathing”. It is especially difficult to compare with a linear upward mobility within a single corporation, which offers a life-time employment, as used to be the case in the 1950ies and 1960ies, i.e. in the first quarter of a century of post-WWII and Cold War period. Student unrest of 1968, which emerged on both sides of the iron curtain and outside of it, in the third world (Mexico City, Yugoslavia), put an end to this period of a relatively stable socialization, while the oil crisis of 1972-1974 and the development of digital and satellite-linked global communications accelerated a further change of socialization procedure, leading to a replacement of an “organization man” (who climbed the ladder of corporate hierarchy) with a “spider woman” (who built his or her career out of projects, assignments and endeavors, which did not necessarily add up to an upward mobility within a single

corporation's hierarchy) and to a new process of self-identizing, less dependent on concrete organizational and institutional frameworks than ever before:

“It is important that we remake our understanding of ourselves whenever the old definitions seem to be failing. Climbing the organizational hierarchy is no longer like climbing stairs in a stable structure. The stairs have become rope ladders, with managers clinging desperately for balance. Organization Man is changing into Spider Woman.” (Johansen, Swigart, 1994, 8)

Notes

- (1) One of my former Dutch students, a daughter of Turkish parents, born and raised in the Netherlands after their arrival in Rotterdam, has recently published a collection of essays on her uncertain identity, a “me”, which is torn between the Dutch “we’s” among whom she grew up and studied and the Turkish “we’s”, who were represented by her parents and relatives met on holiday trips to Turkey. She recognizes the possibility of choice between the two and calls herself “Dutch in first generation” as opposed to either her parents, whom she calls “allochtons” (by origin) or to those of her peers, who had chosen to identify themselves with their Turkish origins, whom she also calls by the same name (albeit they are allochtons by choice, having turned against the possibility of assimilation and adaptation). (Umar,2004)
- (2) Hofstede is, interestingly enough, a nominalist. According to him, theoretical concepts are useful fictions, artificial scaffoldings to let us see and influence reality better (and to be rejected as soon as they outlived their usefulness). He often repeats (for instance in his response to a criticism expressed by McSweeney) that culture doesn’t exist, nor do values – “they are constructs, which have to prove their usefulness by their ability to explain and predict behaviour”. (Hofstede,2002, 91-2) Moreover, he outlines an interesting possibility of differentiating between culturally defined ends and means by saying that: “The practical consequences of the fact that the national culture components relate primarily to values, the organizational component to practices are far reaching. Values (as we measured them) are hardly changeable (they change, but not according to anybody’s intentions), while practices can be modified – given sufficient management attention.(ibid.)
- (3) Interestingly enough, Hofstede is quoted only once in this volume of contributions to a project sponsored by Harvard University’s Academy for International and Area Studies, namely by Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, the president and founder of the Societe Africaine d’Etude, d’Exploitation et de Gestion (SADEG), a former member of the World Bank’s Council of African Advisors, and the author of the study, which poses a rhetorical question in the title: “L’Afrique – A-t-elle Besoin d’un Programme d’Adjustement Culturel?” Etounga-Manguelle quotes Hofstede’s French book (Bollinger, Hofstede,1987) and concludes that: “If Europe, that fragment of earth representing a tiny part of humanity, has been able to impose itself on the planet, dominating it and organizing it for its exclusive profit, it is only because it developed a conquering culture of rigor and work, removed from the influence of invisible forces. We must do the same” (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000, 77)
- (4) Even within the “western” scientific and scholarly communities there is a subtle difference in status assigned to various national contributions, which boils down to a ranking of German, French, Italian or Spanish and other theoretical contributions below those by the Anglo-American ones, a process tackled only marginally, by social scientists (cf. Lamont, 1992, Lamont, Thevenot, 2000)

- (5) In an autobiographical note on his own values, Hofstede writes, for instance, “I completed a university education in the Netherlands and after that worked for half a year incognito as an industrial worker; thus I learned to some extent how an organization looks from below. I am a Protestant Christian but do not claim absolute truth for my faith; I know too well how conditioned we all are by our cultural environment. I believe in the equality to God of all mankind, and my image of an ideal world is one without fear.(Hofstede,2001,523-4)
- (6) “Findings from a new research based on a sample of students at leading European business schools indicate a significant convergence of national values. The four value dimensions of Hofstede were used as the basis of the research. The findings show a number of important differences between male and female students, raising the question whether divisions of gender are more important than those of country. Italian and Swedish women, for example, may have more in common with each other than with their fellow males”(Gooderham, Nordhaug, 2002). One should note, however, that the sample of respondents in Gooderham’s and Nordhaug’s study were all MBA students. Perhaps this student population has already become so standardized and “prefabricated” that their national backgrounds have been pushed back in their identities constructed with future global assignments and multinational employers in mind. However, although more convincing arguments would be needed to question Hofstede’s framework, the argument about gradual convergence along gender or age lines requires more systematic attention of the research community.
- (7) Cf. Joinson,2003,186. Joinson makes the point about socializing rather than marketing as the core function of the Internet: “In a comparison of the revenues of content and network providers, Odlyzko argues that although content may be glamorous, it is not the key to financial success. For instance, the US telephone industry (providing connectivity rather than content) had revenues of \$256.1 billion in 1997. In comparison, the whole of the US motion picture industry had revenues of \$63 billion. While Odlyzko is not arguing that connectivity is the largest part of the US economy, he does point out that people tend to spend more on connectivity than on content.”(ibid.,187, cf. also Odlyzko,2001)
- (8) “A true understanding of the logic of another culture includes comprehension of relationships among values and how values relate to one another in a given context (Osland, Bird, 2000, 70). The abovementioned authors introduce the concept of “value trumping” to describe a conscious decision to revise the hierarchy of values in a given context: “Schemas reflect the underlying reality of cultural values. For example, people working for U.S. managers who have a relaxed and casual style and who openly share information and provide opportunities to make independent decisions will learn specific scripts for managing in this fashion. The configuration of values embedded in this management style consists of informality, honesty, equality and individualism. At some point, however, these same managers may withhold information about a sensitive personnel situation because privacy, fairness, and legal concerns would trump honesty and equality in this context. This trumping action

explains why the constellation of values related to specific schema is hierarchical.”(ibid.,71)

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