



THE 12TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

**The Icelandic and Romanian Profile.
Different Patterns in a Converging World**

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Abstract. The majority of intercultural studies are preferring a sample with two cultures, even such a study can't provide a complex understanding about the importance of culture in the international context. The most complex Cross Cultural studies (Schwartz, GLOBE, Hofstede, and Trompenaars) include a large number of cultures, but time and costs remain major obstacles for an exhaustive analyses. The aim of this article is to present relevant intercultural values that characterize Iceland and Romania: history, language, power distance and conflict management. This study it is a synchronic one because in its content will be analyzed the contemporary situations in the two countries. The analysis is exploratory and it will be used the Locke's consensual inductive system which involves mostly the collections of scholars' opinions but with personal reflections.

Keywords: Iceland; Romania; cultural values; performance; power distance

1. Introduction

Along the history, the cross cultural adaptation offers solutions for individuals to become skilled by identifying critical situation in order to avoid severe consequences for their particular situations. Based on former scholar experience, the assumption of this research is that in the international field, if cross-cultural knowledge is mastered, there is an additional opportunity to develop and maintain an excellent relationship with international partners. At the same time, according to the principle of concordance, in case of identifying common values between two countries, it seems natural that there should be a greater intensity of common projects, compared to that achieved with other regions.

This article will try to present first the main strategy of Icelandic and Romanian policy regarding the European integration. Also, by comparing the cultural values between the two countries, the study will emphasize how much the Romanian society will try to increase the level of stability and establish credibility on the international arena. To integrate the article into the extension demanded by the cross cultural methodology, it will be also analyzed the differences between Power distance and Performance orientation. Both values are presenting the perfect benchmarking model for practical implications in order to benefit the societal culture from the two countries. The approach I propose tries to capture the influence of these two cultural dimensions on the international performance of a state by comparing the values and norms between the two countries. It aims at emphasizing the importance of multiculturalism (Bercovitch & Foulkes, 2012) and is focused on the importance of cultural synergy in interstate relations.

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This article does not claim an exhaustive analysis; it will reflect some aspects of the contemporary cultural values between Iceland and Romania because the most important aspects of the world situation can be passed through cultural lenses. The in depth comparison could be seen as a diagnosis method “whose main content is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the analysed domain, highlighting them and finalizing into corrective recommendations”. (Nicolescu & Verboncu, 2008, p. 135)

In order to achieve the proposed objective, the subject of the study is structured in two parts where it will be presented the intercultural paradigms required for this cross cultural study. In each part the intention is to demonstrate the need for understanding of the cultural values between the two countries, because on the global market the cross cultural knowledge is underlying the innovative skills for international cooperation.

2 Historical Background and the Policy Regarding the European Integration

The main integrators factors from a cultural point of view are: language, religion, ethnicity, social and political values, (Fox, 2002) but the history is the pillar of them. History is highlighting the following feature of national cultures in intercultural research: the country’s specificity is identical with the specificity of the dominant national culture. National history identifies with of the values promoted by a group of people transformed it into a national state. It is also favored by a number of factors that must be considered together: geography, religion and so on, each of them acting as a binder for that group of people.

The mismatch between national culture and the intercultural communication inevitably lead to the reduction in the efficiency. The first literary mentions about the history of Iceland were in *Islendigabok* (the Book of Icelanders) written only after 200 years after the arrival of the first settlers (Karlsson, 2013). The first parliament in the World, the *Althingi*, who now is second time active starting with 1944, was the perfect manifestation of the Old Commonwealth.

The modern political background of Iceland and the national culture were formed during the 1800s as an important part in creating independent Icelandic political platforms (Duelung, 2003). For many Icelanders there is a feeling that their old society was one of the best possible in those times. In history, the dynamics of adaptation of Icelanders to new situations involves a flexibility of their ego for achieving competitiveness in the international market. Iceland was and still it is now a pure cultural space (as in the beginning of the last century was also the German or Japanese) and in present days its history is characterized by a conjunction which is in harmony with the global system. The Discovery of America started from here.

In Romania the national history is characterized by the struggle of a homogeneous human group which from 2000 years, living only in the same determined space, tried not to be integrated in other former neighboring empires. The Romanians are very proud of their history (especially the victorious fights against the Ottoman Empire) but very unhappy with the present. The history in Romania has a self-centered character and its values should not be judged based on some ethnocentric criteria, instead they should be valued by their contribution to the European heritage. The present national history is seen now like a political problem because the 45 years of Communism were an imposed situation for the people.

The Romanian and Icelandic histories are integrated in the mainstream of European values (even on opposite geographical poles) and represent ones of the most important cultural pillars of the continent. In both countries the stories “help us understand how others negotiated the cultural attitudes of the past that have relevance for the present” (Martin & Nakayama, 2014, p. 77).

After the World War II the price of fish rose and this situation was very stimulating for the Icelandic Economy. For Romania it was the beginning of a new political era, the forced introduction of Communism. In the rising of New Europe, after the 1945, the two countries had an insignificant role, Romania because it was a satellite state of Moscow and Iceland because the new formed European Coal and Steel Industry had few implications on its direct export strategy. For that period Iceland had an unusually high volume of trade with the countries of Eastern Europe: 33% of its exports went to Eastern Bloc Countries (Thorhallson & Vignisson 2004, p. 24).

At January the 1st 1959: Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal formed European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Due to the fishery dispute with Britain (the Code Wars) Iceland was not invited to join the treaty. The agreement with the European Community was signed in 1972 when was ended the dispute between the Iceland and European Community regarding the fishing boundaries (Iceland extended the maritime line to 200 km).

The interest of Iceland for the European Community (EC) was from the beginning a practical one. In 1986 Spain and Portugal, the most important buyers of the Icelandic Fish, joined to the European Community and if until 1885 Iceland exported to the EC 23% of its salt fish after that date the amount of exports raised over 95%. After the historical discourse of Jacques Delors from the European Parliament in 1986 regarding the necessity of strengthening the collaboration between the EFTA and EC, the Icelandic Political Parties started to become interested on European Integration.

For Iceland the acceptance of European Economic Agreement (EEA) does not require the acceptance of EU's common agricultural and fishery policies. Also, the full membership to the European Union it was never a strong option for the country (both for political elite or common citizens). The only interest it was on strengthening the collaboration with European Economical Agreement which provides access to European Market with limited tariffs.

The Icelandic euro skepticism is based on the population strong beliefs on self-determination and on the intention that in the future the nation should be able to decide on its inner policies in the fishing strategy. "There was a clear consensus that the Icelandic Nation was unique and had to be protected when it came to international cooperation". (Bergmann, 2012)

Like all the other countries of the former communist bloc, Romania has made efforts to substitute the totalitarian system with democracy and free market policies, which has impacted upon political structure and social behaviours (legislation is under construction and the political and business communities are getting more sophisticated). Until 1989 the Romanian state was a factor of restriction for political freedom. Today, after 25 years, new research initiatives are required about the role of Romania in South Eastern Europe (Bibu & Brancu, 2008).

In the same frame of time, between 1960-1970, Romania was the most Western oriented country from the Warsaw Pact. The South Eastern country was the first communist country with opened an Embassy in Western Germany (1967) and also the first communist state with established commercial relations with European Community by signing two agreements. The first one was signed in 1974 named General System of Preferences and the second in 1980 – Agreement of Industrial Products. (Angelescu, 2012)

The ex-communist president Nicolae Ceausescu (who was executed after a very quick simulation of trial on 25 December 1989) was characterized by "The Economist" as "de Gaulle of the Warsaw Pact". After the 1980 the Romanian dictator became paranoiac with an anti-western attitude and Romania started to be an autarchic society.

Romania was the only communist state which not invaded Czechoslovakia after the social riot from 1968 and a lot of western leaders came as political guests in the communist era - French President Charles de Gaulle, the US Presidents Nixon and Ford. Also, Romania was the first country for the communist bloc with join IMF and General Agreement for Tariffs and Trade – GATT (Constantiu, 2011).

Immediately, after the December Revolution from 1989, Romania was perceived like an East Oriented country, being the last ex-communist state which signed a diplomatic path to NATO - 12 October, 1990. Iceland was a founding state of the Alliance in 1949 and also signed a historical agreement with USA in 1951 which allowed the opening of a military base on Keflavik peninsula, closed in 2006. It is important to mention that a part of the logistical and human resources from Keflavik base was moved to a new open NATO base in Romania. The new base located in the proximity of the Black Sea is now an important part of the European Defense Strategy regarding possible Russian or Middle East (Iran) aggressions.

Unlike Iceland, in Romania the idea of European integration was very popular among the population but not among the politicians with left orientation, who in the 1990 had expressed nostalgia about ex communism society. A survey made in 1995 demonstrated that 97% of the Romanians are in favor for EU membership – the highest score in Europe. (Angelescu, 2012)

In the next period Romania failed in achieving the progress in implementing the European “Aquis Communautaire” and in consequence (together with Bulgaria) was excluded from the first wave of European Enlargement. On January 2007 Romania was accepted as a new member in the European Family but with some restrictions regarding the Schengen space and monetary policy.

Both Iceland and Romania had to face the economic crises from 2007. In Iceland the phenomenon had a very strong impact on the civil society because 90% of the financial system collapsed and the currency lost half of its value. Mostly because of fishery industry the economy was able to recover but it is important to mention the assistance program provided by the IMF, Nordic States and Poland (Polish are the first minority in Iceland).

In Romania, the politicians` strategy was not centered on the welfare of common citizens; even the IMF recommended the taxation of large fortunes, the Government “in its wisdom” chose to reduce the common wages with 25%. It is important to notice that in Iceland the Parliament took measures in favor of the borrowers by creating the “Debtors Ombudsman” with enough power to reduce the value of the debts. If the credits in foreign currency are considered in Iceland a violation of the national law, in Romania there is not a similar mentality and a large number of common people are still having serious problems due to the exchange fluctuations.

As a positive aspect the economic growth was positive in the both countries and Romania is the leader of the European Union with an economic increment of 3,6 % in 2015. It is important to mention the non-conventional response of the Icelandic society regarding the “classical” way to make policy. In 2010 the Best Party promoted by the show-man Jon Gnarr obtained 35% of Reykjavik`s votes and the actor become the mayor of the Capital.

In Iceland and Romania we can find a constant struggle against acculturation and assimilation by powering neighbors. Acculturation refers to the changes that took place in a human community, caused by constant interaction with a dominant social group. (Schmidt et all, 2007, pp. 21-22) Assimilation of cultures implies also the existence of an asymmetry against the methods of distribution of power, or the degree to which a minor culture is active in the community in which it is integrated. (Vlăsceanu et all, 1998, p. 45) In both situations there was no assimilation and acculturation and the icons of the past are

still present in the daily life situations. The resistance to foreign oppression is the most important historical value in Iceland and Romania

3. The Cross Cultural Values of Iceland and Romania

The approach for this section tries to capture the influence of the cultural dimensions on the international performance of a state by comparing the values and norms between the two countries. It aims at emphasizing the importance of multiculturalism for public collaboration (Popa, 2015) and is focused on the importance of cultural synergy in interstate relations. Intercultural communication occurs in every day relations and power relations are very present in these encounters. "Communication across power divides can be very difficult, particularly when there is a cultural difference in how power is viewed or how power distance is expressed". (Martin & Nakayama, 2014, p. 316)

Without no doubt Iceland and Romania are cultural nations with very strong linguistic identities. By culture we understand a group of persons who speaks the same language and belonging to the same territory or social group. (Lun & Firkola, 2000, p. 142) The Icelandic language is the purest manifestation of the Viking spirit and Romanians are the only people from South Eastern Europe who are preserving their Latin language amidst the Slavic nations. The conservation of linguistic legacy is the most valued issue in these two countries regarding their past. Even so, where people are speaking the same language can be differences in communication style and language use. (Martin & Nakayama, 2014)

The jewellery of Icelandic language it have been transmitted across the World through the Saga. From the beginning the Icelandic literature was an open one to the World because "the poets and storytellers of Iceland followed events in the rest of Scandinavia with keen interest composing new works about contemporary matters" (Olason, 2006, p. 5).

In both languages the linguistic metaphors teach how should behave with paradoxes and the complexity of the international realities. The metaphors are used in daily life situations and using them makes us aware about the complexity of our way of thinking.

The practical importance of the metaphor with the acquisition of the ability of using it refers to the fact that Icelanders and Romanians are using it as a basis for explaining and discovering new perspectives. The metaphor requires a fine spirit of analysis, it focuses on the more subtle manifestation of national behaviour, and these are reported to the meanings given by the members of a country regardless of the place they occupy in the society. Working with metaphors, as integrative parts of intercultural diagnosis in Iceland and Romania implies "the ability to follow simultaneously both literal and symbolic communication the symbolic and metaphoric communication, forms a self-expression and a presentation of all the situations where the subject cannot be aware or able to express itself analytically" ((Grant & Oswick, 1996) cited by (Huțu, 2007, p. 124)).

The cultural metaphor offers a new way for understanding the life and behind each structure it is a universe of meanings which determines the human relations. The linguistic metaphor presents the important role of the system of beliefs, values, ideology etc. in the national reality in both countries. In Iceland as in Romania very important is the establishment and acceptance of a linguistic common code of behaviour etiquette (abstaining from religious and ethnic comments, establishing clear the individual responsibilities, the private delimitations) which can develop the solving of the fundamental dilemma of communication (Teodorascu & Arsith, 2014). In both countries there is a diachronic vision

of national language which it is the catalyst bridge to different time periods of the history – the living link with the ancestors.

For cultural values, the Geert Hofstede model presents the dynamics of the common values in a country. For the majority of the people their native values are a very important lens through which the World it is accepted or not. Hofstede identifies six cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, long term orientation and indulgence. Those represent independent preferences for the citizens of a state which differentiate them from the people belonging to other countries.

In the next figure there are presented the cross cultural values between Iceland and Romania.

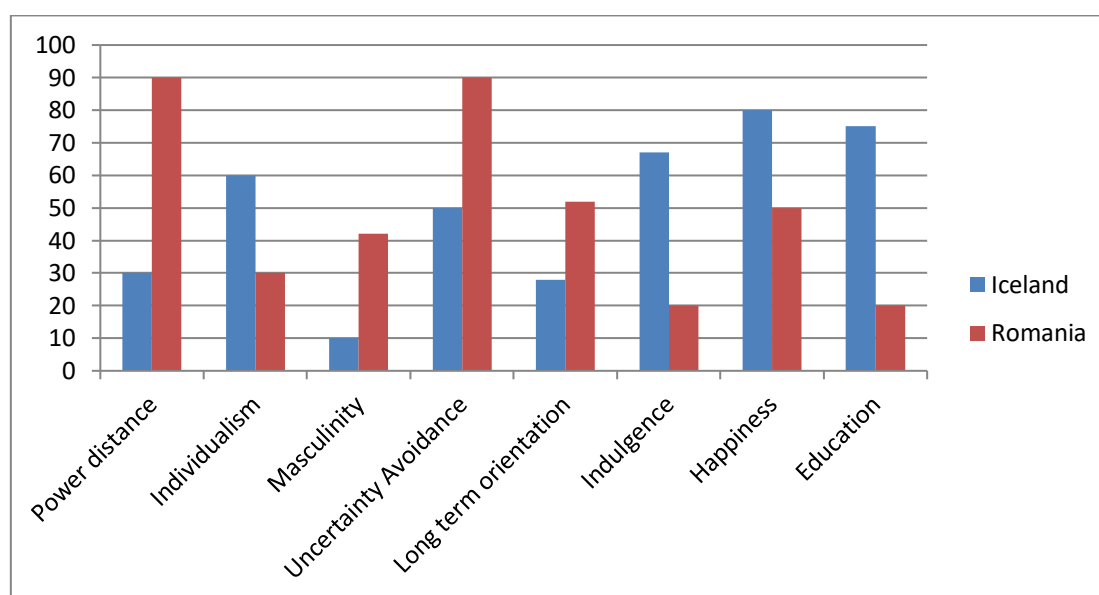


Figure 1. Cross cultural values of Icelandic and Romanian society. Adaptation of the author for Geert Hofstede values, <http://geert-hofstede.com/iceland.html>

Power Distance (PD) is the degree to which members of an organization and society encourage and reward unequal distribution of power with greater power at higher levels or expect power to be shared equally in that society (Chokkar et alii, 2008, p. 4).

Hofstede Center (2017) reported a PD score of 90 for Romania and 30 Iceland (ranking Romania as an unequal society where the people feel that they should not have aspirations beyond their rank). The Romanian score of this dimension is significantly higher than the World average, comparable with Guatemala (95), Panama (95), Philippines (94) and Russia (93). The essence of this dimension demonstrates a huge gap between the elites and the masses, a strong segmentation and an acute inequality in incomes. It is important to observe how it is possible in Romania to make the transition from “the status from ascription” to “the status by achievement” (Trompenaars, 1993). This means demonstrating how much, in present days, a person’s performances accounts for a high status rather than his allegiance to a political group, or sex (Sorcaru, 2016).

Icelandic culture could be presented like USA culture and be described as a: “very egalitarian society whose Constitution not only guarantees the existential equality of every man and woman, of whatever ethnic or national background, but in which people have come to expect that differences in status and power are minimized and hierarchical structures primarily express inequalities in roles established for convenience or efficiency’s sake”. (Chhokar et alii, 2008, p. 508)

Performance Orientations (PO) refers to the extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement or excellence (Chhokar et al., p. 45). As a country of the former European communist block, Romania is characterized by a transitional economy which has to face the substantial changes in political structure, economy and cultural configuration. No discussion of leadership and performance in Iceland or in Romania can be fully understood without, even if ever so briefly, paying attention to the historical, political, economic and social context from which it emerged (Hofstede, 2002). In particular, Romania has been influenced in the last 90 years by successive waves of political ideologies (from Monarchy through Communism to Parliamentary Republic) which shaped a paradox society which oscillates between a non-combative mentality and European Union values.

Even if it is highly evaluated and encouraged in management, the performance is jeopardized in Romania due to the clientelist relations, but there exists a strong expectation of the society to emerge the country as a performance and future oriented nation. Therefore, it is very useful in Romania to present how much the competence counts in obtaining top levels on political or business hierarchy and not the social connections or any other such criteria. And because Icelandic culture is perceived all over the world as a future oriented society, which invests in rationality and pragmatism and guarantees a great egalitarianism among its citizens, its model is an realistic benchmark for improving the Romanian *status quo*.

The happiness index and the importance of education for the Icelandic people is strictly connected with the role of performance orientation in the community. The Icelandic Performance orientation it is related to the country's openness to change, its willingness to take risks and try new things, its pragmatic mentality and its desire to excel in order to achieve tangible results. The democratic ideas, support of others and sense of fair play may help in real life situations in Iceland. Icelandic management style can offer for a recent South-Eastern European democracy the models for the wealth of recognition to encourage competition and to accept the legitimacy of the victorious party in the competitions.

The conflict situations appear in everyday situations and "the way in which people respond to conflict may be influenced by their cultural background...most specifically, most people deal with conflict in the way they learned with growing up – their default style" (Martin & Nakayama, 2014, p. 235).

The intention of conflict management strategies is to generate performance using a free communication style. An increase with 1% of level of economic freedom will generate an increase of economic, political, and social effectiveness with 3,8%. Also an increase with 1% of the quality of rule of law will contribute with 7,5% at the effectiveness area (Pohoata et al., 2013, p. 31).

As a country from South Eastern Europe, Romania is characterized by a conflict management strategy which has to face the substantial changes in political structure, in economy and in cultural configuration.

The solving of conflicts is jeopardized in Romania due to the clientelist relations (if you are better political connected you have the chance to solve all the problems) but there are strong expectations from the people to emerge the country as a performance oriented nation.

The Icelandic conflict management strategy it is related to the country's openness to change, its willingness to take risks and try new things, its pragmatic mentality and its desire to excel in order to achieve tangible results. Conflict management situations can be solved through a "theta reddast/it will sort itself out" attitude because no matter how complex the situation is, in the end things will all work out and even the rules exist can be stretched and expanded as needed (Kristjansdottir et al., 2015).

In general, for a conflict management audit Vanderlinden et al. (2010) identify four key stages: observing, analyzing, evaluation and formulation recommendation. Also is recommended to place the

cultural values in the general context of the cooperation, taking into account the main objectives, but also the particularities of the external environment.

Drennan D. (1992) proposes, for example, the approach of the conflict as an internal approach, as a factor that shapes the internal culture, the main objectives of the managers, having the role to create a team spirit between the employees¹. Is important taking into consideration the objective pursued by the all (staff or employees) and the ways in which they can turn it into performance.

The strategy of conflict management should be based on dialogue, where those interested could be able to ask questions, because in such complex matters always can appear useful new directions. A competent person trained in the research field, is able through its interventions to correct any errors or deficiencies who escaped to those who have served the project, and conversation inevitably is helping to discover new truths.

The Icelandic tradition in conflict management and in political science (the oldest Parliament in the World) can provide for the Romanian elite the civic obligation to seek wealth not only for personal use, but equally to the well-being of the community – a high human orientation.

4. Conclusions

The dynamics of Globalization encourages the study of cross cultural differences between countries and their impact on effectiveness in the proximity. Making progress is quintessential for Icelandic and Romanian societies in the recent European context. The best way for selecting foreign partners involves a complex process in which each partner (with his unique cultural background) it is evaluated.

Icelandic society is a second chance culture and, according to Harold Bloom theory (1997), an *anxiety of influence* is necessary for the Romanian people, because after 45 years of communism and 25 years of hard transition, the Romanians needs to struggle in the global market since the entire South Eastern Europe is still embedded in the historical, political economic, social and cultural frame of the past.

In Romania there is also a need for Innovative Leadership (the Icelandic style) to be seen as a process of influence in which the individual leader exercises considerable impact on others by inducing them to think and behave in an effective way. The Leadership has to be seen as an expression of the democratic will and a process oriented to global collaboration through cultural sensibility and adaptability.

We can note that for the Icelandic culture the country right to self-determination is stronger in the economical agreements with the European Union. In the first part of the study it is noticed that for Iceland the first steps for a European Integration had a strong economical and national importance. In Iceland more than in Romania, it is possible to identify the importance of ethno political identity because the groups are “organized around their shared identity and seek gains for members of their groups” and the “material and political demands as claims arising from their cultural concerns” (Gurr, 1996, p. 53). The welfare of the nation and the security of the fishing boundaries are directly connected with the rejection of EU integration.

In Romania the group leaders have not a common identity with a political doctrine, the loyalty is strictly to the restricted clan (family, business associates etc.) and it is very common to change often the political party (There are Members in Parliament who in 3 mandates changed 3 or even more political Parties etc.). Even Romania is better linked with European Union (from the institutional point of view) this

¹ Cited by (Huțu, 2007, pp. 120-122).

country it is much more limited than Iceland in achieving performance, in part due to the huge phenomenon of corruption. In Romania, future-oriented behaviours, planning, investing in the future are not highly ranked. In Iceland, an expression of Performance orientation is represented by investments in education and personnel development (postgraduate education, competence development, etc.).

The approach which I proposed here, the comparison of several values between Iceland and Romania will help in the future to analyze the contemporary educational and business environment between the two nations. This study helps to understand the importance of the cultural mediator who could be able to provide suggestion which may have a strategic role in any research area.

Similar studies emphasize the conditions through which a project could be operative by involving the collaboration and concentration of all the interested parties. The synergic participation it is achieved only when people identifies themselves with a common project and take collective responsibilities. It is recommended to place the cultural values in the general context of the cooperation, taking into account the main objectives, but also the particularities of the external environment.

We can infer that understating the cultural values of each person is the key factor in the evolution of international collaboration. In conclusion, this limited research could be the basis for an extensive study focused on deeper understanding of the Icelandic political culture and can improve the Romanian cultural adaptability with cross-cultural effectiveness in the South East Europe.

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