Attitudes to some common aspects of culture in the UK, Greece and France

Miroslava KIMAKOVÁ

Introduction
The present diploma thesis deals with the certain aspects of culture in the UK, Greece and France. The attention is put specifically on some traditional customs and dimensions of culture that could be the reason for some cross-cultural misunderstanding. The main aim of the work is to validate the hypotheses based on the largest cross-cultural survey, which affect natural cultural differences as well as point out on the variety of the rate of superstitiousness in the aforementioned countries. Moreover, questionnaire, direct and clandestine observation contributed to effective and realistic viewpoint of the particular cultures as well as raised the authentical perception of certain cultural values.

The Five Dimensions of Culture – Hofstede
Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defines "culture" as a set of unwritten rules of behavior that set out what a particular group expects its members to do and believe. To better understand the concept of culture, cultural differences as well as awareness of importance of collaboration across cultures, Hofstede determine culture in five dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term Orientation. In addition, it has been pointed out that this model ´is based on 30 years of quantitative research. The original data were from and extensive IBN database for which – between 1976 and 1973 – 116, 000 questionnaires were used in 72 countries and 20 languages.’ (De Moolj in Milenkovic, 2009, p.9).

Power distance
Each society is dealing with one crucial issue that is called inequality. In other words, power distance can be characterized as a power that is distributed equally in society and the degree which society accepts this distribution is essential.

**Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS-FEM)**
Hofsteede classified difference between masculinity and femininity as follows: ´The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success, the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life´ (De Mooij, 2010, p.48).

![Graph showing Power/Distance Index](image)


**Individualism vs. Collectivism**
Individualism/collectivism can be explained clearly as a measure of the degree to which culture favours autonomy or group affiliation. In individualistic culture, attention is placed on individual’s goals over group goals. Such a statement furthermore supports the belief that people in individualistic culture are ’I´-conscious and they tend to concentrate on the task and attempt to actualize themselves so free will is highly estimated (Luger, 2009). People in individualistic culture (France, England, Italy, USA, German speaking countries) are taught to be original, self-sufficient, independent, competitive and self-confident (Triandis, 1995). In contrast to that individuals, in collectivistic cultures are ’we´-conscious and put attention on the relationship with people. Decisions made by the group are more appreciated than individual decisions and success is assessed by one’s contribution to the group as a whole. It can be clear that personal needs are less essential than the group’s needs. As a result, it must be noted that countries like Greece, Russia, Japan, Bulgaria, Korea, Arab World etc. have features of collectivist culture.
Uncertainty Avoidance

According to Hofstede 'Uncertainty Avoidance ' is defined as ' the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situation.' (De Mooij, 1998, p.83). In other word, it can be said that Hofstede’s fourth dimension measures the scale of tolerance of ambiguity in a society.

To summarize what has been already mentioned, the following chart includes Hofstede’s five dimensions and provides better perception and understanding basic cultural differences and similarities among those countries.

It has been confirmed that societies with uncertainty avoidance are more hierarchical, therefore, they have tendency to show an avoidance of uncertainty and thus hold strict rules-based system. It might be crucial to mention that Greece, Japan, Turkey and Arab countries are a typical example of the culture with uncertainty avoidance. In
addition, this research has revealed that UK scores 35, which is quite low, that can be the result of mixture of national cultures. Consequently, it might indicate that British culture is relatively open to running risks and coping with change. On a macro level, this can be seen in the steady modification of laws and government structures. On a micro level, conflicts or disagreements in the workplace, even with superiors, are considered healthy. Later on in the book, De Mooij compares the outcomes of the UK with Greece, where Greece scored with index 112, which point out that the rate of superstitiousness will be high in comparison to the UK. For example, Greek and French people are not keen on uncertainty, by planning everything carefully they try to avoid uncertainty. In those countries, there is society based on rules, laws and regulations. Such a conclusion furthermore underlines reducing its risk to the minimum and proceeding with changes step by step. From the point of the emphasize on the communication, people from uncertainty avoidance culture have tendency to raise their voice, use a lot of gestures and show their feelings without concerns. (Greece)(De Mooij in Milenkovic, 2009).

The last but not at least, children being grown up in this type of background (Greece) are taught from their parents that life is dangerous and threatening. Individuals from countries with a long history and whose population is not multicultural, rather homogenous belong to nations with uncertainty avoidance who favour rules, pretend making hypothesis or statements as well as new ideas and concepts are more difficult to introduce and accept. Consequently, it becomes more clear that they try to decline the uncertainty with the help of technology, law and religion. This refers predominately that technology is viewed as a great aid to prevent uncertainty caused by nature. Laws are used as the main features of overcoming doubts and hesitation in human behaviour. In addition, religion aids people to deal with things that are presupposed to shape men’s life and cannot be changed (Hofstede, 1984). Unlike De Mooij, Luger does not pay to the peculiarities of the UA and he presents it as a feature related to xenophobia – establishing a dichotomy of two polar worldview ‘what is different is dangerous’, whereas other cultures think: ‘what is different is strange’ (Luger, 2009, p.17).

In the countries with a young history where the population is quite varied because of the waves of immigrants, Uncertainty avoidance is quite low (the UK, the USA, and Canada) and the innovation and pushing boundaries is supported.

As far as the dimension Power Distance, the UK scores with the lowest index 35 in comparison to France (60) or Greece (66) that would indicate that status and inequalities between British citizens are reasonably low. The other dimension clarifying Individuality vs. Collectivism, revels that the index is quite high in the UK (89). Therefore, it might put attention on the aspect that British culture appreciate and support individuality. On a macro level, it can be observed that the nuclear family is the more prevalent form of basic social structure. In the field of Masculinity vs. Femininity, the UK has index with number 66, that is somewhere in the middle reflecting that British society and culture seeks for equality between the sexes.
Cultural differences of the UK, Greece and France- Time across cultures

“Time talks. It speaks more plainly than words. The message it conveys comes through loud and clear. Because it is manipulated less consciously, it is subject to less distortion than the spoken language. It can shout truth where words lie “ (Hall in Neuliep, 2009, p.140). Each nation considers concept of the time from different point of view and therefore it denotes various attitudes and values. Taking into consideration concept of time, culture can be viewed as a monochromic and polychromic. In monochromic culture, time is treated like money and highly valued. Therefore, it is used in the connection with saving, spending, wasting and losing time. Scheduling has the highest point in monochromic culture and allows to do or to perform only limited number of activities in one place at one time. It can be clear that in M-time culture, people do only one activity at a time and even more, sleep, work of free time is arranged carefully.

On the other hand, in P-time cultures, schedules are not significant and are usually broken. In polychronic cultures, people use to do more activities at once what may seem unnatural for monochromic people. As Hall argues, polychronic people are not ‘slaves of their time’ and therefore they are often late for meetings or may not arrive at all. Last but not at least, in P-time culture, mutual relationships are valued higher than schedules (Ibid.).

Personal Space and Conversation across Cultures

Personal space can be portrayed as an invisible bubble of space that each person produces in reply of relationships, emotional status as well as cultural background. The recent study proved that northern European cultures (for example, England, Scandinavia, Germany) are said to have larger personal space ‘bubbles’ than southern European (for
example Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Italy). Another feature that has been observed in the author’s survey was the fact that people from warmer climates tend to use smaller physical distance than people from colder climate. Typical example can be seen in the countries of Greece, France and England.

**Behaviour aspects of cultures**

As it has been already mentioned in theoretical part, the culture of behaviour is formed by the important characteristic of personality that is involved in everyday human acts that are confirmed by their principles and ideals. This includes the traditional cultural etiquette, rules of religion, and folk as well as moral prescriptions (South East European Educational Co-operation Network).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour culture</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>FR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional custom</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing a rosary ‘kobolo’</td>
<td>The ceremony of tea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drinking tea at 5 o’clock</td>
<td>French hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognac- luxury drink saved for a special occasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional ritual – Greek wedding</strong></td>
<td>Traditional English meal</td>
<td>French hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish and chips</td>
<td>French cheese with wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbol of wealth and happiness</strong></td>
<td>Throwing rice at the bride and groom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Substantial Culture and group inclusion function**

The substantial culture has always played an important role by forming other cultural factors. It relates to the substance and all human products and activities that have been created in the process of changes in the objective world. Culture provides satisfying feelings of belonging to somewhere. This is perpetuated by the fact that man is human being with his need to belong somewhere. In addition, culture creates favourable conditions, where the people experience safety, inclusion and acceptance (Ting- Toomey, 1999). Due to the Group Inclusion Function, people are not considered as separated individuals related to their own well-being, but also as members of the group which appoint them to look for the common good for the profit of others (Lustig and Koester in Chang, 2003).
### Substantial culture and group inclusion function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GR</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>FR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fish Christian Symbol&lt;br&gt;ICHITUS</td>
<td>Self determination and belonging somewhere&lt;br&gt;Queen birthday</td>
<td>Architectural achievement&lt;br&gt;The Eiffel tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of the food</strong>&lt;br&gt;Greek cuisine and its value</td>
<td><strong>Value of the food</strong>&lt;br&gt;French cuisine</td>
<td><strong>Typical French restaurant</strong>&lt;br&gt;Brasseries-way to show off French country and culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Attitudes to common and different superstitions in particular cultures

Following chart will make basic distinguishing features between Greek, British and French superstitions and the more superstitious aspects have been found, the more superstitious is observed country. Each of the country has different type of superstitions as well as different way how to ward off bad luck or on the other hand tools bringing good luck. The author of the thesis clarified and categorised basic aspects that she found out in the direct observation, from the questionnaire as well as from unstructured interview.

### Different ways of warding off the evil and methods bringing good luck

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GR</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>FR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>throwing salt</td>
<td>throwing salt over shoulder</td>
<td>wear a fascinated dress on the 1st January to be prosperous a whole year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spitting for 3x</td>
<td>walk under the ladder</td>
<td>walk along the ladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say ‘Jesus Christ always won and sent the evil away + make a cross for 3x’</td>
<td>say on the 1st day of month-3x white rabbits</td>
<td>horse shoe-UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>braids of garlic in the entrance of homes</td>
<td>horse shoe-UP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cactus situated near the entrance of home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear a blue charm-a little blue marble with any eye painted- protection of evil eye</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say ‘Sto Kalo Sto Kalo Kala Na Mne Feris-means Go with a God and bring me some good news’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to give him/her a rosary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throwing rice at the bride and groom during a Greek wedding- symbol of wealth and happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say ‘Piase kokkino’ to avoid argument with your friends who say the same thing at the same time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation of the real-life situation 1
You are walking along the pavement and you will see a man standing on the ladder to clean the windows. How would you react?
In the UK, most of the participants (95%) answered that they would walk under the ladder to be lucky and some of them stated that in the past a leaning ladder was comparable to gallows so if you walked under the ladder, you would guarantee your death by hanging.
What is interesting to pinpoint is that in France, answers for the same question were rapidly different. Only 27% would choose to walk under the ladder to ward off bad luck and 55% would walk along the ladder in order to have luck. Moreover, some of them (around 18%) would just stop before the ladder.

Observation of the real-life situation 2
Imagine that you have bought an expensive car that you wish for a long time and you want to boast with it to your neighbour. What would you do to avoid bad luck?
All of the British participants admitted that they would touch wood to get rid of bad luck or evil.
On the other hand, the similar situation that would happen in Greece, would be sorted out by completely different method – 86% of Greek respondents declared that they would spit for 3x on the complimented subject or person. Furthermore, some of them would give you a rosary as the way to avoid bad luck or advised to put braids of garlic or cactus in the entrance of homes.

Observation of the real-life situation 3
You have the most beautiful day of your life – wedding and your friend being full of experiments and originality, gives you as a gift – set of knives. What would you think about it?
According to the survey, most of the Greeks will not give you a knife because they believe that placing a knife in another person’s hand represents that they will have a fight or a strong argument. It has been revealed that knife for slicing bread is not used and the only way how to break the bread could be through hands. The reason for aforementioned matter has been found in the Last Supper, when Jesus broke bread and gave it to the twelve apostles.
On the other hand, most of the French respondents (73%) do not bother about getting set of knife as a gift for wedding that could indicate that they do not believe in such type of superstition that can cause some strong arguments or bad luck. Only 9% would think of expelling him/her from the wedding because of strong anger to the giver of ‘such type of present’.
Observation of the real-life situation – how I was accused as a giver of matiasma

Before you are invited to the Greek family for lunch or dinner, you should know some crucial matters. Giving compliments or too much interest in some subject could have negative effect.

Following example comes from real life situation that happened to me four years ago by visiting my friend’s family that was a strong Greek-Orthodox believers. Thinking of being polite, giving compliments to friend’s dog and parrots could only increase the sympathies, kind-heartedness and good behaviour manner from my side as a foreigner to their side as an aspect of the values of their hospitality and interest in their culture. Unfortunately, the reverse was truth and the next day, my friend’s mum found parrots lying in the birdcage without any moving and when doctor came he declared immediately death. Moreover he said that he has never met with such type of diagnose like it was and added that dogs would need special treatment in order to stay alive. The similar situation was observed when I gave compliment to the friend’s car and next day, he accused me that because of me, his car was broken and pleased me not to give him and his car any more compliments. As a consequence, the story with dead parrots did not have happy ending because my friend and his family accused me of a giver of matiasma and considered me as a person with rude behaviour manners. Mostly Greeks believe that mainly people with blue eyes are givers of the evil eye – matiasma. To sum it up, giving compliment or ‘looking at someone’ with jealousy can cause that the other person feel bad physically or psychologically. Last but not at least, when all of the previously mentioned aspect are involved, most of the Greek people would explain ‘this sickness’ as the evil eye.

Conclusion

Each nation has been holding its own bag of customs, values, norms and memories that contribute to the creation of the perfection of each country. Specifically, history of nation is the important matter that unites past with the present and future. Moreover, culture is also inevitable part of history of each nation that evolves values, norms, material achievement of both past and present generation. From one point of view, culture shapes a person’s identity, who you are and where you come from, but on the other hand, culture could create some boundaries and barriers. Why do these boundaries exist? To answer clearly, it might be crucial to take into consideration the existence of cultural differences. Recent historical events have changed the world to the need to support greater understanding, tolerance and trust between people from various cultural backgrounds. By increasing awareness of cultural differences and the breaking down prejudices and stereotypes, people may help to foster tolerance and understanding between nations.

Based on the evaluation of the individual questionnaire and direct observation, it was concluded that different culture includes different aspects. Claiming the above, it can be said that Greece has been viewed as a cradle of European civilisation and therefore, it can be seen there their ‘pure culture’. On the other hand, French and British culture influenced by migration, different mixture of nations, variety of languages, different
customs, ways of life as well as religious faith contributed to multiculturalism. From what has been already said, it might be assumed that culture in the UK and France is more open-minded than Greek culture. It implies predominantly that British and French culture has been obtaining and accepting foreign impacts from the other different cultures for a long time and have integrated them into their own cultures that might be visible in the variety of Englishes.

However, as a result of not accepting the law of banning the hijab in France, the community of French Muslims have become alienated and a new generation of French Muslims is growing up in ghettos instead of being assimilated into the society in which they live. In comparison, Greece is also a country with waves of immigrants from Bulgaria, Albania or Romania but the main difference is that the Greeks have been always trying to preserve the pure richness of their culture and because of such strong ties of ethnocentrism and long history, no other nations can effect the huge grounds of such fascinating culture. Moreover, it was Greek culture that has been giving great cultural contribution to western civilization such as Philosophies of Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, systems of government ("democracy"), history (Herodotus, father of history), Olympic games, Theatrical drama, acting, and comedy as well as various forms of literature/culture – Iliad and Odyssey.

Another issue of the cultural aspect influencing people’s life has been the field of superstitions that the research has been focused on. The statements of respondents showed evidence of overall perception of this phenomenon in society – all of the results have been done from research questionnaire as well as author’s observation and self-evaluation of the respondents.

The author’s hypothesis and her long stay in the observed countries, included expectation that would prove Hofstede’s cross-cultural survey, where Greece got the highest index in the cultural values – Uncertainty Avoidance (112) in comparison with England and France. The present research could indicate that Greek people and their life might be therefore much more influenced by its superstitions than the life of the British or the French. Moreover, by questionnaire and direct observation in Greece, it has been found out that those people have always wanted to favour rules and pretend making the explanation. They try to avoid any type of situation associated with uncertainty or ambiguity. Therefore, they attempted to explain particular situation or superstitions by the statement of law, religious faith or by their own explanation in order to be protected and avoid any insecurity, doubts or the fear from unknown. As a consequence, in the author’s survey, there is a list of the methods how to ward off the evil clarifying Greece as the country with the largest number implying that the rate of superstitiousness will be much more higher than in France or the UK, so the author’s hypothesis has been partially proved. Furthermore, in some cases in Greece, the author directly observed superstitions as the standard way of life and the obsession with superstitions became so controlling and dominant that it had extreme influence on the daily routine of people. (Example of accusing my personality of a giver of matiasma). On the other hand, it might be said that
British and French do not bother by unpredictability around the world. Moreover, for this reason, they do not need such a structured way of life and they favour to learn by their mistakes and can handle insecurity. They declared that they are quite familiar with the particular superstition and therefore they know what should be done in certain situation and only few of them believe in it. It leads to the assumption that British and French participants would not believe in any superstitions so much that their behaviour pattern would be strongly affected. They realize the existence of superstitions but they consider it as the cultural heritage. The high rate of superstitiousness in Greece and lower degree in France and the UK might be influenced by the age of the respondents and the degree of education. In the UK and France, most of the respondents were university students living in the urban areas. In comparison, in Greece, majority were people living in the villages with primary or not finished yet secondary education.

**Bibliography:**