

Cultural Values of Latvian Residents and Their Correlation with Communication in The Public Sphere; Trends of Changes Over the Last 10 Years

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Abstract

Active participation in decision-making and influencing of important for society decisions is an inalienable right of every citizen of a democratic state. However, the inhabitants of Latvia are very inert in exercising their rights. Still, only a small part of the permanent residents of Latvia are involved in public organizations and participate in their activities, as well as regularly follow political events in the country.

Discourse on the slowness, passivity and conformism of Latvians as a nation is popular in Latvian society. Thus, explaining the lack of public activity of the population with the cultural values of the nation.

In order to find out whether and how the cultural values of the nation are determined by the activity of Latvia's citizens in the public sphere, in January 2014 I conducted a nationally representative survey of Latvian permanent residents. With the aim of examining whether and how the cultural values of Latvian residents change and whether there are observable changes in public sphere activity, I conducted repeated measurements at five-year intervals, including in 2019 and 2024.

In each survey round, 1005 permanent residents of Latvia aged 18 to 74 were interviewed. The surveys were conducted online, ensuring a nationally representative sample. Participants were asked questions from the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede culture model of nations, as well as additional questions about respondents' activity in the public sphere. Data processing and analysis were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 29. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed in the analysis of the results, including frequency distributions of response options, measures of central tendency, the Mann-Whitney test, Spearman's correlation analysis, and the Chi-square test.

The findings of the study show that Latvian society can be described as normative, with a medium power distance and a markedly low avoidance of uncertainty. The main values of society are modesty, quality of life and care for the weakest. The majority of the public have expressed the need to identify with a "we" group and are characterized by "sinking" into

negative memories, pessimism and hopelessness with regard to their ability to determine their lives.

According to the data of the research, activity in the public sphere in Latvia's society is strongly correlated with Uncertainty Avoidance Index and Long-term Orientation Index, as well as slightly correlates with Individualism Index and Indulgence - Restraint Index – thus, activity in the public sphere is influenced by a low avoidance of uncertainty, a prioritization of future outcomes over immediate success, a tendency towards individualism, and acting on one's impulses.

Over the past decade, there has been a decrease in the Long-term Orientation Index in Latvian society, while the Individualism Index and the Indulgence - Restraint Index have increased. These changes suggest a conducive environment for the growth of public sphere activity within Latvian society. Therefore, it would be meaningful to focus greater attention on finding new and modern solutions for public participation in decision-making and influencing important societal decisions to strengthen democratic processes in the country.

Keywords: national cultural values, civic engagement, public sphere