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The cultural determinants of entrepreneurship : an example of Vietnamese immigrants running their own business in Poland

The cultural determinants of entrepreneurship. An example of the Vietnamese immigrants running their own business in Poland

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The paper focuses on the cultural approach to entrepreneurship. The results were developed on the basis of the study of Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Poland. The authors analyzed different typologies of national cultures popular on the ground of management theory (Hofstede, 2000; Hall, 1976; Gesteland, 1999; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1998; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1994) and highlighted the most important, in their opinion, dimensions which have influence on entrepreneurial attitude and competences (Glinka, Gudkova, 2011). Vietnamese culture was described according to these dimensions. Further, picture of Vietnamese culture from the literature was compared to the description of Vietnamese entrepreneurs culture from the research. The results were compared and analyzed in order to present how culture determines entrepreneurial competencies of studied community. The text describes the research which is still in progress.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurial attitude, Vietnamese immigrants, national cultural dimensions.

Kulturowe uwarunkowania przedsiębiorczości na przykładzie wietnamskich przedsiębiorców prowadzących swoje firmy w Polsce

Artykuł omawia kulturowe uwarunkowania przedsiębiorczości. Wyniki zaprezentowane w niniejszym tekście oparte są na badaniach przeprowadzonych wśród wietnamskich przedsiębiorców w Polsce. Główną zastosowaną metodą były wywiady częściowo strukturalizowane. Autorki poddały analizie typologie kultur narodowych najbardziej popularne na gruncie nauk o zarządzaniu (Hofstede, 2000; Hall, 1976; Gesteland, 1999; Hampden-Turner i Trompenaars, 1998; Kluckhohn i Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1994) i wyróżniły najważniejsze, ich zdaniem, wymiary mające wpływ na postawy i kompetencje przedsiębiorcze (Glinka i Gudkova, 2011). Stosownie do zaprezentowanych wymiarów zostały scharakteryzowane kultura wiet-namska (na podstawie analizy literaturowej) oraz kultura wietnamskich imigrantów (na podstawie wyni-ków badań). Ostatecznie zestawiono wyniki analiz literaturowych oraz badań w celu pokazania wpływu uwarunkowań kulturowych na kompetencje przedsiębiorcze badanej społeczności. Wyniki zaprezentowane w tekście są częścią jeszcze nieukończonych badań.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość, kompetencje przedsiębiorcze, postawy przedsiębiorcze, wietnamscy imigranci, narodowe wymiary kultury.

JEL: L26, Z1, J15, J61, O15

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1. Introduction

The factors motivating immigrants to set up their own business are very diverse but some trends can be observed. Entrepreneurship among immigrants is often a response to their inability to find a well-paid job or any job at all in the host country (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Starting a business seems to be the only solution that allows not only for earning a living but also earning more and working in better conditions than when working for someone else. Researchers (Löfström, 2002; Borjas, 1986) note that immigrants running their own business earn more than immigrants working for someone else and earnings of immigrant entrepreneurs achieve the level of those of local entrepreneurs over time. Interestingly, entrepreneurs are usually immigrants who are better educated than those who look for a job at someone else's company (Löfström, 2002). On the other hand studies conducted by Anderson and Platzer (2006) in the United States show that migrants who are highly educated and have an opportunity to work for someone at an attractive position are not so willing to establish new business ventures. Many researchers indicate that not all groups of immigrants start their own business as eagerly as others even though they are in a similar situation (Butler and Herring, 1991; Blanchflower et al., 2001).

Cultural approach draws attention to the cultural aspect in the analysis of entrepreneurship. According to this approach, the differences in entrepreneurship between societies are explained by embeddedness in the society which an immigrant comes from and the society's attitude to entrepreneurial activity (Portes, 1995). The awareness of the possibility of receiving support from the family is a big incentive for future entrepreneurs. Therefore, those who have strong family ties allowing entrepreneurs to obtain funds to run their business, psychological support, advice and contacts will be more likely to set up their own firms.

This article aims to provide an insight into the culture of Vietnamese entrepreneurs who take the risks of starting their business in Poland. The analysis covers Vietnamese cultural characteristics that are essential for running own business in Poland. In particular, it includes such dimensions of culture as the attitude to time, attitude to power, relationships and attitude to change. Vietnamese entrepreneurs as a coherent group exhibit a very definite approach to doing business. They think that, in terms of supporting the family, it is much more important to work among and for family and close friends. They prefer working in their own firm to working for someone else. They appreciate values directed towards money-making and supporting the family instead of promoting universal rules. To this end, they set up businesses that can help them generate profit within a minimum timespan and with maximum risk reduction. That is why they do

not start innovative firms, based on creative ideas, but rather follow well-established patents and copy operations in the areas they know well. Being innovative is an excessive challenge and risk for them. Moreover, creativity involves individualism, conduct contrary to patterns, which is not a natural characteristic of the Vietnamese, who act collectively and are not inclined to accept deviations from typical behaviour. Thus, it cannot be said that firms run by the Vietnamese in Poland are innovative because, as the interviewees note themselves, business ideas are copied, which contradicts the definition of creative activities (Sternberg, 1999). It should be highlighted here that the Vietnamese adapt to existing conditions very well and, as they say, have no problems that could not be solved (Mumford and Gustafson, 1988) and adopt a very flexible approach to pursuing their business (Flach, 1990). It may, therefore, be said that their creativity is limited to coping with everyday life and does not translate to innovation in running their firms.

The article provides some insight into the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship and discusses the most important entrepreneurial competencies and the Vietnamese culture in order to present the results of the research and demonstrate the impact of cultural differences on entrepreneurial competencies in the next part.

2. Method

The research was conducted over three years from March 2011 to June 2014. The aim of the research was to investigate what values guide the Vietnamese running their firms in Poland. What is important to them, how they perceive running a firm and what they think about being an entrepreneur.

The method used in the research was a semi-structured interview including a projection technique. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. On the basis of the material obtained, field categories were defined and then replaced by the authors' own categories.

For the purposes of this text, we analysed interviews with 12 Vietnamese immigrants (including 3 men and 9 women) who grew up in Poland and run their business in Warsaw and two Vietnamese women who are planning to start a firm but are not running it at the moment yet. Cases were selected in accordance with the assumptions of the strategy of maximum variation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The research process also comprises elements of the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data were collected systematically and the researchers commenced the research without any pre-defined hypotheses. Hypotheses emerged in the course of collecting empirical material. An interpretative perspective was adopted with a focus primarily on explaining and understanding the community studied (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

3. Culture and entrepreneurship

Countries differ in terms of the number of companies being established and the general declared willingness to conduct own business activities. There are many factors that play a role, including, undoubtedly, general institutional and macroeconomic conditions. Bureaucracy and costs of running own business (Ciccone and Papaioannou, 2007) as well as favourable conditions for taking a possible business loan (Black et al., 1996; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998) greatly affect the number of start-ups. In addition, researchers note that some countries with a similar level of development represent a different level of entrepreneurship (Pinillos and Reyes, 2011; van Stel, Carree and Thurik, 2005). Entrepreneurship cannot be explained by economic variables exclusively (Noorderhaven et al., 2004; Davidsson and Wiklund, 1997). Therefore, attempts were made to identify the differences between countries as regards entrepreneurial activity of their inhabitants in the cultural context. Hofstede et al. (2004) indicate that culture may be a good explanation of unwillingness to start a company in some countries. General social disinclination toward self-employment may be a reflection of national culture and then appropriate steps should be taken to educate and change the attitude of the society. Nevertheless, it may also be a consequence of institutional impediments in a country and then changes in the administrative system should be considered. Beyond doubt, however, awareness of the culture of a given country can certainly help to develop entrepreneurial mindsets of its inhabitants.

It is the analysis of specific cultural endowments possessed by members of every society that cultural theories explaining immigrant entrepreneurship are focused on. By understanding the culture, we can understand its impact on entrepreneurial activity (Sahin et al., 2007). Culture shapes individuals and their identity. People coming from the same cultural background will have similar "cultural software" which will contain a similar set of values, perception of reality and relationships. It will be a kind of "navigator" for action (Magala, 2005). (National) culture is defined as a set of core values that determine the behaviour of people belonging to one community (Inglehart, 1997; Hofstede, 1991). Those who come from the same ethnic group will be characterised by similar cultural features and norms and will have similar cultural heritage (Portes, 1995). The values shaped by culture work implicitly but it is them that shape the political and institutional system (Pinillos and Reyes, 2011). Culture may affect entrepreneurship through two mechanisms (Davidsson, 1995): social legitimacy of entrepreneurial career and values associated with the appreciation of such a career (Shane, 2003). Both mechanisms will lead to the development of an institutional environment favourable to entrepreneurs and the shaping of values and attitudes that support entrepreneurial thinking among individuals through culture (Krueger, 2000; Linan, Santos and Fernandez, 2011), which will make people belonging to such a community more willing to establish their

firms. (Mueller and Thomas, 2001). Researchers note that ethnic groups differ in terms of their inclination toward being self-employed (Borjas and Bronars, 1989). Entrepreneurial activity is clearly noticeable in ethnic groups or geographic locations where it is actually socially desirable (Butler and Herring, 1991; Blanchflower et al., 2001). Ethnicity may be social capital for self-employment (Aldrich and Carter, 2004). The denser social networks a group has, the more likely that people in this group can count on the support of other persons in their network, which in turn will be a huge psychological support for those wishing to start their business (Portes, 1995). Researchers also note that some cultures are more entrepreneurial than others and setting up business by the members of these groups, regardless of whether they live in their home country or are immigrants, is more common than in the case of members of other ethnic groups (Light and Rosenstein, 1995). Throughout their lives, human beings create themselves and change the environment in which they live according to their needs. We can look at cultural factors as a process of interaction between values, perceptions and actions additionally modified by, *inter alia*, historical, social, economic, educational, globalisation and mass media-related factors, which approach to the analysis of cultural factors influencing entrepreneurship is suggested by Glinka (2008). We may also examine culture referring to certain cultural classifications based on factors identified in studies.

One of the most famous cultural classifications is Hofstede's classification (1991), where one of the factors determining cultural differences is the position of an individual in relation to the whole community which is assessed within the continuum between individualism, where an individual is more important than the community, and collectivism, where the community plays a more significant role and individuals are required to sacrifice themselves for it (Hofstede, 1991; Schwart, 1999). Interestingly, this dimension is one of cultural characteristics that affects entrepreneurial intentions and is reflected in the number of start-ups in a given country as well as in innovation (Hayton, George and Zahra, 2002; Linan and Chen, 2009; McGrath and MacMillan, 1992; Mueller and Thomas, 2001; Shane, Kolvereid and Westhead, 1991).

Another equally popular approach to describe cultural differences is the proposal by Schwartz (1999), who suggests that values are determined by an individual's motivation to achieve goals. Schwartz described 7 values which, according to him, determine differences between cultures:
- embeddedness, including conformity, tradition and security;
- affective autonomy, including hedonism, the world full of excitement;
- intellectual autonomy, associated with curiosity about the world, expanding horizons;
- hierarchy, built on power;
- egalitarianism, built on goodness;
- mastery associated with achievements;
- harmony associated with universalism (Schwartz, 1999).

Schwartz (2006) also describes three basic problems that every culture has to solve: the concepts of a person, power and attitude to the environment. These problems correspond to the seven aforementioned values, forming three axes of division of cultures. The first division is connected with the position of a culture on the continuum between autonomy and embeddedness. The problem faced by cultures is to answer to what extent a culture allows an individual to be autonomous and to what extent an individual is embedded in the community and must follow the life model developed in a given culture. Another problem faced by every culture is to answer the question about the extent to which the society should be controlled. In this regard, one extreme of the continuum is hierarchy, where the social order is built on unequal distribution of goods, with one group being privileged and having a huge amount of goods compared to other groups that have significantly fewer goods. The other extreme of the continuum is egalitarianism, which assumes responsibility and honesty of citizens and refers to social justice and democratic rules. As for the third dilemma in a culture, it relates to the exploitation of the world of nature and lies between mastery and harmony. Mastery involves the desire to master the world and the continuous pursuit of development whereas harmony is associated with unity, nature and the desire to live in peace. How members of a given culture deal with the above-mentioned dilemmas indicates the values that are most important and prevail in that culture.

The values pursued in a community determine its culture and behaviours. Hence, embeddedness and hierarchy are associated with the belief that an individual lives for the community. Typically, such values are characteristic of less developed countries. Egalitarianism and intellectual autonomy are connected with the belief that individuals take their own individual decisions based on their understanding of a situation. Such an attitude is typical of developed countries (Schwartz, 2008). Autonomy seems to be connected strongly with economic growth whereas egalitarianism relates to a social change (Schwartz, 2004). In English-speaking countries and those where Confucianism prevails, the value of mastery is widespread (Schwartz, 2008).

Shared values and beliefs affect the behaviour and determine applicable norms, thus allowing for trust building between business partners, which in turn allows for building relationships. A network of contacts is extremely important in the context of immigrant entrepreneurs who need to get organised in a foreign country. Having many relationship allows immigrants to reduce the cost of operation in the market thanks to cooperation, e.g. through sharing necessary information about the market, new business opportunities, or mutual lending (Light et al., 1989). By creating their own supply chains, they create jobs for people in their network. Furthermore, they allow others to find a job or contract, developing their own chains of suppliers (Rath and Kloosterman, 2000).

All these arguments show the essence of a sense of community and willingness to provide mutual support for entrepreneurial activity of the

group members. However, attention should be drawn to the studies by Lee et al. (2004) and Florida (2008), who note that in diverse societies there is a higher percentage of start-ups. According to the researchers, it is the diversity which enhances entrepreneurial intentions.

4. Entrepreneurial competencies

Today, we know that there is no single ideal profile of an entrepreneur that would guarantee success (Gartner, 1988). Yet, it may be argued that entrepreneurs having a certain set of competencies are more likely to succeed in running their business and are also more inclined to start such activities. It should be pointed out, however, that competencies are a very changeable construct, constantly evolving and developing under the influence of an entrepreneur's interactions with the surroundings. The concept of entrepreneurial competencies is based on the concept of managerial competencies described by Boyatzis (1982). Based on the latest research results, Glinka and Gudkova (2011) described a model of entrepreneurial competencies which include internal factors determining an entrepreneur's success. The model consists of five such factors: motives, general and specialist knowledge, personality traits, self-efficacy and cognitive mechanisms. The authors distinguished three personality traits which, according to many studies, prove to be crucial to business success: achievement motivation, locus of control, and propensity for risk-taking.

Achievement motivation means *"striving for continuous improvement, improving the quality of activities"* (Glinka and Gudkova 2011, p. 124). McClelland (1961) noted that people who have high achievement motivation set ambitious goals, being however aware that they can achieve them. Davidsson (1999) noted that achievement motivation is higher among those who start their own companies than those who inherited them. What is more, people with higher achievement motivation set ambitious goals for the development of their business and reached very advanced implementation stages of their projects.

Another important feature is the locus of control, which can be internal, when people are convinced that they control their lives and what happens them is the result of their own actions, or external, i.e. related to the belief that they have no major impact on what happens in their lives (Rotter, 1966).

Entrepreneurs have an internal locus of control (Brockhaus, 1980) and believe that they themselves are in control of events, which allows them to take actions in uncertain conditions.

Another important personal trait is propensity for risk-taking. However, this characteristic is rather disputable as entrepreneurs actually take slightly riskier actions than people who do not run their business but it is a calculated risk. It cannot be stated that this characteristic is exceptionally intense compared to other professional groups. The risk of running

a business is perceived by entrepreneurs as being controlled by them. This is due, *inter alia*, to an internal locus of control (Zaleśkiewicz, 2004) and specific cognitive mechanisms they use (Palich and Bagby, 1995), which in turn allows them to make business decisions regarded as risky by others. Nonetheless, it should be noted that risk-taking in the area of entrepreneurship allows entrepreneurs to carry out activities that most people would not pursue for fear of risks.

In the literature, we can find many more characteristics which may increase the chances for success. These include, *inter alia*, the need for independence, openness to new experiences, determination in action, or creativity. But, following the competency model suggested by Glinka and Gudkova (2011), we will focus on the three characteristics mentioned above as the most important ones.

Another competency that should be taken into consideration when characterising an entrepreneur is knowledge, which changes dynamically because we gain new knowledge about the world and relationships or technical knowledge at virtually every moment of our lives. Knowledge can refer to different areas; for example, Cope (2005) distinguished 5 areas of knowledge that is useful to an entrepreneur: knowledge about oneself, about business, about the surroundings and networks of connections, about small business management and the nature of relationships, and the possibility to manage them. Every entrepreneur should take care of the development of knowledge in these five areas. Kirzner (1973) points out that in the entrepreneurial process a huge role is played by alertness, i.e. focus on market opportunities. The ability to identify and seize an opportunity is actually a prerequisite for success. And here, a huge role is to be played by an entrepreneur's knowledge that would indicate where and how to look for the necessary information.

Motivation for entrepreneurs' actions is also an important element of the model of entrepreneurial competencies. Motivation is the *"state of readiness of a man to take a specific action"* (Glinka and Gudkova, 2011, p. 129) which is intended to meet a specific need. Carter et al. (2003) identified six basic categories of factors motivating entrepreneurs to start their own business: innovation, independence, recognition, social role, financial success and self-fulfilment. Another important division is the division into push factors and pull factors motivating to start a company (Wickaham, 2004). It is a very important division since it shows that entrepreneurs do not always run their firms by choice, because of passion for business, but sometimes this is due to the lack of other alternatives.

Self-efficacy is also one of the main components of the competency model. It is a belief in the ability to reach set objectives (Bandura, 1997) and, in the case of an entrepreneur, a belief in the capability of running a company. Self-efficacy is built on the basis of own experiences, opinions gathered from other people and observation of others. The last element of the model of entrepreneurial competencies are cognitive mechanisms, that

is the way people think about themselves and the world, select information, and interpret and use it (Aronson, 2007). In order to process information, entrepreneurs employ their specific mechanisms.

5. Vietnamese culture

Based on the typologies described above, we will attempt to describe the Vietnamese culture. In particular, we will consider these culture-specific elements which may have an impact on entrepreneurial mindsets among immigrants. Table 1 summarises 6 most popular concepts of culture typology in management sciences. Subsequently, the dimensions which may be significant from the point of view of entrepreneurial actions are identified (Hofstede, 2000; Hall, 1976; Gesteland, 1999; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1998; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1994).

The first dimension is the attitude to time. In the various typologies, it is understood slightly differently. Hofstede writes about short- and long-term orientation, which means a focus of representatives of some cultures on a specific time horizon. Hofstede called this dimension "Confucian dynamism" according to which long-term orientation (more focused on the future and development) includes features such as: persistence (perseverance), shaping interpersonal relationships based on status, saving and thrift, and a sense of shame. At the other extreme of short-term orientation (more focused on the past and present), there are: stability and balance, care about saving face, respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts. The Vietnamese traditionally qualify as a long-term oriented culture the elements of which can also be seen among immigrants.

> *They like risk-taking, take loans and set up. They like risk, indeed. [...] when a business fails after years, they count every penny, have to think it through, the Vietnamese, that, well, this is wrong, they should appear in great state and pomp, but count everything, but on the other hand, they must really strongly believe that this business will succeed, that they're capable of such actions. That's the question if they're actually less afraid and have a bit of, you know, a nature of a gambler and like such things, just like them.* [N]

This research indicates that among the persons interviewed the process of immigrant assimilation is so strong that many characteristics of short-term orientation could be noticed, e.g. the desire to settle down or particular care for tradition. Presumably, this is a natural consequence (defensive attitude) of living in a foreign environment.

> *Yes, but they, just as we talked before, they're to manage those small businesses so the risk is not really big.* [N]

> *[B]ut it concerns everybody, how to talk to other young entrepreneurs who took over the business from their parents, bigger business. That's the same inclination for saving 'cause businesses used to be started in this way. Now if you want to expand your business in very broad markets, you've got to specifically focus on finance and invest concrete money, not like before.* [R9]

Author of concept	Attitude to time	Attitude to power	Individual-group relationship	Attitude to change	Context	Relationships	Transparency of activities	Behaviours	Space
G. Hofstede	Short-/long-term orientation	Small/large power distance	Individualism/ collectivism	Low/high uncertainty avoidance		Masculinity/ femininity			
S. Schwartz		Power and personal achievements		Openness to change		Conservatism (conformity, tradition, security)	Universalism and kindness to people		
Ch. Hampden-Turner and F. Trompenaars	Sequence/ synchronisation	Attainment/ attribution of status Equality/ hierarchy	Individualism/ collectivism		Analysis/ synthesis	Inner direction/ outer direction	Universalism/ particularism	Restraint/ emotionality	
K. Kluckhohn and F.L. Strodtbeck	Past/present/ future orientation	Status attainment/ status attribution	Society-oriented/ individual-oriented			Human nature (good/bad)	Universalism (harmony with nature)		Open/close
T. Hall	Monochrony/ polychrony				Low/high context				Intimate, personal, social, public
R. Gesteland	Monochrony/ polychrony	Ceremonial/ non-ceremonial				Pro-partnership/ pro-transaction		Restrained/ expressive	

Table 1. Summary of concepts of national cultures relevant from the point of view of entrepreneurship. Source: own study.

Hall and Gesteland called these differences in attitude to time "mono-chrony" and "polychrony" which manifest themselves in linear (punctuality, rigid schedules, emphasis on meeting deadlines, etc.) and non-linear, multi-dimensional (lack of punctuality, loose treatment of schedules and other arrangements) treatment of time, respectively. According to these approaches, the Vietnamese are traditionally polychronic, they like long meetings during which they strengthen existing and build new relationships. In turn, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars divided time into time perceived sequentially as ordered, subsequent events and time perceived synchronously, where many events can occur simultaneously. This is a kind of reference to the linearity of actions and their simultaneous occurrence, as defined by Gesteland and Hall. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck made a division which, in our opinion, describes the culture of Vietnamese immigrants best – it is orientation towards the past, present and future. The interviews clearly show that Vietnamese entrepreneurs operating in the Polish market want to achieve stability here and now. Therefore, they mostly think in terms of the present. Unlike the representatives in their country who belong to a group with strong family ties, they do not always think so much about their families and do not tend to think about the tradition exclusively, with the consequence, *inter alia*, that their children are reluctant to continue their parents' legacy. It is a very characteristic attitude that influences strongly entrepreneurial mindsets, as described in the next chapter.

Another dimension of culture which determines actions taken by Vietnamese immigrants in the Polish market is power distance. In Hofstede's typology, it is the distinction between small and large power distance, which means the degree of dependence of subordinates on their bosses/people in power. In Vietnam, it is defined historically and culturally and is very strong. The situation is similar among Vietnamese immigrants. However, in Poland, this dependence focuses on some other areas of relationships and results in a slightly different behaviour of entrepreneurs. In a culture where class divisions in the society have a very strong impact on many areas of life, this is, on the one hand, traditional attitude to people of higher status and, on the other hand, fear of authority (communism). In Polish conditions, where status resulting from hierarchy does not have such a strong influence on entrepreneurial behaviours, power distance brings the effect of preventive avoidance of contacts with any representatives of higher levels in both private, organisational relations and relations with the administration and state. This characteristic attitude of Vietnamese entrepreneurs relates to other typologies as an attitude to hereditary and acquired status. As already mentioned, the Vietnamese appreciate tradition, are strongly associated with the past of their families and the entire nation, hence hereditary status is so important in their culture. In Poland, entrepreneurs are detached from their roots so their behaviour differs from that of the Vietnamese living in their home country. Immigrants still consider hereditary status to be significant

but, in the absence of an extended family in Poland, they do not need to emphasise its importance in behaviours outside their home country. They emphasise the significance of hierarchy in their own cultural environment while ignoring Polish status determinants. The main determinant of the status of immigrants is money that they can obtain by establishing their own firms.

Money. Status. An opportunity to show this status to others, it's common among the Vietnamese. [R2]

As for the attitude to power, this relationship is not characterised by distance or even fear as in their own country; however, if they can, they avoid any contacts with authority representatives. Thus, the relationships with Vietnamese entrepreneurs are rather difficult and complicated and the representatives of this culture are considered to be difficult in contacts with officials. Gesteland named this dimension "ceremoniality" deriving from a specific attitude to status and hierarchy, as we wrote above.

The third important dimension from the point of view of the issue in question is the individual-group relationship. In this respect, all authors who consider this aspect in their studies (Hofstede, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck) agree on the distinction between individualism and collectivism. There is also a consensus as to the fact that the Vietnamese are traditionally considered to belong to collectivist-approach cultures. They appreciate the group and achievements of collectivity. They are convinced of the strength of a group, not an individual.

You've got to be humane – first of all, resourceful – it's important, honest and treat, you have to treat your employees so that they want to work for you and treat my company as if it was their company to be really devoted to this because they love this job, and not because they have to as they get paid for it. The main thing is to have satisfaction at work but also to have some profits and benefits from that. You've got to combine work and your passion. My mum always taught me that you can't, that you must be fair to your partners and your workers. To treat them as we'd like to be treated. [R1]

Among immigrants, this phenomenon is even more prevalent. Vietnamese entrepreneurs abroad are a group that is even more hermetic and inaccessible to outsiders than their compatriots in their home country. Collectivism, which is associated with a positive cultural feature allowing nations to gain strength and groups to cultivate traditional values while obtaining new valuable experience, is a very difficult barrier created by immigrants for the local population to overcome.

Another dimension, noted by Hofstede and Schwartz, is the attitude to change. It is a very interesting category among Vietnamese entrepreneurs. Their culture is marked by quite specific treatment of changes in the surroundings. Given their situation, immigrants are forced to adapt quickly to the new surroundings in which they find themselves. The Vietnamese are able to do it perfectly. Their inclination to stick to the group is helpful in this regard. Arriving in Poland, they are immediately drawn into

their cultural environment. A group helps them adapt to new conditions. They gain information about industries that are most profitable to invest in and start their own business. Thereby, they minimise the risk of failure of their ventures. It might, therefore, be considered to what extent the Vietnamese are really willing to take risks. Certainly, running a business is, *per se*, accompanied by risks but the way they engage in and pursue business activity rather involves avoidance of too much risk and a focus on choices that seem very likely to succeed. That is why they so often set up catering or trading (especially clothing) companies which are very popular in the immigrant culture. They follow such practices, copy best practices and ideas, rather than seek new development paths.

Another dimension – the context – is defined by one author (Hall) only. Nevertheless, we deemed it extremely important, in particular for interpersonal relations with Vietnamese entrepreneurs. The Vietnamese represent cultures of high context, which influences significantly the quality and speed of understanding. Vietnamese entrepreneurs sometimes cause misunderstanding among Polish business partners since they rely on a veiled manner of speaking and communicating information.

Each author defines the wide dimension referring to relationships in a slightly different way. This dimension is very broad since it encompasses many aspects of very different relationships both inside hermetic cultural groups and between members of these groups and the surroundings. Hofstede defined this dimension as the division between masculine and feminine factors. The former include a focus on earnings, the pursuit of recognition in the community, promotion as a goal, and search for new challenges. According to Hofstede, feminine factors comprise relationships with bosses, cooperation, choice of place of living, and a guarantee of employment. Based on this division, the Vietnamese are a definitely more feminine culture, which again is different for immigrants. Vietnamese entrepreneurs adapt to the culture in which they live to a greater extent and their difficult situation makes them put emphasis on masculine factors in order to ensure the survival of their families. In this respect, Schwartz writes about conservatism (embeddedness). This attitude puts stress on conformity, tradition and security, which features perfectly illustrate the behaviour of Vietnamese entrepreneurs. They choose secure jobs, avoid contacts with the broad surroundings, are reluctant to go beyond their own group/environment, and avoid unnecessary risks. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars write about inner-directed and outer–directed cultures which are reflected in the reliance on own opinions/opinions of others and independence/lack of independence in decision making. This is a very important distinction in terms of entrepreneurial competencies. Both in their own country and abroad, the Vietnamese exhibit outer-direction tendencies, which affects their actions to a large extent. They are usually copied from various sources, self-protective, safe, tested, and often imposed by the group.

[...] we'd like [the business] to grow, to be on the market as long as possible, and we'd like more and more customers, lots of them being regular customers, and we'd like the business to survive and bring us, the partners, as much joy as possible. Profits would do no harm either and this is most important 'cause it's like our little baby and our livelihood, actually. [R3]

In conjunction with the avoidance of risk, this provides a very clear picture of their business activities. Introducing the distinction between pro-partnership and pro-transactional cultures, Gesteland also meant a type of relationships and degree of security in activities pursued. The Vietnamese (both at home and abroad) are definitely a culture that prefers to deal with the family, friends and persons or groups who they know well (pro-partnership culture). For this reason, they usually do business only when they have known their future business partners well.

The last dimension of culture we deemed important for entrepreneurial behaviours and mindsets is transparency of activities. This dimension is mentioned by Schwartz and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars only, who all distinguish universalism as a characteristic feature. Vietnamese immigrants have traditionally built their culture based on Confucian principles, hence their pursuit of unity, harmony with nature and the desire to live in peace. However, the combination of these characteristics with the need to survive in a foreign country often makes their actions unclear and incomprehensible for people from other cultures. In our opinion, immigrants exhibit particularistic attitudes far more often than their compatriots in their home country, putting stress on securing their (family, group) interests and prioritising them over the common good. Table 2 summarises the characteristics of Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Poland, described in this chapter.

Dimension of culture	Vietnamese	Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Poland
Time	long-term orientation (focused on the future and development): persistence (perseverance), shaping relationships by status, saving and thrift, feeling of shame, polychromic culture	here and now (the present); they save money for the family needs but do not make long-term business plans
Power	large distance	large distance
Individual-group	group (collectivism)	group (strong collectivism in comparison with other culture)
Change	adapt relatively easy	adapt but avoid risks
Context	high	high
Relationships	feminine, outer-directed, pro-partnership culture	feminine, outer-directed, pro-partnership culture
Transparency of activities	universalism (Confucianism)	particularism

Table 2. Cultural characteristics of Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Poland (source: own study) compared to Vietnamese in Vietnam. Source: literature.

6. Impact of cultural differences on entrepreneurial competencies

This chapter will present the above-described cultural characteristics and their impact on entrepreneurial competencies among the studied group of Vietnamese entrepreneurs. The discussion will comprise only those dimensions of culture that were considered important in view of entrepreneurial activities pursued. The identified ones include: attitude to time, attitude to power, individual-group relationship, attitude to change, context, general relationships, and transparency of activities. Table 3 indicates the areas where the impact of cultural differences on entrepreneurial competencies is the strongest.

	Attitude to time (the present)	Attitude to power (large distance)	Individual-group relationship (group)	Attitude to change (avoiding changes)	Context (high)	Relationship (strong with known people)	Transparency of activities (particularism)
Motives		X	X	X		X	X
Self-efficacy			X	X		X	X
Knowledge			X		X	X	
Character traits	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cognitive mechanisms	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3. Impact of cultural differences on entrepreneurial competencies. Source: own study.

The short-term approach of Vietnamese entrepreneurs to time and their focus on the present, as described above, affect mainly their cognitive mechanisms. The immigrants interviewed do not take into account a long time horizon, plan future actions consciously or build their business development strategy. If they can plan any venture in a longer term, they try to continue it, without much effort though (reference to outer direction). Outer direction as a characteristic of Vietnamese entrepreneurs is reflected in their focus mainly on responding to what is happening in the market, rather than on e.g. creating the reality on their own. Basically, they focus their attention on acting here and now instead of planning long-term activities.

At least those Vietnamese I know want and perhaps tend to think in terms of finding a way to earn money quickly but in a short time while Poles are focused on arduous, long-term and gradual building. [R2]

It made me send lots of CVs at the end of my studies. Before, when I was still in the third year, responses to my CVs were very quick but at the end of the fourth year there

was no response. Most application sites had just been closed because of the economic crisis. So I decided that it would be better to run my own business than to be employed in another company. [R3]

Attitude to power, described as a large distance, influences entrepreneurial activities far more than attitude to to time. This dimension is particularly important for the motives of actions undertaken by the Vietnamese. A strong need to be independent pushes them to start their own businesses and avoid working under supervision of strangers.

I generally don't like being attached to a company through an employment contract because it's these 8 hours that are binding and now I can work when and how much I want, just as much as I want, I earn, let's say, as much as many clients I can manage to attract. [R2]

Despite the popularity of such a method of earning a living (setting up own business) among immigrants, they also tend to adapt to the existing situation. They often choose tested forms of running a business, preferring industries that are known in their environment. If they are forced to work under someone else's guidance, they usually do not argue with their bosses and avoid contacts with representatives of higher levels. Their actions are definitely dominated by outer-directed factors, they prefer not to act against restrictions (imposed by those in power or bosses), do not take up new challenges, do not show risky behaviours, and tend to adapt.

[...] when they've already adapted to this system of work, they can only work, work and sometimes don't think about their own lives, they just follow the trodden path. [R1]

Attitude to power also influences self-efficacy of immigrant entrepreneurs who choose ventures that have worked before, especially for their friends. Therefore, in their opinion, their effectiveness is limited by external factors. If they are faced with the rules existing in a given industry, they will not try to fight them but they may circumvent them smoothly. A large power distance also affects character traits which include mainly a conformist attitude and risk avoidance. Vietnamese entrepreneurs prefer to achieve less but operate in stable and predictable surroundings.

Yes, but they, just as we talked before, they're to manage those small businesses so the risk is not really big. [R8]

Large power distance has also an impact on the last entrepreneurial competency – cognitive mechanisms. Vietnamese immigrants clearly know and feel the boundaries that should not be crossed and perceive the surroundings in which they operate in this way, as well. Thus, they avoid negative consequences of taking excessively risky actions.

The dimension concerning the relationship between an individual and a group has, in our opinion, the most significant impact on entrepreneurial competencies.

[T]hey have no such power when they're not in a group. [R7]

This is because it refers to each of the competencies mentioned in this text. The characteristic group action has an impact on the motives of immigrants. They mainly do jobs that have been proved to work well, reproducing concepts tested by others. They attribute self-efficacy mainly to a group. They are convinced that success can only be achieved through a joint action by the entire group. Knowledge is also seen as a feature of a group. Knowledge is a collective state of mind. Only experience/ knowledge developed collectively is important and valuable, and worth to be used further. They need cooperation very much and attach particular importance to conversations, sharing experiences and mutual help. They often emphasise that whole families work for the success of everybody. Even if they pursue different activities, such work is intended to benefit everyone.

> *Because, for example, I'm good at cooking and so on and a friend of mine at law, accounting, and still another at management. So we decided to join forces and ... we've started a business and a small restaurant, and each of us will invest, which will help. Of course, everyone wants to have their own business but every beginning must be collective.* [R3]

Hence, an impact also on character traits and the conviction of Vietnamese entrepreneurs that they are good and effective in a group only and cannot achieve anything but with it. Moreover, the risk of acting in a group (doing what others do) is greatly reduced. This property of cognitive mechanisms is reflected in the group being the centre of all activities and its members perceiving the world primarily from the perspective of a team. The Vietnamese take the view that acting together is easier, faster and more effective so acting alone simply does not make sense.

> *Together, we are more than two people alone.* [R4]

Negative attitude to change determines the motives of actions taken by Vietnamese entrepreneurs to a great extent. It is the reason why immigrants are able to adapt to existing conditions successfully but they do not initiate this change themselves. They are influenced by factors pushing them to start a business (push factors) far more strongly than by those that encourage them to do so (pull factors). Avoiding changes results in relatively low self-efficacy based only on the use of proven standards. If they do not have to, Vietnamese entrepreneurs do not go beyond the boundaries set by industry rules. Reluctance to change also indicates some specific character traits. Immigrants believe that they are effective only if they act conservatively, do not provoke changes and do not take risks. The impact of change on immigrants' cognitive mechanisms makes Vietnamese entrepreneurs remain in safe surroundings, if possible. According to the respondents, this makes it easier to do business, adapt to existing conditions swiftly and avoid risks

and consequences of failed investments. That is why they so often apply solutions that have already worked in practice.

> There's much sort of spying on others how they do it, do it .... it's like stealing an idea, that's my impression. That there's really little own inventiveness but a lot of help from outside, it is like puzzles, you collect all things and then create a picture of your own business but not everyone does that. [R1]

The context affects primarily two entrepreneurial competencies: knowledge and cognitive mechanisms. For Vietnamese entrepreneurs, sharing experience and knowledge is the basis for action, they work out everything in a broad context, which facilitates the flow of knowledge and information (reference to the collectivist approach). Their cognitive mechanisms strengthen their belief that if they gain sufficiently good and broad knowledge of all the conditions of business operation, they will manage to survive.

Strong relationships with well-known individuals and groups influence their motivation to start a business. Immigrants claim that the more relationships are in business and in life, the better and easier it is to operate. They also share business ideas in this way, considering them mainly in the context of a group. Also self-efficacy is conditional upon relationships because they consider themselves to be effective and strong when they have a sufficiently large circle of friends, strong relationships with their families and business partners. Among character traits, the most visible one is risk avoidance associated strongly with other cultural values. A dominating approach is that if we act within our community, we avoid risk (which is basically our goal). As regards cognitive mechanisms, it is visible as perceiving the world through relationships, toeing the line, doing what others (friends) do, focusing on cooperation, fostering security and stability.

> That's because I didn't have such big capital to start business on my own, to open a small restaurant, 'cause it takes lots of money and we all are students so we decided we can't manage alone. Because, for example, I'm good at cooking and so on and a friend of mine at law, accounting, and still another at management. So we decided to join forces and ... we've started a business and a small restaurant, and each of us will invest, which will help. Of course, everyone wants to have their own business but every beginning must be collective. [R3]

The last cultural dimension – transparency of activities – is a good summary of immigrants' entrepreneurial competencies and influences many of them. As already mentioned, the Vietnamese are traditionally associated with Confucian principles but immigrants exhibit different characteristics due to the need to find their way in the foreign, Polish culture. Their primary objective and thus motivation to act is to support themselves and their families, to survive in unfamiliar surroundings.

> Everyone is doing their local business. Perhaps, they have money and support their families but these will never be big businesses of Czarnecki type, etc. [R10]

They disregard the traditional Confucian universal values (links with nature and harmony) and focus on particularistic interests (family, group). They do not work so that someone is better-off or for the survival of their culture, enrichment of the country or nation. They are not interested in the importance of activities in the economic or environmental context. They are concerned about being effective within their own family and among their closest friends. Therefore, the most valued character traits focus on family: they work in order to help their families and earn a living to support them.

For my father, as probably for many Vietnamese, it's just important how much he earns. It's a measure of success and it's not important if it's achieved by working under employment contract or running own business though sometimes he'd say that it was better to be self-employed than to work for someone else. [R2]

The most important goal is that their small firms should provide food for their families even if it means illegal activity (the only deviation from the risk avoidance attitude). It is here where the contrast with pro-relationship and collectivist attitudes can be found. That is why understanding between cultures is so difficult.

7. Conclusion

The paper shows that culture affects the decision to start entrepreneurial activities and the later way of running a business to a great extent. It analyses factors that may have a particular impact on specific entrepreneurial competencies. Based on the research, areas that may be the most important from the point of view of entrepreneurial activities were identified. This in-depth analysis clearly shows which areas can cause the biggest problems for immigrants in the establishment of companies in Poland. Comparing the experience of other authors specialising in typologies of national cultures, the article presents how much and in which areas the indigenous Vietnamese culture has been deformed in the immigration situation. It also stressed how important these processes may be for both Poles and Vietnamese entrepreneurs, indicating potential problem areas (without analysing the opinion of Poles on this issue).

The research findings indicated possible main obstacles in reaching hermetic groups of Vietnamese entrepreneurs. The contact with them is hindered not only by institutional constraints but also by cultural considerations to a very large extent. The way in which they will behave in Poland is very much determined by the culture they come from. Regardless of factors such as external support, education of an entrepreneur or his/her personal characteristics, the culture strongly affects the way in which Vietnamese immigrants act. The dimensions that affect their behaviour most are a large power distance, strong collectivism, propensity to avoid risk, acting in a high context and specific relationships (feminine, outer-directed and pro-

partnership culture). At the same time, Vietnamese entrepreneurs exhibit a variety of features that have been deformed abroad. One of them is, undoubtedly, the attitude to time that is rather more long-term orientated in Vietnam while becoming more short-term oriented abroad. The next generations of immigrants (not described in this article but included in the studies presented) confirm further progressive changes in this dimension. Transparency of activities, which is rather associated with Confucian values (universalism) in the country of origin, also undergoes a decisive change: abroad, external factors (such as supporting the family, ensuring employment, etc.) force immigrants to change their behaviour and adopt more particularistic attitudes. Further research in this area, taking into account also an analysis of next generations of immigrants, may provide a broad picture of the ongoing changes and their direction.

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