

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CULTURES: THE USA AND SWEDEN

K. A. Kadovb, J. I. Sokolova

kkadovb@mail.ru;

sokolik5050@gmail.com;

Scientific advisor – S. A. Zoudova, senior lecturer

The article presents a comparative analysis of the cultural characteristics of two nations: Americans and Swedes. The work reveals the underlying causes of their individual characteristics, the distinctive features of the mentality, as well as their habits and traditions, which find common ground in a timely manner.

Key words: business etiquette; cultural features; misunderstanding; superstitions.

International relations are not only the sphere of public relations, it is a special kind of connection between the states, which is supported by the treaties and agreements. They consist of not only official and documentary parts, but they are also based on human relationships and attempts to find mutual understanding. Cultural differences can cause misunderstandings on both sides at once, which can complicate their interaction. The American community has been the cause of much controversy due to its diversity and ambiguity. The active and sometimes shameless temper of Americans was often put in contrast to another nation – the calm and knowledgeable in everything Swedes. Their cultures indeed significantly differ. There is a huge number of cultural features of these countries. Many of them have a historical background that reflects the country's development path, economic and social peculiarities. These features can show the attitude of nations to the world, work and interpersonal relations. It is really important to know the cultural features of the country you are dealing with in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Americans are very energetic, open and friendly. With a new acquaintance, they can immediately get down to business and speak quite frankly. The expression «Let's get down to business» - is very popular among Americans [1, c. 59]. Swedes are not too emotional. They are rather restrained. They like temporary pauses in conversation. Just like Americans, Swedes prefer an informal style of communication. During business negotiations, Americans can sit with their legs crossed so that the boot of one foot rests on the knee of the other, or put their feet on a nearby chair or table. This is considered to be normal in American culture. A smile is what distinguishes Americans. Communicating with Swedes you shouldn't keep your hands in your pockets. Women are not allowed to cross their legs and keep their ankle above the knee.

The implicit assumption that «getting things done» is worth it is rarely questioned in the USA. The consequences of assuming what needs to be done affect other cultural values and assumptions and permeate the language of Americans, as in the colloquial exchange of greetings: «How are you?» - «I'm fine, how are you coping?» The predominance of doing affects all aspects of American life. Its most distinctive feature is the demand for this type of activity, which leads to achievements measurable by standards that are considered external to the acting individual. The aspect of self-judgment or judgment about others that relates to the nature of the activity is based mainly on measurable achievement reached as a result of influencing people, things or situations. What is this person doing? What can he or will he achieve? These are almost always the main questions in the American personality assessment scale. In Sweden they take it easier and more relaxed. Swedes don't like to brag about their accomplishments and achievements and don't like to ask others about it. They prefer to keep it secret, hiding the personal from someone else's intrusion.

Foreign visitors coming to the United States quickly get an idea of life going on at a fast pace, and about people who are constantly on the move. This image indicates that doing is the dominant form of activity for Americans. In Sweden it's not obviously like that. When you get to this northern country, the first thing you notice is the slowness of people and their complete calmness. They are in no hurry. They enjoy every minute and try to relax. However, it cannot be said that they are lazy. Swedes are hardworking and clearly complete the work assigned to them. However, they are able to maintain work-life balance.

Americans are individualists, they are more concerned about their own problems [1, c. 70]. They are free to make their own decisions and control their lives. Americans love to express their opinions and don't feel obligated to agree with others. They want to be seen as unique. This is not typical for Swedes, who are more people-oriented. Swedes tend to work in a team for the common good.

Americans are more adaptable to change. They value mobility [1, c. 101]. They are open to everything new and easily adapt to changing conditions. Swedes, in turn, are more conservative. They value their history and traditions. This can explain the presence of a monarch in the country, which embodies the continuity of tradition.

There are different approaches of countries in the choice of clothing. In the United States, the rule is: the higher the position, the more formal the suit. In business life, only dark suits are accepted. For women, a trouser suit of a neutral color is preferable, as well as shoes with heels no higher than 4 cm. Less rigid rules, more free style of clothing apply in sports, art, fashion and in the entertainment industry. Among Americans, you can often see colorful clothes and unusual hairstyles. They are ready to experiment with their appearance. Swedes,

on the other hand, prefer a conservative style. Men like to wear good quality suits and a tie (silk), women like suits and dresses.

In the USA you will not see the number 13. The number is considered to bring various troubles. In the US, in transportation, theaters, and elsewhere, seat 12 is immediately followed by the 14th [2, c. 7]. Swedes don't have such superstitions; they are ok with all numbers.

Moreover, the Swedish culture can be described by the concept of lagom. Lagom is a Swedish philosophy which roughly translates into «not too much, not too little». Any lagom definition will describe this concept as being all about balance. The idea is that you improve your life by removing some of the things causing you stress and bringing more happiness into your world instead. Swedish lagom believes all things in life have a natural balance [3, c. 21]. When we learn how to walk the line between not too much and not too little, we discover what it means to be content. This concept reflects the attitude of the Swedes to life.

However, the cultures are also very similar in some ways. For instance, both Americans and Swedes always strive to create an informal atmosphere during communication, therefore they prefer to communicate with people by name, regardless of their age and position. Etiquette in both countries forbids telling strangers about your own successes or misfortunes. During the conversation, you should talk about abstract topics. In America and Sweden, people are quite straightforward, so in conversations they prefer to get straight to the point, without long lyrical digressions. The same applies to phone calls – small talks here indicate a lack of good manners, telephone conversations are conducted exclusively on business.

Americans are considered a hardworking nation. Punctuality and responsibility are not alien to them. Residents of the United States do not allow lateness and skipping the working day, even due to malaise. The phrase «time is money» became famous thanks to Benjamin Franklin, and Americans still live by this principle. They value people who know how to manage their time effectively. In business, punctuality is an indicator of reliability and discipline. Swedes are very similar. It is not customary for them to work overtime (a sign of indiscipline), most often they take work home. Punctuality is a must in dealing with them. However, Swedes have a traditional «fika», a coffee break, during which opinions are exchanged on urgent issues and strategic decisions are made [4, c. 26]. Fika is held in a pleasant and friendly atmosphere several times during the working day. It is essential for them to have that kind of a break.

There are also food types and cooking styles that are region-specific. The American «comfort» food style of cooking includes dishes such as: cabbage, fried chicken, corn bread and asparagus beans. Tex-mex is a popular type of cuisine in Texas and the southwest, it is a mixture of Mexican and Spanish

cooking styles and includes elements such as burritos, chili peppers, various spices and contains a large amount of grated cheese and beans. Fatty varieties of fish and meat are considered traditional for the Swedish menu. By the way, there are practically no vegetarians in the country – it is very difficult to survive without fatty meals in the country where a cold climate prevails. Most traditional fish dishes include the use of herring. The national Swedish dish surströmming, due to the smell that literally knocks you down, can only be tasted by the most courageous gourmets. Traditional crayfish parties are common in Swedish cities where crayfish are boiled right on the street in huge containers.

To sum up, Swedish and American cultures do differ in many ways, but at the same time they are also similar in many things. They have a different attitude to life, pursuing their principles and approaches to it. Two cultures perceive teamwork differently, following their own traditions. Swedes are unimaginable without their fika, while Americans may be reluctant to take this kind of break so many times during the day. However, it should be noted that success primarily depends on the desire to achieve or come to an agreement with the other side, so the need to behave in accordance with the rules of etiquette of the host party increases.

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