



PSIWORLD 2013

## Symbolic capital and cultural dimensions in Romanian educational organizations

Dana Gavreliuc<sup>a</sup>, Alin Gavreliuc<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> West University of Timisoara, Bd. V. Parvan no. 4, Timisoara - 300223, Romania

### Abstract

Organized in the Western part of Romania, we have investigated the role of symbolic capital as a generator of more opened relational patterns in an educational environment. We have found a problematic profile of teacher from universities, comparing with the profile of teachers from secondary schools (higher social cynicism or power distance for academic sample), that indicates the spreading of duplicitous social symptoms as a functional way of acting and thinking in Romanian educational organizations. Thus, the thesis of relational modernization (as higher the subject is in symbolic capital as less he/she is in duplicitous) is refuted, underlining the role of social attitudes and values rooted in cultural history centered on dependency, assistentialism and precarious self-determination.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Romanian Society of Applied Experimental Psychology.

*Keywords:* symbolic capital, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, social axioms, education.

### 1. Symbolic capital and cultural dimensions

Described as the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition, and serves as a value that one holds within a culture (Bourdieu, 1984/2008), symbolic capital could be presumed as an important resource in generating openness and involvement in social environments. Our research question is articulated around the dilemma of cultural specificity of this feature (as called the hypothesis of relational modernization evoked by

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +40256592377.  
E-mail address: [alin.gavreliuc@socio.uvt.ro](mailto:alin.gavreliuc@socio.uvt.ro)

Bourdieu): as higher you are placed in the symbolic hierarchy of social environment, as opened and honest you are in relationship with your peers? Is the prestige and educational capital a predictor of more democratic relationship Romanian educational organizations? What are the main portrait in terms of cultural dimensions and personal autonomy for Romanian schools?

## 2. Research description

The specificity of this research is also its integrative approach assumed. Thus, the previous studies of the “pathologies” of the system have been realized in predominant (inter)individual (strictly psychological) or a structural one (strictly sociological) perspective. Therefore, our approach brings together the individual register (personal), the structural (societal), the organizational and, especially, the cultural one. Therefore, assembling these distinct theoretical and methodological positions, by signalling the observed trends and critical analysis in terms of the methodology they propose, this study focuses on the relationship between a number of personality variables (associated with personal autonomy: self-determination, self-esteem, locus of control) and a set of cultural dimensions (social axioms, factors Hofstede model).

The survey organized in Timisoara (Western part of Romania) has selected two global samples (N=522), formed by the teacher from secondary schools (n=253) and universities (n=269). We have applied the following instruments: *Values Survey Module 94 (VSM94)*, created by Geert Hofstede, *Social Axioms Survey (SAS)*, realized by Kwok Leung and Michael Harris Bond, *Locus of Control Scale (LCS)*, generated by J. Rotter, *Self-Determination Scale (SDS)*, created by of K. M Sheldon, R. M. Ryan and H. Rice and *Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)*, made by Morris Rosenberg.

## 3. Results

Concerning the register of social axioms, results indicate a high score on the scale of social cynicism (M=3.2970, SD=0.43363). Cynical views seem to be prevalent in the modern world, and many people distrust others and institutions around them, including politicians, business people and government. However, high social cynicism is expected if we refer to decades of communism where authority was excessively valorised, maintaining willingly, amongst people, a climax of fear and mistrust in others. It is clear for those who look back critically the fact that “the authority” wanted a social network made by solitary people, where interpersonal interactions were feared, discouraged. As such, after decades of suspicious and duplicated interactions, we find that the ordinary subjects have forgotten to cooperate. Therefore, many of present behaviour patterns have descended from: lack of responsibility and cooperation, mistrust in the institutions and their significant members, fatalism, deficient social hope, public disengagement – all those characteristics of the social cynicism – find their outcome in contempt of the other. Into a cynic climax of valorous judgments, the alterity can be seen as “taking advantage of us”, “using us”, in who “we” cannot trust. Poor self-determining correlated with high cynicism ( $r=0.186$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) indicate a pattern of vulnerability and helplessness. Social cynicism is also correlated with feelings of frustrations of self, disillusion and mistrust in others and ideology. These characteristics indicate the acquisition of an adaptive duplicitous identity pattern, resulting from the belief that “otherness” will generate an instrumental way of acting and thinking.

The scores for Hofstede’s model, characterized by high scores of power distance (M=78.06, SD= 24.018), collectivism (M=36.31, SD=20.171), uncertainty avoidance (M=85.07, SD=19.221), femininity (M= 33.72, SD=19.739) and short term perspective (M=23.89, SD=15.784).

Moreover, the relation between social cynicism and power distance ( $r=0.392$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) indicates the fact that, the more cynic we are, the more authoritarian the subject become. Therefore, the cynic typical subject is engaged in manipulative, suspicious and deceptive interactions, where the significant other is closely monitored and can be exploited for personal gain. This statement could indicate a defective, vicious model of interpersonal relationship where social interactions are perceived as well-constructed “strategies” for personal gain.

Results indicate also a significant relation between social cynicism and fate control that expresses the personal option for defeated social attitudes ( $r=0.310$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). All these trends are going to create a more accurate image of the social actor with behavioural tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity and aggressiveness. Moreover, results show a positive relation between collectivism and social cynicism ( $r=0.255$ ,

$p < 0.01$ ), on the one hand, and between self-determination and uncertainty avoidance ( $r = -0.786$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), on the other hand. This statement would lead us to ideas of manipulation and duplicity. Although the suspicion associated with cynical views may protect people from being deceived (Leung & Bond, 2004), more often than not, studies have shown that cynicism can also reduce people's life satisfaction. As described in the studies of Leung and Bond (2008), social cynicism has survival value because it helps individuals avoid social traps and scams.

The second factor, social complexity ( $M = 3.4347$ ,  $SD = 0.29657$ ), suggests a belief that there are multiple ways of achieving a given outcome and that a given person's behavior is inconsistent from situation to situation. A belief in the complexity of social life was associated with endorsement of both collaboration and compromise in resolving interpersonal interdependencies. The world-view that there are multiple solutions to social issues is a functional cognitive resource in contemporary social system. However, moderate scores on social complexity associated with higher scores on fate control and religiosity show poor familiarization with implicitly accepted behavior which indicates a feeling of diminished freedom of movement.

Thirdly, reward for application ( $M = 3.8064$ ,  $SD = 0.44364$ ) indicates unrealistic expectations concerning personal symbolic reward and shows a tendency of discontent towards the conditions of self-reality. The state of dissatisfaction characterizes the individualism of the one who perceives himself differently from what he is in reality. Reward for application could be considered a coping strategy that requires grappling with the problem actively. Study results indicate an identity pattern of inadequate reporting to personal biographic success. As Leung and Bond (2004) observed, if a society constantly faces hardship associated with low living standards, social customs, structures, and institutions, subjects are likely to evolve into a configuration that is adaptive in a face of such hardship. Belief of its citizens in effort and hard work sustains the struggle against hardship, and beliefs associated with religiosity conduct towards social order and civility. Fatalism reflects some degree of helplessness in the face of the hardship. Therefore, high scores of these social axioms seem interpretable as a consequence of the need to cope with difficult circumstances in living.

Religiosity ( $M = 3.2750$ ,  $SD = 0.64114$ ) was related to accommodation because of their mutual emphasis on sociality and agreeableness. Religiosity could be seen both as a general response to the spiritual need of humans and as a solution to many social problems. As Leung et al. (2002) point out, religiosity seems to be more concerned with solutions to the challenges of creating social order and encouraging civility than with the satisfaction of spiritual need. Study results indicate a high score on religiosity (only Islamic samples have registered higher scores) and we can relate this to the feeling of subjugating to a higher divine force, hence the incapacity to take life in own hands.

Results on fate control ( $M = 2.6902$ ,  $SD = 0.57815$ ) indicate a tendency to accept any outcome without resisting. Fate control was also related to accommodation because of the passivity in the face of external forces involved in the endorsement of fate's power. The belief that events in one's life are predetermined by fate may incline people towards acceptance of what happens. Therefore, passive acceptance and the feeling that all is in vain, as the individual has no actual control over his own personal life, indicate a fatalistic life attitude. Fate control sharpens an identity pattern of implicit public disengagement.

A similar analysis performed on the identity portrait of teachers according to their belonging to the pre-university or university environment completes the "status quo" picture in schools, contouring the assumed social identities especially in the register of cultural dimensions. No fewer than six dimensions produce significantly different scores depending on the insertion of subjects in the pre-university, or university education (locus of control - LC, power distance - DP, individualism-collectivism - I / C, social cynicism - SC, reward for application - RA, religiosity - R), which are statistically significant, and one is at the limit of significance (fate control - FC). Of the 7 dimensions, at least 5 produce unexpected differences (PD, SC, AR, FC, R), according to whether the subjects are in an environment that requires the purchase of a symbolic capital (prestige, educational capital, capital and opportunities and last, but not least, of all the material capital) specific, richer in the university than in the pre-university field. Thus, the Hofstede model establishes that those working in the pre-university field are involved in hierarchical relations based more on partnership and cooperation than those working in universities, with a statistically significantly lower score on power distance ( $t(520) = -4.583$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result suggests an assimilation attitude pattern with a touch of the local educational environment: the more authoritarian and non-partnership they are, the more the subjects "climb" on the ladder of social prestige. The features depicted above are strengthened by the statistically significantly higher scores in social cynicism for academic teachers, then for those of the pre-university

environment ( $t(520) = -2.213, p = 0.027$ ), with an average extremely high for both samples anyway, significantly higher than the national cultures of most large-scale cross-cultural research studies coordinated by Kwok Leung and Michael Harris Bond (2008).

#### 4. Conclusions

We have evidenced that the profile of teacher from universities is more problematic one (highest scores in power distance, social cynicism), expressing a controversial social portrait. All of these trends suggest the presence of a truly insightful and inertial process of contamination at the level of social cognition for the Romanian social strata with high symbolic capital. Thus, the axiomatic definition of social dynamic and social involvement is more fatalistic and duplicitous, even if the stratum with high symbolic capital is expected to be more self-determined and opened. This observation is more alarming, because the tendency is proved to be active in a social environment (represented by education) that is traditionally associated with promoting social responsibility and communitarian involvement. From our research, we can observe how young people are not "what they seem" to be, and they are precariously integrated into the role of change agents, the vectors of change in mentality binding (Gavreliuc & Gavreliuc, 2012, 2013). For that reason, beyond of appearances (institutional acquisition and behavioral changes), the societal change in Romania realized through a democratic pattern become a problematic one as well, and the *thesis of relational modernization* in Romanian educational organizations is refuted. These outcomes underline the role of social attitudes and values rooted in cultural history centered on dependency, assistentialism and precarious self-determination (Sandu, 2003, Gavreliuc, 2012).

#### References

- Bourdieu, P. (1984/2008). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gavreliuc, A., & Gavreliuc, D. (2013). Intergenerational Analysis of Cultural Dimensions and Attributional Patterns in Romanian Educational Organizations. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 78, 265-269.
- Gavreliuc, A. (2012). Continuity and change of values and attitudes in generational cohorts of post-communist Romania. *Cognition, Brain, Behaviour. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 14(2), 191-212.
- Gavreliuc, A., & Gavreliuc, D. (2012). Social axioms, cultural dimensions and personal autonomy in Romanian educational field. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33, 223-227.
- Leung, K., & Bond, M. H. (2004). Social Axioms: A model for social beliefs in multi-cultural perspective. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 36, 119-197.
- Leung, K. & Bond, M. H. (2008). Psycho-logic and Eco-logic: Insights from Social Axiom Dimensions, In F. van de Vijver, D. van Hemert, & Y. P. Poortinga (Eds.), *Individuals and cultures in multilevel analysis* (pp. 197-219), Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Leung, K., Bond, M. H., Reimel de Carrasquel, S., Muñoz, C., Hernández, M., Murakami, F., Yamaguchi, S., Bierbrauer, G., & Singelis, T. M. (2002). Social axioms: The search for universal dimensions of general beliefs about how the world functions. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33, 286-302.
- Sandu, D. (2003). *Sociabilitatea în spațiul dezvoltării* [Sociability in the space of development]. Iasi: Polirom.