

Using Typologies of National Cultures to Analyse The International Business Environment*

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Abstract

The aim of the article was to examine the usefulness of typologies of cultures for the analysis of the international business environment. Particular attention was paid to the areas of their use and the limitations arising from the methodology adopted by the creators of the typologies, the scope of the research carried out, and the changes taking place in individual societies. The study was based on a literature review of the presented typologies of national cultures. The author uses the method of critical analysis and synthesis of the views of the typology creators and logical inference.

This article examines the typologies of national cultures most commonly used to analyze the cultural environment. Each of them constitutes a source of valuable information on socio-cultural conditions, helping to prepare business activities in specific markets. However, it should be noted that the use of the typologies presented is subject to certain limitations, resulting from the purpose and scope of the research conducted by their authors and the time in which it was conducted. Thus, among other things, they do not take into account, or only to a small extent, many aspects related to the globalization process and the development of the knowledge-based economy, the development of the concept of partnership marketing as well as ongoing social changes. While the typologies may be applicable in the case of exports or cooperation activities, it is necessary to go beyond the presented classifications of cultures for more advanced international activities (direct investments). These limitations should not, however, result in the rejection of the typologies of national cultures, but in their use with some caution as a complement to the process of studying the cultural environment.

Keywords: culture, cultural environment, typologies of culture

Introduction

The analysis of cultural factors and their influence on business activity can be a difficult task due to the fact that the concept of culture is very broad and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. This is confirmed by the appearance of a multitude of definitions of culture in the 20th century (Rutkowska 2018, p. 175). Thus it does not come as a surprise that Williams defined culture as “*one of the two or three most difficult words in English*”. Borofsky compared the search for the definition of culture to being “*akin to trying to cage the wind*” (Throsby 2010, p. 18), while Herder wrote that there is nothing more indefinite than the word “culture” itself (Herder 1962, p. 4). This is the reason why some researchers in intercultural communication in general avoid defining this difficult and complex notion (Mikułowski-Pomorski 1999, p. 35).

The variety of approaches and interpretations does not only concern the problems of defining the concept of culture, it also appears in the case of methods for analysing the international business environment. Over several decades diverse formulas have been used for this purpose, which refer to different factors – PEST (political, economic, socio-cultural and technological), SLEPT (legal factors added), PESTEL (compared to the previous method, environmental factors were also taken into account) and STEEPLE (political, socio-demographic, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal and ethical aspects) (Doole & Lowe 2004, p. 7 and

Skulski 2021, p. 14). Another example of a broad approach to analysing the environment is the PRESTCOM formula, which consists of the following factors: political, regulatory, economic, socio-cultural, technological, competitive, organisational and market factors (Pickton & Broderick 2001, pp. 120-126). Lack of clarity also arises in the case of elements of the cultural (socio-cultural) environment that influence business activity. The most frequently cited elements include: values and attitudes, religion, verbal and non-verbal communication, social organisation, material culture and education (Skulski 2021, p.62).

In the last few decades, many typologies of cultures have been created and used in the analysis of business activities in foreign markets. Their authors refer to various cultural characteristics and adopt different criteria for the division into different types of national cultures, hence there is also a diversity of views and interpretations in this area.

Culture – a term with multiple meanings

For centuries the word ‘culture’ has been interpreted in various ways. Originally it was linked to ‘cultivating the land’, i.e. to agriculture. In the 16th century the concept was extended to other aspects of life. Culture began to be associated with human spirit and intellect. Since the early 19th century the term ‘culture’ has been used in its wider sense referring to the intellectual and spiritual development of civilization in general. One of the first authors to interpret culture in this way was Klemm who related culture to all the aspects of social life of a given community, and included in it customs, crafts and skills, domestic and public life in times of peace and in wartime, religion, science and art (Bartosik-Purgat 2004, p. 9).

A wide variety of perspectives on culture can be found in the literature, showing the diversity of interpretative approaches. It is also clear that they refer to different scientific disciplines (anthropology, psychology, sociology) and are linked to different contexts. This can be seen in the definitions and views proposed, for example, by Cronin, Hall, Linton, Szczepański and Throsby (Skulski 2020, p. 15).

Throsby draws attention to two ways of interpreting the notion of culture, considering the first broad approach as an anthropological or sociological interpretation, which means that culture is treated as the system of attitudes, opinions, customs, values and practices which are characteristic for a certain group or are commonly shared by it. Such a group can be determined on the basis of its political, geographical, ethnic or other properties (Throsby 2010, p. 19). This way of perceiving it allows for distinguishing a Brazilian, European, youth or corporate culture. The characteristics which enable the identification of a particular group can be expressed in the form of signs, symbols, language, material objects as well as customs and tradition which all serve to create a specific identity of the group, allowing its members to differentiate themselves from those of other groups. This interpretation of culture can be useful while, for example, analysing the influence of cultural factors on business activities, as well as when examining relations between culture and economic development.

The other approach to the notion of culture is more functional and covers certain actions performed by people and the results achieved through them, which in turn are linked to various aspects of life (intellectual, moral, artistic). This means that culture consists in actions requiring a certain amount of imagination and mental training, and not just purely technical or professional skills. However, such an interpretation of culture poses the need to define the characteristics expected from the undertaken activities. Throsby suggested the following (Throsby 2010, p. 19):

- creativity,
- generating and transmitting a symbolic meaning,
- bringing results which are a form of intellectual property.

According to this approach, music, literature, dance, film, theatre, producing TV programmes and painting can be treated as cultural activities. This implies that they meet the stipulated conditions. However, scientific innovations would not fit into this definition – they require creativity and the results can be protected by authors’ rights and/or patents, but they usually focus on practical aims and not on transmitting meaning. The case of sport also poses some dilemmas, especially regarding situations which do not require creativity but merely technical skills. This is a controversial issue, especially for certain disciplines such as ice-skating, synchronised swimming and artistic gymnastics. It should be also noted that sport is undoubtedly an element of

culture according to the first approach as a ritual or custom expressing shared values, and also as a means of confirming and preserving group identity (Throsby 2010, p. 20).

The diversity of definitions and different interpretations occur also in the concept of 'national culture' which additionally is used by some authors interchangeably with the term 'culture'. Thus it should be pointed out that even in the 19th century this term was limited to specific communities, among which nation-states. Without doubt, nations and ethnic groups constitute significant entities in culture. Bartosik-Purgat stated that every person in possession of his/her own personal culture creates the culture of his/her nation. This means that national culture becomes the set of personal cultures of individual members of the society (Bartosik-Purgat 2006, p. 14).

Kluckhohn and Kroeber defined national culture as the schematic ways of thinking acquired and transmitted mainly through symbols which are the creations of groups of people, and include substantiation in the form of artefacts understood as artificial cultural objects. Cultural artefacts consist of three groups: material, linguistic and behavioural. Material artefacts are tangible creations of a given society and national culture, among them art and architecture. It can be assumed that they constitute the so-called material culture of a nation. Linguistic artefacts mean a language used by members of a given community. They also include myths and legends of this culture passed on from generation to generation. Behavioural artefacts refer to certain modes of behaviour such as various ceremonies, rituals and customs (Bartosik-Purgat 2004, p. 12).

Review of selected typologies of culture

Many authors dealing with issues of culture and its influence on business activity draw attention to the fact that the typologies of national cultures can be helpful in the study of the characteristics of individual markets. They are a source of valuable information about socio-cultural considerations which assist in the preparation of business activities in specific markets. This comes from the fact that typologies refer to the culture of individual nations which can be perceived and judged in various dimensions, yet they also provide information about the lifestyle and customer behaviour. Such typologies have been created by several authors, and this study analyses five of them, proposed by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, Hall, Gesteland and House¹.

Dimensions of culture by Hofstede

On the basis of the opinion surveys (over 100 thousand questionnaires were sent out, each of them containing more than 100 questions) which were conducted in 1967–78 in IBM, Dutch engineer and social psychologist Hofstede concluded that the majority of differences existing among the individuals from various countries can be reduced to the differences in collective cultural conditioning (Hofstede 2000, p. 11). In his research Hofstede differentiated four features, the so-called four dimensions of culture (Hofstede 2000, p. 51).

- **Power Distance Index (PDI)** – a term which relates to inequalities among members of society in contrast to egalitarianism (in respect of power, wealth, education) Distance to power translates into accepting the situation of the concentration of power and resources, autocratic rule in companies and centralisation of decision-making. In countries presenting a high level of PDI (Japan, Philippines, Mexico, the Arab countries, India) there is an acceptance of social hierarchy and exercising power by the authorities. In cases of low values of that index there is a very strong belief in the equality of all members of society (the USA, Denmark, Austria), while at the same time 'power' can have negative connotations.

- **Individualism vs. Collectivism (IVC)** – in individualistic societies there are different proportions in the importance of group welfare and individual welfare, collective orientation (e.g. willingness for teamwork) and an individual's autonomy. High values of the index indicate the domination of individualistic tendencies (Anglo-Saxon countries), while the opposite trend is shown in collectivist societies whose members are strongly associated with the group (Portugal, Asian and Latin American countries).

- **Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)** – serves to determine the role of gender and its relations within family, school, state, etc. This criterion also includes the importance attached to traditional 'male' values (success, professional career, domination, rivalry, wealth) and those typically 'female' (cordiality, attentiveness, quality of life, caring for the nearest and dearest) in a given country. the examples of 'male' culture with high

¹ Apart from the classifications discussed in this textbook, one could also mention typologies proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Laurent (1983), and Schwarz (1994). However, it seems that they are less applicable in the analysis of business activities.

MAS include Austria, Germany, Italy, Japan and both Americas. A lower value of the index is shown in the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Chile.

• **Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)** – defines the feeling of uncertainty and danger within society and the ability to act in order to avoid such a situation. In the case of high values of UAI, societies aim to create the rules of social life and formal structures. Moreover, in such situations they usually show trust in specialists. It should be added that avoiding uncertainty does not equal the avoidance of risk. Risk is specifically targeted and its probability is also usually possible to estimate, while undertaking actions in order to avoid uncertainty can result in hasty and risky moves instead of waiting for the outcome. Great Britain, Sweden, Ireland and Hong Kong are examples of countries with a low UAI, and individuals in those countries cope well with reacting to ongoing changes. On the other hand, Greece, Portugal, Belgium, Austria and Japan represent countries with a high index in this respect, i.e. they demonstrate a significant dislike of uncertainty.

The later research conducted by Hofstede and his colleagues is also interesting from the viewpoint of the analysed issues, referring to the so-called **Long Term Orientation (LTO)** and **Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)**.

The LTO index is also called Confucian dynamism, and its high level testifies to the fact that in a given society an important role is played by such values as obstinacy, thrift and prudence, stability and level-headedness as well as respect for tradition. These features were seen as the source of economic success of many Asian countries. Out of the 23 countries examined, the highest levels of LTO were noted in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. For Poland, the index equalled 32 (13th on the list) and was similar to that of other European countries (Hofstede 2000, p. 251). Although the positions occupied by countries are of a relative and not absolute character, they show large differences between individual cultures, which do not always constitute a barrier but simply confirm their diversity.

In 2010 the model of cultural dimensions was further extended by adding a sixth element, Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR), based on the research of Bulgarian sociologist Minkov and the questionnaires from the World Values Survey. Societies with a high index in the area of indulgence are characterised by a high degree of freedom and social acceptance for a whole variety of behaviour related to the enjoyment of life and satisfying natural human desires which leads to a feeling of satisfaction. These cultures accept diversity and norms that are not of an explicit nature. The highest values of IVR were recorded in the following countries: Venezuela, Mexico, Trinidad Tobago, Nigeria, Sweden and Columbia. Restrictive societies believe that human behaviour should be subject to restrictions and regulated by strict norms. These cultures represent a formal approach and praise such values as persistence, constancy, and unity of the whole group, and ex e.g. Albania, Hong Kong, Latvia, Egypt and Ukraine (Hofstede et al. 2010, pp. 281–286).

Cultural dimensions allow for obtaining information used in the process of managing international companies, including the management of marketing. They occupy an important place, for example, in creating a company's organizational structure and motivational systems, as well as solving problems arising between employees representing diverse national cultures.

The classification of cultural dimensions created by Hofstede is widely used both in theory and in practice (e.g. in regional grouping – *clustering*), however one should not forget about its certain limitations. The conducted analysis was based on only one company from the IT sector. This means that the research mostly regarded the cultural conditioning of the employees of IBM, a transnational corporation, rather than enabled describing cultural conditioning on a national level. Although the American corporation was strongly internationalised, it was firmly embedded in Western culture. Moreover, the research left out some groups of employees (unskilled labour) and some environments (e.g. entrepreneurs, public sector employees). It should also be noted that the main part of the research was carried out nearly 50 years ago. Culture is a dynamic category that changes over the years – this is evident in the change in attitudes (including consumer attitudes) that can be seen, for example, between the Silver Generation and the Millennials (Zjawin 2018, pp 233-240). However, as observed by Ghauri and Cateora, *it was the first to systematically study culture relevant to business and management, and has thus taken this concept beyond anecdotal references.* (Ghauri, Cateora 2022, p. 75)

Typology by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Other criteria of distinguishing cultural differences used in their research conducted in the environment of international management in the 1980s and early 1990s were chosen by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. Based on the analysis of national and regional cultures supported by the research conducted in branches of

international corporations (such as Eastman Kodak, Heineken, Motorola, Royal Dutch Shell, Volvo) located in 50 countries, they defined the following dimensions of culture (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 2002, pp. 22–24):

- **attitude towards other people** – including criteria of the way of conduct, such as principles and interpersonal relations (universalism – particularism), an individual and a group (individualism – collectivism), the range of demonstrated emotions (reticence – emotionality), the way of perceiving the world (fragmentary – holistic), the way of achieving position (obtaining status – assigning status);
- **attitude towards time** – orientation towards the past, the present, and the future, as well as sequencing – synchronicity, including the significance of punctuality;
- **attitude towards environment** – openness, internal and external locus of control in decision-making, views on nature, i.e. a pro-environment stance.

On the basis of the analysis of the international cultural environment, five regional groups were identified consisting in the countries with a marked similarity shown in relation to the selected dimensions described by Trompenaars. Thus the following groups were indicated:

- Anglo-Saxon (the USA, Great Britain),
- Latin European (France, Belgium, Spain, Italy),
- German (Austria, Germany, Switzerland),
- Asian (Japan, China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore),
- Latin American (Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil).

The classification of national cultures according to the above criteria is considered to be useful in international management (e.g. mergers and acquisitions of companies from various countries). Relatively less researched is its importance from the viewpoint of its usefulness for international marketing, although it may seem that some of the listed factors characterising national cultures are significant in, for example, promotional activities in foreign markets (in adapting advertising content to individual foreign markets).

High and low context culture by Hall

The division of cultures into those with a high and low context, proposed by American cultural anthropologist Hall, is also used when preparing business operations abroad (Zenderowski, Koziński 2019, p.75). He based his concept on the results of research conducted during the 1970s in selected societies (mainly in Germany, France, the USA and Japan), in which the main focus was directed at ways of interpersonal communication; as was already mentioned, Hall identified culture with communication.

High-context cultures are characterised by transmitting information closely linked to the context (Japan, Arab and Latin American countries), which influences both the preparation and conducting negotiations, as well as promotional activities (Czinkota, Ronkainen, Cui, 2023, p. 55), for example Japan where advertisements are dominated by emotional motifs. In other high-context cultures words carry only a small part of information while the non-verbal aspect of the message is of high importance, for example the circumstances accompanying a conversation (contacts at work, in shops, during negotiations), and the basic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, social status, clothing).

Low-context cultures are their opposites, where spoken or written words are the fundamental carrier of information. Context, the situation in which words are exchanged, have a limited significance in the transmitted content. Switzerland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries are among the low-context countries, while Japan, and the Arab and Latin American countries belong to the former category (Sznajder 1995; pp. 38, 39).

From a practical viewpoint this division is significant, for example, when conducting business negotiations. In high-context countries one of the aims of a negotiation is to provide a thorough knowledge of the counterpart, which means the process of negotiating takes up far more time than in low-context cultures. The way of transmitting content can also influence the creation of promotional messages.

Hall also proposed a division of cultures into monochronic (M-time) and polychronic (P-time). This distinction is related to the attention placed on time in various communities. In monochronic cultures, people concentrate on one task during a given time, value punctuality, and time is split into small units. Polychronic communities are more focused on social relations than on agendas, and are occupied with many tasks at the same time (Zenderowski, Koziński 2019, pp. 78-80).

People in P-time cultures in general accept interruptions or delays. Hall also pointed out at the same time that low-context cultures are often monochronic, while in high-context ones a more relaxed approach to the issue of time dominates.

Types of culture according to Gesteland

Cultural models of behaviour in business were also analysed by R.R. Gesteland, and his research on national cultures conducted in the 1980s and 1990s from the point of view of marketing, negotiation and management referred to business practice. He distinguished some models of business behaviour dividing them according to the following criteria (Gesteland 1999, pp. 16, 17).

- **Pro-transaction and pro-partnership cultures** – the former focus on completing a task, the latter on persons. Pro-transaction cultures in business practice are characterised by concentrating on the transaction. Persons representing such an approach are open to contacts with strangers, ready for a dialogue and direct relations. Pro-transaction cultures include Scandinavian countries, German-speaking countries, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. People representing pro-partnership countries place a higher value on interpersonal relations than on business. They distrust strangers, and contacts are usually initiated via middlemen. In such cultures connections and contacts play an important role. Examples of such cultures are the Arab countries, as well as countries in Latin America and Asia.

- **Ceremonial and non-ceremonial cultures** – characteristic features of ceremonial cultures include respect for hierarchy and social status together with the privileges they imply. One can list here the majority of European countries, Arab cultures, and Latin America. Non-ceremonial cultures are dominated by egalitarianism and do not attach great importance to social conventions. Examples include the USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Australia, and New Zealand. Such characteristics of these cultures can lead to conflict and misunderstanding in direct contacts between their representatives.

- **Monochronic and polychronic cultures** – the division is determined by their attitude to time. Monochronic cultures value punctuality and good organization. Here examples can include European German-speaking and Nordic countries, the USA, Canada and Japan. In polychronic countries many things are being done at the same time, while punctuality and deadlines are treated less rigorously. Here we can list the example of the majority of African countries, Latin America, and countries of South and South-East Asia.

- **Expressive and reticent culture** – a division based on differences in verbal and non-verbal communication which can be so large as to obstruct or completely impede effective negotiations. Examples of expressive cultures are Mediterranean and Latin American countries. Reticent cultures are mostly associated with Nordic and German-speaking countries in Europe, and countries of the East and South-East Asia.

Individual national countries can be characterised by a certain combination of the above mentioned criteria. According to Gesteland, Poland can be classified among the cultures moderately pro-partnership, ceremonial, polychronic and of unstable expressiveness, similar to Russia and Romania.

The GLOBE Model

In the early 21st century, an international team led by R.J. House carried out a research project considered to be one of the most ambitious undertakings in the study of cultural diversity. The conducted analysis served to examine the influence of cultural differences on organizational leadership. The model proposed by House's team was named GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness). The research identified nine cultural dimensions:

- power distance - acceptance of the social inequalities that exist in society;
- avoiding uncertainty - the use of norms, rules and procedures to reduce the uncertainty of future events;
- humanistic orientation - the attachment of importance to qualities such as honesty, altruism or generosity;
- public collectivism - the degree to which society encourages the collective sharing of resources and collective action;
- group collectivism - being guided in life by pride and loyalty to the group;
- assertiveness - acceptance of assertive behaviour, self-confidence, confrontational behaviour in relations with others;
- gender equality - minimising inequalities due to gender differences;

- orientation towards the future - motivation focused on future achievement;
- orientation on results - encouragement and rewards from organisations and society.

Some of them were also presented in the earlier discussed typologies (individualism vs. collectivism, distance to power and avoiding uncertainty). However, others can be treated as their own proposals (gender equality, orientation on efficiency/results).

This enabled identifying differences in the behaviour of managers and staff in the analysed cultures. For example, the democratic style of management, which is commonly implemented and universally accepted in Western countries, and is oriented at the individual's development, can be perceived as not very effective in Eastern countries which are predominantly collectivist. Managers in Asian countries place great importance on the so-called paternalistic style of leadership and management, based on cultivating friendly relations with their subordinates and maintaining group unity. In Malaysia they highly value employees and managers who conduct themselves in a humble, dignified and modest way, while in the United States it is 'having clout', assertiveness or sometimes even audacity that are highly valued. The research carried out for GLOBE not only placed in order various types of cultures according to certain categories, but also examined the influence exerted by cultural differences on various leadership styles (Glinka, Jelonek, pp. 48, 49).

The analysis conducted by the team led by House confirmed that their own national culture has a dominating influence on people active within organizations. The research showed that cultural practices vary in different cultures whatever the business sector that was subject to analysis. Employees, although respecting the organizational culture of their companies, often subconsciously act according to the models and values originating from their national cultures.

Conclusions

The process of globalisation and internationalisation has not led to the standardisation of consumer behaviour and the homogenisation of markets, which makes the consideration of cultural considerations and the ability to deal with challenges arising from cultural differences still very important when doing business in foreign markets. Hofstede, one of the pioneers of cultural factors research, stated that culture is much more often a source of conflict than synergy. In contrast, cultural differences are at best a nuance and at worst a disaster (Hofstede 2000, p. 32).

Acquiring and skilfully exploiting knowledge of the cultural environment and the cultural differences that exist between markets can be competitive enablers, however this is a complex task with a high risk of failure.

One way to analyse the cultural environment is to use typologies of national cultures. This article presents the most frequently cited typologies created by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, Hall, Gesteland and House. They provide valuable information on socio-cultural conditions to help prepare business activities in specific markets. It should be noted that the use of the typologies presented is, however, subject to certain limitations, which result from the purpose and scope of the research adopted by their authors and the time in which it was conducted. They do not take into account, or only marginally take into account, many aspects resulting from the globalisation process (organisational cultures in transnational corporations), the development of a knowledge-based economy, the development of the concept of partnership marketing or the social changes taking place in each country.

The existing limitations should not, however, lead to the rejection of national culture typologies as a tool used to study the cultural environment, but rather to exercise some caution in their application. The knowledge gained through typologies of national cultures can be applied to many areas of business activity - establishing international contacts (participation in fairs and exhibitions), conducting negotiations or preparing marketing activities (promotion strategies).

Each of the typologies analysed in this paper constitutes a set of specific characteristics that have been taken into account in the classification of national cultures. Even if the same criteria (distance from authority, individualism, approach to time) appear in different typologies, their interpretation varies. A common feature of almost all the typologies discussed is that they mainly refer to transnational corporations. This is justified by the role of such entities in the functioning of the global economy. However, due to ongoing political, economic and social changes, cultural issues also influence the functioning of other entities, including small and medium-sized enterprises.

For this reason, too, attention is increasingly being drawn to the need to develop new approaches to cultural problems that are applicable to international business (Holden, 2004). This is also important because of the volatility of the environment. An action plan that is excellent today may condemn a company to failure tomorrow. Updating it and adapting it to current needs and the competitive situation is a prerequisite for success. In a similar way, companies should approach the concept of culture to suit the conditions of doing business in today's global market.

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