



CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Cultural diversity refers to the cultural differences that exist between people and collectivities, as multiple entities: traditions, customs, manner to approach education, manner to approach society from an intercultural perspective. According to some authors, cultural diversity is the essence of practicing international public relations.

Those who practice such public relations must have an open and tolerant attitude for managing communication involving people from different cultural backgrounds; otherwise, conflict situations and tensions may arise which would compromise the achievement of the objectives.

Through the present scientific approach, we will highlight some aspects regarding cultural diversity in international and regional initiatives and the fact that this is the essence of practicing international public relations; also, we will highlight the need to respect cultural diversity in the theaters of military operations.

Keywords: cultural diversity; cultural differences; initiatives; security; international public relations; communication; interaction.

"Let's enrich each other from our diversity".
Paul Valery (French writer, 1871-1945)

Cultural diversity in international and regional initiatives

Important topics of international and regional debates include cultural diversity and its importance in shaping the world we live in.

A broad definition of cultural diversity was formulated at the first Cultural Summit of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) international organization, held from March 18 to 20, 2015: "Cultural diversity is the main legacy of humanity. It is the product of thousands of years of history and the fruit of the collective contributions of all peoples through languages, ideas, techniques, practices and creations. Diversity should not only refer to the "other"; it has multiple dimensions and is part of each person's unique identity. Cultural diversity allows the continuous redefinition of identities and differences. It represents an essential component of social harmony, citizenship and the creation of a peaceful society"¹.

A key role in the formulation, promotion and implementation of international instruments on the

various facets of the complex reality encapsulated within the term cultural diversity is held by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Thus, the recognition of cultural diversity as a value of the international community was enshrined in the *Universal Declaration on cultural diversity*, adopted by UNESCO in November 2001², in articles 1-4: "cultural diversity: a shared heritage of humanity; from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism; cultural diversity is a factor of development; diversity means respecting human rights"³.

The approaches on cultural diversity, within UNESCO, have decreased from four (artistic production, identity, in relation to development and in relation to democracy) to two appreciated as convergent: a first approach concerns cultural diversity within a certain society, focusing on aspects such as: fundamental human rights, promotion of cultural democracy, equality on participation of all minorities (ethnic, gender, linguistic, racial, religious, sexual, etc.) and it is placed under the umbrella of the concept of "multiculturalism"; the second approach concerns the cultural diversity between different states, societies and / or cultures, being regarded as a principle that should be

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respected in the exchange of cultural goods and services between these states and / or cultures⁴.

Resolution 57/249 Culture and Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 20, 2002, stipulates that on May 21, the *World Day for Cultural Diversity, for Dialogue and Development* be proclaimed, respectively a day when the benefits of cultural diversity are promoted and the commitment to build a peaceful world, based on the values of mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue, is reaffirmed.

According to article 2 paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (adopted at the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, 2005), "cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed, such as be the freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of people to choose cultural expressions"⁵.

The UNESCO report "Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue" from 2009⁶, appreciates cultural diversity as a key concern of this century. According to this report, there are voices who argue that the globalization and liberalization of the market of goods and services will lead to cultural standardization and will strengthen the existing imbalances between cultures; other voices claim that the end of the bipolar world of the Cold War and the eclipse of political ideologies will lead to new lines of religious, cultural and ethnic guilt and will become the beginning of a possible "clash of civilizations". Joining these voices are scientists warning of threats to the terrestrial environment generated by human activity, drawing parallels between the erosion of biodiversity and the disappearance of traditional lifestyles as a result of a lack of resources and the spread of modern lifestyles.

During the third forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, held in Rio de Janeiro, on May 27-29, 2010⁷, the invited personalities highlighted in the speeches the importance of cultural diversity: all cultures, civilizations and religions contribute to the enrichment of humanity; cultural differences have been used to create fear and to justify invasions and wars; the cultural diversity of the world represents a wealth and a path to the peace of the Planet; civilizations, cultures and societies must recognize and value cultural differences and overcome the fear

of diversity; promoting cultural diversity helps to emphasize the value of the individuals and cultures they belong to; the promotion of cultural diversity must be incorporated as a right and principle in the development strategies of the states; cultural diversity is a transversal element of the three pillars – economic, social, media – necessary for sustainable development.

International initiatives on cultural diversity are complemented by numerous regional initiatives.

We exemplify, in this regard: *The Charter for the African Cultural Revival*, adopted in Khartoum (Sudan), in January 2006, by the African Union member states⁸; *European Parliament resolution of 10 April 2008 on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world*⁹; *The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, entitled "Living Together in Dignity", adopted by the Council of Europe in May 2008¹⁰; *North America Regional Declaration on Bio-cultural Diversity*, adopted in May 2019¹¹.

Cultural diversity – the essence of international public relations

Among the problems that specialists in international public relations face when working in a country other than the one of origin are cultural diversity and cultural differences. Such relationships are planned and executed at the multinational or international level.

In international public relations, culture plays an important role; cultural concepts, according to Patricia A. Curtin and T. Kenn Gaither, make a difference in the practice of international public relations and are the essence of practicing international public relations¹². According to the two specialists in the field of international public relations, "culture represents the thresholds that public relations must face, in order to reach common situations in the middle of international public relations, whether it is about building the national image, attracting tourists, stimulating economic growth or tempering disagreements with rival groups or nations"¹³.

Culture is perceived as an element of identity, which offers a sense of belonging and a way of expressing values; however, it can also be perceived as an economic activity through the cultural and creative sectors. Each culture has its own specificity and functions according to its own internal dynamics, its own principles and laws,



written or unwritten; the values appreciated in a space can differ greatly from society to society, from state to state¹⁴.

In the practice of international public relations, knowing the cultural concepts of a country, understanding cultural differences and accepting cultural diversity are essential and can represent the difference between a contact (personal, group, organizational etc.), a successful discussion and business or a failure.

It is clear that one of the great challenges of the present is to accept cultural differences between us and to understand cultural diversity as a necessity in our changing world.

Cultural reconciliation can be more difficult when one considers that one's own culture is superior to another culture. According to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center¹⁵, people around the world and of all ages are proud of their culture, but the perception of one culture's superiority over others is maintained (for example, in Asia, feelings of cultural superiority are much more intense).

Understanding cultural diversity as well as accepting and respecting cultural differences is helpful in understanding how people look at the world and their relationships with others, but also how people talk about them, about others, or about their ideas.

A relevant example is detailed by Gao Hongzhi, a researcher on the role of cultural concepts in business relations, who states that in business relations with China it is important to know the content of the following three concepts *guanxi*, *miànzi* and *renqíng*: *guanxi* is a deeply rooted cultural concept in rural society and refers to the care for the other; in the business field this cultural concept consists first of building a trusting relationship at personal level, followed by the negotiation and conclusion of contracts; *miànzi* is the cultural concept that refers to the position of a person in the community (organization), in other words, according to the hierarchical Chinese culture, business is done at the same level; *renqíng* is a kind of social currency and refers to the exchange of favors with the other part or parts involved in the business.

For New Zealanders, who are quite individualistic, it is a challenge to develop relationships with a collectivist society such as

China, where the relationship is more valuable than the business¹⁶.

Another example is presented by Daniel David, according to whom "Romanians have a collectivist culture, without being an extreme / strong collectivism. Values such as tradition and conformism that characterize a collectivist culture come to Romanians from the historical need for security"¹⁷.

Kevin L. Keenan brings to public attention another example in which he argues that Egypt has a rich and profound national culture, of which most ethnic and historical subgroups are proud and that the two characteristics that best distinguish Egyptian culture are the importance of family and the central role of religion¹⁸.

The communication process meets difficulties not only in the context of its development within the same culture, but also, even more so, when it takes place between people of different origin and culture.

The field of interaction of international public relations is vast, comprising the field of international organizations, the field of inter-governmental relations, the field of transnational economic transactions and the field of interactions between the citizens of different countries.

There are beliefs and customs so ingrained that the approach to cultural diversity can be extremely different from one country to another or even from one organization (group, company) to another.

The existence of cultural diversity also implies the presence of barriers or obstacles in the way of achieving effective communication in the practice of these relationships. Thus, such barriers and obstacles can be the following: the wrong translation or interpretation of verbal symbols; the presence of norms and behavioral roles; the existence of different beliefs and values; the lack of openness or sincerity; differences in perception; the existence of stereotypes, prejudices and ethnocentrism (belief in the superiority of one's culture over others).

We cannot omit the fact that "the diversity of human cultures lies behind us, around us and in front of us"¹⁹.

In today's complex, dynamic and dynamic security environment, cultural diversity should not be viewed as a security challenge, but actually as an advantage that people can enjoy for expressing their freedom and expressing their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.



In the practice of international relations, it is important to apply the following norms: encouraging and maintaining a working atmosphere appropriate to people's creativity and free expression; promoting open communication within the team by establishing interpersonal relationships based on empathy; promoting a positive and tolerant attitude towards cultural differences; solving possible conflicts generated by the cultural diversity of the group members.

Respect for cultural diversity in theaters of military operations

The cultural dimension is often at the center of peace building processes, being part of the problem or solution. According to Michelle LeBaron, "culture is an essential part of conflicts and conflict resolution (...). Cultures are embedded in every conflict, because conflicts arise in human relationships"²⁰.

The interest in cultural diversity in conflict is directly linked to the promotion of cultural diversity worldwide, starting with the UNESCO report "Our Creative Diversity" (1995) and culminating with the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)²¹.

The theaters of military operations offer possibilities of multiple intercultural contacts, on the international cultural background of the area of action, with the members of different cultures, but also with the members of the culture of the host country where the mission is carried out.

Cultural integration plays an important role in achieving mutual cohesion and trust and contributes to the success of the military mission.

Each community (group, state) has its own moral values, traditions, customs and rules of conduct different from the others; each person has values, habits and behaviors that are different from the other people they come in contact with and communicate with. For the military members participating in missions outside the national territory, it is important to develop skills that promote interculturality in any cultural space and communication skills that allow adaptation to the operational environment and integration among the locals.

Also, in order to understand the cultural specificity of a country / area / region in which the mission is to be carried out, it is important that

the military know the historical, religious, social, cultural etc. aspects that can be obtained from books, magazines or serious specialized websites. The military training before moving to the theater of operations offers many relevant information about the locals, about the cultural differences and similarities.

To illustrate, we can give as examples of practices considered offensive in the communication with the Afghan population: to ask questions and to make observations regarding the female members of the family; to address the elderly, the mullahs and other important people; pejorative comments, such as "as stubborn as a donkey" or "to work like a horse"; accusations of dishonesty, cowardice, corruption, greed etc. (true or false), made especially in public; the use of obscene language in addressing the Afghan population or in the presence of Afghans²².

In theaters of military operations, the process of communication takes place not only between the military members who come from the same culture or from different cultures, but also with the local forces, whose involvement contributes to improving the results of the mission. Therefore, it is important to know the cultural differences, to develop good relations with the locals from the first meeting, based on honesty and respect towards their strengths and weaknesses²³.

An important aspect in the theaters of operations is the negotiation in an intercultural context, as there may be different situations in which the negotiation of the agreements or the resolution of conflicts arising between the soldiers from the same unit or through the interaction with other military and civilians belonging to different cultures may arise. The members of different cultures understand the negotiation differently: some cultures focus on building positive relationships between negotiators, other cultures give importance to the outcome of the negotiation.

An important aspect to mention refers to the culture of the military, which is distinct from civilian life and the non-military organizational culture and which allows the military to be united and act in challenging environments.

In the planning and conduct of military operations, the following aspects must be taken into consideration: the interaction of people with their



environment, economic relations, social relations, political structures and their belief systems²⁴.

If cultural diversity generates intolerant, hostile and aggressive activities aimed at a heterogeneous cultural reality, it can lead to extreme forms, such as armed conflict. The Bosnian War of 1992-1995 provided one of the most dramatic and horrific examples of this kind²⁵.

Respect for cultural diversity is an important condition for the success of missions performed in military operations theaters.

Conclusions

Each national culture comprises a series of its own specific elements (artifacts, norms, values, rituals, ceremonies, heroes, stories, etc.) used to interact inside and outside the respective culture.

The recognition and application of respect for cultural diversity gives expression to the principle of human equality and dignity and is a way of promoting coexistence and interaction within a society.

Cultural diversity has an important role not only for economic growth, for an intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life, but also for the smooth running of international public relations.

In the context of international public relations, mutual understanding of culture is a necessity for planning and performing different activities. For the development of these relationships, cultural diversity forms and strengthens dynamic and interactive relationships between people and their environments, with positive and negative effects on the performance of the team (company, etc.) and the success of the activities.

The military field is one of the areas of international public relations. The high number of missions carried out outside the native country required that the military training be given importance to the training of cultural skills, beneficial for the military in gaining the confidence of the local population, showing respect for the local customs and improving the interpretation of the interactions with the locals and allied troops.

On the agenda of many international, regional or national organizations and for practicing international public relations, cultural diversity is therefore a topic of great interest.

NOTES:

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