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## Research in Social Change

# CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ON NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION DURING THE ON-SITE BUSINESS MEETINGS OF SLOVENIAN AND MONTENEGRIN PARTNERS

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## Abstract

*This research addresses challenges of the intercultural business encounters of Slovenian and Montenegrin business partners with a focus on the non-verbal communication (NVC; body language, physical appearance, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, oculesics) during intercultural business meetings between partners. Analysis was built on the theoretical framework on the basis of Hofstede's six dimensions of culture. The comparison between the two countries was performed, showing that there are no significant differences except for the masculinity–femininity aspects, but when considering the Indulgence and Long Term Orientation, Slovenia exhibits equally dispersed traits of both extremes. This comparison served as a starting point for developing a research structure. Before conducting the qualitative study, nine managers from Slovenian and Montenegrin companies were sampled using snowball technique, conveniently being from partner companies in both countries. They were interviewed by the semi-structured interview technique, which addresses differences and similarities within NVCs: their posture, eye contact, physical appearance, chronemics and proxemics during onsite business meetings. The research data findings demonstrate that respondents did not perceive significant differences, which could impact the quality of NVC or lead to greater conflicts. In the comparative analysis of two business cultures, several aspects were identified within two areas, namely paralanguage and chronemics: Montenegrins are reported to be more talkative, louder and fast-speaking, more gesticulating, and rushing decisions and discussions, while Slovenians are reported to be more reserved, calm, less expressive during the meetings, and taking more time for decisions and discussions. Analysis also revealed that both sides show a relatively low level of awareness of the NVC and not paying enough attention to these specific NVCs and their impact during intercultural business communication. The findings indicate that some cultural differences exist between the cultures; however, respondents showed a low level of awareness and reported no ability to approach or manage NVC during the business encounters.*

## Keywords

*non-verbal communication • Montenegro • Slovenia • cultural differences • Hofstede • paralanguage • chronemics*

## 1. Introduction

As globalisation takes its toll, intercultural communication is becoming a common way of dealing with business, now more than ever. Nowadays, in order to become and stay relevant on the competitive business market, one has to be aware of the cruciality of intercultural connections and partnerships. The European Central Bank (2022, under 'Economic diversity') emphasises that the European Union (EU) countries differ in economic activities which add to the total economic value: 'Diversity in economic structures relates, for example, to the relative importance of different economic activities for aggregate output'. These differences reflect a country's specialised products which are recognised internationally and are strongly influenced by geo-economic factors, such

as location, demography, institutional policies and consumption patterns. Countries become competitive on the market since they can offer domestically produced goods and thus build trading connections across countries. This does not limit trading operations only to the EU market.

However, some countries are limited, whether by the geographical location, institutional support or economy policies, and consequently, they depend more on trade channels with other countries. This also positively affects the real gross domestic product (GDP), 'which tends to increase growth potential as foreign demand expands faster than domestic demand' (European Central Bank 2022, under 'Economic diversity'). Cooperation and exchange of goods can benefit both sides.

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Today's global and European market are influenced and conditioned by the rules of EU, meaning that many businesses coming from the non-EU area have difficulties while trying to step up on the market and consolidate its position. When considering former Yugoslavia, it should be pointed out that it was very well respected in the EU milieu, despite being a socialist country. The first official contacts between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the European Economic Community (EEC) were already made in 1962, but the complexity of the process meant that the official declaration was adopted in 1967 and a year later, the first Yugoslav Ambassador in the EEC was appointed (Djurović and Lajh 2020). Only Slovenia and Croatia became EU members, while other countries show slow process of democratic transition. The reasons for it can be found in the direct or indirect involvement in war, ethnic and identity problems and socio-economic factors. It is a very diverse region both culturally and socio-economically and these differences are even more evidently emphasised once compared with the EU in general terms; we are not going into depths about the cultural diversity within the EU. As mentioned above, some of the former Yugoslav countries are 'stuck' in the transition process, war crimes and building their own identity while trying to recover their national economy. Therefore, they are fighting for their democracy while at the same time trying to fulfil standards of the European integration process. However, research shows that some of the crucial criteria have been fulfilled, specifically cooperation with the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Djurović and Lajh 2020). Montenegro has been negotiating for 8 years now and Serbia for 6 years, while North Macedonia entered the negotiations only at the end of March 2020 and Kosovo is merely waiting for visa liberalisation.

Consequently, Montenegro should follow Slovenia's example on its path to the EU, as Djurović and Lajh (2020, 682) emphasise that 'the two countries should – due to their similar interests – collaborate more in both the political and economic spheres'. There are several areas where Montenegro shows great potential and these are in agriculture, the energy sector and tourism (Palalić et al. 2018).

Eurokaz also emphasises the importance of Montenegro's candidate status and urgency of its future membership, while pointing out the necessity of proclaiming Ulcinj's Solana (salt evaporation pond/plant) a nature park, prosciutto and Plantaze wine quality Montenegrin products, which need to be recognised at the EU level (Radević 2019a). When it comes to the relationship between Montenegro and Slovenia, former Prime Minister Duško Marković and the Ambassador of Slovenia in Montenegro Gregor Presker have emphasised during their official meetings in 2019, 'excellent political and bilateral relations, as well as good economic cooperation that can be further enhanced in the fields of tourism, energy

and agriculture' (Radević 2019b). There are about 150 Slovenian companies operating in Montenegro, particularly in the field of insurance, banking, energy and tourism. These investments offer space for further strategic planning of expansion and upgrading collaborative relationship between the two countries. Apart from that, it is important to keep these collaborations strong so that Slovenia offers its support to Montenegro in the EU process (Radević 2019b).

Montenegro has natural resources which can cover its internal economic activities and gain surplus, therefore, the entrepreneurship development should be of future focus (Palalić et al. 2018). Multicultural and multiethnic environment in Montenegro can only aid social and economic development, if it is seen as an advantage in networking across the former Yugoslavia region (Dana 2010). 'Montenegro is like other ex-Yugoslavian republics, with 'specific country factors,' which sometimes prevent entrepreneurship development and do not allow its smooth flow that will bring new values for the socioeconomic development of the country' (Palalić 2017; Palalić et al. 2018, 106). These 'specific country factors' are important to consider, given the fact that they can influence socioeconomic development and thus also international business relationships, as cited above.

On the other hand, Slovenia represents the most developed economy in the former Yugoslav region, even though it formed only 8% of the total area (Zizmond 1993). Slovenian economy is rooted mostly in industry and it is much similar to other, neighbouring South Eastern European economies, 'very small privately owned sector and full employment with substantial excess demand for labor and a well-educated labor force' (Palalić et al. 2018, 138). Its geographic location allows business owners to develop relationships and expand their business in other neighbouring countries, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Turkey or Bulgaria, and university programmes prepare well new and young entrepreneurs.

The market sets standards for performance and this requires being competitive in the field of expertise. To become competitive in a globalised world, one must build international networks, which can be challenging. Intercultural managers are valuable to this network-building process, since they can mediate and facilitate communication between two business leaders with culturally different backgrounds. Being a potential source of misunderstandings, differences in language, values, norms, expectations or experiences can appear during business conversations and strongly influence the business flow (Krstić 2017).

Given the number of Slovenian companies operating in Montenegro and their success (Radević 2019b), the potential for further growth and expansion is present in both societies, with the need for Montenegro to penetrate more strongly the Slovenian market. Also, sharing historical and geographical

circumstances along with similar goals and visions provides reasons for why these two cultures should be examined and come into the research focus. The cross-cultural analysis offers insights which can only aid the political, bilateral relations together with economic growth in both Slovenia and Montenegro.

Communication is not solely limited to a verbal one but a potential source of misunderstandings exceeds the verbal and dives into the non-verbal area. This area includes various signs and forms of behaviour and this research was structured in a way to include as many different sub-areas as possible. Therefore, non-verbal communication (NVC) as a focus of this research specifically included kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, haptics, paralanguage, physical appearance and location of business meetings. Hofstede's dimensions of culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010) were chosen as the basis for the theoretical framework of this research. The circular relationship between culture and communication and their co-dependence and interconnection have been pointed out by Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). Consequently, this was the starting point of the research.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The concept of culture and its relation to the NVC was the focus of this research, how the two are interconnected and how this can be a barrier for successful communication, especially in the organisational/business context. Furthermore, the focus was on the Hofstede's dimensions of culture that served as the basis for the research, the cross-cultural analysis of Slovenia and Montenegro and its results showed cultural differences which exists between the two. After this, certain aspects of NVC (kinesics (body language, eye contact, posture), physical appearance, chronemics, proxemics and haptics) were chosen to focus on in the research, and empirical data was collected about the perception of the business leaders in the international companies which cooperate between Slovenia and Montenegro, on these aspects of NVC, through a phenomenological approach.

The world is becoming more connected and globalised and the number of international companies has been increasing. Therefore, the ultimate goal of every business and every organisation is to work as efficiently and successfully as possible. This is the point where knowledge and awareness of the NVC, cultural differences in the ways of expressing and understanding it can only aid intercultural communication in the organisations.

Intercultural communication is present at all times at the top levels of organisations and for that reason respondents with many years of experience working with Montenegrin and Slovenian managers or business leaders were chosen for this

research. It is important for them to know how to communicate in order to be as efficient in all other levels of the organisations or companies. Intercultural communication should follow the pattern of utter mutual respect between the sender and the receiver, as well as to eliminate any expression of animosity and find common grounds between the two where there are clear standards that make two backgrounds similar (Blahova 2015). When there is no successful communication at the top level, other levels and work will suffer, which can result in losses, break-up of the partnership or even closing down of international departments.

Montenegrin and Slovenian business cultures have been interconnected over the decades, since the Yugoslav times on; when Slovenia became the EU member, this business relationship became even more important for Montenegro. As regards former Yugoslavia, it should be pointed out that it was very well respected in the EU environment, despite being a socialist country (Djurović and Lajh 2020). The first official contacts between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the EEC were already made in 1962, and was adopted in 1967, a year after the first Yugoslav Ambassador in the EEC was appointed. Montenegro is a small country and business usually depends on the external partners, them being from the Western or the Eastern 'block', so to say. Today's global and European market is influenced and conditioned by the rules of the EU, meaning that many business coming from the non-EU area have difficulties while trying to step on the market and consolidate its position – and Montenegro is not an exception.

Since this business relationship is already growing and Montenegro is a candidate for the EU, it is important for business leaders to develop skills and intercultural competences and gain knowledge of it in order to increase their own chances of building partnerships in the EU business areas, as there are many more opportunities. As for Slovenia, it is important for Slovenian business leaders to build partnerships on the former Yugoslav area, where they can offer more quality – there is a smaller competition and there is also historical and geographical common ground on which they can build stronger personal and business kinships.

To start the analysis, Montenegrin and Slovenian culture were compared and contrasted through Hofstede's dimensions, which is a tool the researcher was first acquainted with during the studies, analysing different cultures through specific case studies, with examples of conflicts that arose in business relationships due to misunderstandings in cultural differences. Bringing a theoretical framework to something which usually went unperceived as reasons behind someone's behaviour can usually go, and solving the issues, forming recommendations for managers/leaders has drowned researcher's attention to the topic and finally become part of this research and master's thesis.

Companies which have participated in the research are in the bank, assurance, transport and hospitality sectors. They have their headquarters mostly in Slovenia, except for one. Their offices are based in the major cities of both Slovenia and Montenegro and communication usually took digital form (Skype, Viber, WhatsApp) together with monthly visits and on-site business meetings, and in some cases even spending larger portions of time in Slovenia and Montenegro, respectively. However, since this research was developed in the pandemic times of coronavirus disease (COVID)-19, it was taken into account that most communication was online and answers are given in retrospective. It was a period after the second wave of the pandemic and transport was enabled, so they started to meet in person again, even though less than usual – yet, all the answers were valid and valuable. Companies which participated have a long history of cooperation with their respective countries and some of the respondents have worked >15 years on their positions. Unfortunately, some of them have been very new to their positions, having started right before the pandemic and have had just a couple of meetings in person. NVC usually takes place on a deeper level than pure conscious and is more driven by one's emotions. Therefore, it cannot be easily controlled and this can cause a conflict in business relationships. It is a universal concept with universal signs which can have a completely different meaning in different cultures (Ker-Dincer 2014).

There are many NVCs in everyday communication, and the same happens in companies that participated in this research. For the sake of this research, focus was on aspects of NVC which are significant for the on-site business meetings (body language, physical appearance, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, oculesics) and which are most commonly expressed, whether one is aware of it or not.

Research was conducted on two levels:

- Theoretical, which was based on the literature review about culture and communication, Montenegrin and Slovenian business culture, together with the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions;
- Empirical, which was application of the framework to the gathered data, so as to analyse the perception of business leaders on cultural differences between the two cultures.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

#### 3.1. The objectives of the research

The research aim was two-level: to conduct a systematic literature review on intercultural communication, NVC and cultural differences that are surrounding it and applying the framework of Hofstede's dimensions of culture to the two countries of interest – Slovenia and Montenegro.

The aim was to identify cross-cultural differences of the NVC and its impact (body language, physical appearance, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, oculesics) on the on-site business meetings between Montenegro and Slovenia.

Finally, the goal was to formulate certain recommendations for the business leaders and managers of the partner companies in both Slovenia and Montenegro, since the number of such companies is rising. Recommendations would be in the form of a handbook, which should help inform people in the Slovenian–Montenegrin business area on the importance of NVC, raising awareness about the existing cultural differences and tools for understanding and accepting it in order to build a successful business relationship.

#### 3.2. The definition of the research area and the description of the problem

##### 3.2.1. Research area

The research area of this thesis is the cross-cultural communication in business, with focus on the intercultural differences and NVC in international partnerships. The focus of this research was the cultural differences in the perception of the business leaders and company managers. Montenegrin and Slovenian culture were in the research focus, and were also analysed through cross-cultural comparison of cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede. The empirical part of the research consisted of expert interviews with business leaders and managers from both countries and their answers were compared on several aspects of NVC.

##### 3.3.2. The description of the problem

The market sets standards for performance and this requires being competitive in the field of expertise. To become competitive in a globalised world, one must build international networks, which can be challenging. Intercultural managers are valuable to this network-building process, since they can mediate and facilitate communication between two business leaders with culturally different backgrounds. Being a potential source of misunderstandings, differences in language, values, norms, expectations or experiences can appear during business conversations and strongly influence the business flow (Krstić 2017). Communication and culture are two strongly intersected constructs, and together they exert a powerful influence over human behaviour.

However, communication and communicating style one chooses to use is under the influence of culture. Communication is not solely limited to the verbal part, but also includes a less conscious level to it, and the significance of this part is also shown in the research that implies how 93% of communication belongs to non-verbal, 55% belongs to body language and 38% to the tone (Kudesia and Anger Elfebein 2014). As culture influences the use of communication, it also

influences non-verbal expressions. Absolute understanding of one's own reactions and deeds usually leads to believing that everything that deviates from one's own standards, which are mostly culturally conditioned and learned, is abnormal and wrong (Szkudlarek et al. 2020).

Consequently, when one does not understand something, one tends to reject it and this is a common action in intercultural relationships where people bring their own, culturally specific behaviour. One of the areas of intercultural encounters is linked to the non-verbal behaviour (NVB) of business partners, which to name a few are kinesics, paralanguage, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and location of business meetings that differ from country to country. It is not known to what extent (if any) NVC impacts the workflow of business partners from Slovenia and Montenegro, since research on this subject including these cultures does not exist. Researchers looked specifically into the posture, eye contact, physical appearance, proxemics and chronemics during the on-site business meetings, comparing and contrasting perceptions from the two countries.

Therefore, communication between at least two business leaders or managers is under the influence of several factors, from personal to social and cultural. These create a dynamic context within which business meetings occur. If there is not enough awareness or knowledge about the respective cultures included, misunderstandings of certain expressions could happen. Research shows that these differences can sometimes go to extremes, as in the example of the gesture 'OK', which is in some cultures considered as positive, in others a symbol of money and in some even a threat (Chaney and Martin 2011). This is a practical example of how one simple gesture can be misinterpreted over the world. Other examples, such as location of business meetings, whether meetings are organised in the office or in restaurants can also be misinterpreted as unprofessionalism or distant, strict work relationship. Consequently, it affects the other side and its vision of the relationship and the business which is being built, so that one side can perceive partners as unprofessional and worry about the business outcomes because of the relaxed attitude towards the work. Furthermore, it can lead to breaking up the business relationship. Chronemics or the attitude towards time is also very sensitive to cultural influence and also to misinterpretations as unprofessional behaviour, if business leaders or managers do not strictly respect deadlines or that work timetables are 'too' flexible and open to change.

Given these examples, one can see the possible outcomes if cultural differences are significant or significantly influence NVC, leading to misinterpretation and more drastic outcomes such as conflicts and breaking up.

In order to prevent and manage these conflicts and misunderstandings, people need to understand such

differences and accept them, therefore assuring maintenance of a successful and fruitful intercultural business relationship. In other words, being aware of cultural differences and how they affect one's own behaviour and way of expressing can help avoiding conflicts and misunderstandings.

### 3.3. Research purpose and goals

The purpose of the research was to investigate and analyse the cultural differences in specific NVC (kinesics, paralanguage, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and location of business meeting) and its impact during the on-site business meetings between Montenegrin and Slovenian partners.

Slovenia and Montenegro are growing their economic relations, with many Slovenian businesses opening their centres in Montenegro. Reports also show the potential to boost cooperation from tourism, information and technology (IT), airport and road infrastructure, energy, as well as waste water management. Slovenia is an important partner from which Montenegro can only benefit regarding its institutional and economic growth and development, including in a bid to join the EU.

This research presented cultural differences between two cultures which share some historical and geographical points, however, through tools such as Hofstede's comparison among six dimensions, as described in: *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind, Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010).

The goals were to do the following: (1) conduct a systematic literature review of important intercultural communication and NVC, together with Hofstede's theoretical framework; (2) identify the cross-cultural differences of NVC (with the focus on kinesics, paralanguage, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and location of business meetings) between Montenegrin and Slovenian business cultures; and finally (3) analyse the impact of intercultural differences on the NVC during the on-site business meetings from both the Montenegrin and Slovenian perspectives.

### 3.4. Methodology

While conducting research, the following methods were used:

- A descriptive method to present the theoretical background behind the communication, its systems of functioning, together with intercultural context;
- A classification method for analysis of the general concepts (Hofstede's dimensions);
- Interviews with managers and leaders of the companies that yielded empirical data;
- Qualitative data analysis of the collected data from both interviews and theory.

### **3.4.1. The approach taken in this research**

Research was undertaken in two phases, the planning phase and the execution phase. In the planning phase, a literature review was carried out, together with cultural analysis and preparation for the interviews. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews and preparation of the practical recommendations was part of the execution phase.

### **3.4.2. The main research question**

**MQ:** What is the impact of the cross-cultural differences (Slovenian and Montenegrin) on the specific types of NVC (kinesics, proxemics, chronemics and physical appearance) during on-site business meetings?

### **3.4.3. Research sub-questions**

**SQ1:** How do business leaders in both countries perceive and react to the cultural specificity of non-verbals – the posture, eye contact, physical appearance, proxemics and chronemics during the on-site business meetings?

**SQ2:** To what extent do business leaders in both countries take into the account the posture, eye contact, physical appearance, chronemics and proxemics of the opposite partner while dealing with business during on-site meetings?

### **3.4.4. The selected method**

In this research, the qualitative method was used for the literature review and for the field work, gathering the primary data through interviews. This method was chosen because of the topic of the research, which is essentially NVB during on-site business meetings and this method allowed gathering as much information as possible. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow much freedom and flexibility for both respondents and the researcher, whilst keeping the structure of the interview and assuring that all the relevant topics were discussed.

### **3.4.5. Sampling**

Snowball technique was conducted in this research, which allowed finding respondents from a similar business environment. The respondents were selected mostly in pairs, since they came from the same companies, and have had close business relationships. All the respondents have daily contacts with the Slovenian and Montenegrin sides, respectively, and have >3–4 years of intercultural experience.

This particular technique was chosen due to the researcher's non-involvement in the business world of both the countries. Therefore, it was easier to act on references, such as contacting one person and following their recommendation on whom to invite for the interview. This allowed having two perspectives on one business relationship, which is even more enriching, as it gives a two-angle data to be compared.

Also, having people recommending other people implied more responsibility to accept the invitation and participate in the research, which was very convenient for the research.

### **3.4.6. The selected techniques for data collection**

Research was conducted through expert interviews, which were conducted in an online form, due to the pandemic. The interview summary table with the demographical data of the participants, as well as the invitation letter and interview guide are given in the Appendix. The interviews usually took place for around 30 min. In order to be precautionous with the data, they were recorded on both phone (recorder app) and through Zoom application.

Regarding the data, each respondent was viewed as an individual and his or her answers were viewed as a single phenomenon and offered unique perception on the NVC. This is why the semi-structured interview technique was chosen as the most suitable. It offered the space for dedicating time to the respondent and reaching insights into specific NVC topics, but also allowed the respondent to share as much as one wants, sometimes leading to detailed stories from business meetings. These stories represent a unique window into business meetings and how they develop, which could only be once there is confidence between the interviewer and the interviewee and questions could lead to elaborating on the answers.

### **3.4.7. The method of processing, analysis, interpretation of the data**

Hofstede's dimensions of culture were the basis of the analysis, starting from the point at which the gathered data was analysed. Both Slovenian and Montenegrin culture were analysed and compared on the basis of Hofstede's dimensions, which offered a broad perspective on their differences. Starting from that point on, it was easier to navigate interviews and modify questions according to the cultural background of each participant, without being suggestive. In other words, the theoretical framework supported the research through conducting the interviews.

After gathering the data, qualitative content analysis was performed in order to easily discover patterns in the responses and offered a more transparent and actual comparison of the two cultures. Detailed transcripts were analysed and later integrated in the conceptualisation of business cultures for both countries. On this basis, interpretation of the data was performed and the answers were not isolated from the theoretical background and the cross-cultural comparison of both Slovenia and Montenegro. In this way, the interpretation could include more information and support the reasoning of respondents and their answers. This integrated approach to interpretation offered at the same time more structure and freedom for analysis and building conclusions.

The analysis of the data, highlighting the differences and similarities in the perception of the NVC in both Slovenian and Montenegrin partners, its influence during the on-site meetings and finally combining it with the theoretical knowledge from the selected culture contributed to the rich interpretation which benefits by forming the recommendations for both parties, but also for intercultural managers in general.

To sum up the methodology behind the research, a theoretical framework was built around the cross-cultural analysis of both Slovenian and Montenegrin culture. After that, communication, its styles and finally the non-verbal part of it were explained with a focus on specific NVC expressions which were the centre of attention of the research. Respondents were business leaders and company managers who have worked for several years in both the Slovenian and Montenegrin markets. This offered rich experience and answers which allowed great insights into the topic of cultural differences affecting not only NVC, but also the work flow. Unique stories and the experience of each respondent were highly valuable to this research. In order to gain a two-angle perspective on the same subject, snowball technique was used and this led to having mostly respondents from the respective partner companies. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which again allowed space for in-depth answers and stories which preceded the formal interview, and this would not be possible by having a questionnaire or a survey in any form. Later, analysis was performed through qualitative content analysis, which offered a space for more integrated and cohesive interpretation of the data, finally leading to strongly supported conclusions and recommendations for both sides.

#### 4. Research Results and Discussion

The research of the impact of the cultural differences of NVC during the on-site business meetings was done by expert interviews with managers and business leaders of companies with their offices in both Slovenia and Montenegro, who are connected to the bank, assurance, transport and hospitality sectors. Interviews were semi-structured so as to give certain freedom to both the interviewer in controlling the interview flow and interviewees in elaborating their answers. However, the main questions were defined prior to the start of interviews, and were divided into three parts:

- First part: general information about them, their experience and job position, their tasks and the level of communication with partners from the counter culture (Slovenia or Montenegro);
- Second part: history of conflicts with partners from the counter culture in general and their perception of those conflicts, why it happened and what led to it;

- Third part: questions about specific NVC during on-site business meetings and cultural differences they have perceived, if any.

The interviews were conducted in Montenegrin and Slovenian language in order to enable all respondents to express their own opinion and share stories without any hesitation or barrier which would minimise their contribution. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom platform and were recorded both on Zoom and on the recorder application on the phone, except for one which was conducted through Viber call, because of technological issues with the participant's computer. This was a precautionary measure which was consented for by all respondents prior to each interview. Besides precaution, the recorder on the telephone offers the possibility of skipping backward and forward for 10 s, which makes it easier to transcribe later. Also, recording it leaves room for a more relaxed discussion and taking fewer notes during the interview.

All the interviews were of approximately 30 min. They were all conducted at the agreed time, except for two due to connection problems and another appointment overlapping with the scheduled interview. However, all respondents showed a high level of professional behaviour and willingness to help with this research.

Interviews were conducted with nine participants individually and with some level of experience and presence on the meetings. Five of them were from Montenegro and four were representatives of the Slovenian sample. Seven respondents were male and two, both from Montenegro, were female. Because of easier comparison and analysis, pseudonyms were used for all the respondents as follows:

- P1: respondent from Montenegro; head of the risk management department of the bank, interview was conducted through Viber call;
- P2: respondent from Montenegro; head of the international department of the insurance company, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P3: respondent from Montenegro; head of the sale department of the construction company, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P4: respondent from Montenegro; head of the airplane company, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P5: respondent from Montenegro; sale manager of the bedding brand company, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P6: respondent from Slovenia; long-time manager of the hotel chain, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P7: respondent from Slovenia; director of the hotel in Montenegro, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;
- P8: respondent from Slovenia; head of the international department of the insurance company, interview was conducted on Zoom platform;

- P9: respondent from Slovenia; director of the consulting agency.

Demographic table, invitation letter and the interview guide were sent by email to all respondents.

#### 4.1. The general analysis

Interviews started with general, informative questions, which would help the respondents to relax and engage more openly. Through these questions, space could be opened for more fluent conversation on the research topic – impact of the intercultural differences of NVC in the on-site business meetings.

The first part of the questions gave information about participants, their expertise and years of experience, current job position and work tasks, as well as the level of communication they operate on with Slovenian and Montenegrin partners, respectively.

On average, respondents had 13 years of work experience, ranging from 30 years to 6 years.

Most of them work with Slovenian and Montenegrin partners equally in regard to the number of years of experience. In the first part, respondents talked about work in the intercultural environment and how it differs from the culturally homogeneous business environment which they have at their home offices. P1, from Montenegro, said, 'it is a much more professional relationship', which was also confirmed by Montenegrins P3 and P4, saying that, 'you pay more attention to the quality of your performance', while P4 added that 'you have more responsibility, or you feel more responsible to perform your tasks, the best you can'. Montenegrin P2 commented on it in the following way: 'I do think that there are pro and cons to every situation, however, sometimes working in your own, home environment gives you a permission to be more relaxed and not to stress about everything. And that can go both ways', where P6 and P8, respondents from Slovenia agreed on. Slovenian P7 added to that – 'it seems to me that you try harder when you work with people you don't know, from other countries'.

Overall, respondents emphasised the responsibility they felt when working with partners from other countries, pushing them to work harder and to be as professional as possible, because a foreign and unknown business environment keeps one alerted to be more aware of one's own behaviour and therefore pay more attention to professionalism.

##### 4.1.1. History of conflicts in the intercultural environment, their view on the respective culture

While talking about their experience of conflicts in the intercultural environment, Montenegrin respondents did not report on any conflicts happening during their period of working in the company. P2 commented that, 'we've never had any conflicts with our international partners, at least since I am working here', while P3 added that, 'whatever small

conflict we had due to deadlines was solved immediately and everyone was happy, we've kind of become 'Slovenes' in regard to that'. P1 elaborated on that:

We've never had any major conflicts, I did not notice any dissatisfaction from their side, I don't know, it could be because they come here and then they behave differently or they have different expectations, but I have not noticed any animosity towards our company. We have a very friendly but professional relationship and I don't know, maybe they behave differently when they negotiate and work with someone in Slovenia, it could be that too.

P4 also emphasised great communication as a pre-condition for effective conflict-solving:

During the pandemic, we have only strengthen our online communication channels. I now work constantly with two or three managers in Slovenia, which are all so helpful and usually they have more knowledge about certain business things, I don't want to bother you now with it, but they really are open and understanding with postponing that happens sometimes in our sector. You asked me about conflicts, I don't think I've had any experience with that, no, now that I go back, I don't think we did, at least I personally didn't.

P5 had a similar experience, saying that 'there were rare occasions of misunderstandings which were solved quickly'.

On the other hand, Slovenian respondents reported slightly differently, with P7 stating that there were times when we didn't understand each other, due to language or whatever, but I don't think it was that. In general, I personally consider myself relaxed person, but when we work, we work. And there were times when workers didn't work the way we agreed. The problem was usually about the deadlines, and few times with the quality of work, but it was all solved once we would all sit together and talk about it.

P6, who is the richest in the intercultural work experience, reported that

in my 20 and something years, most of them working in Montenegro, I did not have any conflicts, and I think it is much related to the primary approach you take when you come to the new environment. I have made great connections which helped organize everything well and formed straight principles and rules from the beginning.

P8, head of the management in the insurance company, commented that 'Montenegrin partners are more relaxed than

we are, however, they do their work'. P9 had an interesting observation: 'Sometimes funny things happen – our partners put on a great show, not that they are not capable enough or something like that, but sometimes it was just, how do you say it, 'selling fog,' while they were not fulfilling with their part of the job', continuing on that 'sometimes we would ignore it, sometimes we would become aware of it later on, but sometimes we would have to say it, but they did not argue on that, therefore all the conflicts were solved very, very quickly'. Therefore, Slovenian respondents perceived Montenegrin partners sometimes as show-offs, which covers up for the work which has not been done. On the other hand, Montenegrin respondents seem to be satisfied with their respective partners, pointing out the professionalism and organisational skills of each other.

When talking about each others' perspectives on Montenegrin and Slovenian cultural differences in general, they all reported on the 'historical and cultural context which bonds us' and P1 compared this relationship and differences with German and Austrian partners, saying that:

I think we are much more similar than we are to German or Austrian partners, with whom we work a lot. If you want me to explain it why, I think it's because of the historical and cultural context, just to mention Yugoslavia, which we know about. From the Balkan wars in 1912-1913 then when we were in the major part under the Ottoman reign and then Slovenians were under Austro-Hungarian reign, and we can see the differences in the architecture. Overall, I can say that they are much more organized and follow the rules more strictly. It is the awareness which was developed over the centuries, to follow the rules and this left marks

and added to this, 'I know there are exceptions, but this is how I see it generally'. P4 commented on the general differences in personal traits between Slovenians and Montenegrins, saying that the former are 'much less vain', however, that Montenegrins often seem 'more confident, in situations which require public appearance', which goes in line with comments from P9. There were some comments regarding the professional attitudes, contextualising them within the Eastern–Western perspective, with P2 saying that 'Slovenians are above all our neighbours, the closest to the Western philosophy, while here at our company, we have a more traditional organizational work'. They all speak in general terms, while P3 said 'I'm more of the theory of individual, every man for himself, every person is unique and I could not generalize in such way'.

It can be seen from the responses that both groups of respondents showed awareness of the geographical proximity of the two countries and also of historical circumstances which are much present in the modern societies of both.

This geo-historical bond is the bridge for the two; however, most respondents showed awareness of the danger of generalisation and did not want to make general statements about either culture.

On the other side, Slovenian respondents perceive Montenegrin business partners in the following way – P7 emphasised 'the importance of the informal part of the meetings', especially when it comes to 'dealing with legal part of the work' and the importance of 'personal connections', which is much more present in Montenegro than in Slovenia. P8 gives the example of one director in Montenegro, who famously said: 'It is important to eat, drink and gain as much profit as possible', continuing with 'and this shows the attitude towards work, which also shows how fast we are leaning towards capitalism'. P9 gave another statement: 'If you want me to say it's different, I don't know, I couldn't. However, one thing that is evident that you can arrange more things in the informal part of the business meetings than during the formal'. Also, he commented that:

we usually prefer to go to Montenegro, rather than them coming here and it was strange to me, once, when we went there on Wednesday, during working hours – every coffee shop and bar was full, and later there were at least five bars with live music, you don't have that in Slovenia.

## 4.2. NVC differences

After discussing more general topics, which put the interview into the cultural context and offered insight into the business dynamics of all participants, the interview continued into specific NVC. Answers put a perspective on the general business relationship and their general perception of each other, finding reasons to justify it by geographical and historical reasons. Question on potential conflicts, which included thoughts on the communication and conflict-solving skills, also served as an introduction to the central part of the interview, which focused on the less conscious part of the communication and the main part of this research, which is the NVC.

### 4.2.1. Kinesics

What is meant by this is the most superficial and closer to eye aspect of the NVC, which includes facial expressions, body movements and eye contact. Kinesics covers a great array of NVBs, therefore it is grouped into several categories: posture, meaning the inclination of the torso, body language, meaning hand and arm gestures, head and leg gestures, oculusics, meaning the mentioned eye contact.

#### 4.2.1.1. Posture

Regarding this first specific aspect, all respondents have reported the same – they did not perceive any differences,

with P1 saying that, 'I am not aware of that, at least it didn't catch my attention, that there are some differences', P3 saying that, 'now with COVID-19, I pay even less attention to such things, it's impossible to see it since we are all behind our cameras', P5 saying that people are not usually aware of it, since it 'doesn't catch the attention if it's not something completely out of the normal'. P8 said 'I pay attention only to my own posture and not to others', but after this question, I sure will'. Other respondents reported in the same way; they are more or less not aware of it or do not perceive differences between their own and respective business cultures.

#### **4.2.1.2. Body language**

Regarding body language, hand, arm and leg gestures, Montenegrin respondent P1 reported that, 'during business meetings, I can say that Slovenian partners are more reserved and they are not so expressive with their hands', while P3 said, 'if I go back to some meetings, I wasn't that aware of this, but they definitely are less expressive when it comes to hand and arm gestures, compared to us'. P4 further explained it with, 'I don't know if it is like that because they come here, but they are a bit reserved during the first few contacts, later on during the informal part, they seem relaxed and much more expressive than usual, maybe that's just my experience'. On the other hand, P2 reported that, 'I work with same people for several years and I can say that there are not significant differences, maybe we are more relaxed in that way'.

On the other hand, Slovenian respondents report similar points of view. P7 commented that, 'we are more reserved, but it's all individual, maybe sometimes we want to appear more professional by not showing too much, not moving too much', adding that 'but I do not see significant differences in between us'. P9 made a comparison between Montenegrin, Austrian and Italian partners:

I worked with many international partners, some of them Austrian and Italian, they are our neighbours, also with Croatians. It seems to me that we are more similar to Italians and Montenegrins in that sense, we all express ourselves, move our hands more frequently when we are passionately talking about some things, maybe more so during informal parts of the meetings, lunches and dinners than in offices but I don't see differences there, maybe Italians are for a degree more expressive.

P8 had a similar opinion, 'don't see there are such differences which would be noticeable'.

#### **4.2.1.3. Oculistics**

Oculistics or eye contact are an important aspect of NVC; however, often people do not pay attention to it. For example, our respondents in the majority report on low awareness

of it, with Montenegrin respondent P2 commenting that, 'I am not aware of it, usually, but I would say that there are not some significant differences, not that I noticed' and P1 adds to that, 'maybe we seem more confident in our public appearance and maybe sometimes we can seem that we look at each other more intensely, but I don't think there are such major differences, that would be so visible and disturbing to the communication'. On the other hand, some respondents showed awareness of this, as P4 said:

I worked in sales for years and I am well trained in working with customers, therefore well-educated on the importance of the eye contact. I always try to keep it with our partners during meetings, equally now because of the COVID, but there are not some significant differences. We all try not to be invasive and as natural as possible, but this is important to pay attention to during meetings.

Slovenian respondent P9 also emphasized the importance of eye contact in any type of conversation, but could not recall any differences between Montenegrin and Slovenian partners. P8 said, 'we are all business people, hopefully all aware of it, some people can be a bit more persistent with it, and it can get uncomfortable at times, but it's usually with partners we meet for the first times, later it all falls into normal'. P7 also added that, 'maybe sometimes during business meetings we all pay more attention to it and try to keep it with the other person, otherwise, it is not something we are all aware of and we don't see great differences between us'.

#### **4.2.2. Paralanguage**

This aspect represents the vocal effects that follow the words and are found in the speaker's voice, such as tone, breathiness, volume, pitch intonation, stress, rhythm and tempo. Here, there are slight differences in perception between our participants, with Montenegrin respondent P1 commenting on these differences in the following way: 'Montenegrins are definitely louder, which usually gets moderated during business meetings', P2 adding that 'we are louder and talk faster, then our partners from Slovenia seem more professional, because they talk more calmly'. On the other hand, P4 explained these perceived differences with 'historical circumstances, which have made Montenegrin people to be louder and to fight for their rights and for their freedom'. Slovenian respondent P7 saw these differences arise from 'Italian influence, which have not been so present in the part of Slovenia, from which he comes from'. He sees Montenegrin business partners as 'more talkative, louder and fast-speaking' which sometimes can be perceived as 'rushing with things'. P8 commented that, 'there is a difference between professional and informal conversation and sometimes they

do overlap, especially in Montenegro, people definitely have more rhythm and talk faster’.

#### 4.2.3. Physical appearance

What is meant by this is the general attractiveness (hairstyle, dress, artefacts), body figure and height, breath and odours. Montenegrin P1 talked about dress code in their company, where ‘it is very casual in some sectors, while in my position it is important to wear suit and tie, because we do have a lot of formal meetings’. P2 talked about having a strict dress code in the company, which ‘is also evident in the partner company from Slovenia, whenever we travelled to Ljubljana for meetings, we observed them in the office meeting rooms and there are no greater differences, maybe we don’t go full dress code every day, but for the meetings definitely’. P3 and P4 worked in the sales department for many years and report on having a strict dress code, and now, on higher positions, it is very important to follow it, no matter for how long they cooperate with Slovenian partners. Regarding the Slovenian partner’s dress code and physical appearance, P4 said, ‘our partners are always very nicely dressed, nothing too expensive, modest and classy, whether in formal meetings or later in the informal part, when they come to Montenegro, or we go to Slovenia, it’s the same’. On the other hand, Slovenian respondents report on a more relaxed way towards the dress code, where P8 commented: ‘when we don’t have formal meetings, we are more free, but when it comes to meetings, especially international ones, you have to be presentable’, regarding the Montenegrin partners, he says: ‘there are not greater differences, you can see they pay attention to the way they are dressed, I would say we are more relaxed in that way’. P9 commented that there are not greater differences either, sometimes it would happen that ‘partners would choose rather not to wear a tie during meetings, women were always decently and professionally dressed, sometimes maybe seeming to try too hard’. P7 summarised this perspective well, saying that:

we, Slovenians I say, don’t pay that much attention to our casual, day-to-day dressing, which I have noticed while coming to meetings in Montenegro, I mean, I appreciate it, but during meetings we all try to respect some not-said and already established rules, and there aren’t big differences, if we talk about formal meetings only.

#### 4.2.4. Haptics

This aspect covers the area of touching behaviour, body contact. Regarding this NVC aspect, P1 said that there are definitely differences in general behaviour, however, ‘during meetings, we try to respect other culture, no matter how close it is to us’. P2 explained initial differences with the process of getting to know each other and working together, so that ‘after

a while, we all greet each other warmly, hug and are much more relaxed’. P3 had a slightly different perspective, saying that ‘sometimes would happen that we would get along great during formal meetings, even better after during work dinners or drinks, however, after we would go there, it would be as if we have never met before, I don’t know, a strange feeling, I don’t know how to explain it’. P4 commented that there are definitely differences, which ‘fade away with time’ and ‘they become more open with hugging as a way of greeting, it’s not something too personal, it’s just our normal greet with two or three kisses on the cheeks’. On the other hand, Slovenian respondents see themselves as more reserved when it comes to greeting, especially in comparison to Montenegrin partners, with P7 commenting:

They have this custom of saying *Dje si brate* to everyone, which in our language could be *Živjo*, so there are no differences in that way, however, there are differences when it comes to greeting, from the first meeting they hug and kiss, which is not something I am personally used to, it doesn’t mean my co-workers aren’t.

P8 said ‘I think it’s normal to greet someone in the meeting cordially, however there is a difference, we will not hug here I don’t know how warmly, but when you go to southern Bosnia, Montenegro, you can see that’. P9 goes in line with P8, saying that ‘you get quickly used to this and when you cross this border of reserved and really get to know each other, it is something completely natural, I work with same people for years now and it is something normal in between us’.

#### 4.2.5. Proxemics

Proxemics presents the way in which people use and perceive personal and social space, which physical distance between people in interaction they consider suitable. P8 commented that, ‘it is normal to sit closer to your business partner, now things have changed, and we don’t know if it’s going to go back to the normal, however, in my opinion, this is normal, but Montenegrin partners sit closer to their business partners for sure’. P9 and P7 go in line, saying ‘that there are differences in the beginning, they sometimes can seem intrusive at the beginning, but after a while it all just fades away, more than in comparison to German or Austrian partners’. Montenegrin respondents also comment on the initial wider personal space, which over time narrows down. P1 said, ‘we don’t take our personal space that seriously, however during business meetings we really show respect for other cultures and therefore we try to keep it a professional distance, then with time, it kinds of melts down and we operate as we do in our own country’. P3 commented that there is a difference which ‘is understandable, but then we try to respect it’. P4 reported feeling stressed of paying too much attention to it,

however, 'after some time, we all come to the same level'. P2 summarised Montenegrin perspective by saying:

We are definitely people who love to be side by side, but in the professional world, we adjust quickly and respect one's own personal space, which in the case of Slovenian partners, quickly diminishes as a problem and we all behave as naturally as possible and relaxed, especially with those you work with for years.

#### 4.2.6. Chronemics

This aspect represents the approach and attitude towards the time, the way people perceive and use it. P8 started with feeling surprised 'that all the bars and coffee shops were full during working hours', however, most of their Montenegrin partners and co-workers do have the value of time and respect the deadlines, which is important in their job, where many projects develop simultaneously and the key is in good organisation and deadlines. P9 went on to describe Montenegrin partners who in the majority 'have effective attitude towards time in general, however there are some who take on more the attitude 'from today to tomorrow' and this can cause problems in the workflow'. P7 elaborated on this: 'They definitely have a more relaxed attitude towards time and are more flexible with it. It happens many times that they call and arrange the meeting for some other time', adding to it:

meetings in Montenegro last much longer, we here don't have that custom of offering coffee to people when they come, it's not that one needs it urgently, but not even a glass of water ... I don't think it goes for saving money, in Germany maximum they've done is to take you to the coffee vending machine to buy it yourself. This wasn't a habit in Slovenia ten years ago and it never happened to me when I was somewhere in former Yugoslavia. I think it's part of the basic culture, manners, it's a way to cross those first barriers of communication, I mean, you don't need it, if you know the person, however it is something normal to me, I don't know. It happened to me many times that I was in a hurry and they (Montenegrins) were like 'relax, we'll sort it out, don't worry', 'don't worry, it will all get arranged', so yes, there are definitely differences, especially now.

Montenegrin respondents have a different view on this – P2 says, 'we have become more Slovenian in this way, we work a lot with Western partners and this has made us be more strict with our time and deadlines'. P1 also said 'we have adjusted well, I think, there is no negative feedback about our dealing with deadlines or time, not within the business context, I don't think so', which also goes in line with P3's opinion. P4 reported on the differences in general, but which are not so evident in

the business meetings, because 'Slovenian partners show level of relaxation when they come to Montenegro, they take their time in both formal and informal parts of the meetings'.

#### 4.2.7. Location of business meetings

Location of business meetings, whether they are held in the office or in more informal places, such as restaurants or bars, is an important aspect of NVC which shows the professional attitude towards business meetings and work in general. Regarding this aspect, both cultures overlap in the majority; P1 said, 'we usually have first part of the meeting in our offices then we leave for work lunch or sometimes in work dinner, which is more of informal nature' and when they go to Slovenia, 'it is the same, we are always welcomed in a very nice way'. P2 and P4 reported the same: 'there are always both formal and informal part of the visit, whether in Slovenia or here in Podgorica, formal is in our office and then we go for some lunch'. P3 also mentioned day trips organised for guests, on both locations 'visiting wonderful places like Bled lake, where we had lunch and then we reciprocate by organizing day trips to Skadar lake or Cetinje, or Boka Bay'. Slovenian respondents report that there are no differences, 'we all have the same attitude, first organizing meeting in the office and then lunch or dinner, or even both, depending on time' as P9 reported. P8 said 'there is always this parole, business then pleasure and it applies to both countries, and I haven't seen any greater differences'. P7 added to this: 'I've always felt more than welcomed and meetings were usually done quickly in the office so that later we can continue with more informal talk during lunch, where we also discuss some work issues, therefore I would say there are no differences compared to here'.

Limitations of the research of the impact of the cultural differences on the NVC during business meetings could be found in the small sample size. Nine respondents from both countries can be seen as a small number, but for the purpose of this research, it was decided on this number in order to dive in-depth the NVC topic. Owing to the pandemic, all interviews and research were conducted online, which has its own limitations. Besides, the amount of time available for conducting the research and analysing data were also limited, and because of that, it was important to choose respondents with a high level of intercultural experience, mostly leaders of the sector or of the company in order to gain as much information as possible. Choosing the right respondents was not a simple linear process, with the factor of online communication; therefore, it is important to acknowledge that information could significantly differ if other respondents were chosen. Another limitation was also the personal bias, since most of the respondents were chosen from the same company but from both the Slovenian and Montenegrin sectors. Snowball technique, in spite of several

great advantages, also puts some visible pressure on the participants, and there is a point at which social desirability should be taken into account.

Another limitation can also be found in choosing only two countries to compare, but due to the researcher's personal experience and knowledge, Montenegro and Slovenia were decided on as pre-research perceived it as significantly different, basing this perception on numerous stereotypes about both, present in societies. However, as the respondents and the research show, they are not as different as the media sometimes represents. However, these limitations lead one to think whether the results would differ if other ex-Yugoslavian countries were included in this research. It is recommended to conduct more empirical research related to the business culture analysis, verbal and NVC in the geographical region.

Overall, the research could be further expanded and developed in the future, as it should be, in order to gain more complete knowledge of the NVC phenomenon in intercultural business partnerships and teams. This research can serve as a basis for further development and possible solution-finding, forming specific strategies which would help prevent intercultural conflicts within the business context. Consequently, these results and solutions can be used to prepare a handbook or a workshop for human resources (HRs) and other staff in the organisations which cooperate internationally, in order to ease the process of onboarding of new international employees or to ease the initial steps of building intercultural business partnerships.

## 5. Conclusions

The business world is becoming more and more connected due to globalisation and the acceleration of its development. Consequently, companies need to gear up in their game and reach the international market, which of course implies dealing with an intercultural environment. To become and more importantly, stay relevant in the field, business leaders and managers should know how to develop intercultural relationships and manage differences which could cause misunderstandings and conflicts. In order to do this, one has to become aware of his own culture and the differences that a partner's culture brings to the table. If one only mentions the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business market, the implications of the research gain even more importance.

Building intercultural communities, especially within the business context is a complex and dynamic process, which requires several specific abilities. One of them is intercultural sensitivity, which has to be developed in all respondents of the company's organisation, from the top level to employees on a lower level. Creating a successful intercultural team is a

great step towards a successful organisation, or a business in general. To acquire this personal trait, which, without a doubt, has great impact on the performance, one has to be open, have a high level of awareness and accept that cultural differences can exist to a smaller or higher extent. Only in this way can conflicts and misunderstandings be prevented or reduced, which happens more often in culturally heterogeneous teams than in homogeneous ones.

In this research, the focus was on cultural differences in the perception between respondents coming from two countries, Slovenia and Montenegro, about specific NVC: kinesics (posture, body language, oculusics or eye contact), paralanguage, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and location of the business meetings. The research was based on the theoretical framework developed by Geert Hofstede and his six cultural dimensions, yielding a comparison between two cultures. On the other hand, empirical data was collected through nine interviews with business leaders, managers from both Slovenian and Montenegrin companies.

The purpose of the research was to analyse the impact of cultural differences on Montenegrin and Slovenian culture on the NVC during on-site business meetings.

In the first part, by using descriptive method and the method of classification, the focus was on the theoretical framework which would serve as a basis for further analysis of the empirical data. The concept of culture was defined, encompassing cultural dimensions, cultural differences, communication in general and finally NVC, with all its specific aspects. Montenegro and Slovenia were compared within the Hofstede's theoretical framework of cultural dimensions. The results show that differences between the two countries are rather small, showing differences in three dimensions: masculinity, long-term orientation and indulgence. In these three dimensions, one or another country shows the tendency towards the middle of the continuum, for which they cannot be sorted in one category specifically. However, there are no extreme differences in either of the dimensions. All the results complement well for each country and there are no contradictions; however, the differences, even if they are not extreme, can be a barrier in communication and impact the NVC during business meetings.

In the second part, the focus was on analysis of the empirical data, which has been collected through expert interviews with respondents from both Montenegro and Slovenia, they being business leaders, as well as managers of specific departments who cooperate in person with their Montenegrin and Slovenian partners, respectively. For the purpose of this research, a phenomenological approach of the qualitative data was used to compare information from interviews with the theory the research was based on, focusing on NVC specifics. Findings have shown that the empirical data goes in line with the comparison of

Montenegrin and Slovenian culture within the Hofstede's framework. Participants' answers have reflected the results of the cross-cultural comparison. They did not perceive greater and significant differences, which could impact the quality of NVC or lead to greater conflicts. They reported on the normality of conflicts, which have been solved very quickly. Also, respondents have shown a low level of awareness of certain aspects of NVC, specifically posture, body language and oculosics – some were already familiar with its importance and have paid attention to it, however, the majority did not. They all reported on insignificant or no differences, which would definitely be noticed, if they were out of the normal. Paralanguage, other aspect which was researched, has shown some differences, with Montenegrins being perceived as more talkative and fast-paced. Physical appearance aspect discussion did not show any greater differences, since there is a universal business dress code which is respected by participants. Also, location of the business meetings has been reported to be the same, without any significant differences. The only differences they mentioned as indeed noticeable are regarding the haptics aspect of NVC, meaning the tendency for physical touch, body contact and chronemics, meaning the attitude towards time; however, they all emphasize that differences fade away with time, as they get to know each other, therefore they do not seem to be a barrier which would harm their business relationship. Montenegrins are in both aspects perceived as more relaxed and open; however, this does not present a barrier or an obstacle in their essentially intercultural business communication.

Overall, it can be seen from the results presented above that cultural differences are recognised to some extent and they go in hand with the theoretical framework the research relied on. On the basis of their results and explanations given, it can be concluded that the differences are insignificant and do not have a significant impact on the NVC and the business meeting flow.

The reasons for such result can be found in the rich intercultural work experience of participants, ranging from 6 years to 30 years and also in their own perception of the respective culture as not being significantly different from their home culture, which consequently implies not noticing significant differences in specific NVC expressions.

On the basis of what has previously been presented and elaborated, it can be concluded that even though some cultural differences exist between the cultures, significant or insignificant, there is a way to approach and manage them. This can be done through raising awareness of one's own culture and of others' along with the openness and acceptance of the others' culture. In this way, differences can be recognised in NVC, which are culturally conditioned, prevent and intervene in conflicts arising in intercultural business communities,

which consequently can only aid the successful performance of a business in the international business markets.

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