INTRODUCTION

"Every time we speak, we perform a cultural act."
(Claire Kramsch, 1993)

From Ice Breaking to Deal-Making is, as the title itself announces, a short and concise guide to intercultural communication and business negotiation. It is conceived as a condensed introduction for students and trainees (and not only) interested in the study of intercultural communication, or those whose work involves an intercultural dimension.

The book draws on current research in the field of culture, communication and negotiation, and aims to provide a framework for acknowledging cultural difference and enhancing awareness and understanding of the complex and complicated issue of (business) communication in cross-cultural settings. Equally, our aim is to enable trainees to become more open to the way(s) in which cultural differences (expressed as different attitudes to time, (personal) space, power relations, etc.) are likely to impact communication in both domestic and international environments.

The work is structured along three key interrelated areas, namely culture, communication and negotiation.

Starting from the premise that "every time we speak, we perform a cultural act" (Kramsch, 1993), we acknowledge the inherent link between language and culture, and the fundamental role language plays in communication, as a form through which culture is expressed.

Chapter one delves into the concept of culture as the glue that links together the pieces of this puzzle, that is intercultural communication. In fact, culture is the red thread, the core around which the whole book revolves. Discussions equally tackle definitions of culture, as well as the features and forms usually attached to the construct. Culture is seen as the ultimate ice-breaker, the key to unlocking and deciphering the "unwritten rules of the social game". Finally, looking into the issue of cultural intelligence, the chapter invites the reader to reflect more on one's own culture and cultural values, beliefs and attitudes. The emphasis is on the fundamental role played by self-awareness in understanding cultural difference and in building effective cross-cultural communication skills.

Chapter two explores the nature and characteristics of communication, with a focus on cultural influences, which account for the different, even divergent communication styles. Incursions are also made into a number of cultural patterns and communication models that can be used as road maps for understanding behaviour and, implicitly, for enhancing intercultural communication skills. The chapter emphasises the importance of accurate cultural profiling, as a means to "decode" other cultures and facilitate understanding.

Moreover, it explores the essential role of nonverbal communication in cross-cultural "dealings", reviewing types and functions of nonverbal communication, with a focus on the potential impact of culture-specific elements.

Chapter three completes the circle and looks into the issue of negotiation, as a genuine form of human communication. We argue that business protocol and etiquette, greetings, personal appearance and communication styles, etc. all vary widely from one culture to another. Moreover, every culture seems to have a dominant negotiation style, which reflects the nation's dominant culture and the inherent communication style(s).

Discussions start from the assumption that given the significant impact of globalisation on the business sector, international negotiations depend heavily on the negotiators' knowledge of cultural differences, on their ability to adapt and on their level of intercultural competence.

The book is an invitation to openness and tolerance and, as such, one of the core elements is awareness – both self-awareness and awareness of cultural difference. However, we emphasise the need to be cautious not to fall into the trap of overgeneralisation and stereotyping. The key to enhancing cross-cultural awareness and understanding also resides in our ability to break away from the "us" versus "them" type of mentality and embrace difference as a fact of life endowed with high potential for self-development.

CHAPTER 1
FOCUS ON CULTURE

"In action and in social life, culture constitutes the unwritten rules of the social game". (Hofstede, n.d.)

1.1. Attempts at a definition of culture: A foray into the "unwritten rules of the social game"

At the core of our investigations on the interrelationship between communication and negotiation lies the concept of culture. Therefore, we will begin our inquiries by attempting to provide a definition of the construct, construed as a core element governing the dynamics of the social interaction game.

A number of definitions of culture have been put forward and, while there is a variety of approaches to the term, we will be addressing the issue from a social stance, emphasising its inherent social dimension. From this perspective, it can be argued that people, as members of a given community, are shaped by and, at the same time, shape culture. Moreover, as E. T. Hall argues in his seminal work, *The Silent Language*, "one of the most effective ways to learn about oneself is by taking seriously

the cultures of others. It forces you to pay attention to those details of life which differentiate them from you." (1959: 31).

When discussing about culture, one of the most difficult tasks resides in defining and describing the term as such, since there is a myriad of spins and viewpoints. As early as 1976, Williams was already anticipating this aspect, describing the term *culture* as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (1976: 76). It is still a word in search of a definition, a complex whole, a word that, as we will later see, has been considered both a noun and a verb, a concept that encompasses anything from knowledge and arts, to morals and beliefs, or customs and laws. According to the Cambridge dictionary, *culture* represents "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a parti cular group of people at a particular time" (https://diction ary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture?q=culture)

Looking deeper into the matter, we notice that the term originates in the Latin 'cultura' (approximately 15th century) and it literally translates as "land tilling", that is, getting the land ready for crops. In 18th century Europe, the concept was still mainly associated with the area of agriculture and crop growing (Jackson, 2020: 27), while in the 19th century, it was linked to a "universal human capacity" (Levine, cited in Jackson, idem).

Throughout time, the term has acquired a myriad of meanings, as it came to be increasingly associated with education; in other words, it no longer meant merely cultivating the land, but cultivating one's mind and soul