

Exploring the Cultural Differences in Polish and Turkish Companies

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ABSTRACT: *Cultural differences are of crucial importance for conducting the international business. The general regularities seem not to account for the particularities of single countries. Thus, the purpose of the present research was to study business culture in Poland and Turkey due to their strengthening position as regional leaders. The research relied on the semi-structured interviews performed in tourism companies amongst Polish and Turkish business practitioners in 2016. The data was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. Polish entrepreneurs were found to prove more pro-transactional approach while Turkish respondents emphasized pro-partnership one. In Poland the opinion on the business partner was formulated based on his/hers competences while in Turkey the role of good manners, politeness and the knowledge of culture, art and geopolitical situation was dominant. Polish respondents claimed high punctuality while one third of Turkish stated that it is possible for their business partners to wait for them even if they have no excuse for being late. The qualitative research presented in the paper requires to be followed by the extensive quantitative one. The paper attempts to fill the gap concerning the cultural differences in conducting business in Poland and Turkey.*

Keywords: *business culture, cultural environment, cultural differences, tourism companies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Just like all other economic entities, enterprises operate under diverse conditions that influence the way their functioning and broadly understood competitiveness. The cultural factor can be perceived as a determinant of competitive edge [1]. Guang and Trotter [2] state that the ability to understand cultural differences is one of key skills which must be acquired in order to gain competitive edge in international markets. Models of behaviour shaped by culture affect communication and outcomes of business activities. Hofstede thinks that the influence of culture can be distinguished in the areas of values, rituals, heroes, symbols and practices [3, p. 24]. This article analyses rituals and practices that are affected by the cultural factor and are present in business.

Cateora and Ghauri [4] suggest dividing the environment relating to complex market entities into the domestic and the foreign one, taking into consideration the level of control these entities have over it. The authors claim that elements of the cultural environment are “uncontrollables”, and influence the “controllables”, i.e. factors that depend on the enterprises’ actions. Both enterprises’ actions and consumers’ choices are embedded in their national culture. Hofstede claims that systems of national values should be treated as facts, similar in their nature to the geographic location of the country or its climate. The author thinks that the concept of culture is more literally related to the nation than to the state [3].

The present article aims at demonstrating the impact of cultural differences on business behaviours. The business behaviours of Polish and Turkish tourism companies were analyzed. No similar analysis has been found in literature. One can pose a question whether the behaviours of Polish and Turkish companies in the areas of rituals and practices are as different as one could assume, based on the divisions suggested by Hofstede et al. [3], and Gesteland [5].

The need to undertake this analysis results from globalization, which intensifies direct and indirect contacts between enterprises or enterprises and clients from different cultural and social backgrounds. Cultural differences can form an invisible barrier in business communication [6, p. 9]. Also, the ability to communicate with people from other cultures can be assumed to significantly contribute to successful negotiations [3, p. 391]. This is because problems can arise whenever the listener interprets the message based on their own cultural patterns, which can distort the intentions of the author. Looking at study results, one might note that culture is treated as a perceptive filter which is a potential source of interference [3, 6, 7].

In the age of globalization, processes referred to as cultural convergence and divergence become apparent [e.g.: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]. Bartosik–Purgat defines convergence as “mutual assimilation of cultural patterns, norms and behaviours” [12, p. 36], while divergence, according to the author, “leads to gradual

separation of cultures and seeking individual identity” [12, p. 36]. It is worth noting that cultural features resulting from cultural convergence are similar to the “Western values” characteristic for the countries of Western Europe and the United States [14]. One must note, though, that in this case, the assimilation of attitudes or behavioral models can only be superficial [15, p. 34; 10, p. 9]. Operating under the assumption that these processes will intensify, the aim of the article is also to reflect the extent to which Polish and Turkish companies differ. Therefore, the authors verified the level of convergence in cultural differences.

Despite the numerous research on the business culture the research gap concerning the particularities of single countries seem to prevail. Thus the purpose of the present research was to study business culture in Poland and Turkey due to their strengthening position as regional leaders. The qualitative research performed relied on the series of semi-structured interviews. The results provided insights into the pro-partnership and pro-transactional business cultures, ceremonial and non-ceremonial business cultures and polychronic and monochronic approaches in both countries. The first section provides literature studies and theoretical considerations. The second one focuses on the methods of empirical research. Third section provides results and discussion. The paper terminates with conclusions.

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Literature offers many ways to classify types of culture. The best-known classifications include the results of studies by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov [3], and Hall [7]. According to Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov [3, p. 112] Poland and Turkey share a similar distance to authority. Other cultural aspects distinguished by the authors (individuality – collectivity, femininity – masculinity, avoiding uncertainty) are different for Poland and Turkey. One might state that despite globalization, cultural differences are still apparent in the behaviors of enterprises. Hall [7] introduced a distinction between high- and low-context cultures. Asian countries primarily belong to the former group, while Western and Northern European countries – to the latter.

This article adopts Gesteland’s classification of types of culture [5]. Gesteland represents management science, emphasizing that in this particular discipline, the consequences of inter-cultural relations have been visibly manifested. Gesteland presents examples of conceptualization of cultural differences and assumes that representatives of particular countries (nations) exhibit specific patterns of cultural behavior. The author distinguishes the following categories:

- Pro-transactional and pro-partnership cultures. People with pro-transactional attitudes concentrate on completing a task while those with pro-partnership attitudes are more people-focused.
- Ceremonial (often referred to as hierarchical) and non-ceremonial cultures. In non-ceremonial cultures, equality of status is valued, while in ceremonial cultures respect hierarchical orders and differences in status between people.
- Monochronic and polychronic cultures. People who pay attention to punctuality in fulfilling their responsibilities belong to the former group, while those who demonstrate a more relaxed attitude to timetables – to the latter.

Based on the above discussion, the paper focuses on and develops further three concepts in the context of Poland and Turkey:

- (1) The distinction between the pro-partnership and pro-transactional business cultures.
- (2) The ceremonial and non-ceremonial business cultures.
- (3) The polychronic and monochronic approaches.

The study conducted will enable a conceptualization of the problem for specific countries. As mentioned above, no studies on the influence of culture have as yet been conducted regarding Polish and Turkish tourism companies. Gesteland does not list these countries in his work. According to Gesteland, the pro-partnership culture is represented by “most Asian and Arab countries” while “Central and Eastern European countries represent a moderately pro-transactional culture” [5]. Based on this, H 1.1 and H 1.2 were formulated in this article. Gesteland [5, p. 49] includes “most European and Asian countries” in the ceremonial culture category, without giving specific examples. Thus, H 2.1 and H 2.2 have been formulated in order to verify whether Poland and Turkey represent ceremonial culture. However, the authors point out that differences can be observed between businessmen from these countries, therefore Poland was termed a country of moderately ceremonial business culture. In his division into polychronic and monochronic cultures, Gesteland [5, p. 56] included “the Arab world” in the first group – thus, the authors aim to verify whether Turkish companies are also consistent with this classification (H 3.1). Poland is a Central European country, but Gesteland did not include such a category in his work. “Russia and most Eastern European countries” were classified as moderately monochronic, while “Nordic and other Germanic European countries” were classified as monochronic. The authors of the present paper presume that Poland belongs to the latter category (H 3.2).

III. METHODS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The purpose of the present research was to explore the similarities and differences between the Polish and Turkish business cultures. The research was conducted in both Poland and Turkey in the period of 2016. The subject of the research was the countries' business culture. It was based on the qualitative research covering 28 semi-structured interviews, each of which included 7 substantial questions. The interviews were conducted in companies involved in such tourism characteristic activities as: accommodation for visitors (n=7), food and beverage serving (n=6), passenger transportation (n=4), travel agencies (n=4), cultural activities (n=3), sport and recreation (n=2), retail trade of country-specific characteristic goods (n=2). The actual research was preceded by a series of two trials aiming at testing the adequacy of the research questionnaire. The interviews were conducted by a group of two experienced researchers.

Behavioural economics, which imposes that several things are not quantifiable supports the use of qualitative methods. Qualitative research is commonly employed in social science. Its popularity stems from the growing complexity of contemporary world where often it is difficult to assess all the details with the use of quantitative research. The role of qualitative research is mainly not to test the theory, but to create new theories based on inductively analyzing social phenomena [16, p. 7]. According to the Cambridge Dictionaries qualitative research stands for a type of "research that aims to find out people's opinions and feelings rather than information that can easily be shown in numbers" [17]. At the same time it assumes that the reality under investigation is context-bound. "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense, of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" [18]. As Flick states "qualitative research is oriented towards analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people's expression and activities in their local context" [19, p. 21].

The important features of qualitative research include four elements. The "appropriates of methods and theories" signifies that (1) the goal of the research is to develop new and empirically grounded theories instead of testing what is already known, (2) the objects under investigation are not limited to a single variable, but are treated as complex entities, which determines the choice of appropriate methods. The "perspectives of the participants and heir diversity" indicate that the objects of study may be approached using different viewpoints – object itself, connected items, professionals, etc. all of which differ due to backgrounds related to them. The results may be explained only in relation to the concrete context of the case. The "reflexivity of the researcher and the research" covers the fact that the subjectivity of objects being studies and the researcher is a part of research process. Researchers' reflections (impressions, feelings, irritations etc.) become new data in its own right. The "variety of approaches and methods" indicates that qualitative research most often is not based on unified methodological concepts and methods [19].

3.1. Quality of qualitative research

The highest research quality is achieved when: "internal validity, the degree to which the results can be attributed to treatment; external validity, the generalizability of the results; reliability, the extent to which the findings can be replicated; objectivity, the extent to which the findings are free from bias" [20, p. 30]. The requirement of validity is fulfilled when the research is trustworthy, relevant, plausible, credible, confirmable, and representative [20, p. 34]. Internal validity "concerns the degree to which results of a study can be attributed to the independent variable" [21, p. 221]. External validity signifies that the sample is representative for the population [21, p. 221]. The reliability may be seen as "the reassurance that another researcher investigating the same issue or working with the same data set would derive the same findings" [20, p. 34¹]. The generalizability stands for "the degree to which the research methods justify the inference that the findings are true for a broader group than study participants; the inference that the findings can be generalized from the sample to the population" [21, p. 719].

3.2. Interviews

In the present research, the method of interviews will be employed. The verbal data will be collected and interpreted in a specific research design. The process of carrying interviews covers: conceptualizing projects, establishing access and making contact with participants, interviewing them, transcribing the data, and working with the gathered material [22, p. 11]. The semi-structured interviews are well suited for exploring the opinions and perception of the respondents regarding sensitive and complex issues. They allow the clarification of answers and probing for more information. Moreover, they are used when respondents' stories in the sample vary considerably and the use of standardized interviews is precluded [23, p. 330]. Sequencing in each interview must be the same to assure that different responses stem from differences among respondents. However,

¹ Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., and Dillon, L. (2003), 'Quality in qualitative evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence', National Centre for Social Research, London.

wording of the questions (but not the meaning) may change slightly to adapt to particular respondent (who may have different levels of English). There is a principle of equivalence of meaning [23, p. 330].

The semi-structured interview's protocol may be organized around three segments. Opening segment creates space for the central story behind the participant's experience. The direction and depth of the interview is achieved through open-ended questions. The first segment aims to elicit data that cannot be anticipated in advance. The free narrative should be assured before theoretically shaped questions can follow [24, pp. 46-47]. The first segment concerned the pro-partnership and pro-transactional approaches observed in both countries. The middle segment's purpose is to ask questions of greater specificity and broader contextual levels. While the first segment moved participant into his/hers story, the second segment attends to the nuances of the story. It may be achieved through the questions constructed as the interview proceeds or through the questions structure into the protocol. The questions of increased specificity should be asked in the second segment, as certain degree of trust has been established. The second segment refers to the ceremonial character of the business culture. The concluding segment is designed to return to the points requiring further exploration. Furthermore, questions reflecting theoretical areas of focus of the study may be placed there. The areas that participants initially didn't consider should be evoked. The third segment concerned the polychronic and monochronic business culture. Once the subject is exhausted, the interview should terminate.

3.3. Sample size

In qualitative research many fewer people are studied than in quantitative one. However, researchers delve more deeply into the problem under investigation [25, p. 8]. The size of the sample depends on the study purpose and subjects' accessibility. It may vary from one to more than hundred. The rule of thumb in solving the problem of average difficulty in average conditions is to gather loosely around 30 interviewees [26, p. 9]. However, the rules of thumb are a rarity, most authors avoid indicating any rule of thumb as far as sample size is concerned.

The determination of sample size in advance was not possible. The research was conducted until the saturation point was reached. Thus until each interview added something new to the already discovered patterns [25]. Usually the great deal of information is learned through the first few interviews and around the fifteenth some firm patterns are already discovered. In the case of homogenous groups typically 12 interviews are sufficient to reach the point of saturation. However, the basic elements for meta-themes occur as early as 6 interviews [27]. In the present research the saturation point was achieved by the 28th interview. 16 interviews were conducted in Poland, and 12 were conducted in Turkey.

There are several factors which shift the saturation point [28]:

- The complexity of the research – the greater the complexity, the more interviews are needed.
- The researcher's experience – the greater the experience the less interviews are necessary.
- The sense of the researcher that there are enough interviews – the more interviews were performed already, the less are still needed.

Furthermore, there may be some requirements imposed by the choice of sampling techniques and methods. There are also technical aspects as: the number of members in the research team [28], and resourcing [22] The size of the sample should be augmented if: controversial topic is pursued, surprising or provocative findings are anticipated or discovered, complex conceptual analyses are constructed, professional credibility is sought. Concerning the last factor, there should be as many interviews carried as necessary to achieve the goals of the research [29, pp. 21-22].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the performed studies delivered insights into Turkish and Polish approaches to conducting business in tourism. Interestingly the results challenged some of the initial assumptions. The thematic analysis allowed defining and interpreting the results in order to determine the overarching themes [30]. In relation to the pro-partnership and pro-transactional approaches four concepts were covered. The first of them embraced the business-meeting organization. It was ascertained that 72% of Polish respondents preferred the business-first approach. It meant that initially the focus was placed on the issue of interest and only after the negotiations were concluded the participants carried on with the informal get-together. The opposite situation presented itself in Turkey where 58% of respondents claimed to start the meeting with a form of introduction before passing to the actual business. Usually the participants got to know each other during any kind of meal.

Next concept included conducting business talks during informal meetings (aside from the core part of negotiations). The results for Polish and Turkish respondents were similar. 19% of Poles and 17% of Turks does so while 13% and 8% consecutively do not permit such possibility. Occasionally and depending on the context 69% of Poles and 75% of Turks allow business talks to continue during informal meetings.

The third concept referred to the actual topics discussed during the business talks and the moments in which they appear. The topics were gathered into seven dominant categories. The topics could appear before, during and after the meeting. They could also be avoided. The summary of the Polish and Turkish respondents' responses is delivered in Table 1.

Table 1. Topics discussed during the business talks

	When	Country	City	Weather	Sport	Family (general)	Family life (details)	Other personal questions
Poland	Before	38%	31%	44%	6%	0%	0%	0%
	During	13%	25%	6%	6%	6%	6%	0%
	After	6%	13%	13%	63%	56%	19%	13%
	At all	44%	31%	38%	25%	38%	75%	88%
Turkey	Before	83%	67%	42%	17%	17%	0%	8%
	During	0%	0%	8%	25%	8%	8%	17%
	After	8%	25%	25%	50%	42%	25%	33%
	At all	8%	8%	25%	8%	33%	67%	42%

Source: own development

As may be seen in Table 1 Turkish respondents are in general more open during the business conversations. In the case of all the topics the willingness to avoid them was overrepresented by Polish. The results confirmed the pro-transactional approach represented by Poles. The willingness to avoid is especially the case of other personal questions, which are avoided by 88% of Polish and only 42% of Turkish. Before the meeting Polish focus on weather (44%) and the general taught about the situation in the country (38%). During the meeting they seem to avoid the threads disconnected from the business. After the meeting they gladly discuss sport (63%) and families in general (56%). Turkish prefer to concentrate on the general situation in the country (83%) and the city (67%) at the beginning of the business talks. Similarly to Poles they focus on the actual business in the central part of the talks. Just after the talks Turks discussed sport (50%) and their families in general (42%). The distribution of the responses confirmed further that Polish represent the business-first approach and are talkative after the deal is concluded while the Turkish are generally very open and willing to converse before the actual business is discussed.

The fourth concept concerning the pro-partnership and pro-transactional approaches covered the personal contacts with the business partners. Half of the Turkish respondents stated that in addition to having the business relations they also have personal relations with their business partners. The other half claimed to have the personal relations only from time to time. In the case of Polish the personal relations were admitted by 31% of respondents. The majority (69%) claimed to have such relations occasionally.

Based on the above evidence it may be concluded that Polish entrepreneurs tend to demonstrate the pro-transactional approach characterized by focusing on the actual business before moving to informal get-together. The Turkish entrepreneurs demonstrated pro-partnership culture characterized by high openness during the business meetings including all sorts of topics. Also the large part of informal conversations could take place before the substantial discussion.

In relation to the ceremonial and moderated ceremonial business culture the factors determining respondents' opinion on the business partner were analyzed. The detailed results are delivered in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors determining opinion on business partner

	Importance	Age	Sex	Knowledge of culture and art	Knowledge of geopolitical situation	Good manners	Politeness	Respect for older people	Competences	Position in the organisation
Poland	Not important	50%	44%	38%	31%	0%	6%	0%	0%	6%
	Rather not important	19%	31%	19%	13%	6%	13%	25%	0%	6%
	Semi important	31%	13%	31%	25%	38%	13%	6%	0%	31%
	Rather important	0%	0%	6%	31%	6%	25%	31%	12%	25%
	Very important	0%	13%	6%	0%	0%	50%	44%	38%	88%
Turkey	Not important	27%	70%	9%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
	Rather not important	9%	20%	18%	8%	8%	8%	9%	0%	8%
	Semi important	45%	10%	36%	17%	25%	25%	36%	25%	25%
	Rather important	9%	0%	18%	50%	17%	17%	27%	42%	33%
	Very important	9%	0%	18%	8%	50%	50%	27%	33%	25%

Source: own development

As may be seen in Table 2 the perception of the business partner depends on the slightly different factors in Poland and Turkey. The most striking difference concerns the role of competences. Polish respondents in 88% of the cases claimed competences to be very important in shaping their opinion on the business partner. At the same time this factor was by far the most important. Surprisingly such response was the case only for 33% of Turkish respondents, giving place to good manners (50%) and politeness (50%). Polish respondents attributed very little importance to the age of their business partner - 69% of the respondents claimed it to be not or rather not important. Turks seem to attribute more value to the business partner's age – 63% claimed age to be at least semi important. Moreover, the knowledge of culture, art and of geopolitical situation pleased Turkish respondents. Consecutively 36% and 58% of them claimed these categories to be at least rather important. In the case of Poland, the numbers equal 12% and 31%. Poles attribute more value to the sex of their business partner – 13% of the respondents claimed it to be very important. In Turkey the categories not and rather not important grouped 90% of the respondents. Furthermore, in Poland the respect for elderly people was more strongly indicated by the respondents – 69% claiming it to be at least rather important. In Turkey 54% of the respondents represented such view. Good manners and politeness were important in both countries. In Turkey these categories were indicated both very important in the 50% of the cases. In Poland 50% of the respondents claimed good manners to be very important and 44% did so for the politeness. The importance of the position in the organization was of similar importance in the case of both countries. Therefore, the dominant role of competences in judging the business partner observed in Poland was compensated by good manners, politeness and the knowledge of culture, art and geopolitical situation observed in the case of Turkish respondents.

In conclusion it seems that both countries demonstrate the similar level of ceremonial culture. The perception of the business partner based on his/hers position in the organization was of similar (relatively small) importance. In Poland the driving force was represented by the competences, which corresponded to the previously described pro-transactional approach. In Turkey the general courtesy and the ability to talk about diverse topics formed the basis of business partner perception which corresponded to the pro-partnership approach.

In order to study the polychronic and monochronic cultures the concept of punctuality was evoked. 33% of Turkish respondents stated that it is possible for their business partners to wait for them even if they have no excuse for being late. In Poland none of the respondents allowed such possibility. At the same time 56% of Poles and 44% of Turks allowed the lateness in the case of important events preventing punctuality. Lastly 44% of Polish respondents and 25% of Turkish ones claimed that there is no possibility for their business partner to wait for them irrespectively of the circumstances.

The respondents were asked about the reasons for them to be late. They could provide as several responses, which were then grouped and categorized. The results are delivered in Table 3.

Table 3. Reasons for being late

	Poland	Turkey
I could be late due to an accident of mine	23%	40%
I could be late due to an accident of my family member	46%	20%
I could be late due to an accident of my friend	4%	0%
I could be late due to a minor problem of my relative	4%	0%
I could be late due to traffic	12%	20%
I could be late due to time-extension of previous meeting	12%	20%

Source: own development

Based on the evidence it may be concluded that Poles represent the monochronic culture, while Turks demonstrate the polychronic approach. Analysis of cultural influence also reveals an opposite effect, i.e. the influence of entrepreneurs and consumers on the national culture, which is, after all, strictly associated with individuals comprising a given cultural group [31]. Globalization processes affect the bidirectional relationship.

One must also bear in mind that enterprise culture is not determined exclusively by the cultural values of a society. Each organizational culture is, to a certain extent, unique and autonomous [12, p. 19]. Any enterprise can develop its own patterns of behavior. However, in accordance with Hofstede's onion model [3], cultural inertia stems, among other factors, from the system of socially accepted values, making up the foundation of collective identity. Thus, globalization notwithstanding, cultural differences between Polish and Turkish enterprises can be expected to affect negotiation processes, contacts, and international competitiveness.

Further conclusions could be drawn from a study of the same enterprises using a dynamic approach, performed in several years' time. It would be worth investigating whether it is only the "Western" lifestyle that is disseminated by globalization processes, as anticipated by Hannerz [32, pp. 66–75], who suggested that in most variants of globalization, Western models would be adopted by other cultures.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite numerous research on the business cultures, there is no evidence accounting for the single countries' particularities. Thus the present research focused on the cultural environment of tourism companies in Poland and Turkey due to their strengthening position as regional leaders. Such comparative analysis seems to be a novelty in respect to the previous research. The research was based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Poland and Turkey in 2016.

The research demonstrated that Polish entrepreneurs show the pro-transactional approach while Turkish entrepreneurs demonstrated pro-partnership culture and high openness during the business meetings. The entrepreneurs in both countries demonstrate moderate level of ceremonial culture. In Poland business partners are perceived based on their competences, in Turkey the focus is set on good manners, politeness and the knowledge of culture, art and geopolitical situation. Furthermore, it was observed that Polish entrepreneurs represent the monochronic culture, while Turkish ones demonstrate the polychronic approach.

The qualitative considerations delivered in the present paper provided insights into the business cultures in Poland and Turkey. However, the nature of qualitative research is that it is more suitable for constructing hypotheses than for verifying them. Thus further research should encompass the extensive quantitative study allowing more definitive conclusions.

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