

JIRS JOURNAL OF INTERCULTURAL
AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ISSN 2147-0405

Number 4
ÇANAKKALE 2013

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TURKEY AND BOSNIA: DOES CONVERGENCE EXIST?[°]

Azra BRANKOVIC* & Savo STUPAR **

E-mail: azrabrankovic@yahoo.com & savo.stupar@efsa.unsa.ba

Citation/©: Brankovic. A., & Stupar. S., (2013). Cultural Differences between Turkey and Bosnia: Does Convergence Exist? *Journal of Intercultural and Religious Studies*. (4), 77-93.

Abstract

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a place where many cultures are present. Ottoman presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted for five hundred years. The encounter with the Ottoman culture brought significant changes in the cultural structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The aim of this paper is to research differences between the national cultures of Turkey and Bosnia, and to determine if there is a convergence. We measured 4 dimensions of national culture: 1. The relation to authority, 2. The relation between the individual and the group, 3. Concept of masculinity and femininity, 4. Ways of dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Students at the International University of Sarajevo who took the course Business Communication in the spring semester of 2010 answered a questionnaire regarding 4 dimensions of national culture in June 2010. The class consisted of 44 students, half from Turkey and the other half from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We assume that the students are representative of their cultures, as everybody who lives in certain culture shares the values of that culture. An inductive method of the expert system (Case Based Reasoning) has been applied to analyze the questionnaire and to explain the differences between the national cultures of Turkey and Bosnia.

Keywords: National culture, Hofstede, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, expert systems

[°] This paper was presented in the International Symposium for Balkans and Islam: Encounter- Transformation-Discontinuity-Continuity, 3rd – 5th November, 2010, Canakkale, Turkey.

* International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

** School of Economics and Business, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Short history of Bosnia and Herzegovina

People inhabited Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Palaeolithic period, a hundred thousand years ago. During the Neolith, people in Bosnia established permanent settlements. The first tribes in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the Illyrians. Celts from Northern Italy attacked Bosnia from the north in 370 century BC. They stayed only in the north part of the land, but their influence spread all over Bosnia, as they were technologically advanced the Illyrians adopted new technologies. The Greeks established their colonies along the Adriatic coast and islands in the 4th century BC, but their influence also spread throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina because of trade. The Greeks were advanced and the Illyrians learned from them how to make coins, build cities, and produce arms, tools, jewellery and dishes. The conflict between the Illyrians and the Romans started in the 3rd century BC, but Rome would not complete its annexation of the region until the 9th year AD. The Illyrians were finally defeated, after three centuries of battle and for the next five centuries were under rule of the Roman Empire, sharing the same destiny as many nations of Europe, Asia and Africa. In the Roman period, some settlers from all over the huge Roman Empire settled among the Illyrians while others travelled to Bosnia for various reasons. Thus the population of Bosnia in the Roman period was very heterogeneous. It was comprised of people coming from the Orient, Greece, Egypt, Trakia, Iran and many other countries. It is noted that 40 different religions co-existed in Bosnia at that time and that the people worshiped 52 different gods.

Following the crises of the Roman Empire between the end of 3rd and the beginning of 4th century AD, barbaric tribes started with attacks. The region was conquered by the Goths, Alans, Huns, the Byzantine Empire and finally by the Avars and Slavs, who crossed the river Sava in the year 602nd AD. We do not know a lot about the life of Slavs upon their arrival and the political situation in Bosnia during the Early Middle Ages. It was around this time that Bosnia was Christianized, probably being one of the last areas to undergo this process.

Bosnia emerged as an independent state in the 12th century under the rule of local *bans*. During the rule of Kulin Ban (1180-1204), one of the most important rulers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country started to develop economically and culturally. The official church in Bosnia was the Bosnian Church and the official religion was Bogumilism, considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and the Byzantine church. Bogumils did not believe in resurrection, sacraments, forgiveness of sins, purgatory, saints, icons and the cross. They did not believe in the Church as an institution and criticized the Christian church's greed for money and gold. Kulin Ban was forced by the Pope and the Hungarian king to formally reject Bogumilism in 1203, but this religion survived until the Ottoman Empire arrived to Bosnia. In the 14th century, during the *bans* and kings from the Kotromanic dynasty, Bosnia reached the top of its political and territorial power and king Tvrtko I Kotromanic was the greatest ruler in the Balkans. With territorial expenditure, Bosnia acquired Catholic and Orthodox believers, thus becoming a land consisting of three religions.

The first encounter with the Ottomans happened in 1386 in the Neretva valley and then again in 1388. The Ottomans lost these battles, but their activities and influence in Bosnia have been increasing since, until the final fall of Bosnia in 1463. The Ottoman conquest of Bosnia marked a new era in the country's history and introduced drastic changes in the political and cultural landscape of the region. The Ottomans allowed the preservation of Bosnia's identity by incorporating it as an integral province of the Ottoman Empire with its historical name and territorial integrity, what is a unique case. People in Bosnia and Herzegovina started to accept Islam as their religion even before its final fall. According to historical sources, almost all Bosnian Bogumils accepted Islam, along with a lot of people of catholic and orthodox religion. However, people were not forced to accept Islam. The Islamic culture was expanding in art, science, literature, the way of living and especially in architecture and civil engineering. More than 100 mosques have been built in Sarajevo in the 15th and 16th century, as well as many bridges, roads, schools and libraries. The Ottomans ruled Bosnia and Herzegovina for almost 500 years but with the decline of the Ottoman Empire they

were forced by Great Power to cede administration of the country to Austria-Hungary through the treaty of Berlin in 1878. ¹

Culture and cultural dimensions

Culture is, according to anthropology, the way, pattern, or scheme of how we behave, think, feel or act. We learned this pattern in early childhood in our families. We may not even be conscious of it, but we behave according to this pattern. The way we eat, greet, marry, shop, talk, vote is determined by the culture which we belong to. Culture is always collective. We are all children of our culture.

There are as many cultures as societies. There have been many attempts to import other culture's values, but they all failed. It is not possible to change the way people in a country feel, behave, or act simply by importing foreign values. It is also impossible to change a culture by propaganda, money, or military force. Since the end of the war in Bosnia, the international community, consisting mainly of Americans and Western Europeans spent a huge amount of money trying to import to Bosnia their way of economic development, privatization, solving social problems, their models of democracy and human rights, but all foreign solutions did not work in Bosnia, simply because culture is deeply rooted in a country and cannot be changed easily, especially in a short time.

In the first half of the 20th century, American anthropologists argue that all societies, modern or primitive, face the same basic problems, just solve it differently. They try to identify these problems. Based on the work of Geert Hofstede, influential Dutch social psychologist and anthropologist, and the work of anthropologists before him, it is possible to identify 4 basic problem areas or cultural dimension. Dimension can

¹ See more in Group of authors, Bosnia and Herzegovina from the old times till the end of 2nd World war, Press center of BH Army, 1994, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

be measured and thus compared among various countries. These dimensions are:²

- Power distance (or relation to authority)
- Individualism versus collectivism
- Femininity versus masculinity
- Uncertainty avoidance

The explanation of every dimension is given below. However, these are theoretical extremes. Reality is usually somewhere in between.

Power distance

There is inequality in every society. We live today in the world where some people have more money, power or status than others. Different cultures have a different attitude about inequality, whether it is basically good or bad. Laws in many countries proclaim equality, stating that everybody is equal in front of the law, regardless of status, wealth or power. However, this is not exactly true in reality. Islam is an equalitarian religion, stating that everybody is equal in front of God. However, there are huge social differences among people in countries where Islam is the predominant religion.

In a large distance power culture, people are unequal. Everybody recognizes and accepts inequality. People who have power have privileges, use power to enrich themselves, show symbols of their status. Scandals involving people in power are expected and always covered up. If something goes wrong, the blame is with people who are lower in hierarchy. Income distribution is unequal with a few very rich people and many poor people.

In a small power distance culture, inequality is considered undesirable. Everybody is equal before the law regardless of status, power or wealth.

² See more in Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, Cultures and Organizations, 3rd edition, 2010, McGraw Hill Companies, USA

Privileges are not desirable, everybody uses the same parking lot, restaurant, rest room. It is negative to show status symbols like expensive cars. Politicians in these countries go to work by bike, foot or bus. These are wealthy countries with a large middle class. A scandal means the end of a political career. Countries with small power distance are wealthy countries, with a well established democracy and human rights.

The power distance index value for 76 countries shows that the countries with the highest power distance are Malaysia, Eastern European countries with strong Russian influence (Slovakia, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria), followed by Latin American countries (Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador), than ex Yugoslav countries (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia), and Arab countries.³

Countries with low power distance are Austria, Israel, Scandinavian countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, US, Germany, Great Britain and Baltic countries.

Individualism versus collectivism

The first group where people live is a family in which they are born. There are as many family structures as societies or cultures. People may live in extended families, consisting of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and children. We call these cultures collectivistic cultures. People stay connected with the group from birth until death. The group protects them and they owe loyalty to the group. The majority of countries in the world belong to collectivistic cultures. All poor countries in the world share this culture.

On the other extreme, people may live in a family that consists of parents or even one parent and other siblings. They leave this family as soon as they get an education and lose connection with it. Young Americans

³ See more in Geert Hofstede, *Culture's consequences*, 2nd edition, 2001, Sage publications, Inc, USA.

leave their homes to go to college and usually never come back. Everybody takes care of themselves and only their immediate family. Students take care about their education, taking part time jobs or taking a government loan and do not expect their parents or extended family to cover the expense of their education. We call these cultures individualistic cultures. These cultures are common in rich countries.

An employee in an individualistic culture is “homo economicus”; he/she works for a company because his/her skills and experiences match the company needs. He/she will leave as soon as he/she gets a better offer. On the other side, the employer will fire him/her in the case of unsatisfactory performance. In a collectivist society the employer will hire somebody that he/she knows, usually a relative. The employer will protect an employee in exchange for loyalty. Bad performance will not be a reason for firing, maybe only placement to another job.

In a collectivistic culture a business deal is done when the parties in the business deal know each other very well, trust each other and consider each other as friends. That may take a long time.

In contrast, in an individualistic culture, business is important and the person is not. Further, preferring one person, partner or client is considered discriminatory and against the law. American and Western European companies lost many business opportunities because they try to imply their rules to other cultures.

USA is the most individualistic country in the world. It is followed by Great Britain, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. On the other pole there are Latin American countries (Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Columbia), Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea.

Masculinity versus Femininity

All human societies consist of men and women. They are biologically different, but also their roles in society are different. A culture is called masculine when gender roles are clearly distinct, men are assertive, tough and focused on material success; women are modest and concerned with the quality of life. A culture is called feminine when gender roles overlap; both men and women are concerned with the quality of life.

The masculinity index value for 76 countries shows that the most feminist countries are Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland), than Baltic countries, Netherlands, Slovenia, Costa Rica, Chile, Russia. On the other hand the most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, China, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Great Britain and US.

In the work place, a masculine culture appreciates hard work and performance. Men are expected to work hard, earn money and make a career. All management methods and techniques are born in Anglo-Saxons's countries which are masculine countries. The purpose of these techniques is to push people to work harder and more intensively. In these countries people live to work. In US many people hold 2 or 3 jobs. In feminine cultures people work in order to live.

Feminine cultures value equality. These are welfare countries. They think that the state should provide a normal life for everybody. Their tax system distributes money from rich to poor. The percentage of poor people in these countries is very low. Also, everybody has equal access to education and health care. The percentage of illiterate people is low. In the US, the tax system makes rich people even richer. A big percentage of the population does not have access to health care and its excellent universities are open to those who are able to pay for them.

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is a measure of the extent in which people feel threatened by unknown and uncertain situation. We do not know what will happen tomorrow, our future is uncertain. It is difficult for a human being to live with it. From the beginning of history, people tried to decrease uncertainty, developing science, technology, law and religion. Technology and science can decrease uncertainty regarding natural forces. Law tries to regulate people's behavior and to make it predictable. Religion tries to make people accept that we have to leave with uncertainty. The strongest feeling of uncertainty, measured by the index of uncertainty avoidance in 76 countries, is in Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Portugal. A very high index is in Latin-American countries such as Guatemala and Uruguay. At the top are Russia, Japan, Belgium and other Mediterranean and Latin American countries. At the bottom is Singapore, Jamaica, all Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, US, Canada, Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, India, Malaysia.

In society, cultures with high uncertainty avoidance have a lot of laws and regulations. Sometimes, laws are obsolete and even dysfunctional, but they still exist. However, people in these countries have a strong need to have a lot of laws, but do not trust their legal system. These countries are more conservative, often not tolerant of different people and new political ideas. There are not many people, especially young people, in politics.

In cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, there are not many rules. Great Britain does not even have a written Constitution. People believe that many problems can be solved without rules. If some rule or law becomes obsolete or does not work, they change it. Citizens are interested in politics, and usually trust the politicians and legal system. These countries are more liberal and tolerant of different people and different ideas.

Research results

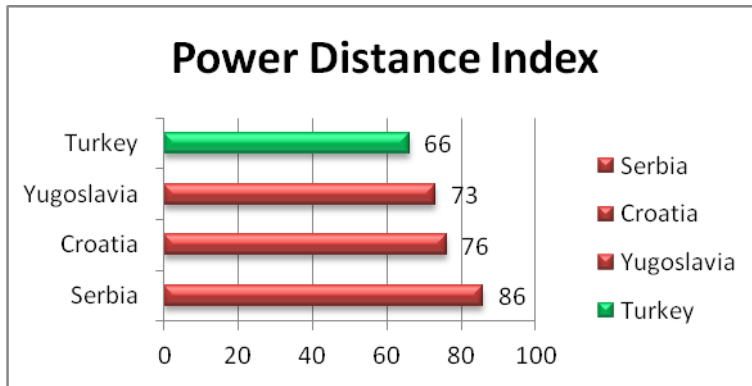
First, we will present the results of secondary research done by Geert Hofstede who made an extensive survey about the values of IBM employee in the more than 50 countries all around the world in the late sixties and published it in 1980. The results have been recalculated several times since then and the number of countries increased to 76. There is no data for Bosnia, however, there is data for Yugoslavia, which Bosnia was part of during the time the research was conducted, and recalculated data for the neighboring states of Serbia and Croatia. Then, we will present the results of primary research. Students at the International University Sarajevo who took the course Business Communication in the spring semester of 2010 answered a questionnaire regarding 4 dimensions of national culture in June 2010. The class consisted of 44 students, half from Turkey and the other half from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We assume that the students are representative of their cultures, as everybody who lives in a certain culture shares the values of that culture. An inductive method of the expert system has been applied to analyze the questionnaire.

Power distance

The power distance index value for 76 countries shows that Turkey shares the 32nd – 33rd place, which means it has a moderate power distance. Serbia is in 8th place and Croatia in 20th.⁴ The index for Yugoslavia is 73.

⁴ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 3rd edition, 2010, McGraw Hill Companies, USA, pp. 57-59.

Chart 1. Power distance index for selected countries



The results of primary research do not show a convergence in power distance between Bosnia and Turkey. Bosnia still has a much higher power distance than Turkey. According to our results, it does not seem that Bosnia moved toward a smaller difference in power distance. There might be several reasons for it. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the poorest countries in Europe⁵ which means higher power distance.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been dependent on foreign aid, as a result of the war, since the nineties which also implies a higher power distance.

The wealth in Bosnia increased in the last two decades but the wealth distribution did not benefit all members of society equally. Wealth in Bosnia is distributed so that the rich people become even richer, thus increasing power distance. Also, rich people use power to lobby for adopting laws in Parliament or paying expensive lawyers to win cases in court, what make them even richer and more powerful and further increases power distance.

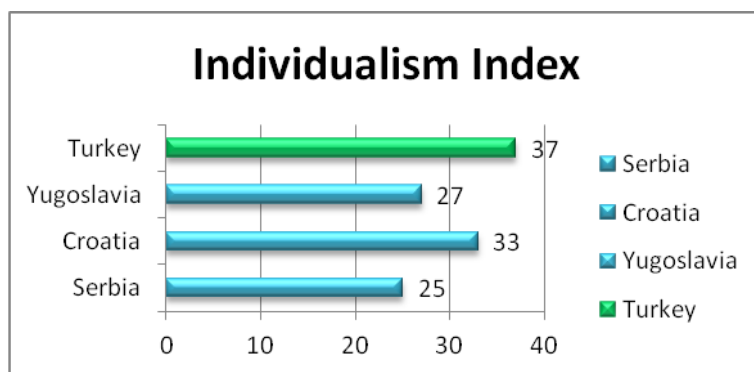
In conclusion, power distance in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains high. It is visible in everyday life in Bosnia, where politicians and people in power have huge salaries, pensions, businesses, houses, cars and are entitled to a lot of privileges.

⁵ World Bank, (2011), Indicators, GDP per capita, retrieved 25. 05. 2010.URL: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

Individualism versus collectivism

The individualism index value for 76 countries shows that Turkey is in 43rd place. We can conclude that Turkey is a collectivistic culture, but moderate. Serbia shares 55th - 56th place and Croatia is in 46th. ⁶In the previous survey of 53 countries, Yugoslavia had the 34th place and Turkey the 29th. According to this, Bosnia is definitely a collectivistic country and has higher collectivism than Turkey.

Chart 2. Individualism index for selected countries



Our results do not show a convergence in individualism-collectivism between Bosnia and Turkey. Bosnia is a more collectivistic country than Turkey. Turkey moved more towards the individualistic side, what could be explained with the rise of wealth in Turkey. This move toward the individualistic side is one of the most dominant cultural characteristic of Turkey. People started to appreciate having more time for their private life and their own interests.

According to results of primary research, Bosnia did not move toward individualism. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the poorest countries in Europe and this discourages individualism. People moved during the war in Bosnia to their national and religious group and tried to find security and protection inside their group in exchange for loyalty. This largely

⁶ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, Cultures and Organizations, 3rd edition, 2010, McGraw Hill Companies, USA, pp. 95-97.

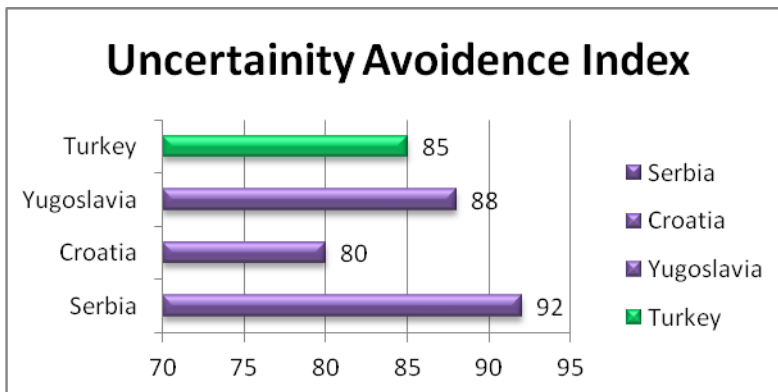
contributed to the increase of collectivism. Hiring in Bosnia is not merit based, but family or party based. There is a Law on civil service in Bosnia where hiring of civil servants is described in details. However, hiring is done on a preferential basis and it is impossible for a well educated and experienced outsider to get a job in civil service.

People in individualistic cultures tend to be positive and express happiness, versus people in Bosnia that always tend to express sadness and rarely smile. Bosnians will use the opportunity to complain about health, weather, prices, politics, etc.

Uncertainty avoidance

Regarding uncertainty avoidance, ex Yugoslav countries scored very high. Serbia shares the 11th – 13th place and Croatia shares the 29th – 30th place. Turkey also ranks very high; it shares the 23rd – 25th place.⁷ Yugoslavia, in previous research was in 8th place and Turkey in 16th.

Chart 3. Uncertainty avoidance index for selected countries



⁷ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, Cultures and Organizations, 3rd edition, 2010, McGraw Hill Companies, USA, pp. 192-194

There is no convergence between Bosnia and Turkey regarding this cultural dimension. Bosnia is a country with high uncertainty avoidance. This is the most dominant culture dimension in Bosnia. It is obvious that people in Bosnia feel uncertain about their future and feel threatened. The most dominant question in this research was “Will you work for a boss of another nationality?” Almost all Bosnian students answered negatively.

People have a feeling that they cannot change anything. People write petitions or go to protests but government suppression is expected and happens. In Bosnia, war veterans recently demonstrated in front of the Federal Parliament because of their pensions. They clashed with police, some were injured and leaders of protests were prosecuted.

There are many laws in Bosnia, but they are not implemented, like the previously mentioned Law on Civil services. Court cases last for years, and their results are uncertain. People who have power usually win cases.

Results show that Bosnia became more conservative, often not tolerant of different people, especially not of people from other nationalities. One of the explanations may be that during the war in Bosnia, people confined themselves to their national groups and became conservative. Later, the political situation reinforced that feeling.

Bosnia is not open to new political ideas. There are not many new people, especially young people, in politics. Various indicators show that the same politicians have been on the ballots for the 2010 elections as for the 1992 elections.

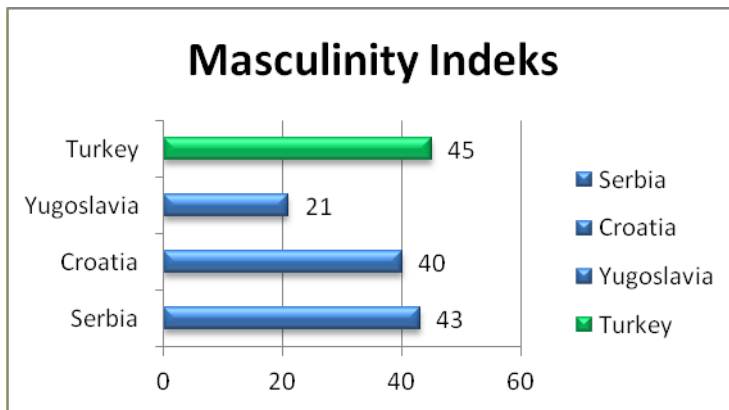
Corruption is very high in Bosnia. Bosnia is on the top of the list of the most corrupt countries in the world according to Transparency International⁸. Bosnia has received huge foreign aid from friendly countries during the war and after, but the money has ended up in private pockets and nobody has been prosecuted for that.

⁸ Transparency International, Retrieved: 25.05. 2010. URL: www.transparency.org

Femininity versus masculinity

The masculinity index value for 76 countries shows that Croatia shares the 55th – 58th place and that Serbia shares the 47th – 50th place. Yugoslavia was a feminist culture. Turkey is on 43rd – 45th place, which is more towards the masculine side than Bosnia.⁹

Chart 4. Masculinity index for selected countries



There is a convergence between Bosnia and Turkey regarding the masculinity-femininity dimension. This is also one of the most dominant cultural characteristic of Turkey. Turkey moved more towards the feminist side. That means more equality between genders, more appreciation toward quality of life, use of private time, living and working in a nice environment. Turkey still has the characteristics of a masculine country where people appreciate hard work and competition, want challenges and high earnings.

Bosnia moved towards the masculine side. This could be explained, again, with poverty and the recent war.

⁹ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, Cultures and Organizations, 3rd edition, 2010, McGraw Hill Companies, USA, page 141-143

Conclusion

Primary research results shows that there is no convergence between Bosnia and Turkey regarding power distance, individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, but there is a convergence in the femininity versus masculinity cultural dimension.

The most dominant characteristic in Bosnian culture is uncertainty avoidance. The most dominant characteristics in Turkish culture are the shift toward individualism and femininity side. Explanation may be that Turkey became a wealthy country with many years of stable economic development. People started to appreciate and enjoy their private time and to enjoy their jobs more. There is also an evident shift towards equality.

References

Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, (2010). *Cultures and Organizations*, 3rd edition, McGraw Hill Companies, USA,

Geert Hofstede, (2001). *Culture's consequences*, 2nd edition, Sage publications, Inc, USA,

Group of authors, (1994) *Bosnia and Herzegovina from the old times till the end of 2nd world war*, Press center of BH Army, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Transparency International, retrieved: 25.05. 2010. URL: www.transparency.org

World Bank, (2011), Indicators, GDP per capita, retrieved: 25.05. 2010.URL: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.