

# Cross-cultural Communication Challenges of International Tourism Business Environment

This paper, based on analytic literature review, identifies contemporary challenges of international tourism, considering the changing international market structure from a perspective of cross-cultural communication. It confirms the importance of cross-cultural communication for contemporary international tourism.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, service quality, tourism management.

Straipsnyje, remiantis analitine literatūros apžvalga, identifikuojamos šiuolaikinio tarptautinio turizmo problemos, įvertinant besikeičiančią tarptautinės rinkos struktūrą tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos požiūriu. Pagrindžiama tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos svarba šiuolaikiniame tarptautiniame turizme.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** tarpkultūrinė komunikacija, paslaugų kokybė, turizmo vadyba.

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## Introduction

Emergence of contemporary international tourism is often analyzed in a close relation to globalization and related processes of it. This leads to cross-cultural communication as a topical issue, due to the development of international relations and international business. Reduced trade barriers and the generally increasing flow of capital and movement of people are other characteristics describing contemporary business environment. Millions of people traveling both for leisure and business purposes are among most visible processes describing the ongoing processes. At the same time, recent market trends indicate, that these are not only Western societies looking for international travelling, while remarkably increasing is the share of the

so called emerging markets, most often associated with Brazil, Russia, India and China, named also BRIC countries. Therefore there is an ongoing discussion regarding international tourism which is facing various management related changes. Among them is cross-cultural communication, which is becoming a must for international tourism enterprises. As different cultures represent different cultural backgrounds people are traveling with different expectations towards provided service, while international enterprise managers are expected to be aware of different cultural differences and effective integration of these differences into management. **The object of this article** is cross-cultural communication from a perspective of international tourism business environment and **the aim of this article** is literature review

on the main issues of cross-cultural communication principles, concentrating on aspects both of basic concepts of cross-cultural communication and intercultural business communication, available for international tourism business entrepreneurship and considering the presence of globalization and related processes.

### **Westernization of international tourism**

International tourism often has been associated with, so-called, the third wave of globalization (global integration processes initiated by political and economical liberalization activities in The United Kingdom and The United States) (Collier, Dollar, 2001) having a purpose to draw parallels of international tourism traffic growth and global integration, stimulated by globalization. Considering different discourses of globalization, international tourism, obviously, has been benefiting from all of them: political, economical, social and technological aspects and related processes as internationalization, liberalization, universalization and westernization. In this context, there have been plenty of discussions both on positive (in form of economical importance of tourism on economy) and negative impacts related to the growth of international tourism flow, discussions related on tourism as a global job creator (Huescar, 1997) and a form to stimulate the growth of welfare (Christie, 2002). At the same time also negative impacts on local communities, created by international tourism (Trigo, 2003) should be noted.

Considering the mentioned changes of international tourism business environment in a form of emerging markets and

changing profile of an international tourist, there are further challenges created by globalization. Considering the shape of globalization and its influence on contemporary societies and businesses, from perspective of international tourism, there can be identified various aspects where particular attention should be paid. When analyzing interaction between globalization and international tourism as a form of contemporary international business the following aspects can be highlighted: sustainability, as a response to growing importance of international tourism on local cultures and societies, glocalization, as a result of cultural transformation and intercultural communication as a new requirement set by changing market situation and structure of emerging international outbound tourism markets.

With the rapid growth of international tourism during the second half of the last century, there also emerged a concept of sustainability as a response to the ongoing usage or resources. This came as a response to risks related to international tourism, including sustained tourist flow and sustainable resource planning and socio-cultural challenges created by tourism (Liu, 2003). At the same time, international tourism has been involved in the conflict between consumption of natural resources and economic benefits of local community. On another perspective, which is sustainability of nation state and especially small nation states is export-oriented services, including tourism (Ozay, 2003). At the same time, considering global aging of population and further reducing prices of travelling and increasing speed of travelling international tourism is expected to strengthen its positions as a global economy (Tsiotsou, Ratten, 2010).

Taking into consideration further emergence of new destinations and considering international tourism as a product of Western societies, the issue about culture heritage glocalization is important (Salazar, 2010). Glocalization as a problem emerges from the question on cultural heritage and globalization and wish to use culture heritage for sale (Salazar, 2005). Globalization tends to enter into and shape different localities. These localities, on the one hand are societies with their own cultural perception, ways of living and habits, but on the other hand (Salazar, 2010), for international tourism these localities compose some of the most important elements of tourism products through culture. Practically, local things are being exported as service to international tourism and the problem occurs that in this process of transition local cultures are interpreted according to needs and expectations of the global market (Salazar, 2005).

Even studies of cross-cultural communication as an academic discipline are not new, taking into account changes of international tourism structure and growing importance of emerging markets (BRIC), another discussion is re-actualized which needs a deeper interdisciplinary analysis. It is needed with a purpose to analyze globalization of international tourism business environment and intercultural business communication. Global economical changes create new threats to international tourism which originally has been a product of Western societies, displaying Western cultures, values, norms, attitudes in it. Intercultural communication can be considered as a contemporary issue of international tourism, because of westernization of societies, understood as integration of Western philosophy and

lifestyle components into daily routines (Scholte, 2008). This integration, obviously, has been also deeply integrated into international management and into international tourism in particular, considering remarkable importance of Western societies in the international tourism business structure. Such approach in the management of international tourism business, practically, has been developed considering the market structure of international tourism, where major portion of international travelers historically are Europeans, from countries earning the best from international tourism.

Though Europe is still expected to be the main market player in terms of international travelers, international receipts and international expenditures, new emerging markets of international tourism certainly play an increasing role (Kavous, 2009). The changing structure of international tourism business environment will be challenging for destinations, current market leaders and in particular Europe as a new outbound tourism market is expected to require alternative products, corresponding to their cultural interests and needs. In order to better understand further expectations, intercultural differences will re-gain their topicality as they might act as a guarantee for successful operational performance.

Paying attention to already ongoing and also expected changes it is self-evident that issues, looking on how different affect what we do and how differences can be used in our own favor, is gaining popularity. In this perspective, the need of new or amended business strategies, respecting cultural differences in business administration, is consistently understandable. On the other hand, complicity of the culture related issues requires some

attention to various aspects to be considered by international business environment and international tourism as impre-scriptible part of it.

### **Approaches to cross-cultural communication**

In modern societies, the word *culture* is often used to describe different activities of daily human routines. However, if looking at culture more as an academic discipline, over the decades it has been developing as a complex topic involved in several interdisciplinary studies. *Culture* is understood as a sense of excellence, integrated system of human knowledge, opinion and attitudes, values and practices describing institution, organization or group (Kluckhohn, Untereiner, Meyer, 1952; Singer, 1998). Through culture, individuals and societies, set a frame of daily routines by implementing general understanding of categories, such as right or wrong, good or bad and similar (Hofstede, 1989). Currently, culture is analyzed from different perspectives and ongoing global order changes require culture to be analyzed no longer as a static element, existing within any society or group of individuals, but to consider it as an active element describing interaction between different societies.

Further emergence of globalization mostly is associated with late 80ties and early 90ties, international relations and also cross-cultural communication as integral part of international relations and international business, gained its importance, consequences of culture were noted. Communication between societies and individuals were facilitated by increasingly opened political borders and internet and acute needs of manag-

ers and organizations to succeed in global marketplace (Hoppe, 2004). International business, in a form as it is operating in the XXI century is facing with a tendency of growing impact of emerging markets. On the one hand, emerging markets are considered as new business opportunities for various industries and in particular for service sector and international tourism in the first place. On the other hand, there are also various challenges set within the context of cross-cultural communication as more often it includes dealing with unknown – individuals, or group of individual representing different cultural values, norms and with different cultural background. These group of individuals and societies in general represent also new and potential markets for business development but at the same time dealing with unknown markets and people maybe challenging tasks if looking from perspective of culture. At the same time, culture, in a contemporary business world cannot be avoided, as it plays an important role in everyday activities.

Changes in the international market structure means the need to pay attention to how different cultures are interacting with each other and how this interaction affects business activities. This analysis is done by studies of cross-cultural communication as a static approach. Alternatively, interaction analyzed in a dynamic environment is named intercultural communication. When looking on cross-cultural communication as a subject of contemporary management of international tourism enterprise and entrepreneurship in general, there are various aspects noted by different researches, where core attention should be paid. Interaction of different cultures either in routine activities or in business communication is often

related to using of two definitions: „cross-cultural” and „intercultural”. However, „cross-cultural” refers to comparisons of different cultures in situations of non-contact and „intercultural” to comparison of cultures in contact. Finally, „intercultural” describes behavior within a culture (Gudykunst, 2002). From this perspective, considering the shape and structure of international tourism as a discipline analyzing processes involving different cultural interactions in contact, aspects, relating to intercultural communication deserve more attention, thus giving more practical analysis opportunities.

Cross-cultural communication is based on the generalization of cultures and analysis of how these generalized cultures interact to each other. When analyzing cross-cultural communication, a wider view of communication should be considered when not only language is considered as a factor describing cultural differences. Due to globalization, as a framework of all international operations, cross-cultural communication has become an actual and integrated part of a business communication. In business environment, the key to cross-cultural business is to understand one’s business partners well enough to make cultural adjustments, (Hooker, 2008) thus requiring to analyze cultural interactions from a dynamic perspective. Even often it is noted that globalization implies cultural hegemonization, world economical order is moving away from Western hegemony toward a multi-polar equilibrium (Hooker, 2008).

Development of intercultural analysis has boosted such academic disciplines as cross-cultural psychology and international management (Minkov, Hofstede, 2011). Contemporary analysis of intercultural communication is very much

based on Hofstede’s doctrine, looking on different aspects of culture and variables of it. Countries aren’t king-size individuals; they are social systems (Hoppe, 2004). However, issues related to cross-cultural communication and international management, practically, cannot be separated, as only integrated analysis of cross-cultural communication can help to use and implement principles of cross-cultural communication into daily routines. Besides, assuming countries as social system determines need to understand these systems, before doing any incentive, thus securing from eventual failure, which can occur due to lack of knowledge or behavioral principles. Implementation of these principles into business creates intercultural business strategy, integrating cultural strategy, business strategy and communication strategy (Varner, 2000).

Intercultural business strategy, thus, serves as an important tool for businesses, operating into international business environment and facing issues of cross-cultural communication and intercultural relations. International tourism is particularly interesting business to look on from perspective of cross-cultural communication as it operates into highly internationalized environment.

In intercultural communication analysis different cultures are basic elements. Intercultural communication analysis is based on the structural systematization of cultures, based on different variables. There are different cultural attributes that are systemized, covering various aspects of intercultural communication. Among various cultural attributes there are some having more substantial importance to business operation in general.

Categorization of cultures from the communicational perspective, they are

observed and named respectively **low context** and **high context communication**, is among the keystones of intercultural communication. Being developed by Hall, suggesting there are two types of cultures, approach has been in the spotlight for decades. In high-context cultures little information is in the message itself. Communication in low-context cultures is action oriented and solution minded (Brett, 2000). Importance of communication contexts and their role in business communication and business negotiations is further developed by the authors developing the concepts of communication contexts of Hall and Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, highlighting importance of culture in business negotiations and defining that in intercultural communication involving high and low context cultures negotiators have to approach other party with skill-based connection (Adair, 2003). Communication contexts can give overall understanding of culture, while specific aspects of the communication process are more important when it comes to practical cross-cultural business communication.

Cultures with Western European roots rely in low context communication when details are specified and context must be explicit in the message. Message itself means everything. Low context cultures are German-Swiss, Scandinavian, English (both American and British); in contrast, high context communication when all is understood from context, where Verbal messages have little meaning without the surrounding context. These are such cultures as Japan, China, Arab Countries, Latin American countries; In these cultures relations are close and personal, like in a family (Hooker, 2008). Practically, classical international tourism market

leaders and core markets can be considered as low context, while current ongoing market changes means that high context cultures are expected to enter to these markets.

Advanced systematization has been developed by Hofstede, naming dimensions all societies have to deal with: power distance (relationship with authority), individualism-collectivism (relations between the individual and the group), masculinity-femininity and uncertainty avoidance (ways of dealing with uncertainty) (Minkov, Hofstede, 2011). From perspective of international tourism business environment, individualism-collectivism aspect is to be noted. In tourism, where individuals are traveling and meeting other individuals while traveling, relations to group may play an important role. Understanding of these aspects may give answers to questions, arising when looking on how different tourist groups receive and evaluate different services, provided for larger number of tourists at the same time.

Emerging international tourism markets represent different cultural type and communication context. In analysis of culture and elements different societies are encompassing into their cultures two cultural types can be distinguished, based on psychological studies and studies concentrating on individual relationship to group (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, 1988). Two cultural groups can be named: **individualist** (USA, Canada, Europe – UK, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, individual goals are primary versus collectivist) and **collectivist** cultures (Asia (Japan, China, Korea, India), Africa, Mediterranean countries, Middle East, Central and South America (Brazil, China, Argentina), goals of individualist



are subordinated to collectivist; in collectivist cultures it is considered to be important – how my own action interacts with entire group) (Watkins, Liu, 1996).

Individualist and collectivist cultures also represent different approaches how emotions towards service supplier are expressed. Individualists are concerned only about personal concerns, while in collectivist cultures the worth of an entire group is considered; in collectivist cultures emotions signal internal, subjective feelings, while in an individualist culture emotions signal changes of reality (Mesquita, 2001). This assumption and analysis of reactions in different cultures has been interesting for service suppliers, as it is even more important to understand actual meaning of expressed emotions when facing with unknown and inexperienced. This, being an important part for international tourism is explored in the following paragraphs.

Finally, cultures may differ according to social structure: if a social structure is flat, it is considered **egalitarian** culture and when it is differentiated into ranks, it is named **hierarchical** (Schwartz, 1994).

### **Cross-cultural communication of international tourism**

When analyzing cross-cultural communication various authors propose various aspects, where cross-cultural communication and general knowledge of cultural differences can be noted. These aspects also reflect various operational elements of a company, working in an international environment. Considering structure of international tourism, at least two of them should be highlighted, as they are stressed to be important in intercultural studies:

negotiations of international tourism and service perception of services.

In any organization or relations, where at least two people are working together effective communication is important as the outcomes of their cooperation depends on their ability to express efficiently what they are meaning. Communication is an art, not mastered by all as some are naturally gifted by this art, while some are not (Bardia 2010). In globalized societies organizations are operating, communication is made difficult not only by inter-cultural differences, but even **intra-cultural** and **inter-racial** communication (Bardia 2010). For an organization and at a very remarkable grade for international tourism enterprise management of differences in communication processes becomes an important part of management functions.

Alternatively it is proposed that **cultural variables** should be considered and play an important role in business negotiation, as a part of intercultural communication of contemporary business environment. Such variables as greetings, negotiating styles, attitudes to time, and meanings of numbers, gift-giving customs and significance of gestures are defined as elements of cross-cultural communication aspects of business negotiations (Huang, 2010). Considering number of these variables, playing an important role in the process of negotiation, it is obvious, that knowledge in general plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. By different aspects to be considered, negotiators, aware of cultural differences can play an important role in business success. Business negotiations are among key elements where culture plays an important role, as when people from two or more different cultural groups negotiate, each brings to

the table his or her way of thinking about the issues (Brett, 2000).

In the context of cross-cultural communication and international tourism (business) relations, increasing attention is paid to managers, who are in charge of managing international businesses, forming international business strategies, managing international operations. For an international business, the issue of international strategies has been topical since 1960 when started the emergence of contemporary international business. The approach to it over years has developed from centricity based to ethnocentricity and policentricity based into geocentricity as a modern form of an approach. This change of approaches to international business can be also analyzed as development into understanding world as a whole and respecting differences it encompass.

**Geocentricity** as an approach to international business relations is playing increasing role and geocentric approach to international business transaction requires negotiators to have knowledge about themselves and the other party in terms of culture, subculture, language and communication style (Lawson, Rudd, 2007). For international tourism business enterprise need of geocentric approach managers confirms importance of knowledge into enterprise.

Another issue to be noted is related to **quality management** and advertising to different cultures, using different communication approaches. The distinction between the high and low context communication cultures make it very likely that people in these two cultures may evaluate comparative advertising differently (Shao, Bao, Gray, 2004). For service businesses, such as international tourism is, quality management thus cannot be single one

for all markets company is operating and cultural differences should be also well noted. At the same time, analysis of service and customer behavior understanding is even more complicated, as proposed by Harris and Morgan.

Firstly, the unit of analysis or the level at which culture is to be defined, because the item can be something else than the nation, as it can also be sub-cultural groups or ethnic groups (Hispanic countries), or regional (Eastern Europe vs. Central Europe); Forming of sub-cultural groups, thus, is developing into another challenge when approaching to evaluation of various business aspects from perspective of intercultural communication. Secondly, the meaning of culture or what all it includes; culture is a dynamic force resulting from the interaction of humans and their environment influence each other; five groups of culture including material, social institutions, humans and their universe, aesthetics and language. From this aspect, intercultural communication studies are becoming even more challenging as different entities may perceive these interactions differently.

Thirdly, the nature of cultural influence, or the ways, how culture affects consumer behavior. Ten attitudes and behaviors to be influenced by culture: sense of self and space, communication and language, dress and appearance, food and feeding habits, time and time consciousness, relationships (family, organizations, government), values and norms, beliefs and attitudes, mental process and learning, work habits and practices.

Perception of surrounding environment is related to sensory stimuli that include conditions of the physical environment, indirect environmental conditions, genetic differences and cultural dif-



ferences in how people interact with their environment (Neuliep, 2006). For service sector and international tourism, this confirms the need to differentiate customer satisfaction evaluation, depending on their cultural backgrounds and various aspects of intercultural communication, as observed above.

Finally, considering the structure of international communication and importance of communication via e-mail, intercultural communication in virtual environment is not a less important subject to be considered. There are various miscommunication risks when communicating with e-mails and it can arise from three perspectives: language (misspelling of words, improper use of words, grammatical errors etc.), culture (misunderstanding or urgency, lack of historical background) and business culture/interpersonal contact (personality problems, receiver distrust in requestor, etc.) (Davis, Dobelman, 2009).

## Summary

International tourism operates in a highly globalized world and development of globalization has been favorable to international tourism if looking from the perspective of business development and general growth of international tourism

traffic volume growth. At the same time, globalization, supporting the development of international tourism as a global industry, has created various challenges to international tourism. By continuous changes of contemporary global order and stable growth of emerging markets, Western character of international tourism is endangered. Communication with different, unfamiliar cultures and individuals representing these cultures is a routine of any enterprise operating on international level.

In this perspective cultures and the importance of understanding them has gained its actuality. This analysis has been done both looking of cultures both having contact with other cultures and without it. International tourism with no doubts is a sector where cultural contacts are inseparable part of business and thus intercultural communication is considered.

Intercultural communication is not any longer only an academic discipline, as it has been developing as an important part of business communication strategies. Accepting differences of cultures and importance of intercultural communication in business environment, in the international tourism business environment both organizational perspective and end customer perspective can be determined.

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## TARPKULTŪRINĒS KOMUNIKACIJOS PROBLEMAS TARPTAUTINIO TURIZMO VERSLO APLINKOJĒ

### S a n t r a u k a

Tarptautinio turizma verslas, kaip greitai auganti globali pramonės šaka, yra glaudžiai susijęs su globalizacija, dėl to dažnai yra nubrėžiamos paralelės tarp trečiosios globalizacijos bangos ir tarptautinio

turizma plėtros. Kyla daug diskusijų dėl teigiamo globalizacijos poveikio procesams susijusiems su tarptautiniu turizmu. Turizmui teigiamos įtakos padarė tokie veiksniai, kaip rinkos liberalizavimas,

politinė demokratizacija ir technologijų vystymasis. Tarptautinio turizmo verslo augimas siejamas su pasaulyje didėjančiu turto kiekiu, kuris priklauso nuo augančios tarptautinės prekybos ir paprastėjančio tarptautinio žmonių judėjimo, kuomet mažėja migracijos sienos bei politinė integracija. Taip pat svarbu paminėti transportavimo kaštų mažinimą, nors tai reikalauja atskiros diskusijos pasaulinio turizmo vystymo kontekste. Atsižvelgiant į Jungtinių Tautų Pasaulio Turizmo Organizacijos (angl. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)) pateiktą statistiką, tarptautinių turistų skaičius, tikimasi, iki 2020 metų pasieks 1.5 bilijono. Remiantis prognozėmis šis augimas dalinai tikėtinas ir dėl naujų rinkų, tokiuose besivystančiuose regionuose kaip Lotynų Amerika, Pietryčių Azija, Kinija, Indija ir Rusija. Visos šios rinkos yra dalinai arba visiškai skirtingų kultūrų, kuriose vyrauja skirtingos vietinės kalbos lyginant su Vakarų kultūromis, kur tarptautinis turizmas, toks koks yra dabar, prasidėjo daugiau nei prieš šimtmetį, kai Jungtinė Karalystė pradėjo pirmąsias tarptautines keliones ir pasiūlė jas kaimyninėms šalims.

Dėl kintančių tarptautinės rinkos ir šiuolaikinio tarptautinio turizmo struktūrų, tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos problema ir jos tarpdisciplininė diskusija tampa itin aktuali. Didėja tarpkultūrinės verslo komunikacijos strategijų kūrimo poreikis, ypač tarptautinio turizmo įmonėse, kur tarpkultūrinė komunikacija yra neišvengiama. Tam, kad būtų galima atnaujinti ir reformuluoti tarptautinio verslo komunikacijos strategijas, turizmo įmonės privalo jas grįsti pagrindiniais tarptautinio kultūrinio bendravimo ir tarpkultūrinio verslo komunikacijos principais, kaip itin glaudžiai susijusiomis temomis. Tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos strategijos reikalingos dėl besikeičiančios tarptautinio turizmo verslo struktūros ir mažėjančio tarptautinio turizmo rinkos kaip lyderės Europoje vaidmens. Šio straipsnio tikslas yra apžvelgti literatūrą analizuojant tarptautinio kultūrinio bendravimo principų pagrindines problemas, sutelkiant dėmesį tiek į tarpkultūrinio bendravimo bei tarpkultūrinio verslo komunikacijos pagrindinius aspektus, itin svarbius tarptautinio turizmo verslui, bei atsižvelgiant į esamą globalizaciją ir su ja susijusius procesus.