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# Are National Cultures Changing? Evidence from the World Values Survey

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze from a quantitative standpoint the stability of the concept of ‘national culture’. In this respect, we analyzed whether significant changes in people’s perception have occurred in the past 25 years in different national cultures. A longitudinal study based on data provided by World Values Survey and European Values Survey was conducted. 13 countries were selected. One of the main research findings is that some national cultures are more stable than others. The cultures that are subject to major changes, such as economic ones, change to a greater extent and faster, while others change more slowly. Results and limits of the research are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of national culture and of its study has long been argued in numerous researches pertaining to a large number of fields: management (Liu, Meng & Fellows, 2015; Mao & Shen, 2015), sociology (Ye & Ng, 2015), marketing and market research (Assiouras et. all, 2015), medicine (Bailey & Kind, 2010), education (Kubow & Blasser, 2014) and many more. It seems, culture is more important nowadays than ever. The role and importance of

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national culture derives from the need for a generally accepted unit of analysis that facilitates the intercultural comparison and knowledge transfer. But, in order to use culture as a variable in explaining the human behavior, it is necessary that we identify a means of measuring culture, to understand it in its whole. Many scholars have been preoccupied by the study of culture throughout time. Today, the study of cultural differences remains of topical interest.

Numerous studies from diverse fields handle nations as entities from both a political and cultural standpoint. Considering the fact that nations provide a variety of statistical data about their population, it is easier to obtain data as a nation than it is as a society (Hofstede, 2001). In many cultural studies, nations are used as units for analysis, so that the question arises whether national cultures are homogenous enough to be considered entities. Moreover, because nations are used as units for cultural analysis, it is important to see if the concept of national culture is stable enough to be considered valid.

The manner in which nations create and maintain a national culture is an important aspect to be studied. To what extent do the state, the institutions, the schools, and the national organizations influence the creation and maintenance of national culture? Starting from the definition of ‘culture’ given by Hofstede – that ‘culture’ represents the collective mental programming that makes us accept something together with the members of the nation or group to which we belong, but not with other members of other groups or nations (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) – we can say that the source of mental programming is found in the social environment in which the individual is living. The inception is in the family, continuing with school, entourage, work environment, and community (Hofstede, 2001).

The concept of national culture is highly contentious. One of the main objections brought about is the fact that there can be both significant cultural differences in the same country and cultural similarities that cross a nation’s boundaries (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). For example, House and Javidan believe that national border are not the most effective method of delimiting cultural frontiers, due to the fact that there are many countries with significant subcultures (House et. all, 2004). Tung states that intra-cultural variations can be equally important as intercultural variations are (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).

Peterson and Smith have identified three major critiques against the usage of nations as units for intercultural analysis (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012):

- Studies on individuals show significant variations inside a country;
- Countries have regional, ethnic, or other subcultures;
- Structural theories have been contested.

Nonetheless, when comparing national cultures, it does not matter whether or not the differences between individuals from the same culture are great or small, because they share the same values in essence. But the existence of subcultures can be an important argument against the usage of countries as units of analysis. Minkov and Hofstede have examined the fundamental cultural values (by using the WVS database) from 299 regions belonging to 28 countries worldwide (except for Europe) in order to identify whether regions from a country group themselves within national borders or if they scatter or mix with other regions belonging to other countries. The conclusion of the study stated that when fundamental cultural values are compared, regions from within the country tend to group within the national borders, not scatter or mix with other regions from within the cultural or geographical area (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).

On the other hand, the existence of cultures which transcend national borders has not been studied enough. An instance of such culture would be the Roma culture manifested in countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, etc. Nonetheless, these countries have a mass culture, shared by the majority of the inhabitants, which can be considered and treated as a national culture (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).

## 2. Methodology

The aim of the study is to analyze from a quantitative standpoint the stability of the concept of ‘national culture’. In this respect, we have analyzed whether or not significant changes in people’s perception regarding the aspects considered important in life have occurred in the past 25 years in different national cultures. The research is quantitative; it is a longitudinal study (trends study) that uses the data provided by World Values Survey

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