
Introduction

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Biographical notes: Gerhard Fink is a retired Professor of International Business and acting Vice-President of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Competence and Management (IACCM). During 2002–2009, he was the Director of the doctoral programmes at WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Austria. He was the Director of the Research Institute for European Affairs during 1997–2003. His research interests are in organisational culture, intercultural management and international business. He can refer to 230 publications and has authored or (co-)edited about 15 books. Among others, he is an Associate Editor of the *European Journal of International Management*.

The main interest in the call for an issue on cultural variations and mappings was to highlight that observable cultural outcomes, patterns of behaviour and cultural artefacts, may vary between and within cultures, can be put in relation to each other, and made visible in some sort of maps (mappings) or typologies. It also is of interest whether and how variations may come about within cultures. Earlier versions of several of the papers published in this issue were presented at the 10th IACCM Conference, at Ruse, Bulgaria, on Cultural Aspects of Cross-Border Cooperation: Competencies and Capabilities in 2011, taking place at ‘Angel Kanchev’ University of Ruse, Ruse, Bulgaria, and organised by Prof. Dr. Juliana Popova and Prof. Dr. Roumyana Petrova.

For their contribution ‘Cultural maps of the world’, Michael Minkov and Vesselin Blagoev compiled important behavioural outcome variables from a broad range of national statistics, i.e., data on artefacts, which could be interpreted as outcomes of specific variations of cultures. These data are projected into maps providing easy visualisation of the cultural similarities (proximities) and differences (distances) that they show for any pair of countries. Instead of comparing scores of value dimensions, the reader can see at a glance how similar or dissimilar a high number of nations are on a particular collection of cultural outcome indicators, which can be seen as consequences of culturally determined behaviours: murder rates, HIV rates, adolescent fertility, national level IQs, road death tolls, transparency versus corruption, living with parents, and more. The map is based on two dimensions derived through factor analysis, is reflecting national culture and creating clear geographic clusters, which resemble the mappings of scholars in the field of national value studies.

Roger Bell, in his article on ‘A semiotic and critical approach to teaching intercultural management’ addresses issues of the emergence of meanings in contextual configurations. While in principle assuming a ‘neutral and etic’ stance, the traditional value dimension studies systematically overlook power relationships and interests within societal cultures. Bell emphasises to study not only values, but also artefacts. Thus,

semiotics, i.e., the study of signs and symbols as artefacts and integral elements of communicative behaviour, is a necessary instrument in analysis and teaching of cross-cultural issues. Bell emphasises, when cross cultural researchers are leaving the isolated and neutral view on the level of values and are entering into the related mappings of cultural behaviours and their outcomes ‘at the end of the day teachers may have to take sides on cultural and ethical issues’, an insight that is easily understood as a reflection of the mappings offered by the article of Minkov and Blagoev in this special issue.

The third article ‘Challenging traditions from a management perspective: an Egyptian case study’ by Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger and Anett Hermann illustrates the emergence of new patterns of behaviour from economic survival needs, which affect the internal system of values, strategies and structures of the organisation itself, and in turn the social embedding of the organisation. The economic success of survival efforts and successful institution building is legitimising new patterns of behaviour, but legitimising also some (modest) shift away from traditional values within society. This is illustrated with a five year case study of an NGO supporting micro-finance activities and women involvement in small business in Upper Egypt. The theoretical base for this study is Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory, which offers configurations of interrelations between so called ‘economic, cultural and social capital’. This case can be taken as an illustration of Roger Bell’s contribution to this special issue: local context and meaning of values and their outcomes do matter.

In the paper on ‘Greek management and culture’, Charalampos Giousmpasoglou is addressing the shifting balance and emerging issues in the cultural field of three forces emerging from:

- 1 Greek EU membership
- 2 US-American teaching of management thought and related practices of international firms in Greece
- 3 traditional Greek national values, societal goals, signs, artefacts and the traditional collectively attached meanings.

While up to the end of the 2000s, these forces could have been seen to be in a delicate balance, the lasting economic and social crisis with its devastating outcomes leave the Greek population ‘begging for understanding’ of new realities. Gradual alteration of the ways of thinking, the habits and patterns of behaviour seems to be unavoidable, but where to shift?

Dietmar Sternad and Alexander Schwarz-Musch, in their article on ‘Conflict perceptions in top management teams: a cross-cultural study’ undertaken among Austrian and Slovenian managers in different merger contexts, are trying to disentangle issues emerging at the level of organisational culture from issues emerging from personal attitudes and perceived behaviour. In their model configuration, they can identify antecedents of conflict that are emerging when manager’s behaviours deviate from perceived organisational rules and when personal interest has a stronger guiding function for behaviours than perceived organisational interest. Affective conflicts are emerging when personal goals and self-interest dominate over organisational interests. Among Austrian managers, a stronger cognitive conflict perception is arising when Slovene counterparts are deviating from established rules; among Slovene managers gaps in pursued interests play a slightly more important role. Since in Austria participative leadership is an important value, group decision making can have a modest effect on

conflict moderation. This paper can be taken as an illustration of Roger Bell's contribution: considering national values only is a too narrow and thus misleading approach, in the end interest conflicts are at the core of an issue.

To summarise, in this special issue, which we are commending to the readers of EJCCM, we have collected two articles covering issues of high relevance across the field for scholars, students of teachers of cross-cultural management: the *mapping of cultural outcomes* and the *role of local context for research and teaching culture*, and three country specific cases, which could be seen as a locally focused specification of the issues raised in the first two articles: *Greek culture* at a trifurcation in the economic, social and political crisis; a micro project in *Upper Egypt* with a specific macro cultural effect, which so far is locally constrained, but perhaps indicative of survival needs and emerging value and interest conflicts across Egypt; finally, we publish a cross-cultural study of management team conflicts consisting of *Austrians and Slovenes*, which apparently are rather emerging from pursued personal interests and not so much from cultural difference.