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# THE ROLE OF SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF VALUES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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## Abstracts

**Purpose** – the aim is to discover the links between values between individuals and between different social science disciplines.

**Design/methodology/approach** – the study was based on convenience purposive sampling. The paper first provides an overview of interdisciplinarity in the context of the social sciences from a values perspective. Then, after collecting data through in-depth interviews, points of overlap between the attitudes and values of the informants were discovered. The study discovered links between individuals' values and different social science programmes.

**Finding** - Characterising the links between the narrow interdisciplinarity of the social sciences and people's values and attitudes revealed that individuals from different socio-demographic groups express attitudes that have many similarities. The similarities relate to attitudes towards the meaning of life, beauty and inspiration. This can be useful for discovering the links between different social sciences, where the individual is at the heart of the research, with his/her values and individual experiences.

**Research limitations/implications** - this study may lead to further exploration of the links between individuals and social science disciplines. Limitations relate to the subjectivity of the selection of informants.

**Practical implications** - this paper provides a hermeneutic approach to the theoretical and practical understanding of the links between individuals and the social sciences. Positive aspects of interdisciplinarity include enhancing creativity (Tang, 2019), people's ability to work together (Pryor & Steinberg, 2023), and the potential for expanding social research (Huutoniemi et al., 2010). As research shows, a broad view of interdisciplinarity as a diffusion of human experience (Siebert et al., 2020) can be a useful component of interdisciplinarity, which is explored in this study. This study explores the possibilities of combining the subjective range of individuals' values and attitudes with the need for research.

**Originality/value** - The results of the study can be applied in the field of management, as well as in research on relevant issues. The research may be of interest to the general public as well as to professionals in management, sociology, political science and business.

**Research type:** research paper.

**Key words**: interdisciplinarity, social sciences, values.

## Introduction

Due to the complexity of the concept and application of interdisciplinarity, the phenomenon is related to philosophy (Papo & Potlimbrzović, 2023), and it is therefore

important to distinguish the links between interdisciplinarity and values. With the constant pervasiveness of rapid change and innovation in societies and cultures, the constant ruptures - in time, space, activity, thinking, feeling and, more generally, ways of life - often become an end in themselves, and the glimpse of meaning is lost (Telban, 2021). As a result, the issue of values has been raised in research (Bennett et al., 2017; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Telban, 2021). Values at the intersection of different social sciences can provide an important link between them. Social sciences such as management, sociology, political science, economics, law, education, psychology involve the study of people and society. In these 'soft' sciences, people's attitudes and values cannot be completely ignored. When making generalisations in the social sciences, there is a tendency to compare people from different social groups, looking for group-specific characteristics and highlighting differences. This study has been carried out in order to understand the links. The intersections of values and attitudes that are revealed in qualitative research can be useful in the field of interdisciplinary research in the social sciences.

The aim of this paper is to discover the links between values between individuals and between different social science disciplines.

Methodology: the study was based on convenience purposive sampling. The sample consisted of 16 individuals, without controlling for gender, age, place of residence or education. All informants were asked the same questions about current issues and encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences. The questions included summaries of values and attitudes that reveal the links between people from different social groups. The participants included a mother with a disabled child, a pensioner born in exile, a nine-year-old schoolboy with a fear of war, and a nature researcher with no fixed abode. Points of convergence in attitudes and values were discovered, relating to attitudes towards love, pain, beauty and the meaning of life. From a hermeneutical point of view, the links between individuals can be significant for a deeper understanding of the links between different social sciences.

## Interdisciplinarity in the social sciences

There is a consensus in the literature that the concept of interdisciplinarity is multidimensional and ambiguous (Huutoniemi et al., 2010; Wang & Schneider, 2020). Interdisciplinarity in a general sense refers to collaboration between two or more disciplines. In the social sciences, interdisciplinarity can enhance creativity and the ability of people to work together (Laursen et al., 2022; Song, 2016; Wise et al., 2022). Researchers are increasingly interested in how to define and measure interdisciplinarity in research (Huutoniemi et al., 2010; Laursen et al., 2022). However, interdisciplinarity still faces challenges in terms of a clear evaluation theory, structure and a common language across disciplines (Laursen et al., 2022).

Research becomes interdisciplinary when research activities span multiple fields. As there are no impassable boundaries between fields, the notion of interdisciplinarity does not imply an objective, unambiguous characteristic of research. What is perceived as interdisciplinary depends on how the field is perceived, but there is no objective level of definition of the field. Therefore, what looks like interdisciplinarity to one person may look like routine disciplinary work to another. Thus, the interdisciplinarity of research cannot be determined solely by the fields in which the research is carried out. It is recommended that this phenomenon should be assessed in terms of how the domains are represented, how they relate to the research problem and to each other, and the extent to which the researchers themselves experience the clash of domains as a scientific challenge (Huutoniemi et al., 2010).

The implementation of interdisciplinary ideas is often hampered by a mismatch between rhetoric and practice (Laursen et al., 2022; Politi, 2019). The development of disciplinary cultures that define social relations and fields of study is important for practical

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interdisciplinarity in the social field. The social field emphasises productive collaboration between different disciplines (Schoenberger, 2001). Collaboration between different social science disciplines is beneficial because national interests do not reside in closed and isolated nations, but in the relationships between them (Telban, 2021). Related to the challenges of interdisciplinarity as a practical means of collaboration between different disciplines are the subjective attitudes of the disciplines themselves (Huutoniemi et al., 2010), a possible lack of strong expertise in one particular discipline (Song, 2016), and institutional constraints (Garforth & Kerr, 2011). Recent discussions of interdisciplinarity in the social sciences have attempted to describe methods, theories, and approaches to knowledge production, but less time has been spent on how personal trajectories lead to different kinds of interdisciplinarity (Garforth & Kerr, 2011; Wise et al., 2022). This paper will focus on a narrow mode of interdisciplinarity, where it is defined as the interaction between conceptually close fields (Huutoniemi et al., 2010), in this case, the interaction between different areas of social science.

Values play an important role in visions, critiques and debates in politics, religion, educational life (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022), psychology, social sciences (Schwartz, 1992), and sociology (Haller, 2002). The role of values in science ranges from deciding which research projects are worth pursuing to developing sound methodological approaches and assessing the sufficiency of evidence for scientific claims (Douglas, 2023). Theories of values are diverse. The main theories of values in the social sciences can be divided into the psychological strand (Schwartz, 1992) and the sociological strand (Inglehart, 2008).

Social value theory is based on societal and public values (Fukumoto & Bozeman, 2019). The study of social values seeks to explain differences across countries in terms of the values prevalent in society. It highlights the importance of value differences across different stakeholder groups, drawing attention to different socio-economic situations and cultural differences. Research has found a link between social values, politics, and environmental ideas (Shmeleva, 2017). As a leader in social values research, R. Inlehart (2008) proclaims that value change is primarily perceived as a consequence of technological development and economic growth, leading to the spread of values related to social equality. However, this research has also been criticised as being insufficiently grounded and lacking coherence in the context of cultural differences (Haller, 2002). The controversial research evidence on the links between social science and values shows that the topic is complex and its definition is receiving increasing attention. The aim is to question existing theories of values in an attempt to discover the differences and connections between values and the social science disciplines.

The theory of core personal values is based on psychological science. Values in this view have links to personality traits, subjective well-being, and the origins of values are linked to cultural (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022), political (Shmeleva, 2017), extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Pekrun, 2006) factors. Significant research on individual value theory has been conducted by S. H. Schwartz (1992). A refined theory of values was developed, indicating that each value is uniquely correlated with external variables (Schwartz et al., 2012), and the importance of values has been found for religiosity, social behaviour, political and environmental behaviour and creativity (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022). Findings related to the subjectivity evidence of this theory suggest that a person's value structure is so deeply embedded in the psyche that it is used to assess other people's values despite limited behavioural information (Ye et al., 2023), when behaviour and values are linked (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022).

**Study methodology**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 persons. The criteria for selecting the informants for the subject of the study related to ensuring diversity among the subjects. Convenient purposive sampling was used to achieve this objective. The sample size

was defined based on the recommendations for qualitative research in a systematic review (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The study aimed to have as diverse a population as possible in order to reveal the experiences, values and attitudes of the subjects in as many ways as possible. The subjects were 16 individuals aged between 9 and 72.

The study aims to include people from different socio-economic backgrounds, countries, cultures, educational backgrounds and health conditions. The duration of the interviews varied from 13 minutes to one hour. To preserve confidentiality, the names of the subjects have been replaced by a code.

Interview material was transcribed and then main themes and sub-themes were identified. Insights were formulated on the basis of an interpretative stance and a hermeneutic approach. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the use and protection of data, and confidentiality. The anonymity of the participants and the data was preserved, and the ethical principles of voluntariness, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and respect for the individual were respected. Records are stored in a password-encrypted document folder. To preserve confidentiality, subjects' names are replaced by a code. The characteristics of the informants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of informants**

| Code | Gender | Age | Place of residence | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M1 | Female | 34 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Jobs in finance |
| M2 | Female | 31 | Utrecht, Holland | Circus therapist |
| V1 | Male | 44 | Brussels, Belgium | Nature guide |
| M3 | Female | 40 | Druskininkai, Lithuania | Association Manager |
| V2 | Male | 33 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Basketball coach |
| M4 | Female | 23 | Tbilisi, Sakartvelo | Communications and PR specialist |
| M5 | Female | 29 | Lienz, Austria | On maternity leave, expecting child |
| V3 | Male | 16 | Šiauliai, Lithuania | Student |
| M6 | Female | 27 | Berlin, Germany | Social worker |
| V4 | Male | 9 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Student |
| M7 | Female | 66 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Cleanliness coordinator |
| V5 | Male | 38 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Pediatrician, lector |
| P1 | - | 21 | Vilnius, Lithuania | Art student working as a night watchman |
| M8 | Female | 36 | Riga, Latvia | Project manager |
| V6 | Male | 50 | Kaunas, Lithuania | Plastic surgeon |
| V7 | Male | 72 | Šakiai r., Lithuania | Retired |

The majority of informants gave similar answers to the question of what is important in life (Table 2).

**Table 2. Values**

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Values | The importance of relations | "Building a relationship is the most meaningful." M1<br>"It's relationships with people that matter. And of course it's about the relationship with yourself." V2<br>"Family. Love for them, care for them." V3 | 11 |
| | Family | "How you raise that child is so that he or she achieves something, so that he or she sees, hears". M7<br>"Getting to know your child with a disability." M3 | 5 |
| | Meaning as helping others | "Creating some good for society." M3<br>"Maybe change lives for the better, at least in small way." M4<br>"To listen, to understand, to help <...> you have to try, to do something, to help." M7 | 7 |

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The majority of informants mentioned family members, relatives, friends and the relationships between these close people. The distribution of informants to this question varied. Relationships between relatives were identified as an important aspect of life by informants representing different social groups and age groups: a person with a disability, a mother of a child with a disability, a senior citizen and a child, as well as by middle-aged people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The question of the meaning of life also reveals similarities. The overlap in the sense of meaningfulness in relation to children was characteristic of the majority of informants - 5 out of 7 - who have children. Children are not a frequent indicator of meaningfulness in the overall sample (5 out of 16 responses), but these findings are directly proportional to the informant's family situation.

Most of the informants consider people to be a source of inspiration. Some mention specific people who inspire them, others mention people who have certain inspirational qualities. Freedom, the ability to come up with ideas and implement them, beauty and courage are repeatedly mentioned as qualities that inspire people. Inspiration comes from people in different countries (Germany, Sakartvelo, Austria, Lithuania, Latvia), and these people also express similar characteristics of inspirational figures. It can be concluded that there is no significant cultural difference in the sources of inspiration between people in the study.

Inspiration comes from nature and various nature-related sensations (Table 3).

**Table 3. Sources of inspiration**

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sources of inspiration | Nature as inspiration | "I am very inspired by nature. Because I think nature is such a very primitive source of beauty, which is just infinitely, terribly beautiful." P1<br>"Water, nature, wind." V6<br>"Nature started to inspire. The other senses began to intensify. As there are fewer of them, you start to rely on others "V3 | 13 |
| | Inspiration - people | "What inspires me on the professional side is the thoughts, the people - the seminars, the books, the conversations - that, 'Oh, here's what I'm going to do now'. Behind it all are people and their ideas." V2<br>"My mother inspires me because she helps me." V4<br>"I am inspired by people who have ideas. Who believe in it, fight for it, work for it and make it happen." M2 | *12* |
| | Other sources of inspiration | "My faith. Jesus Christ. Music, Travel, Mountains. The life of the world. <...> Spirituality." M1<br>"Wisdom. <...>Also "triggers" - sensitive spots that irritate, but that say a lot about me. It's inspiring because it's very interesting. Why does it annoy me? Philosophy. Religions. Music." V1 | 8 |

These answers were given by men and by a person who did not identify their gender. However, nature as a value and an important component of life is mentioned by almost all informants in different answers to the questions. Some refer to nature as an inspiration, others as beauty, others as a favourite activity. A significant proportion of informants associate the meaning of life with helping others. There is overlap in views on the meaning of life, not only between people from different countries (which belies the position of cultural differences in terms of values), but also between the youngest (9 years old) and the oldest (72 years old) informants.

Beauty, according to the informants, can be related to physical beauty, naturalness, nature, positive feelings and human creativity (Table 4).

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**Table 4. Attitudes towards beauty and love**

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Attitudes | Beauty | "These are things that make you smile. Maybe it's flowers, beautiful music, lyrics that are close to you. The satisfaction you get when you do what you set out to do." M4<br>"A sunny spring day. A feeling that everything is beginning again. I look out the window. It's a new beginning." M2<br>"It's natural. Being natural, authentic as a human being. And nature itself." M5 | 16 |
| | Love - positive aspects | "These are the things that make you smile. Maybe it's flowers, beautiful music, lyrics <...>. The satisfaction you get when you do what you set out to do." M4<br>"A sunny spring day. A feeling that everything is beginning again. I look out the window. It's a new beginning." M2<br>"It's natural. Being natural, authentic as a human being. And nature itself." M5 | 13 |
| | Love – negative aspects | "I don't believe in love." M8<br>"It is a temporary feeling, or a temporary illness." V6<br>"When I think of myself in terms of love, I'm so ehh...no, not really me." P1 | 3 |

Nature was identified as the source of beauty by the highest number of informants. A 9-year-old student from Lithuania, a 23-year-old public relations specialist from Sakartvelo, a 72-year-old senior citizen from Lithuania, and other informants were also indifferent to the beauty of nature. Both men and women, representing different demographics, associate beauty with feelings and positive emotions.

Informant's attitudes towards love can be divided into descriptions of love as an action (caring, work, sacrifice) and love as an abstraction (strength, energy, attitude towards life and the environment). From a personal perspective, the informants mainly described love as a bond between people and between other objects (e.g. man and nature), an effort to build and nurture relationships. Three informants indicated that they did not believe in love. These included a 50-year-old man from Lithuania, a 36-year-old woman from Latvia and a 21-year-old person from Lithuania. There were no overlaps in marital status among those who did not believe in love. However, it can be noted that all of the persons who do not believe in love mentioned the loss of a loved one or a close relationship as a negative personal experience.

The area of deep experiences is one of the broadest in the survey (Table 5).

**Table 5. Deep negative experiences**

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Experiences | Painful experiences - childhood | "When I was seven, my parents thought I would go to school in another city and took me somewhere else to live. I carried that feeling of abandonment for a very long time. I was also left alone in a small house. What helped? That I recognised it. And then my mother was killed, so I was abandoned in another way. Then my boyfriend left me. <...> I'm learning to get over it." M1<br>"The first 20 years of my life were difficult. My dad left us when I was two and a half. My brother and I (brother a year older) lived in a very insecure environment." V1 | 5 |

*Table 5 continues in next page*

*Continuation of Table 5*

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Experiences) | Painful experiences - losses | "I haven't accepted it, really. Last summer my dad died <...> he committed suicide. Yeah, it's really cruel. I don't know why he did it, maybe he was afraid of depression or something, but he did it <...> I want to say that we need to talk. More, more, more." M8<br>"As a man-woman relationship <...> discipline helped, sport, I started running very strongly. I also went to church and prayed at that time, to God. And this helped me a lot. I gave up alcohol. And that brought me out." M3 | 6 |
| | Disability | "My son's disability. Such a trauma. I haven't accepted his disability for 10 years. <...>Now relationships with other people help. Acceptance. Leaning on close people. When you have people like that, they reflect, they tell the truth." M3<br>"I'm autistic, and when I talked to my mother, now, at a conscious age, I realised that she always knew that there was something wrong with me, but she just didn't do anything about it, didn't even try to somehow, well, accommodate me, to... so that I could somehow learn properly, into some kind of program to make it easier for me. She just thought that I would just be able to get through it on my own <...> Suicide is another option. And if those are the only two options, then of course you will do everything to avoid that second option. "P1 | 3 |
| | Other difficulties | "Professional things, relationships, health things all came together." V2<br>"I haven't had any particularly painful experiences." M5 | 5 |

Due to the breadth of responses and the marked differences between experiences and assessment of experiences, painful experiences were divided into domains. These include childhood experiences and experiences related to the original family situation (often the relationship with the mother and/or parents), painful experiences related to losses - both relationship losses and death of relatives, experiences of disability or serious illness (both own and relatives' experiences). The category of other difficulties includes professional difficulties, timely or temporary challenges. Losses are difficulties experienced in both death and divorce. These difficulties were identified by 6 informants. Responses about grieving depend on the length of time since the loss. Self-love and acceptance of the situation, with all the challenges it entails, are identified as important aspects in all cases. Meanwhile, 5 informants identified painful experiences as a primary family difficulty. Of the five members of this group, four do not currently have a family of their own. In the category of connection to the primary family, individuals mentioned an unsafe environment, parental neglect, incomplete family, feeling/feeling of abandonment, and poor economic situation as painful experiences. These experiences are very personal and a more detailed account of the impact of these experiences on individuals' later life can be linked to attachment theory and other theories of psychological science.

Disability is mentioned by three informants as a painful experience. Two of them are persons with disabilities and one represents a social group of parents of a child with disabilities. Feelings of not being accepted for who you are, loneliness are mentioned as disability-related feelings that can be experienced with great effort and motivation to live. Difficult career-related situations, timely or, in the opinion of the informants themselves, insignificant difficulties were identified by 5 persons.

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Social injustice, discrimination, lies, inequality and crime are upsetting not only for those who have experienced discrimination related to social exclusion, but also for those who did not express such experiences in the interviews (Table 6).

**Table 6. Sociological values**

| Theme | Subtheme | Examples | Number of informants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sociological values | Sad things | "Rejection. Daily News. This is how I start the day angry. <...> violence." V1<br>"There is such injustice. Especially if it's like in society. Well yes in society, <...> Like how disabled people are devalued in society, or the LGBTQ+ community, the coloured community. When they are poorly looked after, I feel bad." P1 | 7 |
| | Public welfare - influence of people | "Start with yourself. A little good deed already makes the world a better place. An ocean of many drops. When you do good, others do too. "M1<br>"Maybe people should be more conscious and think more about the impact of our behaviour. Connection. Between different people, cultures. Different worlds. It's hard to care and think about what's happening far away from you. If you don't know anyone there." M2<br>"Probably think a little more about others. Not to think about others more than myself, but a bit more. By think, I mean care. To try and believe that you can make a difference." V2 | 8 |
| | Public welfare - ecology | "And consumption. So that people use less, buy less. We don't know how much time we have left. Sometimes you even wonder if we are really moving forward." M4<br>"Man himself is the biggest parasite. We are not needed by the earth at all. And we need the earth. That's why we are such exploiters. "V3 | 4 |
| | Politics | "Policy. I would abolish the one person in power who has too much power. Like Putin, for example." M4<br>"What many people don't understand, especially from the Western world, is that those on the other side are not poor because they have chosen to be so. They are poor because we, the rich, are here. It's not two different things, it's something that goes together. We have the opportunity to live a good, privileged life because others suffer for us. I think that is the dilemma here. At the same time, people from western countries travel and are amazed that people have discovered how the world works." M6 | 7 |

The majority of informants see personal effort as the means to change the world. 7 women and 1 man say that we have to create a better tomorrow ourselves. Taking responsibility, kindness, awareness, thinking about others more often, relationships between people, personal efforts to create a better future can help. Ideas related to ecology are identified by those aged 30 and under. Peace ideas are expressed by different people of different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds. From a sociological point of view, therefore, the informants are expressing fundamental values related to the future of the world. These include peace, social justice and sustainability. To achieve these goals, informants say that both political decisions and the contribution of each one of us are important.

To summarise the survey data, it can be said that the overlapping values were revealed between the attitudes of people of different ages, cultures and social groups towards the meaning of life and the things that matter in life. The prevailing views were that it is important

to help others, to grow and develop, and to take care of loved ones. Family members and friends, relationships and connections are seen as the most important things in life. The similarities in attitudes were not related to specific differences in individuals' experiences.

In terms of personal values, informants were asked about personal experiences and ways of coping with them. The distribution of individuals according to the prism of painful experiences revealed predominant groups of painful experiences. These included difficulties related to relationship crises, relationships with the original family (the most frequently mentioned figure was the mother), difficulties related to the professional field, bereavement, disability. Although the experiences showed marked differences between the informants, the ways of dealing with the problems appeared to be similar - this included the power of supportive relationships, the importance of time, and self-development.

In terms of sociological values, individuals shared observations about the well-being of the world and society. Aspects of politics, ecology, psychology and sociology were highlighted. Individuals expressed similar sentiments from a psychological point of view that the well-being of the world is linked to the contribution of each of us. Younger informants expressed the importance of ecological and sustainability ideas. Political attitudes as indicators of well-being were expressed by people of different ages and cultures. Peace ideas as a necessity for world well-being are expressed by people living in different countries (Lithuania, Sakartvelo, Germany), representing different ages (from 9 to 72 years). Social justice is mentioned both by persons representing socially vulnerable groups and by persons who did not indicate in their answers any personal connection to the examples of social discrimination of concern.

## Findings

Interdisciplinarity can be related to people's values through similarities in attitudes between individuals representing different demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The aspect of interdisciplinarity as an opportunity to build links between different social science disciplines can be linked to people's needs to collaborate and connect with other people.

In terms of values, informants mentioned, from a personal point of view, areas related to the social sciences, politics, education, psychology and management. This shows that personal experiences can be related to different social science disciplines.

Life experiences had a greater impact on attitudes than cultural or demographic differences. However, the study showed more similarities than differences in terms of values. Shared points of view can be interpreted as an opportunity to improve awareness and a sense of commonality between different individuals and different disciplines.

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