CULTURAL-HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE IMAGE OF UKRAINIAN COMPANIES OPERATING ON THE POLISH MARKET

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to outline cultural and historical determinants of the image of Ukrainian companies operating on the Polish market. The author's thesis is that although both communities are close geographically, they showed mutual distrust based on historical experience and cultural differences.

However, due to the orange revolution and joint preparation of Euro 2012 as well as mutual relationship becoming normalized, mutual liking improved, which translates to a positive investment climate.

Key words Economic Integration, Comparative Studies of Countries, Relation of Economics to Other Disciplines, Public relations

Preface

Discussion of the significance of the cultural compatibility of companies operating in new markets is increasingly gaining importance. The growing interest in this issue is influenced by globalisation, the opening of new markets and the decreasing importance of geographical distance when taking investment decisions. In situations where there are few barriers to the flow of capital, know-how or technology, one factor, which can neither be moved nor changed in the short term takes on greater significance. The factor in question is culture and the degree to which it influences the commercial effectiveness of an investing enterprise.

Promotion departments struggling to attract investors are well aware of this fact. A positive climate for investment does not merely entail organisational flexibility and infrastructure, but also the degree to which the inhabitants of a given area are open to new investors. This openness is all the more important because it is these inhabitants of the country hosting an investor that will be its potential employees, associates and clients. Identifying the cultural contexts for creating an image, knowledge of complicated patterns of customs and notions enables one to avoid many threats and contribute to the commercial success of an enterprise.

The miniscule amount of Ukrainian investment on the Polish market may stem from Polish perceptions of Ukrainians¹. However, our close proximity, common economic interests and mutual potential will lead to an intensification of business contacts and mutual invest-

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¹ The 3 most important Ukrainian investors operating in Poland are: Industrialnyj Sojuz Donbassa, which purchased the Huta Częstochowa steelworks, Awto ZAZ, which bought the FSO Żerań car factory. The Ukrainian company Astarta is also registered on the Warsaw Stock Exchange. Source: http://gospodarka.gazeta.pl/gospodarka/1,33181,4327265.html /2008.05.14/
ment, which is why it is also worth analysing the sources of potential misunderstandings on the cultural level.

**Dimensions of Polish culture**

The analysis of Polish culture and its susceptibility to image creation initiatives on the part of the Ukraine should start with our defining the notion of culture. Within this paper, as well as other analyses, the notion of culture will be defined as a set of values, influencing people’s lifestyle, which includes particular forms of behaviour, and historically developing within a particular community. The interpretation of cultural relations in Poland has been presented in “The Global Public Relations Handbook” (Lawniczak, Rydzak, Trębecki, 2003).

According to this paper, culture functions not only as a factor defining and determining particular behaviour, but also operates as a factor distinguishing particular social groups. In the case of Poland, it has special significance due to its geographical situation. Poland is a lowland country. Its lack of natural boundaries and the location between two powerful states, Germany in the West and Russia in the East, has led to Poland being treated in the course of its history as a kind of ‘transit passage’ for foreign armies.

As a consequence of its location, from the 17th century onwards Poland was almost constantly threatened with the loss of its national identity. This is why cultural factors were accorded great significance in distinguishing Poles. Paradoxically, the same features which were supposed to distinguish Poles from their neighbours from the East (Ukrainians, Russians, Byelorussians) are a mirror image of those allegedly distinguishing Poles from the Germans.

Following this line of stereotypical thinking common in Poland, its Eastern neighbours are characterised by the lower level of civilisation development, Asian features, lack of discipline substituted instead by blind obedience to despotic rule. The Pole, on the contrary, is a civilised person, a European, disciplined, law-abiding and at the same time somebody who values freedom and democracy.

When characterising Germans, Poles resort to stereotypes, with our Western neighbours characterised by tidiness and pedantry, but at the same time severe discipline and blind obedience to the law. Poles, in contrast, are free and independent, seeking their own way, endowed with greater imagination and sense of humour, people who are much more open and friendly than the Germans.

However, not all features of Polish culture can be explained by way of geographical factors; instead, geography influenced certain historical factors, which in turn determined particular elements of Polish culture. Historical factors provide more material of use for the present analysis:

- The base relates to the oldest aspect of Polish statehood, namely the adoption of Christianity in the Roman-Catholic rite in 996 AD. Since then, religious attitudes have clearly influenced Polish idiosyncrasies. This influence was determined by Poland’s waging war against countries of different religious backgrounds, i.e. the Islamic state of Turkey, which fostered in Polish minds the image of Poland as ‘the bulwark of Christendom’, especially in the context of Jan III Sobieski’s victory in the battle of Vienna; Poland was also at war with the Orthodox state of Russia and finally against the mainly Protestant Germany. What emerged as a consequence was the image of a Pole = Catholic. This equation was strengthened by the Communists’ pressure to secularize Poland, as well as the investiture of Karol Wojtyła as Pope.

  The dominant influence of Catholicism can be analysed on the basis of Max Weber’s theory, according to which Catholicism triggers ‘a claiming attitude’, resentment towards wealth, very often accompanied by the superficial but spectacular cele-
bration of Church ceremonies. Polish Catholicism focuses on the family, with a special emphasis on the role of the woman (veneration of the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa). In the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations, this Catholicism can be contrasted with the Orthodox tradition often associated with the Ukraine.

- A further superstructure on the Catholic base is the strong memory of noble traditions associated with the sentiment to Poland’s status as world power in 15th and 16th centuries. At that time, Polish nobility comprised a large proportion of society (15%) and the values of the nobility, such as honour, politeness, chivalry towards women, the feeling of patriotic duty and even a social mission were transferred to the intelligentsia of the 19th and 20th centuries.

So strong was this basis that in spite of 50 years of indoctrination, values such as honour, social mission and chivalry are still significant, despite their superficiality. Connections with Ukrainian history are also evident in this respect.

The Polish-Cossack wars are not perceived as a decline but rather the golden age of the Polish Republic’s power. Sienkiewicz’s literature and particularly the screen adaptation of “With Fire and Sword” conveyed a mythical image of those times, overlooking the fact that what we term the Chmielnicki (Khmelnytsky) Uprising was in fact a movement striving for Ukrainian independence. What emerged was enormous sentiment to the inhabitants of Ukraine, expressed not only in popular songs but also as a form of respect for these people. To this day the word ‘Kozak’ remains a synonym for bravery and daring (Wiktionary, 2008).

- The layer of the Partitions, a legacy of the times when Poland was carved up by Germany, Russia and Austria, also consolidated the notion of Pole=Catholic, as well as giving rise to immense distrust of the state and its institutions. For over 170 years, and in part for the 50 years of Communist Poland, the state was a foreign, hostile power. Defiance of such a state and undermining it was treated as an act of patriotism and was accorded respect by society. The weight of this layer also became very apparent to the governments brought to power in democratic elections and quickly disregarded as ‘they’.

Another legacy of the Partitions is the still discernible difference between parts of the country under the rule of different Partition powers. These differences do not merely refer to the denser rail network or better-developed infrastructure, but a conscious belief that an inhabitant of Wielkopolska, from the area under Prussian rule, exhibits the clearly “German traits” of thrift, resourcefulness, good organisation etc. Geographical proximity did not foster a sense of unity with the Ukraine, but rather engendered tendencies to treat Ukrainians as rivals in the struggle to recover the Partitioned lands. What stand out particularly clearly are the memories of the Polish-Ukrainian battles of the early 1920s (in particular the recurrent conflict over the Cemetery of Eaglets - Poles lost in the battle for Lvov) and the memory of Poles killed in conflicts with Ukrainians during World War II.

It is principally this era with which digressions regarding the background of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation are concerned. A distribution table of opinions may serve as an excellent indicator of Polish society’s relations with the Ukraine.

- The dramatic history of both nations meant that before 2004, when mistrust and dislike of given nations were measured, the Ukrainians took one of the last places (24th out of 27 nations). Following the Orange Revolution, Ukraine rose up the popularity ranking to 18th out of 32 nations analysed (CBOS, 2004).
The penultimate layer is the result of 50 years of socialism in Poland, theoretically an independent and democratic state, yet one consigned by the Yalta Treaty to the Soviet sphere of influence. The vestiges of the centrally-planned socialist system, in which the state regulated almost every aspect of its citizens’ lives remain discernible today. Society’s passivity in the face of the challenges of the free market, the lack of an active approach to life and a tendency to make claims on the state are all the legacy of this layer. Another factor, not less important, is the distrust of foreign capital and the institutions of the capital markets.

The average worker exhibits attitudes framed in the class struggle. For this worker the owner of private enterprise is not somebody whose success can be attributed to their own ideas, effort and knowledge, but rather a thief who builds his prosperity on the work of his employees. In the cultural layer, this era left behind the conviction that each person is entitled to receive an equal amount, regardless of their work, knowledge or skill. A similar legacy is visible in both Poland and the Ukraine. We may also get the impression that in the case of Ukraine these changes in mentality went deeper, analogous with more extensive integration with Russia. Nevertheless, Poland did retain its independent nation status at the Yalta Conference in stark contrast to Ukraine, which became one of the republics comprising the Soviet Union.

The final layer is capitalism. This is characterised by burgeoning Americanisation, commercialisation of all aspects of life, the growth of hitherto unknown phenomena such as organised crime, unemployment, shallowness of interpersonal relations and an orientation towards profit-making.

Young people have adapted best to this situation, although paradoxically the greatest beneficiaries of the new system have been those in the 50-60 age group, who were able to turn their political relationships into financial gain. The differences may be greater here. Facts such as swifter social transformation, integration with the European Union etc. can be treated as an element of a widening gulf between Poland and Ukraine.
Classification developed by Hofstede

Analysis of the differences which distinguish Polish culture and which may potentially lead to misunderstandings can be carried out using the classification developed by the Dutch scientist Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1991). He specified four national measurements of culture in work-related values. These are:

- **Power distance** – the extent to which less powerful individuals expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (totalitarian regimes are characterised by a culture of great distance to power – leaders have more authority than their subordinates). At this point we could also project greater integration within the Soviet Union and all that goes with it, including increased power distance, when compared to that of Poland.

- **Uncertainty avoidance** – the extent to which uncertain or unknown situations are perceived as threats. We may also indicate the influence on Ukrainian enterprise culture of the memory of the last 50 years, when each element of this entrepreneurial culture was suppressed.

- **Individualism/collectivism** – the extent to which families and individuals are expected to look after themselves. (Deeply collectivised societies are characterised by strong social bonds, which offer unconditional support and protection throughout life). Both Poland and Ukraine inherited defence mechanisms, where the medicine against state intrusion was care and attention from the family.

- **Masculinity/femininity** – the extent to which “masculine” values dominate – assertiveness, ambition, desire for success – in contrast to “feminine” values – relationship-building, quality of life, services. In “masculine” societies these gender roles are clearly marked, while in “feminine” societies, they overlap.

- **The newest category – long-term orientation** – skills, adaptation of tradition to modern challenges, foresight and the ability to take a long-term perspective.

In terms of Polish culture in the context of Hofstede’s classification, it may be assumed that the greater part of society exhibits great distance to authority and a lack of faith in the possibilities of change by way of democratic elections. Successive declines in election turnout and the lack of interest in politics serve to corroborate this hypothesis – (in 2000 the presidential election turnout was 61%, while the turnout in 2001’s parliamentary elections was 46.29%) (PKW, 2001). Growing distrust of change is also discernible. The euphoria of the early 1990s, when every change is a change for the better, was followed by disappointment and the resulting inertia. Economic difficulties, unemployment and growing concerns all formed a fertile basis for collectivism. The model of the family propagated by the Church and right wing is being adopted for practical reasons. Only the family can serve as a definite source of support in the face of great risk and uncertainty. The consequence is growing nepotism and support for family members in their search for work and promotion.

In terms of the “masculine/feminine” context, we can notice a drift away from the negotiation model of problem solving. In the dominant “masculine” mode of problem solving, the very suggestion of negotiating is perceived as a sign of weakness. Political parties and trade unions compete for influence among a desperate and dissatisfied electorate. What emerges is a form of auction, won by the one making the most excessive demands and demonstrating their power. In Poland the beneficiaries of this system were the radical political parties such as “Self-defence”, under the charismatic leadership of Andrzej Lepper.

Such a model of political culture is unfavourable for traditional public relations. Growing mistrust of information-disseminating activities, economic polarization of society and the radicalisation of feeling all lead to traditional PR may be perceived as government propaganda.
Conclusion

It seems that the cultural differences between Poland and the Ukraine indicated here are so small that they do not pose a significant obstacle to the development of relations, even more so considering that the natural feeling of solidarity and sympathies for the Orange Revolution remain strong.

It is therefore advisable to remember these differences and take advantage of them when planning potential promotional activities.

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