

THE INTERNATIONAL “COOPERATIVE CODE” COMPARISON OF TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF EUROPEAN COOPERATIVES IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA IN THE RAIFFEISEN YEAR 2018

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Abstract

The International Raiffeisen Year was celebrated in 2018. More than 22 million people in Germany are members of a cooperative, and there are more than 900,000 cooperatives worldwide. They create more than 100 million jobs. Today, they are a driving force for economic and social development, above all on a regional level [Böhnke 2018].

The scientific treatment of the transcultural component of the cooperative idea is below average. The current development of cultural studies in modern societies shows that post-colonial transformation and international interdependence as a result of globalization poses a challenge to coexistence in transcultural societies. Raiffeisen's cooperative idea – which is more than 200 years old – can help to solve current transcultural problems and enable conviviality, the core idea of transculturality. In addition, the cooperative approach, which works separately from religion, can fill cultural-theoretical gaps (there is also no solution of Wolfgang Welsch to problems of different religious backgrounds). In this context, this paper deals with a partial aspect of transculturality – the transcultural communication.

To commemorate Raiffeisen's idea, the Raiffeisen and Cooperative Associations in the German-speaking countries of Germany and Austria launched communication campaigns to raise public awareness of the subject of cooperatives and the cooperative idea that goes back to the original founder Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen. A scholarly examination of the transcultural aspect with regard to the differences and parallels of communication has not yet taken place.

An examination of the orientation of the cooperative or Raiffeisen associations in Germany and Austria is advisable, since Raiffeisen himself spoke German and the cooperative idea gained its fastest support in the region of Germany, Austria and

Switzerland from a historical point of view [Prof. Dr. Matheus 2018 / Editing: Dr. Engelen 2018].

Keywords: *Cooperatives, Raiffeisen Year 2018, Transculturality, Transcultural Communication, Communication Strategy, Communication Impact.*

Introduction

On 30 March 2018, Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen's birthday was celebrated for the 200th time [Mende 2018]. The cooperative idea was included in the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2016 [Dr. Stange 2016]. The current development of cultural studies in more modern societies shows that post-colonial transformation and international interdependence as a result of globalization is a challenge for coexistence in transcultural societies [Hamm 2001].

Transculturality describes precisely this aspect of the development of clearly delimitable individual cultures into a global culture. In 1997 Wolfgang Welsch described the concept of a society in which cultural identities are constituted by mixing elements of different cultures. Cultural boundaries and the idea of homogeneous national cultures are abolished by merging individual cultures within a community. In this way, modern societies can be seen as structurally heterogeneous and hybrid. In addition, culture is not only formed within individual states, but also forms in various cultural collectives such as religious, political or social groups. The individual identity thus necessarily consists of different cultural affiliations [Welsch 1997]. However, Welsch does not provide a formula for solving different backgrounds.

Raiffeisen's more than 200-year-old cooperative idea can help solve current transcultural problems and enable conviviality, the core idea of transculturality. In addition, the cooperative approach, which works separately from religion, can fill cultural-theoretical gaps.

Part of transculturalism is communication. The theory of transcultural communication is based on the synthesis model and the synergy model. It represents a social constructivist direction within intercultural communication that examines how cultures develop through communication. In the synthesis model, two sizes (thesis/antithesis) are combined into a third (synthesis). From two assembled sizes, a new, third, etc. can be combined. This normative model should be usable independently of the cultural environment. The synergy model describes the "continuous creation of a context of action in which the energy potentials of the foreign cultural communication partners flow together" [Bolten 2006]. The theory is based on the hypothesis that a new culture results from the

convergence of cultural diversity through communication. In order to understand the mechanisms of transcultural communication in relation to Raiffeisen and the cooperative idea, a look at the communication around the Raiffeisen year 2018 is an opportunity.

To commemorate Raiffeisen’s idea, the Raiffeisen and cooperative associations – especially in the German-speaking European countries of Germany and Austria – have pursued various (communicative) ways of drawing the general public’s attention to the special anniversary. The similar historical-cultural starting point of both countries and the relationship of the population to the topic of “cooperatives” enables a comparison of the communicative strategies of the cooperative associations of both countries in the Raiffeisen Year 2018. The transcultural communication aspect with regard to the focal points of communication in the Raiffeisen Year 2018 in Germany and Austria has not been investigated yet. The subjects under consideration are the campaigns of the cooperative associations in Germany and Austria. The German-speaking region is ideal for investigation, since Raiffeisen himself spoke German and the cooperative idea gained the fastest support from a historical point of view in the region of Germany and Austria [Prof. Dr. Matheus 2018 / Editing: Dr. Engelen 2018].

Discussion

The following compares the two communication campaigns in Germany and Austria. This paper uses a content-comparative methodology and a Limbic map method. For explanation: To make it possible to compare the impact of both campaigns, they can be located on the Limbic map. The Limbic map according to Hans-Georg Häusel uses the findings of brain research for marketing. It is based

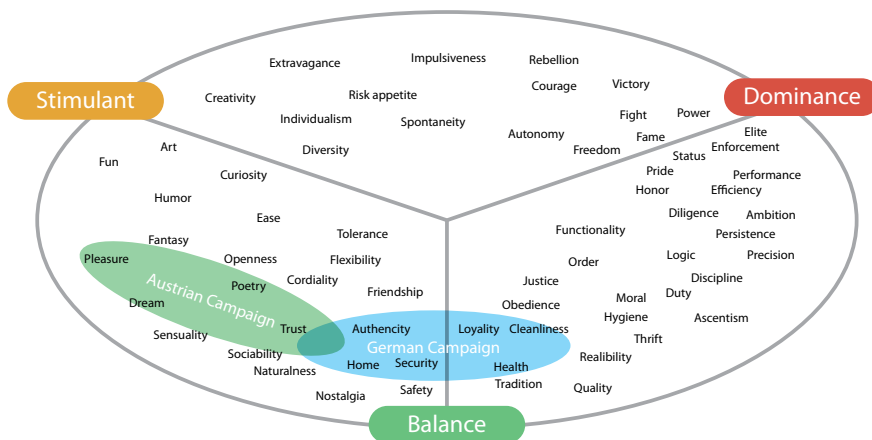


Figure 1. Location of Raiffeisen campaigns from Germany and Austria on the Limbic map.

on the assumption that people make decisions primarily on the basis of emotions and subconscious motivations. The processes in the so-called limbic system of the brain are therefore of crucial importance [Dr. Häusel 2007]. *“The Limbic approach is a neuro-marketing concept developed by Dr. Hans-Georg Häusel which combines the latest findings and disciplines in psychology, neurobiology, sociology and philosophy and prepares them for marketing. Based on the core statements of the above-mentioned humanities, target groups can be segmented in detail and more comprehensive statements on motive and purchase analyses as well as precise age and gender marketing can be derived. With the help of Limbic, we can obtain important information on how purchasing decisions are really made and why emotions are of great importance when purchasing”* [Ziegler 2015].

The Campaign Initiators

German Raiffeisen campaign

The person Raiffeisen was commemorated and tribute was paid to his work with the nationwide anniversary campaign “The Man Raiffeisen. Great Idea!” by the **German Raiffeisen Association (DRV)**, in cooperation with the **National Association of German Cooperative Banks (BVR)** and the **Genossenschaftsverband – Verband der Regionen** (Cooperative Association – Association of Regions) under the patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier [Schmedt 2018]. The aim of the communicative orientation of the campaign around the Raiffeisen Year 2018 was to start a debate on what the cooperative model can contribute to solving current societal challenges. The public was to be made aware of the idea of a cooperative as a democratic economic form of the future [Schmedt 2018].

The German Raiffeisen Association (DRV) is committed to the interests of cooperatively organized companies in the German agricultural and food industry on national, European and international level vis-à-vis politicians, administrators, economic partners and the public. The aim of its work is the practical design of the economic and agricultural policy framework [Schwarze 2015]. The National Association of German Cooperative Banks (BVR) is the umbrella association for the cooperative banking sector in Germany [Schmergal 2016]. The Cooperative Association – Association of the Regions is an audit and consulting association, educational institution and advocacy body for approx. 2,800 member cooperatives [Schütt 2014].

The three associations had commissioned the COMPACT MEDIA agency from Berlin to create and manage campaigns [Schmedt 2018].

Austrian Raiffeisen campaign

Under the motto “Raiffeisen200 – The Power of the Idea”, the **Austrian Raiffeisen Association** created a uniform communicative framework for Austrian cooperatives. The Austrian Raiffeisen Association is the auditors’ association and the representative body for the Austrian Raiffeisen Group. Consequently, it is the representative of all Austrian Raiffeisen companies. Its work focuses on lobbying, including in the banking sector and the agricultural and food industry. The Austrian Raiffeisen Association supports the cooperatives in improving their competitive position within the food supply chain and in further developing their quality strategy [Reichl 2018].

The aim of the communicative orientation of the campaign was to create a depiction of the historical-cooperative roots and their significance in today’s world. In contrast to the German campaign, the advertising media and the entire concept were created and accounted for in-house by the Austrian Raiffeisen Association. Various service packages were made available to the members and the regional cooperatives for implementation on site (workshop, communication, event, travel and digital packages) [Reichl 2018].

Communication content of both Raiffeisen campaigns in Germany and Austria

German Campaign

With the chosen motif, the founding father of the cooperative idea, Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, is placed in the centre of the campaign. As provider and “head” of the idea, the focus is on the “Man Raiffeisen” with all his (graphic) facets. In addition to the central content such as “Raiffeisen Year 2018” and “200 Years”, the campaign motto is “The Man Raiffeisen. Great Idea!”. The colour code blue, orange and green is based on the traditional colours of the German cooperative banking sector (Volksbanks and Raiffeisen banks, blue and orange) and the agricultural



Figure 2. Key Visual of German Campaign.

warehouses (green). The contrasting colours black and white serve to contrast with the above-mentioned colour selection. The font is based on Frutiger VR, the popular company typeface that is widespread in the Raiffeisen bank sector.

The key visual was rolled out at the beginning of the Raiffeisen Year in all three associations (the German Raiffeisen Association (DRV), the National Association of German Cooperative Banks (BVR) and the Genossenschaftsverband – Verband der Regionen (Cooperative Association – Association of Regions)). All cooperatives were responsible for its use on a voluntary basis. The German Raiffeisen Association developed its own campaign in addition to the key visual.



Figure 3. Poster motif of the German Raiffeisen Association for the Raiffeisen Year 2018.

Under the motto “Progress for humans and animals – The cooperatives. The model of success for all of us”, the campaign put special emphasis on the agricultural origin of the cooperative idea. Despite its own image world and focus on the agricultural and food industry, the campaign nevertheless refers to the higher-level Raiffeisen 2018 campaign on its landing page (www.raiffeisen2018.de).

Austrian Campaign

For Raiffeisen Day 2014, the initiative “Consciously: Raiffeisen.” was developed, which was continued in the Raiffeisen Year 2018. The central approach is a division of the theme: historical cooperative relationships and current (political) developments. The cooperative idea is brought into a larger context and learned patterns there, which historically lead to Raiffeisen’s idea.

A special feature is represented by the strong headlines (“We were founded because people had to take control of their own future”), which make a current reference (“Today we are called upon again.” Reference to refugee policy).

The central colour code consists of the three main colours of the Austrian Raiffeisen Association: green, yellow and black. White is added as a contrasting colour. The gable cross made of horse heads (in itself the logo of the Austrian Raiffeisen banks) is also used.



Figure 4. “Consciously Raiffeisen” subject. Raiffeisen Zeitung No. 43, October 22, 2015; Austrian Raiffeisen Association.



Figure 5. “Consciously Raiffeisen” subject. Raiffeisen Zeitung No. 20, Thursday, May 18, 2017; Austrian Raiffeisen Association.

The motifs were regularly posted as image advertisements in the Raiffeisen newspaper (circulation of the weekly newspaper: 44,000 copies) and on the association's website. All cooperatives in Austria were also responsible for its use on a voluntary basis.

If you locate the two campaigns on the Limbic map, it becomes clear that the German campaign is increasingly acting in the area of "balance" and stands for traditional values there. The campaign stands for terms such as "security", "tradition", "clarity" and "nostalgia".

The separate campaign of the Raiffeisen Association uses a classical agricultural image to refer to a traditional image of the cooperatives.

The Austrian campaign puts the historical Raiffeisen idea much more strongly into a modern context and encourages reflection. These factors increasingly target the "stimulant area" of the Limbic map.

Communication content of both Raiffeisen campaigns in Germany and Austria

In Germany, the campaign initiators published a representative survey at the beginning of the Raiffeisen Year 2018, which was created in 2017 to measure the image of the cooperatives and the cooperative idea. After the Raiffeisen Year, no measurement has taken place so far, so that the figures collected cannot currently be connected.

Two thirds of the population of Germany (64 percent) in 2017 believed that cooperatives provide more social justice. This was reported by the German Friedrich-Wilhelm-Raiffeisen Society. The figure is as high as 70 percent for those under the age of 30. Three quarters of respondents consider the economic form to be fitting for the times. Only one in ten (11 percent) think that cooperatives are outmoded. On the other hand, only four percent of the respondents associate "Raiffeisen" with a person or know Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen as the father of the cooperative idea. Of the respondents, 79 percent associate cooperatives with banks, 76 percent with agriculture and 73 percent with apartments. 90 percent said they would be willing to join a cooperative that is committed to their needs.

The opinion of *forsa* is based on the survey of 1,010 people aged 18 and older in December 2017 on behalf of the German Friedrich-Wilhelm Raiffeisen Society [Eder 2018].

The survey period of the Austrian telephone survey was February 2018. The surveyed population in Austria were those aged 16 and older. A total of 1,000 interviews were conducted.

To the question "Overall, do you have a more positive impression or a more negative impression of Raiffeisen?" 62 percent of Austrians replied that they had a

more positive impression of Raiffeisen, 25 percent had a more negative impression and 13 percent did not respond. Fewer than four percent of the respondents associate “Raiffeisen” with a person or know Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen as the father of the cooperative idea. Of the respondents, 83 percent associate cooperatives with banks, 77 percent with agriculture and 65 percent with apartments. When asked what attributes are applicable to the Raiffeisen Association, 81 percent of respondents answered “powerful”, 68 percent “Austrian” and 66 percent “trustworthy” [Reichl 2018].

Comparison of both evaluations reveals massive parallels in terms of ignorance of the origin of the cooperative idea or the historical person Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, both in Germany and in Austria. Nevertheless, the overall organization is attributed a positive picture/image and is trusted to have a certain strength, and people can imagine becoming part of the group.

Conclusions

Cooperatives provide an alternative economic model in which all members participate equally and have an equal say in issues of investment and expenditure. What the cooperative world has so far lacked is an exciting narrative that brings the idea to the consciousness of people today as a democratic economic form.

While the focus of the German campaign was on the agriculture-historical context of the cooperative idea and history, the Austrian campaign deliberately tried to place the topic of cooperatives into a larger historical and socio-cultural context.

The evaluation of both campaigns must take into account the cultural transfer. This method, which was developed by M. Espagne and M. Werner at the CNRS in Paris in the mid-1980s, arose from a criticism of comparative studies, the shortcomings of which it seeks to circumvent [Espagne/Werner 1988: 11–34]. The focus is on two factors: the divergence between the importance of a cultural export in the respective context (in this case the campaign idea to Austria) or the deliberate reinterpretation of the message in the new environment (Austrian campaign: historical idea in the context of current events). The second factor is the acculturation of the imported goods, i.e. the creative process that accompanies the acquisition and mediation of the foreign goods [Moebius/Quadflieg 2011: 111–114].

The relationship between advertising and society is considered in the literature from various perspectives. On the one hand, it is a question (in the context of advertising impact research) of the extent to which advertising can bring about changes in society; on the other hand, it is a question of the extent to which society itself influences the form and content of advertising offers [Burst 2002]. The consumer is seen here as a key figure who controls the economic process to a high degree through demand: successful advertising must always address the existing or evolving needs of society. It must sell the same brands from the past under different aspects and

with different persuasion strategies. Advertising can only work if it accurately meets the spirit of the times, i.e. addresses people's wishes, feelings, expectations and fears and adapts to the respective social and economic conditions. Accordingly, if the advertising industry fulfils these tasks, social and cultural structures of a company must be reflected in advertising, i.e. the interpretation of advertising offers must also make it possible to derive valuable statements about the company concerned [Kroeber-Riel/Weinberg 1999]. In the above case, it means that both consumers in Germany and Austria want to benefit from or participate in the benefits of a cooperative despite ignorance of the historical background.

According to Schmidt and Spiess, advertising is an important and sensitive indicator of social and cultural change, a kind of resonant body. Due to the need to generate consequential attention among the respective target groups, the advertising system is forced to monitor other social systems closely. This observation can take place either informally, through personal experiences of the creative community, or in the form of scholarly analyses by market research institutes. This way, the advertising system imports communication possibilities from other social systems and translates them into advertising communications under its own system conditions [Schmidt / Spiess 1995]. Therefore, a further study and measurement should examine whether the basic knowledge of cooperatives has improved during the Raiffeisen Year and whether there are other reasons for this. Why consumers choose cooperatives. Particularly topics such as co-determination and exclusivity could play a role here. This can be understood by the terms of social and cultural change. This refers to changed stratification structures and income relationships, changed professional and family structures, changes in production and consumption relationships. Cultural change refers to changes in value orientations as well as changes at the subjective-psychological level, such as changes in individual behaviour or individual objectives. For example, the question is asked whether collective interests are in the foreground or rather private, self-serving interests are being pursued.

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