
A comparative study of perceptions towards entrepreneurship in India, Poland, and the USA

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Abstract: The main purpose of our study was to assess the perceptions of MBA and MS (in organisation development and knowledge management) students towards entrepreneurship. We were interested in questions such as whether students from the post-socialist Poland or less capitalism friendly India will perceive entrepreneurship the same way students from a free-market oriented culture such as the USA. Using qualitative methods of data collection and thematic analysis we explored the data to bring out underlying and deep rooted assumptions towards business, leadership, and wealth creation. We found that core cultural values impact significantly students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship and business creation.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; cultural differences; locus of control; India; Poland; USA.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Glinka, B. and Thatchenkery, T. (2013) 'A comparative study of perceptions towards entrepreneurship in India, Poland, and the USA', *Int. J. Human Resources Development and Management*, Vol. 13, Nos. 2/3, pp.119–135.

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Appreciative Inquiry and Knowledge Management (2007), and *Appreciative Intelligence: Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn* (Harvard Business Review 2006 Reading List).

This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled ‘The social construction of entrepreneurs, success, and wealth: a case study of management students’ perceptions from three different cultural contexts’ presented at the ICMC 2012, Birla Institute of Management Technology, Greater Noida, India, 29–30 November 2012.

1 Introduction

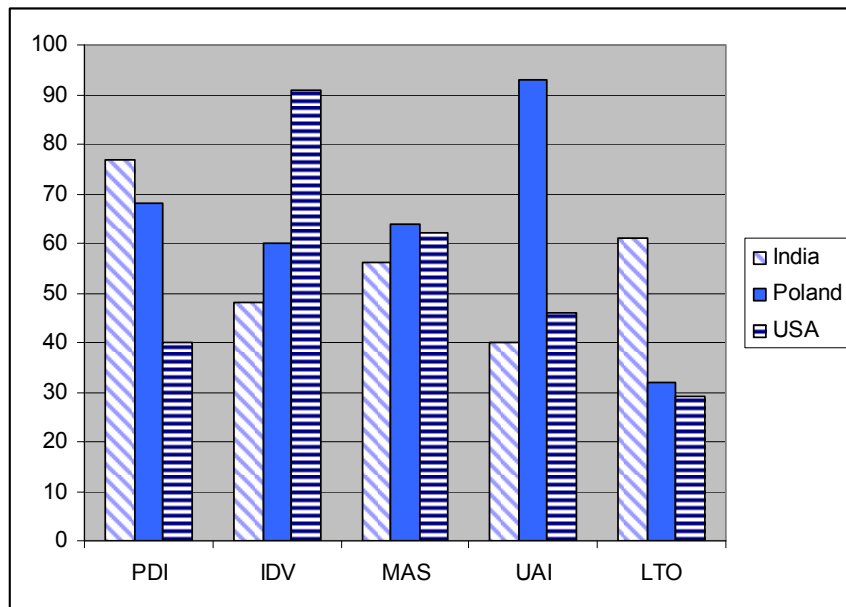
Most scholars agree that opportunity is the heart of the entrepreneurial process (Acs and Audretsch, 2011) and the actions taken by individuals as entrepreneurs (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Wickham, 2004). Entrepreneurship is most often exemplified in new venture creation (Timmons, 1999) and the identification of opportunities behind it is a creative process enabled by entrepreneurs in effectively interpreting environmental changes. These individual capabilities and forms of entrepreneurial activities are influenced by the cultural context (LaVan and Murphy, 2007) and occasionally as a barrier to new venture creation (Glinka, 2008). In the end, cultural context influences every stage of entrepreneurial process (Glinka and Gudkova, 2011) such as the decision to start a business, nature of opportunity recognition, types of businesses and ways of managing it (Hayton et al., 2002; George and Zahra, 2002).

Hofstede’s concept of four (or later five) dimensions of culture and national cultures of management is one of the most popular in the field (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993/1998). Other concepts have recently gained momentum, such as GLOBE project (team of House, 2004) or the “seven cultures of capitalism” (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993/1998). However, these models oversimplify and stereotype culture (Thatchenkery, 2006). They show some differences, but seldom explain their causes. Most of the models are static though culture is a dynamic phenomenon, co-constructed and in a state of flux (Morgan, 2006/1986) and continuously renegotiated through human interactions and dialogue (Thatchenkery, 2013; Gergen and Thatchenkery, 2004). In our research we decided to explore how the constructs of cultures might impact attitudes towards entrepreneurship and wealth creation in three very different countries – India, Poland, and the USA.

Hofstede et al. (2010) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002) have described the cultural uniqueness of India, Poland, and the USA. In Hofstede’s research the three countries differ in various dimensions. Power distance¹ is highest in India (index 77), slightly lower in Poland (68), and lowest in the USA (40). The US emerges as the most individualistic country (91). Though Poland is individualistic, it is much closer to collectivism (60) than the USA, while India may be seen as a collectivistic country (48). According to Hofstede’s data India is a long term oriented and pragmatic culture. Time for Indians is not linear, and not as important as to western societies which – like the USA (29) score low on this dimension. Poland is also short-term oriented, very close to the USA (32). In the masculinity – femininity dimension, all three countries are seen as masculine cultures (Poland – 64, USA – 62 and India – 56).

In one dimension – uncertainty avoidance – India (40) and the USA (46) are very close. Poland differs very significantly from India and the USA with an unusually high index of 93, making it a country with a very high preference for uncertainty avoidance. According to Hofstede, nations exhibiting high uncertainty avoidance maintain rigid belief and are intolerant of unorthodox ideas. The three countries under discussion differ in almost every dimension, with Poland being ‘in the middle’, albeit close to the USA, except for the significant difference in uncertainty avoidance. The cultural distance between India and the USA is quite high while Poland differs significantly from other countries in our analysis. The comparison of Hofstede’s research results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Hofstede’s cultural dimensions: India, Poland, USA (see online version for colours)



Notes: PDI – power distance, IDV – individualism, MAS – masculinity, UAI – uncertainty avoidance, LTO – long time orientation.

Source: <http://geert-hofstede.com> (accessed 2 March 2013)

The dynamics of ‘locus of control’ is worth noting in entrepreneurship research. For example, when asked if they believed that their fate is in their hands, 82% in the USA gave an affirmative answer, while only 66% in Poland and 63% in India felt so [Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, (1997/2002), p.173]. In entrepreneurship research some dimensions of culture are typically associated with the tendency for entrepreneurial behaviour such as individualism rather than collectivism, low uncertainty avoidance and internal locus of control. Further, US culture is often perceived as the one that stimulates entrepreneurship (see Shane, 1992). The majority of concepts in entrepreneurship have originated from the USA (Thomas and Mueller, 2000). US success stories of rags to the riches are universally known. During various economic crisis (such as the one in 2008–2009), the decline of US ‘culture of entrepreneurship’ is often narrated by scholars

and politicians as one of the causes. Many claim that in order to foster economic growth, the US entrepreneurial spirit must be revived (Shapiro, 2011).

Research on entrepreneurship in India began in the mid-1960s. McClelland (1961) and McClelland and Winter (1978) conducted pioneering studies on entrepreneurship in India in 1964 and 1965. Believing that the need for achievement was a critical factor in entrepreneurship, McClelland sought to train young people in India to develop a desire for success. He conducted a five-year project known as the 'Kakinada experiment' in one of the economically prosperous areas in Southern India. McClelland designed a three month long training programme to train your people to set new goals and develop the need for achievement. To his surprise, he found that the traditional Indian values did not come in the way of achieving material success. Fifty years later, entrepreneurship continues to be a hot topic of research in India (Khanna, 2008; Pota, 2010; Nath, 2007).

Research on entrepreneurship and culture in Poland is not as prolific as in India or the USA (Glinka, 2008). According to opinion polls (CBOS, 2009), social status of entrepreneurs is still very low in Poland. The climate for entrepreneurship has been unfavourable in Poland for the last 200 years. First, in the end of 18th century the country lost its independence and had been divided among its neighbours for around 125 years. In the beginning of 20th century Poland experienced a short era of independence and economic freedom, and after the Second World War the socialist system was introduced. In official socialist propaganda, entrepreneurs were depicted as second class citizens, those who cheated and exploited honest working class. Only since the economic liberalisation that began in 1989 could entrepreneurship develop without major obstacles.

There are a few international studies that show conditions for entrepreneurship in different countries. One of them, global entrepreneurship monitor (GEM) is of particular interest for us, as it shows culture and social context as important factors influencing entrepreneurial activity. Unfortunately, our possibility to compare three countries under investigation is limited, as the newest data for India were collected in 2002 and published in 2003 (Manimala, 2003). We strongly believe that in a rapidly changing country such as India, it does not create an adequate base for comparison, especially, that the methodology of GEM research evolves², and different dimensions of cultural context are taken under consideration.

However, in 2003 report for India, we notice that framework conditions for entrepreneurship like cultural facilitation of entrepreneurship and social support for entrepreneurship are assessed as slightly worse than the average [see Manimala, (2003), pp.11–12]. In most recent reports, different elements of social context were taken under consideration: perceived opportunities, perceived capabilities and fear for failure (see Table 1).

Table 1 Selected dimensions of social context of entrepreneurship

	<i>Poland 2011</i>	<i>Poland 2012</i>	<i>USA 2011</i>	<i>USA 2012</i>
Perceived opportunities	33	20	36	43
Perceived capabilities	52	54	56	56
Fear of failure	54	43	31	32
Entrepreneurial intentions	27	22	11	13

Source: GEM 2011 and 2012 research data
(Kelley et al., 2012; Xavier et al., 2013)

When we compare Poland and USA, we get a paradoxical image – in Poland less people perceive opportunities, fear of failure is quite high, but still more individuals have entrepreneurial intentions. Explaining that is not easy, however we may notice that:

- intentions do not mean creation of enterprises; when we compare entrepreneurial activity measured by number of new companies created, an percentage of population involved in that process we can get a different image – real entrepreneurial activity in Poland is not higher than in the USA (Xavier et al., 2013)
- in Poland a huge part of new businesses is necessity-driven rather than opportunity driven: people do not perceive opportunities, are afraid to fail, but still feel obliged (or forced) to start a business for various economic and legal reasons.

2 Culture and entrepreneurship in the classroom

Favourable social and cultural contexts are needed to help entrepreneurs with their ventures. Values and beliefs cannot be created or changed by direct governmental or orchestrated initiatives, especially in the short term. Values change over time in a slow and complex process. Since our reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, 1983) new values, beliefs, and the perception towards entrepreneurship may change only gradually. Students' perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship reflect their cultural context, but they may also indicate the quality and effectiveness of education as a way of promoting entrepreneurial behaviour. Numerous studies have focused on entrepreneurial intentions of students (see Gassea and Tremblay, 2011 for a review). In addition, universities and business schools often try to measure entrepreneurial intentions in order to evaluate their performance in entrepreneurial education, and to define students' needs and preferences. Only a few studies have attempted to understand how the students' values, attitudes, and behaviour can predispose them to create a new venture or have the intention to do so (Gassea and Tremblay, 2011). In this case study we describe student perceptions and beliefs towards entrepreneurship in three different cultural contexts. We do not measure directly the influence of beliefs on entrepreneurial intent. Our focus is instead in understanding the socially constructed images of entrepreneurship.

The following research questions were raised in this project:

- How do students in different cultural settings perceive entrepreneurs? What are their beliefs about entrepreneurial processes and the roles of entrepreneurs?
- Does culture influence how management students perceive success and wealth creation by entrepreneurs? For example, will students from a highly free-market culture such as the USA perceive wealth creation and success more positively than students from 'socialist' or less 'capitalism-friendly' cultures?

It was assumed that cultural values in the three countries in three different continents with different history, religion, and modes of development would differ significantly. The goal was to show the consequences of different cultural settings to the perception of entrepreneurship.

3 Methodology

Grant and Perren (2002) analysed publications in the leading journals on entrepreneurship and concluded that 90% of them had been based on positivist assumptions. This means that most of the literature on entrepreneurship and its context are based on the use of quantitative methods, often taking the form of surveys. After ten years, the body of research is elaborate and exhaustive but positivistic assumptions still dominate the field. In contrast, this case study is based on interpretive assumptions and the use qualitative methods as we believe that this approach leaves more space for open research and discovery and encourages the researcher to break new grounds and explore new phenomena. As many researchers have suggested, the utilisation of methods other than quantitative can often lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Jennings, Perren and Carter, 2005; Rae, 2002; Warren, 2004).

We decided to use narrative methods (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998; Czarniawska, 2004, Kostera, 2006) that was useful in previous research projects of one of the authors. Students were given questionnaires with open questions and story lines. They were asked to interpret and comment upon stories about entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, their success and wealth. We also asked them to finish a story prompted by us. We conducted our research in three universities in Poland, USA and India. They were

- 1 University of Warsaw, Poland, Faculty of Management (90 students, most of them 19–26 in age, about 60% male)³
- 2 School of Public Policy, George Mason University, Virginia, USA, (21 students, between 23 and 53 years in age, about 60% female)
- 3 Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH), Greater NOIDA, India, MBA (52 students, most of them between 20 and 26 in age, about 60% male).

The Polish part of the research was conducted during 2005 and 2006. The Polish stories were translated into English. Appropriate corrections were made to adjust them to the USA and Indian cultural setting (e.g., testing, changing names of entrepreneurs). Research in India and the USA were conducted in December 2011⁴ and January 2012 respectively. We also decided to use eight questionnaires that were collected from a group of US students in Poland in 2006. The data collected during the research was analysed by two researchers separately (in order to triangulate results), compared, and discussed.

The research questionnaire consisted of three major parts.

3.1 *The wealthy entrepreneur*

In the first part students were asked to finish the following story and propose its title “Mr (Name)⁵ is the owner and CEO of a well-known company. For the last couple of years he has been listed among the richest people in (the country)”.

Most of *Indian students* (over 3/4) finished the story with a positive description of the entrepreneur and his business. Three types of interpretation were most common among them: success through ethics and in connection with the society, hardworking men can be

successful and success is rooted in mind; one's knowledge and ability to innovate will play crucial role.

- 1 The entrepreneur is successful, because of his strict moral rules and good relations with other people. His happiness is based on solving social problems; he helps others and serves the society. His business is built on ethics and social responsibility. He cares about other people: family, employees, friends, stakeholders.

Following sound ethical business practices has made his company achieve greater benefits. [M25]

He wants to serve the society with this money and go for sustainable development. He wants to be a philanthropist. [M23]

He has shown the example of simple living in spite of all the richness. He has many social initiatives developed for the welfare of children and women in the society [M23]

He donates with free hand to many NGO's and has his own Cancer Kid's Foundation. People say he has a heart of gold [F21]

The entrepreneur not only thinks about his family, he also thinks about succession.

- 2 Success of an entrepreneur is a result of his hard work. He's gone a long way from 'rags to riches'.

He worked hard and raised an empire. [M28]

He attained this zenith by his hardworking [...] He is a self-made man as he has shown that if a person wants he has the ability to rise from rags to riches. [F20]

- 3 Success and wealth stem from good education, experience, and innovation.

His company works on innovation and finding solutions to problems faced by society. [M22]

The reason for Sharma's success is his innovative streak and his knack for grabbing new opportunities. [F22]

Indian students very often emphasised the meaning of balance in life – having family and friends, simple life within society, and helping others. They felt that success may come and go. Even if entrepreneurs work very hard, they may never know when the fortune may turn its back on them.

He was always considered to be in the control of things, had a first rate idea about the market. But things changed after he was diagnosed with a life-threatening cancer. [M23].

Contrary to their Indian counterparts, the majority of Polish students (about 75%) interpreted the story in a very negative way. They felt that the entrepreneur was arrested since he earned the money in an illegal and scandalous way. He was caught on money laundering or cooperation with mafia. Most of the stories were not only pessimistic but painted elements criminality and brutality. The entrepreneur was exploiting his employees and stakeholders. Some students described this dishonest entrepreneur as a product of Polish economy.

Obviously, in Poland there is no place for decent business. Will it ever change? [M24].

Some students pointed out that even if the entrepreneur himself is a good man, there are people who will influence him and make him take part in ‘dirty business’.

Despite honest work, he was dragged into shady business [K19].

A few stories focused on the moral side of entrepreneur’s life, depicting him as a character in a sex scandal. Only few people (around 15%) suggested that he was probably a successful entrepreneur and that they should learn from him.

Over 70% of the students from the USA presented a positive story of a business owner. Two students did not give an answer and in two cases stories were ambiguous. Among the group of US students examined earlier in Poland, six out of the eight gave a positive interpretation. Most of the students wrote about the hard work of the successful entrepreneur who was seen as a good example of a self-made man.

To be at the top of the Forbes list of billionaires has taken a considerable amount of hard work, ambition and dedication [F29].

One student presented a story of patience, persistence and tolerance to failure:

His success was not handed to him easily. He failed in the past in several small companies he started – all went bankrupt. Mr. Smith didn’t give up. He learned his lessons from his failure and was able to create this successful enterprise he now enjoys [F52].

Some personal characteristics like ambition, creativity, and ability to empower employees were also stressed. Good education was seen as important:

During his childhood, Mr. Smith was supported entirely by family members who provided him with money to pay for the best education in the nation [M34].

Some students stressed that now that the entrepreneur was wealthy, he could donate money to charity and that he could serve as an example for others who wanted to be successful. The role of entrepreneur’s family was also crucial, and balancing business and family was one of the most difficult tasks of this entrepreneur. Here, we see a similarity between Indian and the US students; both groups define the same problem, but for the US students it is much harder to solve. Three stories were about the struggle for balance in life.

This is what he has always dreamed about but with wealth didn’t come happiness [M39].

He is torn because he enjoys his job and the money is phenomenal. However, when is enough, enough in regards to money? Is it more important than his family? [M26].

A few students suggested that the next step of entrepreneur’s career will be politics. Negative interpretations of the story were connected with exploiting workforce in countries with poor human rights protection and rampant with fraud. In all countries the titles reflected the character of stories (see Table 2). Title of positive stories stressed success, while those proposed to negative stories – crime, scandal, or fraud.

Table 2 Selected titles of wealthy entrepreneur story proposed by students

		<i>Examples of titles</i>	
		<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Leaders Tale • Story of a Pioneer • The Rich and Successful • Hard work Always Pays Off • Inspiring Story of a Self-made Man • Innovation creates great success stories • From rags to riches • The Rich and Successful Entrepreneur • All that makes a difference is “Passion” • A Philanthropist • Good work needs no helping hand. It has the hand of God • Mr. Sharma who made it big • The man who owns – the heart of gold • The Innovative and Ethical Business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Sides of a Coin • Illegal practices leading to fall in profit • Power: a wicked temptation 	
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success in a Polish style, • Work, work.... success! • Happy end! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another scandal in Polish business world • Pol\$ka?? • Dirty money • Another businessman in jail • Dark side of impressing career • Polish businessman • The fortune built on harm and exploitation • Iksiński-gate • The truth about III RP 	
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American, “Boot-straps” success Story • How leaders are made? • Jimmy’s Innovation Challenge • From rags to riches: The Story of how Mr. Smith rose to the top • Mr. Smith saves the Day • Go for it! • Success: Through and Through • The American Dream 	<p><i>Negative:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Enron story <p><i>Ambivalent:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it Possible to Have a Balanced Life: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Success • The True Meaning of Life 	

Source: Own research

3.2 *Stories about the economy*

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of ten stories,⁶ given in pairs. In every pair one story was more positive (gave a positive image of entrepreneur or economy), and the second was usually connected with a kind of illegal or unethical action. We asked students to choose in every pair one story which, in their opinion, was more probable. We also asked them to indicate three of ten stories that, in their opinion, were most typical for their county's economy and explain the choice. The short version of stories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Stories about entrepreneurs/business

1 Anthony's company of just six people is really innovative and conquered the market with their new product.	2 Anthony's company of just six people is really 'innovative' and thanks to illegal practices managed to hide real earnings for many years.
3 'Strawberry', a company from a small town, is a victim of a dishonest contractor, who vanished with their product and never paid for it.	4 'Strawberry', a company from a small town, is successful thanks to close relations with its business partners based on trust.
5 (Mr. Name) is a well-known entrepreneur, owner of some giant companies from Fortune 500. Recently he was arrested on charges of corruption, breaking labour laws, misappropriation of property and many other violations.	6 (Mr. name) is a well-known entrepreneur, owner of some giant companies from Fortune 500. Born in a poor family he is a classic example of a self-made man.
7 Hard work is a main source of (Ms. name) company. She had some hard times in her business – but now it is over, thanks to her business attitude.	8 Relations and connections are main sources of (Ms. Name) company. She works with people, who have 'something to offer': an uncle in IRS, sister working for a member of congress, etc. She knows she can go through hard times thanks to them.
9 (Mr. Name)'s company has vanished from the market because of a dishonest associate and accountant, who had been pulling out money from the company.	10 (Mr. Name)'s company has vanished from the market because of his inability to listen to good advices of smart associates and accountants, who suggested that the company needed a new strategy. (Mr. Name) ignored them and they both left the company.

Source: Own research

The results in three countries differ significantly (see Table 4). Polish students tended to give very balanced answers in four out of five pairs. Only in one case certain option was assessed as more plausible – Polish students did not believe in a 'self-made man' story and thought that the option of an entrepreneur in jail was more likely. On the contrary, in the USA and India about 2/3 of students thought that self-made man was closer to reality than the entrepreneur being seen as a criminal. The positive story was assessed as more plausible than the negative one in both India and the USA. Such beliefs are much stronger in the USA (pairs 1\2, 7\8 and – especially – 9\10).

Table 4 Students opinion of plausibility of stories about entrepreneurs/business

Country	Percent of students finding a certain story more likely									
	1	2N	3N	4	5N	6	7	8N ¹	9(N) ²	10
India ³	80%	20%	37%	63%	34%	66%	52%	49%	50%	50%
Poland	51%	49%	52%	48%	72%	28%	53%	47%	53%	47%
USA	81%	19%	10%	90%	38%	62%	62%	38%	19%	81%

Notes: ¹The negative interpretations of that story are especially characteristic to Poland where even the Polish word for 'network' has almost purely negative connotations (so it is used in English).

²In his case both stories end with company's failure. In the first case (9) – the failure is connected with fraud, and in the second (10) – with ignoring good advices by entrepreneur.

³In India almost 1/3 of students did not follow instructions and did not indicate the most likely story in every pair. All the students marked the stories that, in their opinion, were most characteristics to the business/economy in India.

Source: Own research

Half of the students in Poland indicated story number 5 which was the one where the entrepreneur ends up in jail. Story number 8 (relying on people that has something to offer) was a second popular choice (41%). This story was also popular among Indian students, but it is important to note that connections have different social connotations in these two countries (generally in Poland this story sound much more negative than in India). Stories 2, 3 and 9 came next (between 25 and 30% of choices). All this scenarios are in Polish context negative, giving pejorative image of entrepreneurs and economy.

We asked students to explain their choice. Most Polish students offered explanations criticising business practices in Poland. Almost one quarter of the students claimed that their choice was influenced by mass-media that show examples of dishonest entrepreneurs and business scandals.

In Poland people build their fortune by cheating [M20]

Lots of business people steal. [M22]

The central role In Polish economy is played by connections, corruption and exploitation. [M19]

You can hear about allthese spectacular situationsin the media. [F28]

These cases are most often described in different media. [M20]

Students felt helpless and frustrated. Some of them felt that there was no way to change situation while others hoped for governmental intervention:

I hope that state will introduce proper regulations that will limit such situations. [F28]

Only few voices were more optimistic:

[Good] entrepreneurs are in majority. There are companies that cheat, but it's a minority. Most entrepreneurs try to be honest. [M21]

On the contrary, in India and the US, student tended to indicate much more positive visions of business as characteristic to their countries. In India stories 1 and 6 were chosen by over 40% of students. In the first we see innovation as a source of success, in the second – a successful self-made man. Description 8 came third, and we have discussed it earlier in this case study. When commenting their choice most Indian students would not give an in-depth analysis of Indian economy. However, they stressed some important aspects of it which were good and bad. They included the role of trust, business networks, hard work and innovation, numerous examples of self-made men, but also some shady practices.

The business environment in India is very healthy and has a bright future. [M25]

People in India are innovative in the sense they get output from minimum possible resources. [M21]

Every business in India start from a scratch and within no time they expand like anything. [M22]

Trust is an essential aspect in Indian business. [F21]

Also there is a lot of corruption in India. [M21]

In the US descriptions 4 and 6 were chosen by almost half of the student, i.e., self-made man, and relation based on trust as a source of success. Stories number 10 (failure of an entrepreneur who did not listen to smart advice) and number 1 (innovation) were next. Positive remarks dominated among the explanations behind the choices which stressed the US entrepreneurial spirit.

Most people in the United States operate through relationships, hard work, creativity and trust. There are some famous bad apples but the majority of people are good. [F41]

Small businesses are the life-blood of the American economy. [F29]

Some students tried to present different sides of economy which were not always trouble free and filled with honesty. On the other hand, students felt that negative images promoted by media and politicians are exaggerated and do not reflect the state of businesses in the USA.

While the media and politicians like to publicize the negatives, I believe that the wide majority of business on the US work hard and strive to operate ethically. [M39]

Both legally dubious and strategically clever paths to success seem possible. They often are present at the same time. [M39]

Some students compared corporations and small businesses.

I think there are many small businesses that work hard and with integrity. However I also think that there are many corrupt corporations. [F24]

Corruption from large companies seems fairly common in today's world. [F52]

3.3 Sources of success – unfinished sentences

In the third part of the questionnaire, we asked students to finish five sentences connected with success of entrepreneurs, or in business in general. The list of sentences is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Unfinished sentences

1	The owner of the Bemex company started his business in 1997. His company is doing very well, brings profits and gradually enters new markets. The success of Bemex is caused by.....
2	Owners of companies make big bucks because.....
3	The best recipe to create a good business is.....
4	(Name) works in the gardening industry. He is a hardworking, decent and scrupulous man. These characteristics mean that (name).....
5	“The first million has to be stolen”. Comment on that statement.....

Source: Own research

After answering questions in the first two sections in very pessimistic ways, Polish students surprised us by proposing more balanced argumentation in the last section of the questionnaire. The most popular source of success and wealth (sentence 1 and 2) were: finding a market niche, good management, designing good strategy and using market analysis. Hard work and commitment also help. A minority of students pointed to exploitation of employees, cheating on taxes or other illegal/unethical practices.

Almost all US students named only positive reasons for success and wealth. They were vision, innovation, hard work, leadership and teamwork. They stressed that business is inherently a risky venture and that one cannot succeed without taking some risk.

A culture of innovation and hard work along with taking calculated risk. [M34]

Only a few students mentioned negative sources of wealth. All were concerned about the differences in wages in top-down structures or extra bonuses.

Indian students pointed out mostly positive sources of company success, but were mixed when it came to sources of wealth. As far as success is concerned factors such as innovation, ethics, creativity, hard work, honesty, and good HR practices were felt to be behind it. One student stated that the success was based on ‘pure luck’. Those factors are also important when students are discussing sources of wealth, but this time also some negative elements may appear, like cheating, exploiting people or overcharging for products.

They beg, borrow and steal. They are cheaters. [M21]

According to Polish students, there was no clear recipe to create a good business. Some focused on idea, innovation and hard work, while a significant percentage of them suggested that contacts with politicians and evading the law as a more simple way.

...become a member of parliament. [M19]

US students saw this thing differently. All of them connected good business with entrepreneurial action: his/her motivation, willingness to learn, vision and creativity. They also felt that good location and resources also may help.

Do what you love – and hopefully people will need it. [F52]

Students in India too presented a clear recipe to create a good business and all of them were based on positive business attitude:

Think + initiate + lead + trust + persevere [M22]

[Hard work + honesty + care + belief [F21]

[Always be innovative and creative in doing business and never cheat your customer and be transparent. [F20]

Being a hardworking man (sentence 4) for Polish students may mean both: success in life (but in a long term) or being poor and clumsy. People may like him, but probably his success will be very limited. Obviously it is not a best way to do a fast career. For US students having those characteristics means being prepared for success, trusted by clients and the community. For Indians this man is prepared for success and high earnings. In all three countries students had difficulty in determining whether their fictional character was a worker or an entrepreneur, but the second possibility prevailed in most instances.

In the last question ('the first million has to be stolen'), almost 40% of Polish students avoided direct answer, 30% disagreed and 27% agreed. Almost all US students disagreed with that statement, and one person ironically stated:

Sounds good to me, but where? [M39]

Indian Students mostly disagreed with that statement and felt that business requires honesty. But some of them noticed that in real life corruption does occur.

4 Conclusions

Students' images of entrepreneurs, success and the nature of the business climate were different in the three countries explored in this case study. The most negative images emerged from Poland. India was closer to the USA than Poland. It was a surprising finding since Asian cultures are generally perceived as more distant from the USA than European. The reason for this may lie in high uncertainty avoidance of Poles and their risk aversion (Hensel and Glinka, 2012). This can explain low status of entrepreneurs (they have risky job), but not the fully negative stereotypes of them. This can be better explained by historically rooted beliefs.

Despite the rapid homogenisation of cultures suggested by some authors (Thatchenkery, 2006) arising mostly out of advanced state of globalisation, the results of this study indicate that deep rooted cultural values still play a key role in how people think of entrepreneurship, material success, and wealth creation. It seems to support Robert House's argument that

"As economic borders come down, cultural barriers will most likely go up and present new challenges and opportunities for business." [quoted after Steers et al., (2010), p.45]

While people in the three cultures seem to want to succeed and achieve, the ambivalence towards wealth creation is very clear among them. For the USA, entrepreneurship is the foundation of its economic engine and there is no ambiguity about the desirability of possessing wealth. The picture gets muddled for the Poles and Indians. In Poland high proportion of necessity entrepreneurship in total entrepreneurial activity may be one of the results of paradoxical perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

The findings of this study have significant implications for management education. MBA began as an US invention and has largely been exported to rest of the world. The popularisation of MBA was done without much regard to cultural uniqueness of the local context in rest of the world. Influential researchers such as Mintzberg (2004) have called for the creation of ‘managers, not MBAs’ in recognition of this important need for cultural appreciation in management education. This case study also shows that the differences expected across national cultures are not what they used to be. Culture is not a stable phenomenon, its nature is processual. It calls for an open approach in entrepreneurial education and taking new faces of cultural context under consideration.

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Notes

- 1 All the following data taken from: <http://geert-hofstede.com> (accessed 2 March 2013).
- 2 For details refer to: www.gemconsortium.org, where full versions of country and global reports can be found.
- 3 The first question, story of a wealthy business owner, was answered by almost 200 students, as it was included in two stages of the research in Poland.
- 4 We would like to thank Manosi Chaudhuri and doctoral student Nidhi Thakur, all of BIMTECH, for their help in data collection.
- 5 Different names that were culturally familiar were used in each country.
- 6 In Polish part – 12 stories, but two of them were irrelevant to other countries, as they were based on EU regulations.