"BABEŞ-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY

CLUJ NAPOCA

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY FACULTY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SECURITY STUDIES DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Impact of cultural differences on strategic planning.

From tradition to innovation: a hybrid model for Romania's strategic system

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

PH.D. Supervisor

UNIV.PROF., DR. Erzsebet Nagyne Rozsa

PH.D. Student

Uifăleanu Ovidiu Liviu

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CONTENT

Summary of the doctoral thesis

The title of my PhD, *"Impact of Cultural Differences on Strategic Planning,"* reflects a combination of personal and professional motivations shaped by my experiences during the profound societal transitions in Romanian society. Witnessing and participating in these changes heightened my awareness of how cultural dynamics influence decision-making processes, particularly when adopting systems and practices from other cultures. This sparked a long-standing curiosity about the challenges of implementing planning systems without tailoring them to a country's unique cultural and social specificities. This research is significant as it sheds light on a crucial aspect of strategic planning that has been overlooked.

My motivation for this research also stems from a desire to share insights and experiences with those interested in understanding the interplay between culture and strategic planning. This study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on how organisations can better navigate cultural differences by delving into the complexities of cultural diversity in decision-making and planning. The research also seeks to address gaps in the literature by examining how cultural factors shape strategic planning processes and outcomes, particularly in transition contexts, such as Romania's integration into broader alliances and unions. The practical implications of this research are significant, as it can provide valuable insights for practitioners in the field.

Cultural differences manifested within multinational organisations are unanimously recognised in the literature. The road from cultural shock to cultural synergy is extensively analysed and becomes explicit in the context of contact between two or more consolidated cultures. The present study proposes awareness of cultural dominance in the context of the interaction between so-called historical cultures and cultures in transition, as is the case for newcomers to unions or alliances. Any difference in terms of interoperability multiplies in crises. The impact of cultural differences on strategic planning is more significant than is currently perceived. The need for anticipation, the duration of decision-making processes, and the time to implement measures are much longer for countries in transition. The urgency of this research is underscored by the recent pandemic and the comparative analysis of the reactions of

the EU and Romania from the perspective of programmatic documents and public discourse, which can generate solutions regarding the anticipatory approach of decisions and reactions related to crisis management and post-event recovery.

Romanian society is in the phase of clarifying its values (...). The long process of acceptance in the Schengen space is based on administrative political motives and more profound reasons, such as the psycho-cultural foundations on which these political-administrative incompatibilities appear[1].

On the" European Sustainable Development Report 2020", Romania occupies 30 out of 31 ranks in Europe with only a 58,31% score due to stagnating trends on strong institutions and partnerships for the goals criteria, mainly due to the lack of timeliness in administrative procedures and official development assistance.

Strategic planning is the backbone of organisational success, enabling entities to chart their course through complex and dynamic environments. However, the intricacies of global interactions have introduced an additional layer of complexity: the influence of culture. Culture shapes individual and collective behaviour, decision-making, communication, and leadership styles, all of which are integral to the formulation and execution of strategies. My motivation for this research lies in observing organisations' increasing struggle to align their strategic plans with the diverse cultural contexts in which they operate. Misunderstandings and misalignments stemming from cultural differences can lead to inefficiencies, conflicts, and missed opportunities. Conversely, organisations that successfully integrate cultural considerations into their strategic planning processes stand to gain a competitive advantage, fostering innovation, cohesion, and adaptability. By delving into this intersection, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural insights can be harnessed to refine strategic planning practices.

The unpredictable evolution of the security environment in the Black Sea area in the last 10 years - illegal annexation of Crimea, the paradigm shifts in strategic arms control, and the recent pandemic of COVID-19 being just a few examples - generated unprecedented reactions inside Romanian governance. Political decisions were taken in 2014 at the Wales Summit, and political consent to supplement the defence budget to 2% of GDP generated the establishment of a multinational military formation on national territory and a multiannual program for endowment with military equipment for the Romanian Armed Forces. The need for interoperability and interchangeability rapidly changes from a top-down approach to a dynamic bottom-up pressure.

In Chapter 3 (*NATO Exports its "New Model Army": Why it Did Not Take*) of his book[2], Young (2017) answers the key research question related to the impediments to reforming existing legacy defence institutions and armed forces of Central and Eastern European countries, recognise Geert Hofstede work[3] and his explanation why some cultures are open to some form

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[1] Daniel David, Psihologia poporului Român,2015, Polirom, București, pag.16

[2] Thomas-Durell Young, *Anatomy of post-European Defence Institutions*, 2017, Bloomsbury, London, pag.43

[3] Geert Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations SOFTWARE OF THE MIND*, 2010, McGraw-Hill, New York

of change, while others are not. Only two of the six cultural criteria are analysed briefly; I think there is room for more elaborate discussion. Chris Donnelly (2001, apud Young), Farrell, and Terriff (2002) accept that culture, especially military legacy, is the most challenging organisational attribute to alter.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the interplay between culture and strategic planning, an area that has been sparsely explored in academic and professional circles. While a robust body of work exists on cultural dimensions, such as those proposed by Hofstede and Trompenaars[4], and a wealth of literature on strategic planning methodologies, the intersection of these domains remains underdeveloped. This thesis goes beyond existing research by investigating how cultural dimensions influence each stage of the strategic planning process—from formulation to implementation and evaluation, exploring the challenges and opportunities cultural diversity presents in domestic and international contexts and proposing a pragmatic framework that integrates cultural awareness into strategic planning practices. The research contributes original insights that bridge theoretical constructs and practical applications by addressing these aspects, thereby making a unique and significant contribution to the field of study.

The issue of cultural differences is still insufficiently analysed. I hope candid looks on individual behaviours – mainly education, self-development, and lifetime training cycle – and organisational collective mentality – heritage, customs, structural transformation, working environment, resistance to change – influence the standardisation process. The main attributes of resilient management are action planning and decision-making needed to anticipate, prevent, if possible, and prepare for and respond to a disruptive incident (emergency, crisis, or disaster).In the best-case scenario, during the formative and institutional period, or the continuous professional training, individuals and professional organisations become aware of a regime of lessons learned and examples of good practice, having, nonetheless, a limited ability to capture and scientifically formalise in doctrine and standard operating procedures a foundation for future development and continuous adaptation to a volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous environment.

Contemporary global trends underscore the need for this research. Today's Organisations operate in an interconnected world where cultural diversity is unavoidable and often a defining characteristic of their workforce, clientele, and stakeholder networks. The increasing prevalence of multinational corporations, cross-border collaborations, and culturally diverse teams has elevated the significance of cultural competence in achieving organisational objectives. Moreover, events like the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the necessity for agile, culturally attuned strategic planning. Rapid shifts in global circumstances have revealed vulnerabilities in traditional planning models, particularly those that fail to account for cultural variability. This research is thus timely, addressing an issue of both theoretical and practical urgency.

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[4] Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. (2012) *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. 3rd ed. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

The influence of culture on strategic planning is a topic of profound importance for scholars and practitioners. Recognising and incorporating cultural factors can enhance organisational performance, more effective stakeholder engagement, and sustainable competitive advantages. On a broader scale, fostering cultural awareness within organisations can promote inclusivity, ethical practices, and mutual understanding among diverse groups. This research illuminates these benefits and underscores the strategic and societal value of integrating cultural insights into planning processes.

This research situates itself within the broader discourse on organisational adaptability and effectiveness. Previous studies have extensively explored cultural differences in leadership styles, negotiation strategies, and team dynamics. However, the implications of these cultural dimensions for strategic planning remain insufficiently addressed. This study aims to fill a critical gap in the literature by contextualising the theme within theoretical frameworks and real-world organisational challenges. It also draws upon interdisciplinary perspectives, incorporating insights from organisational theory, cultural anthropology, and behavioural psychology to provide a well-rounded analysis.

Existing literature provides a solid foundation for this study. Landmark theories such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Trompenaars' seven cultural dimensions offer valuable frameworks for understanding how cultural factors influence behaviour. The GLOBE study further expands on these concepts, exploring the relationship between cultural dimensions and leadership. However, most of these studies stop examining the practical implications of strategic planning. While some research has touched on cross-cultural management and international business strategy, a systematic exploration of how cultural factors impact strategic planning processes remains lacking. This thesis builds upon these foundational works, connecting theoretical insights with practical applications.

In conclusion, the MAIN OBJECTIVE of this research is to analyse the impact of cultural differences on strategic planning and policy implementation.

The ***primary objective*** of this research is to explore the influence of cultural factors on the strategic planning processes of organisations operating in multicultural environments. To achieve this overarching goal, the study pursues several ***specific objectives***:

-To identify key cultural dimensions that significantly impact strategic planning.

-To analyse how cultural factors shape decision-making, communication, and stakeholder interactions during strategic planning.

-To develop a practical framework for incorporating cultural considerations into strategic planning.

-To provide actionable recommendations for organisations seeking to enhance their strategic planning processes in multicultural settings.

The **central research problem** addressed in this thesis can be formulated as follows: "How do cultural influences shape the strategic planning processes of organisations in

multicultural environments?" This problem is further explored through a primary research question: "What are the mechanisms through which cultural factors impact the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategic plans?" Supporting sub-questions include:

-Which cultural dimensions are most influential in strategic planning?

-How do cultural differences manifest in strategic decision-making processes?

-What challenges and opportunities arise from cultural influences on strategic planning?

The **research hypothesis** posits that cultural dimensions significantly influence the effectiveness of strategic planning by shaping behaviours, communication styles, and stakeholder engagement. The fundamental thesis of this study asserts that integrating cultural insights into strategic planning enhances organisational adaptability, stakeholder alignment, and performance outcomes. By validating this hypothesis, the research aims to contribute to theoretical advancements and practical tools for organisations.

The ***research methodology*** for exploring the role of cultural differences in strategic planning, using Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory[5], involved a systematic and iterative approach to data collection and analysis. The study began with open coding, breaking down data into concepts related to cultural influences, such as communication styles, decision-making norms, and leadership preferences, which are then grouped into categories. Axial coding established relationships between these categories by examining the conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences of cultural variations in strategic contexts. Theoretical sampling ensures that data collection focuses on areas requiring further exploration, saturating categories to build a comprehensive understanding. Selective coding identifies a central theme, such as the importance of cultural alignment in achieving strategic success, integrating all categories into a cohesive theory. The research incorporated into articles published during doctoral research to document emerging insights, using Strauss and Corbin's coding paradigm to frame findings within a structured narrative of cultural influences. This methodology ensures that the resulting theory is grounded in empirical data, providing a robust framework for understanding the interplay between culture and strategy.

Proposed ***research method***: A Multi-Phase, Cross-Cultural Mixed-Methods Study

In the exploratory stage of research to identify cultural differences between the US and Romania, I followed Daniel David's method of intercultural psychology comparative analyses in a multidomain, interdisciplinary, evidence-based, empirically supported with the tertiary and secondary quantitative analyses of existing databases (i.e., European Social Survey 2006, World Values Survey 2010-2014).

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[5] Strauss, Anselm L., and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1990.

Strategic Planning Theories include classic rational planning models, emergent strategy frameworks (e.g., Mintzberg[6]), and resource-based or institution-based views highlighting how external environments influence planning processes.

From these bodies of literature, develop a conceptual model positing that specific cultural values (e.g., uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, power distance) shape how organisations conceive, execute, and evaluate strategic planning.

The ***expected outcomes*** will illuminate how the specific cultural factors (e.g., levels of hierarchy acceptance, preference for consensus, comfort with ambiguity) shape strategic planning processes, how organisations operating in multiple cultural contexts can adapt their planning approaches to align with local values and norms and provide guidelines for global managers and strategists on fostering culturally responsive strategic planning methods. By integrating theory-driven qualitative exploration with subsequent quantitative validation, the study will yield both deep contextual insights and empirically generalisable conclusions.

This research is expected to yield several significant outcomes, including a conceptual framework for understanding the influence of cultural factors on strategic planning, empirical evidence supporting the integration of cultural considerations into strategic planning processes and practical recommendations for organisations navigating multicultural environments.

The elaborated introduction draws inspiration and concepts from foundational theories, frameworks, and research studies in cultural dimensions and strategic planning. The primary source of inspiration for studying the cultural dimensions frameworks is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which identifies key dimensions (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism, power distance) that explain cultural differences and their implications for organisational behaviour. Trompenaars' Seven Cultural Dimensions explores cultural variability in relationships, time orientation, and communication styles.

Strategic Planning Literature studies encompass strategic planning processes and their integration with organisational goals. They include Mintzberg's concepts of deliberate and emergent strategies and insights from authors like Fons Trompenaars and Erin Meyer, who discuss managing cultural diversity in international business contexts.

Case studies of cultural misalignment in strategic decisions leading to operational inefficiencies or reputational issues.

The limitations of our research primarily stemmed from the inability to utilise all available information. This was a natural consequence of information classification as mandated by applicable laws, necessitating constant diligence in distinguishing between open-source data and classified information. The complexity and variability of cultural dynamics may limit the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the focus on specific organisational contexts may constrain the applicability of results to other sectors or regions. Future research could address

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[6] Mintzberg, Henry, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel. *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour through the Wilds of Strategic Management*. New York: Free Press, 1998.

these limitations by exploring longitudinal trends and expanding the scope to include various industries and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, inconsistencies, lack of organisation, and inadequate systematisation of electronic archives belonging to certain national public institutions hindered our understanding of the research's comprehensiveness. For instance, this impacted our ability to fully cover existing legislation or proposed legislative projects on specific areas of interest.

Chapter 1 analyses cultural differences between the USA and Romania using Hofstede's, Trompenaars', and Daniel David's cultural frameworks. It explores dimensions such as individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance to uncover how cultural traits shape societal norms, workplace behaviours, and governance. The analysis highlights Romania's collectivist, high power distance, and restraint-oriented tendencies contrasted with the USA's individualistic, low power distance, and indulgent culture. The chapter seeks to enhance cross-cultural understanding for collaboration in business, education, and interpersonal relations through theoretical insights and practical implications, stressing the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in global interactions.

Chapter 2 focuses on strategic planning processes. It highlights the general acceptance of strategic planning definitions and explores their evolution and theoretical underpinnings. Central to the chapter are comparisons of Henry Mintzberg's diverse schools of thought on strategy with Stephen Haines' systematic and goal-oriented approach. The chapter discusses both frameworks' strengths, weaknesses, and practical applications across diverse organisational contexts.

The chapter critiques rigid planning models while emphasising adaptability and structured alignment. It also explores the interplay between deliberate and emergent strategies, aligning them with organisational goals. The comparative analysis aims to inform the development of a hybrid framework that balances flexibility with systematic execution tailored to specific cultural and industrial contexts. The chapter provides theoretical grounding and practical insights for optimising strategic planning in complex environments.

Chapter 3 outlines the evolution and structure of strategic planning in the United States, emphasising its cultural, legislative, and institutional foundations. Rooted in values like pragmatism, innovation, and decentralisation, the U.S. approach integrates rigorous processes such as the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 and the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010. These acts institutionalise frameworks emphasising measurable outcomes, adaptability, and public accountability.

The document provides an overview of the core phases of U.S. strategic planning, including mission definition, environmental scanning, goal setting, resource allocation, implementation, and performance measurement. It highlights the influence of think tanks like Brookings and RAND and private-sector contributions while showcasing examples like the National Defense Strategy.

The analysis also critiques challenges like decentralisation, metric overreliance, and short-term focus. Additionally, it connects the U.S. planning style to Henry Mintzberg's schools of thought, aligning it primarily with the Planning School but incorporating elements of the Learning and Cultural Schools. The conclusion underscores the interplay of culture, policy, and institutional frameworks in shaping U.S. strategic planning while addressing its ongoing challenges and adaptability.

Also, the chapter explores Romania's strategic planning process, emphasising the profound influence of cultural, historical, and societal factors. It highlights how Romania's traditions, such as assertive community bonds, respect for heritage, and regional diversity, shape governance priorities and strategic frameworks. Historical transitions from agrarian and centralised communist planning to democratic systems integrated with EU norms underscore the evolution of its approaches. Strategic planning focuses on preserving cultural heritage, promoting rural and environmental sustainability, and addressing regional disparities. Challenges such as rural-urban divides, generational differences, and public mistrust are balanced with opportunities in cultural tourism and inclusive governance. Recommendations include fostering cultural education within government, leveraging digital tools for heritage preservation, and aligning modern reforms with traditional values to maintain authenticity while promoting innovation and inclusivity.

The case study compares the development strategies of Bel-o-mar, the United States, Cumeeira, Portugal, and Chilia Veche, Romania, using Robert Yin's case study methodology.

When national strategies are disconnected from regional and local realities, they often fall victim to **SPOTS syndrome**—Strategic Plans on the Top Shelves—gathering dust instead of driving real change. Budgeting becomes a one-way street, overlooking regional disparities and leading to inefficiencies. Implementation suffers as local authorities, lacking resources and guidance, resort to fragmented, short-term fixes. Without a feedback loop, policymakers remain unaware of on-the-ground challenges, stalling development, widening inequalities, and eroding public trust. Strategic planning at the local level varies significantly based on governance structures, historical influences, and institutional maturity. Comparing Bel-O-Mar, Cumeeira, and Chilia Veche provides an opportunity to understand different models of strategy building and how local authorities evolve in their approach to sustainable development. Bel-O-Mar serves as a model for strategic planning due to its structured and methodical approach. Cumeeira, with its established EU integration experience, represents a more advanced strategic planning stage, leveraging long-standing institutional capacity. Chilia Veche, by contrast, embodies the challenges of transition, illustrating the struggles and opportunities in aligning local planning with broader European frameworks.

The analysis highlights Cumeeira's strengths in innovation and EU integration but notes its reliance on external funding and narrow demographic appeal. Chilia Veche's strategy effectively addresses immediate needs through participatory governance and traditional industries but faces limitations in financial resources and long-term diversification. Cultural differences shape each village's strategic focus, with Cumeeira prioritising modernisation and technology, while Chilia Veche emphasises heritage and community-centred development. The

study underscores the importance of aligning strategies with local contexts and provides insights for future rural and innovative village development initiatives.

Chapter 4 explores the adaptation of Stephen Haines'[7] Systems Thinking Approach to strategic planning for Romania's defence institutions, emphasising the need to modernise planning frameworks in response to geopolitical and cultural challenges. It highlights the legacy of rigid, centralised Soviet-style planning, which is unsuitable for contemporary security threats like hybrid warfare and cyberattacks. The document advocates for a transition toward flexible, collaborative, and transparent systems that align with NATO and EU standards.

Key adaptations include integrating environmental scanning to address emerging threats, fostering stakeholder engagement to build trust, and aligning Romania's vision with Western frameworks. Specific recommendations focus on participatory governance, feedback-driven adjustments, and leveraging NATO's capability-based interoperability and resource modernisation framework. Additionally, it emphasises the need for a national strategic vision and interagency collaboration to prepare for evolving security risks.

"For the leaders operating in Stability and Support Operations, pre-deployment training should be focused on two dimensions: "outside the fences" to increase the ability to work with people belonging to a different cultural system of values and customs, and "inside the fences" training to understand the requirements of unity of effort and purpose between military allies and partners and between the military coalition, other departments, and agencies, developmental and humanitarian community and private sector representatives."

The ideas expressed at the end of the American Land Forces War College in *NATO's comprehensive approach—a challenge for cultural training*—represent not only the findings of three mission tours (BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA 2003 and AFGHANISTAN 2007, 2013) but also the personal conclusions regarding the 20 years of transition, both of the Romanian Army in particular and of Romanian society in general.

The document concludes that Romania's strategic planning requires a balance between respecting cultural dimensions like hierarchical tendencies and embracing systemic modernisation to achieve resilience, democratic alignment, and international competitiveness.

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to advance understanding of the critical intersection of culture and strategic planning. By addressing a significant gap in existing research, the study aims to contribute theoretical insights and practical tools that empower organisations to navigate the challenges and opportunities of cultural diversity in strategic planning.

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