



Ethnicity and acculturation of environmental attitudes and behaviors: A cross-cultural study with Brazilians in Canada

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to identify the possible acculturation of sustainable attitudes and behaviors by ethnic groups in a developed country. A descriptive research, qualitative and quantitative in nature, was performed with Brazilians living in Canada. The comparison, through self-assessment, of their current attitudes and behaviors with the attitudes and behaviors they had while living in Brazil revealed that the knowledge and the feelings were already pro-environmental, but the behavior was not, and it really changed after the migration, especially with regard to waste separation and the replacement of plastic bags for their own shopping bags. This result shows that even when there already exists the willingness to adopt sustainable behaviors, the lack of norms, laws and infrastructure influences the attitude-behavior gap.

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability was coined explicitly to suggest that it was possible to achieve economic growth and industrialization without environmental damage (Adams, 2006), and that it is impossible to consume without limits in an ecologically limited world (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013).

In the ensuing decades, the mainstream of sustainable development thinking was progressively developed, and Brazil was the scene of two of the most important events about sustainability. In 1992, Rio de Janeiro hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also called the Earth Summit or ECO-92, the birthplace of Agenda 21, an action plan for developing the planet sustainably through the twenty-first century, signed by 179 countries. In 2012, twenty years later, another important event was held again in Rio de Janeiro, called Rio + 20 Conference, where world leaders, along with thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other groups discussed how to reduce poverty, advance social equity, and ensure environmental protection for the planet.

But Brazil itself is not yet a sustainable country, and Brazilians have not developed an environmental consciousness, which is reflected in their daily behavior (Instituto Akatu, 2013). In 2012, the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) produced by a team of experts from the U.S. universities of Columbia and Yale, ranked Brazil in the 30th place

on environmental performance among the 132 countries surveyed (Emerson et al., 2012), and in 2014, out of 178 countries, Brazil fell to the 77th position (Hsu et al., 2014). In 2016, Brazil came in 46th place (Hsu et al., 2016).

Some researchers argue that sustainability, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Elkington, 1997), must be understood as a fundamental cultural idea (Adams, 2006). Whether people themselves take responsibility for the environment or expect their governments to take responsibility also varies by culture (Mooij, 2011). It is suggested that environmentalism has become an important part of the culture of developed countries, and performing certain pro-environmental behaviors is a form of cultural praxis of citizenship or ritual forms of participation in civic life (McCarthy, 1996, as cited in Mukherji, 2005).

Thus, considering that annually thousands of Brazilians go to study and work abroad, we are lead to ask: How is the Brazilians' environmental performance when they immigrate to a developed country? One of the favorite Brazilians' destination is Canada which is as one of the most opened countries for the entry of skilled foreign labor (Pádua, 2015). Also sustainability is a message that Canadians take very seriously. In 2012, Canada was in 37th place in the environmental performance ranking of the EPI Index (Emerson et al., 2012), and in 2016, it places in the 25th position (Hsu et al., 2016).

This research aims to identify the process of environmental

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Table 1

Comparison of Brazil, Canada and Canada-Quebec, based on Hofstede's dimensions.

Source: Hofstede et al. (2010).

Dimension	Brazil	Canada	Canada-Quebec
Power distance The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	69	39	54
Uncertainty avoidance The extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations.	76	48	60
Individualism × collectivism The extent to which the decisions about a person's life are determined by the individual or by the in-group (a person's circle of family, friends, or peers).	38	80	73
Long term orientation Describes how the society deal with the challenges of the present and future, while maintains some links with its own past.	44	36	Not evaluated
Masculinity-femininity Refers to a focus on "material success" as opposed to a concern with the "quality of life".	49	52	45

acculturation of Brazilians who immigrate to Canada, a country with a developed environmental culture, and compare it, through self-assessment – the most widely used methodology in acculturation research (Sam & Berry, 2006) – with the attitudes and behavior they had when they lived in Brazil.

To achieve our goal, we draw upon two studies conducted with Canadians: 1) The influence of culture on pro-environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behavior: a Canadian perspective (Laroche, Toffoli, Kim, & Muller, 1996), and 2) Cultural differences in environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Canadian consumers (Laroche, Bergeron, Tomiuk, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2002). These inspired our data collection instrument for the quantitative research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Ethnicity and the acculturation of attitudes and behaviors

Ethnicity is broadly defined as the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group (Pires & Stanton, 2005). The progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (i.e. ideas, words, values, norms, behaviors, institutions) by persons, groups or classes of a given ethnicity is acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006). Acculturation involves contact that takes place at both group and individual levels leading to individual cognitive, affective and behavioral changes (Sam & Berry, 2006), and it is also positively related to environmental attitudes and behaviors (Dunlap & Mertig, 1995; Laroche et al., 2002; Mukherji, 2005).

Attitudes and behaviors are components of the acculturation strategies exhibited in day-to-day intercultural encounters, and changes in various aspect of acculturation are likely to occur at different rates (Sam & Berry, 2006). As the concept of cultural pluralism became more entrenched, researchers modeled a more complex acculturation process, whereby minority groups can learn and adapt to the host/majority culture while simultaneously preserving and promoting aspects of their original heritage (Cleveland, Laroche, Pons, & Kastoun, 2009), putting forth that ethnic consumers are aware of a balance between their sense of self and the place (Rosenbaum & Montoya, 2007), since values, ideologies and world-views are not changed as easily as other aspects of acculturation such as knowledge and behaviors (Sam & Berry, 2006).

An element of cultural diversity is the concern that different ethnic groups who immigrate to a developed country may come from cultures in which certain pro-environment behaviors are not common (Mukherji, 2005), so immigrants from developing countries would have less concern for the environment. However, researchers argue that poor environmental conditions in the immigrants' home countries would have sensitized them to environmental awareness (Dunlap & Mertig, 1995; Mukherji, 2005), thus there would be no difference between immigrants' and residents' sustainable attitudes and behaviors. In some cases, ethnic diversity, taken to refer to the consumer's original ethnic

background, is assumed to decline in importance in a process of assimilation to the dominant host culture (Pires & Stanton, 2005).

Most acculturation studies are designed to examine similarities and differences across ethnic groups or generations within or between societies, but there is an increasing interest in comparisons of acculturation orientations across countries (Sam & Berry, 2006). Our focus is the cultural influence of Canada on Brazilians' sustainable attitudes and behavior.

2.2. Sustainable attitudes and behaviors in Brazil and Canada

Canada's experience with diversity distinguishes it from most other countries. Its 35 million inhabitants (Statistics Canada1, 2017) reflect a cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup found nowhere else on earth; approximately 200,000 immigrants a year, from all parts of the globe, continue to choose Canada as their new home (Library and Archives Canada, 2014). According to the Government of Canada (2016), Brazil is a priority market for the country, and both countries share strong cultural and academic connections.

A challenge facing acculturation researchers is how to demonstrate the existence of a cultural difference between groups and individuals in contact with each other (Sam & Berry, 2006). Hofstede's original framework of five dimensions (Hofstede, 2001), is enthusiastically praised and acidly criticized, but the most widely used national cultural framework in psychology, sociology, marketing, management studies, or for comparative cross-cultural studies (Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007) reflects such differences between Brazil and Canada.

Due to some peculiarities of the French-Canadians, Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) addresses a specific analysis of Canada-Quebec. As our research takes place in Montreal, the biggest city in the province of Quebec, we present in Table 1 the comparison between Brazil, Canada and Canada-Quebec based on Hofstede's dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Husted (2005) – interested in understanding how specific cultural values actually affect human activity related to environmental sustainability – used data published by Hofstede (1997) for fifty countries and three regions, and five other countries that were not part of Hofstede's original study, to examine the relationship among Hofstede's dimensions and environmental sustainability. Husted (2005) found that higher levels of power distance and masculinity are related to a lower social and institutional capacity for environmental sustainability; also higher levels of individualism in a country are related to a higher social and institutional capacity for environmental sustainability. Uncertainty avoidance was not significantly related to capacity for environmental sustainability (Husted, 2005; Park, Russell, & Lee, 2007), and long-term orientation was not examined as a variable in Husted's study (2005). However, Park et al. (2007), in a similar research, found a positive relation between the level of education and the degree of natural environmental consciousness, and they conclude that, as a consequence,

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