**Babeș-Bolyai University**

**Faculty of European Studies**

**CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS**

**Doctoral Thesis Summary**

**Author: Horațiu Sorin Dan**

**Doctoral thesis coordinator: prof. univ. dr. Nicolae Păun**

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Keywords: cultural dimensions, competitiveness, inclusive growth, social progress, fiscal policy, shadow economy, European integration.

**Summary**

The doctoral research is based on the hypothesis of the existence of relations of causal nature between national cultural dimensions specific to European Union member states and a series of elements defining the economic climate and, implicitly, the complex European economic integration process. Thus, we have tried to identify and describe these connections in order to make possible a potential future application of the conclusions of the study in the sphere of public policy, with a positive impact regarding their calibration and cultural adaptation and, as a consequence, the increase of the integration endeavor.

The PhD thesis comes in the context in which the last period the has shaped even more clearly the need of analyses that study in depth those structural elements that constitute the foundations of the European integration process. Recognizing the potential role that cultural factors play in the integration equation, the paper aims at analyzing the cultural elements that influence the European economic integration process and the dynamic of the causal relation that operates between culture and identity on one side and economic phenomena on the other. Without being a paper centered on a sociological or cultural anthropology point of view, the thesis follows an interdisciplinary approach from the perspective of the economist that recognizes the multivalent character of the economic integration process and, consequently, the lack of accuracy of any analysis that has a strictly economic approach without taking into consideration a series of aspects related to national cultural dimensions and their influences on a vast number of social and economic elements, among which the institutional structure, fiscal behavior, social policy structure of competitiveness.

From a methodological point of view, regarding the identification of causal links between cultural factors and elements that are specific to the economic environment, the thesis uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments, seeking to combine, in the design of the methodological approach, different instruments so that conclusions that meet the rigors of both external and internal validity could be obtained. Also, we underline the fact that a series of conceptual clarification must be brought first, as the notion of causality is sufficiently heterogenous as to generate potential differences of perception and understanding. Thus, we adhere to the vision of Gerring, that proposes an understanding of the concept in concordance with the principles of Bayesian inference postulating that a cause increases the probability of an event[[1]](#footnote-1).

The section of the paper dedicated to the investigation of causal links established between national cultural elements (as defined and measured by Hofstede and his collaborators[[2]](#footnote-2) and by Schwartz[[3]](#footnote-3)) and factors that define the economy and economic life (*i.e.* the public deficit, the public debt, the size of the shadow economy, social spending, the degree of social progress, the level of competitiveness and the degree of social inclusiveness of economic growth) is based on an quantitative methodological approach. Thus, we recognize the fact that respecting epistemological rigors implies using statistical instruments that capture both effects of size (in our case the level of Pearson correlation between variables) and probabilistic elements that are specific to regression analysis (meaning p values of independent variables)[[4]](#footnote-4), an endeavor in which we will apply ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions seeking to identify those independent variables that have statistical meaning at p=0.01 and p=0.05 levels. Similar methodology is used in other papers that explore the effects of cultural dimensions on various dependent variables[[5]](#footnote-5).

At a structural level, the thesis starts by sketching a general picture of the European construction from the perspective of the phenomena that connect the identity components with the economic and socio-political processes that constitute the foundation of integration, then continuing with the exploration of the vast scientific literature focusing on the comprehension, definition and measurement of cultural dimensions that permit international comparisons. Once clarified the theoretical framework that facilitates the use of cultural concepts, the next step was the performance, with the help of a preponderantly quantitative toolbox, of a deep analysis of the relations that operate between two sets of cultural dimensions measured on a national level on one side (the first being the result of the research performed by Hofstede and his collaborators and the second, with the same importance on a socio-cultural vector, being generated by Shalom Schwartz) and, on the other side, a series of elements that shape the economy and, implicitly, the economic integration phenomenon: the public deficit, the public debt, the size of the shadow economy, social spending, the degree of social progress, the level of competitiveness and the inclusive nature of economic growth. In the final phase of the paper, a phase representing an extension of the research, we have applied the results of the above-mentioned analysis on the case of Romania and its European economic integration process, this being just one of the numerous possible applications of the conclusions regarding the existence of causal relations between various pairs of variables (national cultural dimensions as independent variables and the elements with an economic impact listed before as dependent variables).

Concentrating our focus on relations of a causal nature between cultural dimensions and the considered dependent variables, a series of results regarding the existence of causal connections have emerged.

First, after studying the relationship between national cultural dimensions and the main indicators of public finance (deficit and debt), the analysis reveals proof regarding the role that some of the cultural dimensions play in modelling fiscal behavior in EU member states. More precisely, the study has identified the existence of a relevant and time-consistent influence of the long term orientation dimension on public deficits, an effect that is visible regardless of the nature of the chosen period (fiscal expansion, austerity or post-austerity). Also, a partial link, limited to the period of fiscal expansion, between deficit and the cultural dimension of masculinity was identified.

With regard to the relation between the level of public debt and national cultural dimensions as defined and measured by Hofstede, the analysis has revealed a connection of causal nature in the case of uncertainty avoidance, thus validating the hypothesis that this dimension influences, through a series of indirect channels, the considered dependent variable.

Using the same methodology, but departing from Schwartz’s cultural dimensions, the research concludes that the cultural dimensions of egalitarianism and mastery influence the level of public debt, while public deficit is not influenced by any of these cultural dimensions.

Second, regarding the relation between culture and the size of the shadow economy, the study indicates the existence of a causal link between the size of the shadow economy on one side and the cultural dimensions of indulgence (Hofstede) and empowerment (Schwartz) on the other, these results having direct applicability in the effort of elaborating more efficient measures to fight the phenomenon.

Third, regarding the influence of cultural dimensions on social progress, the discovered relation represents an opportunity for the cultural adaptation of the public policy elaboration and implementation process, that could in this way generate net superior results form an effectiveness and efficiency perspective. In this context, the analysis highlights the existence of a link of causal nature between (1) the hofstedian cultural dimension of indulgence and social progress; (2) the cultural dimension appertaining to the spectrum proposed by Schwartz of egalitarianism and social progress and (3) social spending reported to the gross domestic product *per capita* and the hofstedian cultural dimension of indulgence, a relation that is consistent with the causal link identified between the same dimension of indulgence and social progress (which, in turn, is influenced, in a certain measure, by the level of social spending), fact that indicates the operation of social spending as a relevant transmission channel. Also, the disappearance of the causal connection identified between the dimension of egalitarianism and the level of social progress when it comes to the level of social spending must be mentioned, thus invalidating the hypothesis referring to the role of the social spending channel in ensuring the transmission of the effects that this Schwartz cultural dimension induces (as opposed to the case of the hofstedian cultural dimension of indulgence).

Fourth, the analysis of the causal relation between national cultural dimensions and the level of competitiveness reveals relevant connections between the latter and the cultural dimensions of indulgence (Hofstede) and embeddedness (Schwartz), the former being positive and the latter negative.

Fifth, the expansion of the research by addressing the relation between the cultural dimensions and the inclusive growth index, as defined and measured by Samans *et al.* in a study performed under the umbrella of the World Economic Forum[[6]](#footnote-6), has generated the conclusion of the existence of a causal influence of the hofstedian dimension of indulgence on inclusive growth, thus strengthening the perception on the extremely important role that this dimension plays when it comes to the economic journey of Member States.

The table below synthetizes the links of causal nature between cultural dimensions and the studied dependent variables, the green color indicating a positive relation (*i.e.* an increase in the value of the independent variable leads to an increase in the value of the dependent variable and vice versa) and the red color indicating a negative relation (*i.e.* an increase in the value of the independent variable leads to a decrease in the value of the dependent variable and vice versa).

The Table of the links between cultural dimensions and elements of an economic nature

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Hofstede | Schwartz |
| Public deficit | Long term orientation,  masculinity (partial, pre-crisis) | - |
|
|  |  |  |
| Public Debt | Uncertainty avoidance | egalitarianism,  mastery |
|  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Shadow economy | indulgence | embeddedness |
|  |  |  |
| Social progress | indulgence | egalitarianism |
|  |  |  |
| Propensity for social spending | indulgence | - |
|  |  |  |
| Competitiveness | indulgence | embeddedness |
| Inclusive growth | indulgence | - |

Source: Own calculations based on data series, according to the bibliographical indications from the doctoral thesis[[7]](#footnote-7)

Turning our attention on the applicative extension of this research referring to Romania, we highlight the necessity of integrating Romanian cultural dimensional realities, as described in the fourth chapter of the paper, in the processes that are at the basis of elaborating and implementing public policies. Thus, we underline the conclusion regarding the advantages of an approach that (1) takes into account the current stage of the Romanian cultural positioning and, following mainly short and medium term effects, includes these cultural particularities in the public policy actions that are undertaken and (2) intervenes in the direction of cultural modelling (for example through a series of public policies aimed at encouraging attitudes and behaviors pertaining to the cultural axis of indulgence, the cultural dimension with the widest effects when taking into consideration the dependent variables that were analyzed in this study), even if such an endeavor may generate results only in the long run, given the more rigid character of the cultural construction.

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