

## ÎNȚELEGEREA CARACTERULUI UNIC AL CIVILIZAȚIILOR DIN LUME

### UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUENESS OF CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD

Stăncuța LAZA

Universitatea de Vest „Vasile Goldiș” din Arad

#### Abstract

*The present paper underlines a few aspects related to the intercultural communication of different nations, each of them being characterized by a certain uniqueness rendered by their manner of interacting, by the country's traditions or by the individual personality of each nation. I have exemplified by using some customs from Great Britain, India or China. Although we are living in a modern and technological era, cultural values are handed down, from generation to generation because people tend to stick to traditional standards. On one hand, certain religious issues force the country to communicate in its own way, bestowing upon it a degree of uniqueness. People act and react according to their cultural environment and social background.*

**Key words:** *uniqueness, culture, nation, values, communication, language, education*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *unicitate, cultura, națiune, valori, comunicare, limba, educație*

“As we grow as unique persons, we learn to respect the uniqueness of others.” [1]

Culture is not established only by the way we are brought up but also by past experiences and by the ability to adapt to certain surroundings and life style. Just like the Americans, we strive for our personal individuality, but on the other hand, we follow the same stereotypes every day. We have personal routines, that are done unconsciously, but as a society we reflect that pattern, standing out in the “crowd” of nations. When compared to another society, it gives us the possibility to see the unique character of the nation.

Great Britain for example, is unique for its afternoon tea break and sense of humour. In Holland people depend on bicycles as the main means of transport unlike Switzerland where one can experience the narrow train that goes up the mountain (instead of cars).

Therefore, each culture is unique because it relies on values passed on from generation to generation. Although, nowadays, we are living in the technological era, dealing with all sort of state-of-the-art devices and gadgets, people tend to preserve their national identity, by making use of traditional standards.

When it comes to speaking about differences between cultures, people experience them from several points of view. Firstly, there is communication which can be produced in several ways, such as conversation forms, non-verbal communication, eye contact or even silence. Secondly, there is the invasion of private space, as in the case of Latin Americans who have this tendency of getting closer than normally, to the person they are talking to.

Other features that define and separate cultures could be time, social organization, racial differences. There are nations that plan things by the clock, act in a traditional way, make plans for the future or simply react on the spot or do things when they need to be done.

All these above-mentioned dimensions may define our culture or another, focusing on habits triggered by all sort of social factors. “A simple act is rarely a simple act” [Kim and Drolet, Conformity or Uniqueness? The Effect of Culture on Consumers' Choice, 2003], meaning that people act according to their cultural background. Each culture is unique. People from different countries have different views of self. For example, while Americans consider that their behaviour

should be determined by their thoughts and feelings as distinct entities, the Asians' feelings and actions should depend on others.

Americans place emphasis on their internal attributes, trying to be independent, to express their uniqueness through a personal style. Asians on the other hand, follow traditions and social norms without pointing out to the fact that each of them has a distinctive self.

Besides social background, habits and family environment, learning a foreign language also contributes to the uniqueness dimension of a nation. It broadens the awareness of other cultures giving one the opportunity of learning things otherwise one would have never come across. The more languages we study, the more we understand other people's culture, making our minds stronger and more flexible at the same time. While using a foreign language, we acquire new experiences of the world, enabling us to make connections and draw comparisons. Persons who do not master foreign languages very well can also prove their cultural uniqueness by making use of other strategies for communication like focusing on the meaning of words, on sounds and intonation patterns. The best way to extend one's knowledge is through contacts with native speakers and through visits in other countries.

In India for example, the uniqueness of their culture has its roots in the religious and cultural plurality that co-existed so creatively. The inhabitants are as diverse as they can be. They have different occupations, upbringing and opinions about the world. Sometimes one wonders how these people can be so well knit together, having so different lifestyles at the same time. Probably the most powerful bond between them is their nationality and the idea of belonging to one nation, having a common legacy. India is unified by its diversity. The uniqueness of Indian culture is underlined by the multiplicity of language, music or literature. Chinese culture is also unique due to its ancestral worship, to its own traditions and history.

Going further with the uniqueness debate, I decided to refer to education as well, and to its importance in shaping unique characters and personalities. And the best example in this respect would be the Montessori approach. First of all I should mention that its main goal is to develop the whole personality of the child. Each individual is different and should be respected for his uniqueness and ability to assimilate information. The Montessori classrooms are mixed, in terms of age, giving the children the opportunity of choosing and doing different tasks, thus becoming independent. Maria Montessori considered that children can learn new things by direct contact with the natural world. A famous Montessorian, David Khan compared the subjects taught to children in a Montessori environment, to the spokes of a wheel. [2]

They have the role of making it stronger. The wheel alone, without spokes is weak. On the other hand, the spokes without wheel represent just isolated sticks. Therefore, the things children learn are inter-related and together as a whole, contribute to the development of a unique personality, showing them that they have a unique talent.

### **Conclusions**

Culture is defined by our past experiences which contribute to our behaviour in society and to the way we act and react in different situations we come across in life. Each culture is unique due to its principles, values, customs or traditions, handed down from father to son, from generation to generation. Education, on the other hand, such as the one based on the Montessori approach, may shape unique characters and personalities as well as develop talents and skills – contributing thus to the uniqueness of cultures in the world.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Schuller, Robert H., American Reformed Church Minister, <http://thinkexist.com/quotes>, April, 6, 2010.
2. The Uniqueness of a Montessori Education, <http://www.trinitymontessori.com>, April 6, 2010.