

THE APPLICABILITY OF HOFSTEDE'S THEORY WITHIN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

The proposal I am launching within the current research is linked to the sphere of international relations, more precisely, to the understanding of certain actions performed by the states by a cultural point of view. Considering this aspect, I shall employ comparative analysis and case study as research methods. Concerning both, the incipient proposals are the analysis of the factors leading to a conflict and, at the same time, the possibility to have avoided that conflict, from the perspective of Hofstede's theory.

Keywords: Hofstede, international relations, mental soft, constructivism

Introduction

Even though they are entities, the states react in different ways, just like people do. This situation, often present in the literature, has an explanation. The reason behind this multidisciplinary research is also due to the way in which the field of international relations was shattered by a new European conflict. I consider that it is a necessary condition for political science to demonstrate and insist on these differences. In the lack of this element, we could never understand the states' methods of action. 'To see the differences... is a condition for finding valid global solutions' (Hofstede *et al.*, 2012). These valid solutions mentioned by Hofstede are available to us through the states' way of being. Another certain reason is that, in order to avoid any kind of conflict, the cooperation between countries is required. Yet this cooperation implies several stages: knowledge, understanding,

acceptance, discussion, and solving. If we do not consider these factors, we cannot have a correct but especially complete vision on international relations. The scope of this paper is to propose a new way to approach international filed, through the lenses of cultural differences also. It is difficult to understand the real meaning of the complexity of decision making if we don't consider the Other. Hofstede's study is a good example of a study that has successfully demonstrated the intercultural interactions.

Context

World War II has largely changed the political, economic, social, and cultural factors which influence the everyday life of all people. Although important European countries have suffered immense economic and social losses, in more than 50 years Europe succeeded in establishing a continuous and long-term development. With this new alignment stage of the European states, there are different factors, amongst which the cultural ones, which favoured better achievement regarding bilateral or multilateral relations. The way through which important bilateral and long-lasting relations can be achieved implies diplomacy, as well. The advantage of diplomacy is that it does not necessarily target an economic interest. It rather employs a shaping force, translated in the importance of good relations with other states, European or not.

Furthermore, I mention that this paper does not have an exhaustive character. Taking into account this aspect, I will venture on providing some possible solutions which should be considered when we relate to the field of international affairs. One of the proposed objectives is to offer valid, clear, conclusive answers for this changing domain.

In addition, I hope that this research will find its specificity exactly within cultural relations and their relations between two or more states. As confirmed by Hofstede, 'the world is full of confrontations involving individuals, groups and people feeling, thinking and behaving differently' (Hofstede *et al.*, 2012). Due to this input and following the current research, I consider that in the end we would be able to understand and even to propose a new way of solving a possible

conflict. Thus, the main objective takes shape: an *avant la lettre* way of solving conflicts using sociological and cultural data, even with geopolitical stakes.

The absence of a conflict of any nature, but in this case an armed one, is strongly linked to the cooperation between nations. In the field of international relations, this term serves for the states like a collaboration mechanism for the functioning of humanity, after all. Yet compared to an economic, social and even political cooperation, can the cultural manifestations presented in Hofstede's studies to explain certain conflicts? Moreover, it is possible that they can provide us a new sociological method for preventing any form of conflict, but applicable in political studies.

Regarding the theoretical frame of this study, in my view it is best associated with constructivism, with a topic taken from sociology and transformed within the theory of international relations in scientific knowledge. The present paper does not aim to approach the analysis of military conflicts but rather the incipient state, the moment before the outbreak of any conflict, the way to explain *avant la lettre* a possible imminent conflict. Although inherent, the clash of civilisations¹ is explainable and can be solved once the international scene understands and accepts that people and, implicitly, societies are different yet unequal. Any group, no matter if large or small, will have a different order. The simple existence of different social classes deepens the gap between those who possess certain advantages and those who don't. why not imagine a space in which these theories are transposed when talking about states?

My aim is to analyze the way through which the states must consider everyone's cultural specificity but often fail to do so. Sometimes, we have to witness different mistakes made by leaders in regard to the cultural particularity of each country. Therefore, we assist to a violation of the respect towards people and what they stand for. Our principal author stated that: 'No group can disregard culture'. There has been always a strong need to know the Other², because knowing the other one could reveal more about what We are³. The need to clarify who are They

¹ Notion proposed by Samuel Huntington in the book with the same title.

² The Other is regarded as generic in this case. Practically, he includes every individual, state, entity which is not similar to me.

³ We – all the people, states, civilisations, societies which are not the Other. I will use this generic term, as did before by other researchers. For further details, see Vintilă Mihăilescu,

– enemies, close ones, others, someone, bad, good, etc. and Us. The classification is essentially made from a sociological perspective, depending on physiognomy. But in this case and for this classification I shall employ the difference between Us and Them, a frequently used motif in the geopolitical space: West-East, North-South, Europe-America, Russia-America, Democrats-Tyrants, Rich-Poor. We often find these alterities next to theoreticians (like Paul Dobrescu, Rudolf Kjellen) who provided an explanation for the gap forever created between people, states, societies, etc.

The ideologies' gap represents another very good item used to distinguish. People are also defined (so groups) by the left and right visions⁴. These ideas are eventually constructed in what we call *existent international culture*. The latter is formed by different ideas shared by states and, 'because ideas can change in time, both identities and interests may vary, which means that there isn't a unique international culture but that it can also modify' (Wendt, 2011).

I forward the following questions of research: are there differences between states that can be observed and analyzed at international level? Have this differences a meaning for the international field? Using these two methods we can predict, to a certain degree, even their way to react in the present – a time of continuous change. Moreover, depending on the mental software of each country, we can shape and explain certain reactions from the recent history. Constant interaction in the international field can lead to a prolonged historical time span and to the creation of a collective identity. This study could serve to further research in the near future..

The measure through which the weaker members of the country's institutions and organizations expect and accept that power will be distributed unequally. Countries with high index, therefore with a larger distance to power: Malaysia (Asia), Philippines (Asia), Russia, Romania, Serbia, the United Mexican States, China, India, Slovenia, Bulgaria, etc.

Antropologie – Cinci introduceri.

⁴ In this case, I shall regard left as an ideology characterised by the implication of the state in the good development of the individual and right as the reduced implication of the state in the life of the individual. All nuances and layers which derive from this dichotomy are not included.

Countries with low index, therefore with a shorter distance to power: Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, etc.

The most significant differences identified by the author are: Countries with a larger distance to power: supervising staff is numerous, high-income differences between those at the top and those at the base of the organization, subordinates expect to be told what to do, the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or a good father, the relation subordinate – supervisor is emotionally charged, the privileges and symbols of the state are natural and widespread, office work is more appreciated than manual labour.

Countries with a shorter distance to power: supervising staff is reduced, low-income differences between those at the top and those at the base of the organisation, managers rely on their and subordinates' experience, subordinates expect to be consulted, the ideal boss is a capable democrat, the subordinate – supervisor relationship is pragmatic, the privileges and symbols of the state are not approved, manual labour shares the same status with office work⁵.

If these differences highlight a major discrepancy between states from the perspective of the societies, then I consider that the same criteria applicable at national level could be valid and applicable in the field of international relations.

Methodology

In the next stage of the research, I will analyze and explain the way in which the cultural manifestations at different levels of depth, enunciated by Hofstede, can be also applicable to what we understand by the thorough understanding of the states' diplomacy.

How can we shape and explain certain reactions of countries? Can we do it depending of the mental soft of each country?

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There are five items according to which previous researches in sociology have collected their data: distance to power, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity

⁵ All these data are taken from the study of Hofstede.

vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long vs. short term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint.

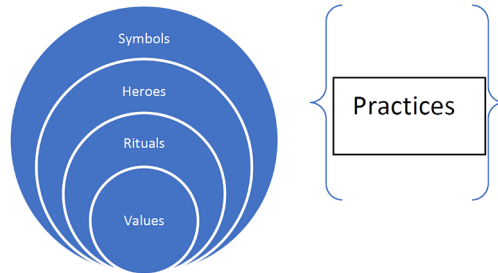
I will focus in this paper on the first item which is power distance. The main question here is: how should we approach the fact that people are not equal? Political scientist Ronald Inglehart claims that the countries with a short distance to power are described as secular-rational states.

The limits of the endeavor, identified until this incipient state, would be the method of performing the comparative analyses between multiple countries. More precisely, what type of countries are chosen for the analysis, which is the selection methodology? I consider that another impediment is represented by the transition from the field of sociological sciences to political sciences

Layers of cultural manifestation

Let's take Romania for example. Being a state with a larger distance to power, where the criteria of society reveal and reflect an existential inequality between the superiors and the inferiors, the same aspect could be applied in the field of international relations. In other words, countries like Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia (all ex-socialist states) will expect from the superiors (in general, states with a shorter distance to power), like Germany, to guide their trajectory by the means of formal rules. If we build on the hypothesis that social inequality is also applied for the actors on the international stage, then these states will appreciate the relationship subordinate – superior much easier than the states with a shorter distance to power. These data do not interfere with topics such as sovereignty, case law or national independence. This is also due to the fact that, according to the systems theory, countries are rarely found in complete isolation from each other. By international law, states recognize the sovereignty of the others and, at the same time, their right to independence. Furthermore, we can state that because of Hofstede theory, we can see the differences that are influencing the field of international relations. Citizens from different countries are going to react differently to the idea of society, leadership, power or beliefs. As we can see below, the values are shaped by the national culture of each country:

Cultural manifestations at different levels of depth



(Hofstede, *et al.*, 2012)

As we analyze the layers of cultural manifestation, we can observe that values are in direct connection with rituals, heroes and symbols. For countries that have a large distance to power, the cultural manifestation is going to be more inclined to have the ideal of a leader. People are more obedient in this case, because they see the leader as a person or a group of people that have the symbols and the manifestation of a hero. This manifestations can be seen and should be seen from the outside into inside. The symbols exist to a higher level meaning the outside layer that we see often, taking into consideration the social political context, culture, economics and so on. The symbols can be words, images, manifestations, objects, that have a certain meaning for those that are sharing the same culture. We see examples in Romania that has this type of symbol: Romanian language, hymn, the flag, different buildings (for example: House of the People). We should be aware that this symbols are often contested by the people. We have the example of House of the People which represents a big building, headquarter of Romanian Parliament, but which was made in the moment the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu. Because of that matter and because of the questions surrounding the construction of this building, people are questioning the identity of this building. It is the most visited building in București, according to the official tour guide the Parliament (Centrul Internațional de Conferințe, Palatul Parlamentului, 2024) but which it is also the most controversial. It is relevant for our study to to say that in Romania, the Romanian people, are contesting the value of a symbol. Every symbol is related to a context, you can't take out of the context the object because it will be a meaningful exercise. This symbols have a meaning

just because of the people from that culture. In the lack of a deeper meaning and understanding of symbols we are not going to be able to understand the real value of such an important part off the manifestation of culture, stated and described by Hofstede. This type of exercise is proposed also by the European Union that stated that we need symbols, European symbols, to be much closer one to the other. We have a headquarter of European Parliament, we have a headquarter of European justice court, we have a flag and we have a hymn. Even though we have the symbols, people are identifying with their own national symbols. To be European does not involve only a symbolic building of justice or to punish the injustice but it implies that people relates to that building as a set of practises to maintain democracy. If if at European level we observe we have this unclear situation, in the case of heroes, the situation is more unclear for Romanian people. According to the definition of Hofstede "heroes represent people living or dead real or imaginary that are gifted with attributes cherish in a culture, therefore they represent a behaviour model" (Hofstede *et al.*, 2012). In 2006, Romanian television (TVR) has launched a public campaign To identify the biggest (to be read – important) Romanian people of all time. Sociologically speaking, related to this moral behaviour, we can observe that we have also fictional characters, for example Bulă (stereotip din bancurile românești) and also real persons like football players, writers, politicians, leaders, that occupy a spot in this list. For a better understanding of this model on how Romanian people were reported to this classification, the statistics tell us the following: 73,97% have superior education, 21,89% have medium education and the rest basic education. Most nominalizations are made from people of the fallowing segment of age: 31,24 % – 19-25, 33,85% – 26-35. Regarding the gender of the respondents, 68,34% are male and 31.66% are female (TVR, 2006). The results of this survey has the following nominalizations: Ștefan cel Mare (1435-1504), Carol I (1839-1914), Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001), Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957), Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989), Heri Coandă (1886-1972), Gheorghe Hagi (1965 –), Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), George Enescu (1881-1955), Ferdinand I (1865-1927), Mihai I (1921-2017), Nicolae Paulescu (1869-1931), Regina Maria (1875-1938), Ana Aslan (1897-1988) or Amza Pellea (1931-1983). The list extends up to 100 individuals and characters

who have been voted by the viewers of the produced shows. In the modern era, the extensive exposure in mass media of various personalities has emphasized aspects such as rhetoric, non-verbal communication, language, etc., thus causing significant changes in how heroes or models of behavior are perceived. Physical appearance has become more crucial in selecting future heroes compared to its previous significance. The criteria for selecting these cultural manifestations, as discussed by Hofstede, are changing rapidly. Therefore, individuals from the past will relate to symbols, heroes, rituals, and values differently from those in the present. Regarding the figure above, values reside at a profound level. Thus, based on these associations with values, heroes, models, and symbols, we can present a behavioral model of states, particularly in this case, Romania. „Values are implicit; they belong to the invisible software of our minds” (Hofstede *et al.*, 2012).

However, there also exists a difference at the national level, aiding in better distinguishing between them. Institutions that have developed throughout history, ultimately encapsulating the legal rules and customs we follow, and how they deal with people, families, women, animals, social welfare, etc., also reveal how a state constructs its own value system. For example, in a state where there is absenteeism of an organization or institution dealing with abused individuals, it indicates a lack of state involvement in aiding abused women rather than a lack of abused women themselves. A medical institution where a woman is assisted in terminating a pregnancy does not denote a lack of women desiring this but a lack of state involvement in individual medical issues⁶. The case of Romania, reveals the fact that the mental soft of this country has been present also in the decision making in various problems of the state.

Interest in foreign policy

Foreign policy in the realm of international relations is a fundamental concept and factor in pursuing and developing the interests that states wish to fulfill.

⁶ Here we are referring to the communist period, where the prohibition of abortion through Decret 770 signed by the Prim-minister Chivu Stoica, kills women because of the illegal procedures.

What is meant by foreign policy? Let us take, for instance, the definition used by Hadrian Gorun in his manual: the totality of objectives pursued by a state actor and the tasks it assumes internationally, as well as the set of methods and means through which it acts to achieve these objectives. Thus, possible methods used, according to this definition, can also include institutions created to achieve those objectives (Gorun, 2011). Given the vast space of international relations, let us turn to the Eastern European region, which has a complex past. For example, we have former communist states such as Romania, Poland, and Hungary, whose cultural dimensions are undergoing modernization and alignment with European standards. These states have acutely felt the need to access international forums such as the European Union, a pursuit that even the Republic of Moldova is actively following, having been granted candidate country status in 2022 (European Council, 2024).

The institutions created to address a state's foreign policy can also reflect the identity that states seek to preserve. Among the objectives targeted by states in foreign policy are material, ideological, and prestige objectives, classified by the literature as medium-term objectives. The situation was different during the process of Stalinization of states under the umbrella of the USSR during the existence of the Soviet Union. Then we witnessed a process of destalinization, which former Soviet states did not hesitate to propagate. In this case, we observe states that have a great distance from power (according to Hofstede), which, having a huge legacy of how a leader should look and behave, have been forced to change their perceptions and behave as the Other (Western Europe), which in this case represented something better, more democratic, more worthy, ultimately. Democratization has been and remains an ideal for all states, especially those mentioned earlier. In a certain sense, identity, ideology, and culture are distinct from power and interest and play a causal role in social life (Wendt, 2011). The concept of power and the content of ideas are largely functions of ideas (Wendt, 2011), or these ideas are constructed based on the various interests that societies have. Let us focus on the word „interest.” What is the interest of a state? How can we define this interest? And perhaps most importantly, is there a common interest among states? Which states? What group? What interest? All these are justified questions to try to better understand the interests of states. From a

constructivist perspective, as Alexander Wendt also mentions, „we want what we want because of how we think about what we want” (Wendt, 2011). There is a common sense among societies about how they are or simply exist. This social standard (e.g., respect for human rights, the right to education, absence of armed conflict, equity, salary rights, access to a medical system, etc.) are a series of social standards about what constitutes a functional society, or these ideas are more cultural than material. They are constructs (ideas) of society about how it should function. Or what is the best way for a society to function, thus a state. Thus, an entire society has agreed on how that society can function as best as possible, directed towards the needs of each individual forming that society.

Cultural similarity

Anthropologist Roy D'Andrade, in his study – A study of personal and Cultural Values – American, Japanese, and Vietnamese, identifies the importance of common values as having an overwhelming influence on societies but also represents a legitimate asset for actions. The author chooses three subjects, namely three states: the United States of America, Japan, and Vietnam, to try to find this common link between the aspirations of the three different states. With a different past, with a different geographical position, and with a different culture, the three states demonstrated through D'Andrade's study (D'Andrade, 2008) that there are a series of common aspects that bring them together but also those that differentiate them. It is worth mentioning that the way in which common interest was measured is as follows: agreement within society = common agreement of all societies + specific agreement of that society. Based on this calculation, it resulted that there is a similarity of over 49% compared to a difference of 12%. Among the similarities presented in all three societies are: taking care of others, being loyal, being responsible, accepting people as they are, working for social justice, treating people equally, avoiding war, and living in harmony with nature. As differences are highlighted: respect for authority, having strong ties with faith, having money, what others say about me, or traveling to new places. Constructivists define these constructions of societal aspirations and

the cognitive bases of desires. Like individuals, states also have certain desires, beliefs, and values that they promote, develop, and desire. This is practically what shows us the foreign and domestic policy program of each state and it is what sums up the foreign policies of states. However, Roy D'Andrade's study is a study that seeks to show and reinforce the idea that both capitalist states and monarchical states or states under strong dominant influence can meet and can show that the difference between them is primarily one of nature of the individualism versus collectivism relationship. In the first part of the study, we can observe that the 328 items used in the research questionnaire show that the probability of finding common elements is higher than not finding common elements. Roy D'Andrade's study supports Ingelhart's idea that before dividing by economic, political criteria, it is necessary to differentiate states from a cultural point of view. This culture intertwines with the constructivist perspective, which offers us a different view of the state than the other types of international political currents.

Conclusion

To the listed questions: How can we shape and explain certain reactions of countries? Can we do it depending of the mental soft of each country?, the answer after a short research is that yes, we can anticipate answers and reactions in the space of international relations from the use of Hofstede's theory, Moreover, we saw that Romania, the exemple of this study, bases its decisions on the influence of certain states that it considers and sees as leaders (etalon). Either for economic, political or sphere of influence reasons, regardless of it, it was related to other state in making decisions at the national and international level. Moreover, we also see from other studies that although cultures are different, there are elements in common that bring closer or can separate two or more states.

Of course, this article does not aim to solve political-cultural dilemmas, but it aims to become a broder approach to demonstrate how important the mental soft of each state is.

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