

# CHANGES IN VALUE STRUCTURES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MODERN SOCIETY

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## ABSTRACT:

Current massive development of information and communication technologies increases the importance of global communication that is closely linked with changes in value structures of individual and distinct entities. Intercultural relations are mainly based on an exchange of values and life models that create the connection between various cultures, and search for ways of coexistence of distinct cultures with the aim to deepen mutual understanding and minimize the possibilities of communication interferences and ensuing conflicts. For example, the Europeans show a deeply rooted distrust towards foreigners that transforms into hatred in some European destinations (Balkan countries). The counterpart to this is the North American society that was formed thanks to massive immigration and can be considered a fully intercultural society. In order to start communicating in certain social and cultural environments, it is necessary to understand the interconnection of communication activities of different entities with their values and value structures as such understanding helps eliminate conflicts between different cultures. Respect for values and creation of value structures is not expressed only in legal and ethical standards but also in their setup and interpretation. The current intercultural society is strongly influenced by the American culture and so called "consumerism" leading to unjustified overconsumption. The key task here is therefore to perform a fair and factual classification of conditions under which the relationships with foreign cultures are formed with the aim to maintain their identity and cultural power of traditions. The paper therefore focuses on value structure development in globalizing society with the aim to find the most suitable form of functional intercultural relationships among the distinct cultures in modern society. The outcome of this study indicates that the conflicts of current intercultural society are not based on a different level of civilization but mainly result from different values that are connected with the social, economic and cultural poverty and lack of education. Moreover, current society has developed a mechanism of various obtrusive, blatant recommendations and models of consumption people are overwhelmed with and maneuvered by into a life governed by consumption. Marketing and media play a major role in this mechanism. Their tools have shaken the trust of people into fair society (financial crises, war conflicts of 21st century) and resulted in a lack of responsibility and limited development of traditional comfortable value structures of various cultures.

## KEY WORDS:

communication, values, company, person, preference



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# Introduction

Intercultural relations are mainly based on a mutual exchange of values and life models that create the connection between various entities, a search for ways of coexistence of different cultures with the aim to deepen mutual understanding, and to minimize the possibilities of communication interferences and ensuing conflicts. A good example is Europe which, due to its democratic approach to foreign culture and ethnic group penetration into the European continent, had to introduce certain migration rules. The main cause of such an attitude is the submissive, conservative behaviour of Europeans who do not make any effort to preserve their identity and traditional European values and to protect them. On the other hand, as we mentioned above, European distrust of foreigners is deeply rooted and sometimes transforms into hatred, particularly in the case of some European countries. The North American society can be seen as the counterpart to this tendency since it was formed on a basis of massive immigration and thus can be considered a fully intercultural society.

Searching for value forms and contents together with the efforts to analyse the differences between them are the prerequisites that enable us to communicate in certain social and cultural environments. Conflicts in these environments evolve mainly because of an insufficient understanding of the content of values, as people do not behave spontaneously nor based on reflexes but very often they decide how to behave according to their purpose, goals and expectations. The decision-making process always means a choice between possible and acceptable, tolerated or feasible alternatives that are not always based only on goals, but also on available or disposable funds.<sup>1</sup> This means respecting certain values expressed in a form of value utterances and the connecting rules; the integral part of which are legal and ethical standards.

Here, the attention is focused mainly on the principles of the development of these standards, their organization, possibilities and forms of competent interpretation, semantic and logical analyses of these standards and other issues related to social-political and cultural themes.<sup>2</sup> Provided that these values can be examined within the framework of the economic sphere, the examination has to be based on the behaviour of individuals participating in economic processes. In general, values are adopted by the individuals within the process of socialization in early childhood long before the analytical part of thinking that enables adoption of practical skills is developed.<sup>3</sup>

The Czech Republic belongs to open economies and societies and as such it has introduced certain procedures enabling an increase in the quality and sustainability of life. These procedures include respect and differentiation in relation to other cultures, necessity to find and create ways of communication between them, to take over the responsibilities for their own acts and to manage one's behaviour based on a rational approach to the world and ourselves.

Within the framework of intercultural communication, the key is the behaviour itself and the approach of "home" people to foreign cultures. The goal is to create an environment that is not perceived to be hostile by the foreigners and that enables integration of the majority with minorities. In intercultural psychological terms we talk about intercultural sensitivity within which we aim to enable adaptation of foreign culture members to the "Czech" environment while simultaneously preserving the cultural identity and traditions of their cultures.

It is also the personality of people that governs to a certain extent the adaptability and sensitivity towards foreign cultures (people's orientation, openness, sensibility). For example, rigid people have a hard time when adapting to a foreign environment.<sup>4</sup> In order to explain the different reactions of people in diverse intercultural situations, Bennett<sup>5</sup> have constructed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity – DMIS).

1 PRUDKÝ, L.: *Inventura hodnot: výsledky sociologických výzkumů hodnot ve společnosti České republiky*. Praha : Academia, 2009, p. 287-312.

2 PRUDKÝ, L.: *Inventura hodnot: výsledky sociologických výzkumů hodnot ve společnosti České republiky*. Praha : Academia, 2009, p. 287-312.

3 HOFSTEDE, G., HOFSTEDE, G. J.: *Kultury a organizace. Software lidské mysli*. Praha : Linde, 2006.

4 MORGENSTERNOVÁ, M. et al.: *Interkulturní psychologie. Rozvoj interkulturní senzitivity*. Praha : FF UK Praha, p. 84.

5 BENNETT, J. M., BENNETT, M. J.: *Developing Intercultural Sensitivity. An Integrative Approach to Global and Domestic Diversity*. In LANDIS, D. et al.: *Handbook of Intercultural Training*. Thousand Oaks : Sage, 2004, p. 147-165.

The reactions are as follows:

- Denial: Their own culture is the only proper culture. Within organization no cultural diversity is supported.
- Defence: The foreign culture is refused, discrimination may also occur. Within the organization the employees try to get rid of members of foreign cultures.
- Minimization: Efforts to avoid cultural differences. Extreme focus on one common culture, cultural conformism is supported.
- Acceptance: Cultural diversity is accepted, however without consent.
- Adaptation: The individual tries to adopt the "foreign culture" point of view, becomes culturally emphatic.
- Integration: The individual is multicultural and is able to adopt the identity of another culture. This may lead even to losing his/her own cultural identity.<sup>6</sup>

People react to cultural changes differently based on their experience, personalities, attitudes and potential. It is assumed that the experience/contact with foreign culture intensifies identification with values of our own culture – for example when the foreign culture representatives enforce/push forward their culture in a way that is not sensitive to the cultural environment in which they live or work (for example expatriate managers in the Czech companies).

## Results and Discussion

Values are important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. As such, they are something that marketing – the new modern discipline of 19th and 20th century – can make use of and master very well, especially in the environment of market mechanism and uncontrolled impact of demand and offer. The economic literature brings in the term "Homo economicus" describing the individuals trying to maximize their own benefits from limited resources independent of others. In a narrow sense, these individuals are egoists thinking only about their profits and making decisions irrespective of others. This characteristic can be partly shifted away using institutional economics and game theory where also the cooperative form of behaviour is analysed. Sociological literature introduces the term "Homo sociologicus". According to Morawski,<sup>7</sup> Homo sociologicus in its behaviour refers more to values than interests. The basic unit of analysis in the sociological areas is then a social group or social level.<sup>8</sup>

The historical overview can bring in many facts that influenced systems of values and needs of inhabitants in the past. For a long time, mankind was endangered by an unfavourable economic situation, sometimes even by hunger. After WW2 however, many states experienced – thanks to the fast economic development – changes in value priorities of the young generations. This shift in priorities in the area of human values and needs started approximately in the 1960s when developed Western countries reached a satisfactory economic level and secured minimum physical safety and security for their inhabitants. Being on this level, people (especially the younger ones), started to consider their life to be permanently secure and started to focus on other values – post materialistic values. According to Inglehart,<sup>9</sup> these changes induced important effects in economic and political behaviour of inhabitants in relationships between social classes and towards political parties. Inglehart proved his statement by showing that middle class society that used to be open to conservative parties started to prefer more radical left-wing parties and voted for them. Meanwhile the conflicting line between the "workers" and "owners" moved to groups with different priorities and needs. One can conclude that the post materialism creates innovated or another new communication view of the world that reflects what people expect from future.

6 MORGENSTERNOVÁ, M. et al.: *Interkulturní psychologie. Rozvoj interkulturní senzitivity*. Praha : FF UK Praha, 2009, p. 86.

7 MORAWSKI, W.: *Ekonomická sociologie*. Praha : Sociologické nakladatelství, 2005.

8 PRUDKÝ, L.: *Inventura hodnot: výsledky sociologických výzkumů hodnot ve společnosti České republiky*. Praha : Academia, 2009.

9 INGLEHART, R.: *Modernization and postmodernization: cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1997.

The process of shifting values and needs from a materialistic to a post materialistic level was defined by Inglehart<sup>10</sup> as a “silent revolution” due to the fact that it is a gradual process of discreet changes in values and needs of individual generations with typical post materialistic views.

There are several causes of post materialism:

- Technological innovation – people were forced to master new sets of knowledge and skills and the innovation thus eradicated some previous patterns of behaviour and attitudes towards human needs and life style. New machines and technologies replaced human work, reduced physical work and enabled people to spend more time focusing on their mental development.
- Change in professional structure – more emphasis is given to creativity and using personal and professional knowledge. Combating bureaucracy and a more democratic system of management in companies increased the professionalization within organizations.
- Economic growth – compared to pre-war time the average income per person in the majority of countries increased several times. Every inhabitant now has more funds to satisfy basic physical needs and lead a better quality life.
- Increased level of education – based on statistics, the number of university graduates has increased distinctively since the beginning of 20th century. People are more educated and open to new ideas.
- Development of the means of communication – a growing influence of media on society and public opinion, a possibility of twisting meanings and facts by interested subjects, the impact of advertising on purchasing, and the proliferation of information between nations.

Possible reasons for human values and moral degradation may lie in the economic crises and changes in the political situation in a majority of countries since the beginning of 20th century to the present. The process of globalization in all spheres of life was influenced by the American culture and so called consumerism by which we mean a specific behaviour leading to unsubstantiated overconsumption. We may also call it ideology, a way of living that became popular mainly thanks to the media.

“Consumer society” is the mainstream culture of the majority of countries in Europe and the USA, especially in the big cities of these countries. Their strong economic environments enable higher production on one side and higher consumption on the other side. People buy not only the things they need to survive but also things that provide entertainment; feelings of happiness and delight. This is the behaviour of the majority of society. Globalization trends, craving for high social status, aggressive advertising – those are the factors that influence purchasing most of all.

Consumer society is not perceived clearly as either positive or negative. For the producers, consumer society offers the possibility of significant cost reduction enabled by mass production. Consumer society leads to overconsumption and overproduction that generate profit for companies. Consumer society is – in a certain sense – the outcome of these economic processes focused on continuous economic growth. People are also benefiting from the consumer society. They can choose from a broad range of products that are immediately available in any volume. The negative side of consumer society is represented by increasing indebtedness of people, considering “money making” as a top life priority, worsening health because of lack of exercise, increased production of harmful products such as alcohol, cigarettes, etc., and by consuming more than we really need.

Such a consumer trend is most probably not long-term sustainable. We face huge ecological threats – overproduction and consumption lead to accumulation of waste, poor water and natural resource management, pollution of air, water and environment in general. It is clear that we cannot afford to go on like this in the future. Natural resources are limited and the nature requires protection and proper care.

State strategies for the future indicate some positive changes in this respect. Nearly all of these strategies stress the necessity of sustainable growth and development as a prerequisite of a quality life for future generations. The basic goals of this positive development include also the development of ethical values com-

plying with cultural traditions, making culture accessible to all, etc. It is evident that some countries are afraid of negative impacts of consumerism and adopt preventive measures (such as consistent adoption of ethical values related to ecological life style, consumer behaviour, etc.).

Despite this, the globalization trends presented in various forms in the media substantially influence the process of human values and needs formation. It is relatively hard to define to what extent the media influence human needs and thinking. Proliferation of advertising, pushing certain brands and the use of other marketing communication mix tools support the development of consumer society and undoubtedly lead to this single-sided style of life. The use of marketing tools in consumer society is considered to be the integral part of modern life. It influences purchasing behaviour, leads to increased purchases and is therefore important and interesting from the economic point of view. Based on this, we can simply say that the development of marketing supports the development of consumerism as, in the majority of cases, marketing is used as a tool to increase sales (as proved, for example, by research performed by Incoma GfK Praha focusing on purchasing power, consumption volume and consumer behaviour in the Czech Republic).

Human values have their specific functions; they ensure continuity of culture and stability in the society. Their structure and relationships condition the changes in human needs and behaviour. They shape our life style. At the same time, the needs developed during our everyday life influence the values of people. The value structure of each individual is unique. But there is one unanswered question – which came first – values or needs? Based on research on the value structures in the Czech Republic, the “family needs” are placed in the first place followed by “friends and acquaintances”, “leisure time”, “work” and then “politics and religion”.<sup>11</sup>

The exploration of the behaviour of individuals and groups therefore means comparing the values with holders of certain value preferences and their localization into a certain value frame. The exploration of value preferences of consumers can be performed analogically. Thus, we can take up the research of G. Saad who defines an individual living in the current society as “Homo consumericus” – an unpredictable and insatiable entity. Saad uses the term consumption in a broader sense and especially in relation to the economic influence of consumption on all human activities. This enables us to focus on both individual and shared values that create characteristic features of consumer behaviour.

For the purposes of quantification of the consumer survey results, the sociological approaches mentioned above can be simplified to value preferences that influence decisions regarding purchases of material or immaterial products that can be defined as consumer decision-making process. This consumer’s decision-making process takes place in the mind of a consumer that perceives certain stimulus using his/her senses, interprets it and comes to either a positive or a negative evaluation for which he/she has his/her reasons.

The results and verification of this issue can be found in an intercultural concept of communication between different entities. Interconnection of value structures with communication abilities is not easy. Many authors<sup>12</sup> specializing in the field of interculturality try to define intercultural communication as a process of direct interpersonal communication between members of different cultures. Research activities are now focused on the forms of communication between people within the interpersonal contact. The results are then presented as dialogical forms in the areas of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal communication. The positive aspect is that the dialogical form of communication enables creation of social relations. Social relations can then be interconnected with values and value structures of communicating parties that send, receive, share or refuse to receive or share information. This finding is very important within the frames of globalization. It is very important to know in what form the members of different entities communicate their value structures and in what form they are willing to receive the structures of others. A certain paradigm can be found in C. Crouche<sup>13</sup> who defines two dimensions of the conditions for forming the relations between entities:

- Mutual distance of communicating parties (from estrangement to full identification)
- Level of calculations involved in relations (from non-existence of agreements to calculations in relationships such as friendship and love to clear-cut agreement in market relations).

10 INGLEHART, R.: *The silent revolution: changing values and political styles among Western publics*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.

11 PRUDKÝ, L.: *Inventura hodnot: výsledky sociologických výzkumů hodnot ve společnosti České republiky*. Praha: Academia, 2009.

12 Authors: Hofstede, G., Bauman, Z., Inglehart, R., Keller, J., Prudký, L., Kolman, L., Schwartz, S. H.

13 CROUCH, C.: *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions*. Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1993.

Using the two dimensions, Crouche then defines six categories of relations/contacts:

1. Hostile sporadic contact (low level of calculation, large distance).
2. Conflict pursuant to rules (average to high level of calculation, large distance of communicating parties).
3. Market relations (high level of calculation, average distance).
4. Markets with norms of reciprocity (higher level of calculation, small distance).
5. Friendship (lower level of calculation, small distance).
6. Love (non-existence of agreements and calculation, small distance or full identification).<sup>14</sup>

The above mentioned structure can also be used as a model for dealing with a positive intercultural communication in the global environment. European countries in the European Union found ways via market relations and markets with norms of reciprocity but, when communicating with other countries, conflicts pursuant to the rules or even hostile sporadic contact may occur.

Based on the stated findings, intercultural communication can be interconnected with a perception of value structures of different entities. To convey the value preferences, certain communication form is required that is influenced by the preferred values of communicating parties. The relationship that is created by this process is socially constructive or destructive depending on the level of individualism or collectivism within the value preferences. It is therefore very difficult if not impossible to create some universal model of intercultural communication. To create positive and constructive relation between different entities, it is important to understand and to share values and value preferences, including value structures of the communicating parties. For example, if the goal is to strengthen the position of the Czech Republic in the global competitive environment, Czech citizens must not consider migration a threat but a process of getting acquainted with and used to members of other nations while maintaining and representing their own identity and value structures verified by historical development and to preserve them for future generations which can be really difficult. On the other hand, it is also necessary to perceive and understand the foreign culture and to try to apply our own values within this culture.

A possible solution to this situation is to create an innovative process of shared values for the different entities in a form of both demands on knowledge and the competences of majority of population that relate to employment and self-fulfilment in intellectual, cultural, health and sport meaning of life, and in a form of demands on value level (citizen, human and moral) of current people connected with the individual and the social responsibility to mutual respect of the differing entities.

In contrast to the first demand that is linked to the educational and economic level of the population or entities that can be evaluated exactly, the second demand poses more difficulties as it includes personal responsibilities of citizens in this modern society. The former populations were heavily influenced by religion in which concepts such as honour, integrity, veracity on one side and sin, dishonesty and falseness on the other side were introduced and applied. In other words, the measures of evaluation and the influencing of the human value orientation were placed on a line between “heaven and hell”.

Providing that the quality of certain human activities is specified by value orientations, the ethical norms and levels of applicability of these activities should be determined. It means that the crucial demanding tasks have to be solved by people who possess a high level of knowledge and are also highly competent from the moral and human point of view.

Roubal<sup>15</sup> states that optimistic expectations and hopes of knowledge societies are markedly amended and limited by the current development of developed western countries where an increase in education level does not bring expected results and effects in both the society and the lives of individuals. Allegedly, instead of being a reliable way to a higher social status, the education is becoming a mere “security measure” that helps people maintain their current position and reduces the risk of social decline.

<sup>14</sup> PRUDKÝ, L.: *Inventura hodnot: výsledky sociologických výzkumu hodnot ve společnosti České republiky*. Praha : Academia, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> ROUBAL, O.: *Knowledge of a Social Profile and its Role in Marketing Practice of Schools in „Knowledge society“*. In Communication Today, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 65.

## Conclusion

Existing sociological scientific research proves certain dynamics of value development; on the other hand, it proves only small changes and insignificant trends in the formation of the 21st century society. The whole western society has been undergoing a process of modernization that is manifested by forming groups of people promoting the holistic way of life.

The factors of globalization that have been influencing our society over last twenty years are becoming more dynamic. They interconnect with communication systems that support consumption, put pressure on the whole population using methods generating fear for the individuals and the whole society. Usually, the conflicts in the current intercultural society are not based on differences on the level of civilization but result from a different value orientation that is interconnected with social, economic and cultural poverty and insufficient level of education. Current society created the mechanism of oversupplied advice that – using insistent recommendations and consumption patterns – leads people to a consumption-based life. Media and marketing play a very important role in this process. With their tools, they may lead the society to crisis (financial, economic) by damaging the trust within the value orientations of citizens; such a crisis results in a lack of responsibility and a deficit creation of values and value structures in the society.

As far as the value orientation and competence of citizens are concerned, the ability of people to make adequate, quality and responsible decisions to select and/or to refuse has been decreased enormously. It seems that modern society lost – for the above mentioned reasons – the ability to support especially the positive value orientations of the population and self-control.

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