Een schaap in de bus? Een onderzoek naar waarden van de Nederlander. Amsterdam Swocc

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Summary

This research deals with the question which values autochthonous Dutchmen have and how these can be structured in a useful manner.

Values play a major role in every society. They serve to facilitate choices and they focus people's behaviour. Values are central to a culture and are acquired in earliest youth. This occurs at an implicit level and takes place by transference of values in the family, at school and in the neighbourhood. For this reason values are culture-dependent and one cannot presume that values which are found in one culture are without question present in another culture.

The greatest problem in intercultural research into values is the status a value enjoys in a certain culture. Within this one can distinguish between the concept a value is based on, the existence of the value itself, the importance the value has for a society and the description of that value.

People's values change gradually through time. Generally, it is not the case that the value itself changes, but that the importance people recognise in that value changes.

Values influence behaviour, but the way in which values influence people's behaviour depends on the group to which someone belongs. The same value may be interpreted differently per group and subsequently varying behaviour occurs. This is why research into people's values alone is not adequate, one also needs to take into account people's surroundings. A fast-changing environment may lead to great differences in values between generations and changing relations between values and behaviour within a generation. For this reason fundamental research into values must be repeated frequently.

Vinson, Scott and Lamont have divided values into universal, domain-specific and product-bound values. Through the method of scaling these values may be related to each other. This is a system of ongoing questioning into ever deeper embedded motives behind (consumer-)behaviour. By interviewing people through scaling the values behind the product may be discovered and subsequently these values can be attached, via a focused campaign, to the product, to attract the consumer and tempt them to purchase.

In the marketing world values are mainly employed to position a product, communicate with the consumer and segment the target group. In this way products may be, as it were, dressed in values that attract consumers. Values play a role for distribution, sales staff, packaging and advertising for the product. In market seg-
mentation values are used to divide consumers into groups. All in all, where the marketing of products and services is concerned values play a central role.

A first large-scale values study was carried out by Rokeach. The world is indebted to him for a list of instrumental and final values, that is still used to this day in many parts of the world. Schwartz used it among others to draft a culture-wide theory. Through this it is possible to compare cultures with each other based on values. Hofstede is another researcher, who has performed large-scale intercultural research. He utilised polls for this purpose, which were conducted by IBM to investigate work satisfaction among staff. He found some dimensions with which he can compare countries. These studies show, however, that it is problematic to transfer a list of values, that claims to be fairly complete, from one culture to another. Also, Rokeach has himself indicated that his list of values was created largely by intuition, yet this appears no hindrance to many researchers to use the Rokeach value list anyway. Both these matters then justify a values study aimed at the autochthonous Dutchman. This is the SWOCC values inventory.

In the SWOCC values inventory qualitative interviews were used. Twenty respondents were asked what they think are the opinions held by people in twenty-two different living domains. These domains vary from having babies, going to school, puberty, work, holidays, politics, violence, to dying. In the interviews stimuli material in the form of photographs were used. These photos were accompanied by a number of questions, that should facilitate the respondent in talking about a certain living domain. The questions also make it possible to address issues not directly related to the photographs. Moreover, they provide better standardisation and repeatability of the research.

The interviews were transcribed literally and the values were then selected out of them. These values are as much as possible literal transcripts of what the respondent said. In this way 1372 value descriptions were generated. These descriptions were in a later phase reduced to 160 values. These were subsequently presented to a panel of 2000 households, the CentREpanel, to determine to what extent values correspond in meaning and to what extent they form each other's opposites. Statistical analysis of these data has shown that six dimensions can be distinguished.

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The interviews, photos, value descriptions, statements by respondents and results from statistical analyses have been collected on a cd-rom called the “Waardenwoordenboek”. In this way the results of the research are now available to science and marketing sectors. There is also a thesaurus included on the cd-rom with which
the 160 values, which will from hereon be called values*, are linked to the remaining value descriptions and also to the statements and background variables of the respondents and the photos. The value dimensions found correspond to a large extent with dimensions from other studies, with the notable difference that in this study all six are found simultaneously, while in other studies a maximum of three are found at once.

To test the substantiality of the results, the sample survey on which the results are based have been halved in a variety of ways. As well as with halving the number of values, as with the number of qualitative interviews, as with the number of judges of meanings, the results of the dimensions remain intact. From this it appears the dimensions found are stable and have substantial meaning.

That the six dimensions yield independent results is proven by the application of the SWOCC value research in the development of the VNU Waardemonitor. In this monitor brands and magazines are linked together on the basis of values. Which dimensions discriminate well in this process depends on the market analysed.

From the development of the VNU Waardemonitor it appears that there is a difference in value association between respondents with different educational backgrounds, but not between respondents with different income levels, while in many studies such relations run parallel to each other. Values appear to be connected to education which fits the theory that values are acquired in youth. To research this further the respondents from the CentERpanel were asked to report a number of childhood experiences. It appears that values are not only connected to age, but also to childhood experience. A part of the measured relation with age is therefore a cohort-effect, that doesn’t change with age, but with generation. This illustrates how age and circumstances simultaneously affect the relative importance of values.

By extrapolation of the cohort-effects we can take a glimpse into the future. Some trends in value development are calculated on this basis. In this way Dutchmen in the next twenty years, if the cohort-effect is taken into account, will set great store by ‘a social life’. The importance of ‘being care-free’ is rising, it is becoming more important to ‘prove yourself’ and people are more inclined to choose a ‘challenge’ over certainty. Family life will take a less important place, people would rather be ‘independent’. Finally, people are more attached to maintaining the ‘individual identity’ and they are less inclined to adapt to other people’s opinions and wishes. Whether all this will lead to a better world I leave the reader to determine.