IDEOLOGY, PUBLIC RELATIONS, INTERCULTURALITY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: INTERDEPENDENT CONCEPTS THROUGH TURKİYE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the interdependent relationship between interculturalism, ideology, social structure, and public relations in Turkey. It posits that ideology and social structure provide the framework for intercultural interactions, with public relations functioning as a key managerial tool within this process. The paper specifically focuses on the compulsory transformation in Turkey's communication strategies following the 2011 Syrian crisis. This period marked a distinct shift from externally focused public relations centered on 'soft power' and image management to intercultural public relations practices aimed at ensuring internal social cohesion. The efforts by public, private, and civil society organizations demonstrate the evolution of public relations from an image-management tool into a crucial mechanism for social stability. However, the success of these efforts is contingent upon overcoming structural challenges, such as negative media representations and entrenched ideological prejudices.

Keywords: Interculturalism, Public Relations, Ideology, Social Structure, Migration

İDEOLOJİ, HALKLA İLİŞKİLER, KÜLTÜRLERARASILIK VE TOPLUMSAL YAPI: TÜRKİYE ÜZERİNDEN BİRBİRİNE BAĞLI KAVRAMLARA BİR BAKIŞ

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki kültürlerarasılık, ideoloji, sosyal yapı ve halkla ilişkiler arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi incelemektedir. İdeoloji ve sosyal yapının, kültürlerarası etkileşimler için bir çerçeve sunduğunu ve halkla ilişkilerin bu süreçte bir yönetim aracı olarak rol oynadığını savunmaktadır. Çalışma, özellikle 2011 Suriye krizi sonrası Türkiye'nin iletişim stratejilerinde yaşanan zorunlu dönüşüme odaklanmaktadır. Bu süreçte, dışa dönük "yumuşak güç" ve imaj yönetimi odaklı halkla ilişkiler faaliyetlerinden, ülke içinde toplumsal uyumu sağlamayı amaçlayan kültürlerarası halkla ilişkiler uygulamalarına keskin bir geçiş yaşanmıştır. Kamu, özel sektör ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarının bu yöndeki çabaları, halkla ilişkilerin bir imaj aracından toplumsal istikrar için hayati bir mekanizmaya dönüştüğünü göstermektedir. Ancak bu çabaların başarısı, medyadaki olumsuz temsiller ve köklü ideolojik önyargılar gibi yapısal zorlukların aşılmasına bağlıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürlerarasılık, Halkla İlişkiler, İdeoloji, Sosyal Yapı, Göç

INTRODUCTION

Increasing cultural diversity, rapid societal changes, and complex political dynamics characterize the contemporary global world. In this context, the study of intercultural relations has become more critical than ever. Migration, globalization, and digitalization are bringing new forms of cultural interaction to societies. Under these circumstances, the ability to manage diversity and foster harmony among different groups has become indispensable for social stability and progress. Public relations plays a significant role with its capacity to shape perceptions, promote dialogue, and build relationships among diverse groups within society.

In this process, intercultural dynamics reshape public relations practices, while the factors of ideology and social structure are variably and repeatedly applied to the implementation process. Ideology shapes worldviews, behaviors, and interactions through belief systems and values, while social structure establishes the framework and patterns in which these occur (Zmigrod, 2022, s. 1073). Therefore, understanding the mutual interaction of these elements is vital to grasping the full scope of intercultural relations and public relations practices.

Turkey, situated at the crossroads of different cultures and experiencing significant internal and external socio-political transformations, offers a particularly rich and suitable environment for examining the connections between these concepts. The country's history, geography, and current demographic structure enable a profound analysis of how ideology and social structure shape intercultural dynamics and public relations strategies.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of these intertwined concepts within Turkey's unique national context and its intercultural relations. Accordingly, the study will first examine fundamental concepts from a public relations perspective, including interculturalism, ideology, and social structure. Through this framework, it aims to explore the complex relationships, interactions, and causal links among these three core concepts systematicly. The subsequent section of the study will focus on Turkey's socio-cultural and political environment, examining various public relations practices through this systematic framework.

1. A Brief Overview of Interculturalism, Ideology, and Social Structure

1.1. Interculturalism

Given the growing diversity in social life, interculturalism is considered a concept that constructs the process of "living together." The point here is not merely mutual tolerance but the establishment of a genuine foundation of integration and goodwill. In other words, the concept does not imply being forced to coexist but rather a political strategy that can ensure social peace in a cultural sense. The concept approach is interpreted as promoting interaction in the public sphere and developing a new civic culture based on a "culture of diversity." This requires not just passively accepting different cultures but engaging in a meaningful dialogue with them by understanding common human needs and differences. It should be noted here that the term "policy" should not be misconstrued. The populace itself, through a civil society approach, should develop interculturalism as a policy, not a top-down imposition by political power. The role of the public sector here is not to suppress but to support interculturalism. (Cantle, 2012, s. 53-54; 68)

Interculturalism is an approach that emphasizes the dynamism of cultures. Therefore, change and transformation are its fundamental laws. It involves processes of validation, exchange, change, and ultimately, the evolution of cultures through interaction. Here, the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism becomes apparent. While multiculturalism implies the coexistence of different cultures in spite of each other, interculturalism implies their existence because of each other. In an intercultural society, unlike in a multicultural or monocultural one, identity is not based on group affiliation, ethnicity, or religion but is individual-centered and "fluid."

Identity ceases to be a fixed category and acquires a meaning that is constantly "negotiated, transformed, and adopted" within social interactions (Mato, 2012, s. 106-107). Thus, policy, as previously emphasized, points not to a centralized process but to a much more dynamic and multifaceted one arising from interpersonal contact.

This process is directly proportional to the transformation of modern public relations practices. Moving away from one-way, persuasive models, public relations has assumed a more societal role, adopting two-way and interactive strategic communication efforts. Acting with ethical responsibility that is more honest, symmetrical, and mutually beneficial, the contemporary understanding of public relations is defined as a planned interaction process aimed at building "mutual understanding and trust" between organizations and their publics (Lucas, 2020, s. 369-360). This modern understanding has positioned it to assume primary responsibility in conducting intercultural communication and interaction efforts.

1.2. Ideology

Ideology represents beliefs about idealized forms of social convictions and behaviors. When considered as a collection of ideas about society and social life, ideology can be interpreted as a regulatory force concerning ideals. Ideologies are regarded as "epistemic and socially organizing forces" in scholarly literature because they "both describe and prescribe human action." Structurally, ideological thinking signifies a rigid adherence to beliefs and a direct rejection of the outside. Socially, perceptions of the "in-group" are positive, while ideas about the "out-group" can be continuously reproduced in a negative direction. This way of thinking is conceptualized as "a rigid adherence to a doctrine, a resistance to evidence-based belief-updating, and a positive orientation toward an in-group and a hostile one toward out-groups." (Zmigrod, 2022, s. 1075-1076) Over time, this process can lead to a rigid dogmatism that attaches a negative connotation to the ideology it currently holds.

However, this study relies not on the critical view of ideology as "false consciousness" defined by Marx, but on Mannheim's definition of ideology as the entire accumulation of a society's experiences and thoughts. In a societal sense, the concept of ideology points to purposes such as seeking common meanings, avoiding uncertainty or despair, and generally ensuring integration. The individual, through ideological thought developed in line with beliefs, connects to the social structure and strengthens their sense of belonging (Zmigrod, 2022, s. 1076). Similar to the connection we established with interculturalism, it can be seen that public relations plays an effective role in the continuity of ideology, its reception by the individual, and its acceptance by being placed on legitimate ground.

1.3. Social Structure

Finally, the concept of social structure fundamentally refers to the relationships among people living within the same society and the principles and rules of the "world" they jointly construct. In sociology, social structure is defined as the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together. How members of a society get along, what elements bind them together, and what kinds of relationships they form are examined within the concept of social structure. The main focus of this fundamental investigation is to determine the role

that all these examined elements play in constructing and maintaining society throughout its historical process. Indeed, one of the basic assumptions of sociology is that society is not a static entity but a "historical process," and each society must be evaluated within its specific historical evolution (Form & Wilterdink, 2025).

2. A Cross-Examination of the Concepts

We will examine interculturalism, ideology, social structure, and public relations in the context of their interactions under this heading. The need for this examination stems from the interdependent and dynamic relationships among these four concepts.

2.1. Ideology, Social Structure, and Interculturalism

Ideology, which permeates all of social life, also has a direct impact on intercultural processes. Conflicts arising from ideological differences in society can disrupt the intercultural process or at least slow down the spread of the intercultural interaction network. Intercultural conflicts are often defined as situations where incompatible goals or expectations between two or more parties lead to a struggle, and these incompatibilities frequently have deep ideological roots. Beliefs about culture, like linking it to nationality, valuing ethnic identity more than shared cultural values, or thinking that having many cultures harms society, influence how people understand and engage in cultural interactions (Holliday, 2011, s. 25, 52-53, 172).

Therefore, to manage the intercultural process, it is necessary to arrive at a point of reconciliation with the dominant ideology. This reconciliation, does not mean accepting concepts that interculturalism opposes, such as race-based discrimination, exclusion, and alienation. What is meant by reconciliation is making interculturalism possible through the values of the dominant ideology in society.

In the connection between social structure and interculturalism, the prominent point is that social structure can be defined as the entire -including the family- environment that affects human behavior and interaction (Yang & McDonell, 2023, s. 32). Interculturalism examines the effects that diversity can produce in this environment. In this context, recognizing the cultural foundations of social structures and family systems is crucial for developing culturally sensitive theoretical frameworks, effective practices, and inclusive policies. Therefore, understanding how diversity has developed over time, what causes people to be excluded, and how cultural interactions build social connections are key areas where social structure and interculturalism meet. A thorough examination of the social structure will help create intercultural policies that ensure social equality, lessen bias, and encourage trust, adaptation, and a sense of belonging (Mato, 2012, s. 102-103, 107).

2.2. Ideology, Social Structure, and Public Relations

Although public relations may at first glance be perceived as a management function in the business world, it also encompasses a set of practices that can work for cultural and political purposes, shape public opinion, and trigger or foresee social change. Therefore, not only companies but also public institutions, political parties, or non-profit organizations frequently resort to public relations, directly or indirectly, for various purposes (Kyalo, 2024, s. 3, 7)

Ideology allows social relations in social life to become unequal and even places this situation on legitimate ground. Social behavior moves away from more universal foundations like right or wrong and is placed on an axis of being either in line with or contrary to ideology. So it is hardly possible to think of public relations as independent of ideology. Public relations is tightly bound to the dominant ideology (economic, political, or cultural) in which it develops to legitimize its activities or at least keep them free from interference. Mengü (2012, s. 5) mentioned that public relations is a tool for the adoption of the ideology of globalization. According to her, under the conditions of the capitalist-liberalist system, public relations acts in line with the basic missions of the ideology adopted by this system. his assessment is based on ideology, but the key is the impact of dominant ideologies in the social plane of operation. Therefore, public relations must align with the dominant ideology, or at the very least, contribute to the discourse it supports. The idea that this situation could create a contradiction with issues such as public relations ethics or the public interest requires a professional and philosophical debate too broad to be addressed in this study.

Examining the fundamental relationship between social structure and public relations reveals the growing complexity of society. Every new development that enables the emergence of different ideas and prevents society from being fitted into predetermined molds—such as individualization, education level, and media consumption—has led public relations to adopt a greater role in terms of social order. Public relations, with its research function, aims to gather the most up-to-date information about the changing society, determine the forms of relationships between different groups, and bring opposing interests to a common ground. Public relations is one of the basic mechanisms for making sense of dynamic social norms, values, and institutions, and for triggering change when necessary (Bowen, Rawlins, & Martin, 2019, s. 10-11).

2.3.   Interculturalism and Public Relations

The combination of public relations and interculturalism refers to public relations activities aimed at solving the problems of different cultures and the social structures they build and achieving mutual benefit. This field is defined as an approach that examines how individuals and organizations with different cultural identities interact and negotiate to solve problems and achieve mutually satisfactory outcomes. Cultural sensitivity, facilitating adaptation, and creating effective communication strategies are key to intercultural communication. Public relations stands out as an effective tool in all these processes (Ni, Wang, & Sha, 2018, s. 3-4).

Interculturalism and public relations require the simultaneous management of communication and culture. While interculturalism focuses on a more theoretical approach—recognizing cultures, identifying the causes of separation, and evauliating possible solutions—public relations represents a more applied approach as it focuses on both data collection and direct long- or short-term solutions. This situation allows the two fields to support rather than obstruct each other. This scenario demonstrates the mutual support between both fields. Indeed, while increasing cultural diversity tests the communication skills of public relations practitioners, knowledge about cultural diversity necessitates practical knowledge that will ensure mutual harmony.

Therefore, this new approach, which can be called "intercultural public relations," leads public relations practitioners to establish effective communication in various societies and to go beyond informing to build mutual understanding (Ham, 2025, s. 8) (Ni, Wang, & Sha, 2018, s. 5).

3. Ideology, Public Relations, Interculturalism, and Social Structure in Turkey

The cross-examination of the concepts shows a tight network of connections among ideology, social structure, interculturalism, and public relations. This section will examine the relationships between these concepts in the historical and current context of Turkey. Social structure and ideology will form a supportive framework to demonstrate the connection between these concepts, while the main focus will be on intercultural public relations practices.

3.1. Historical Background and Structural Transformations

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey was more than just a political revolution; it also pioneered a new nation and, as an extension of this, a series of socio-cultural revolutions. The idea of modernization in the early years of the Republic led to a series of reforms; every aspect of life, from dress and education to industrialization and the entire political system, entered a process of "construction." The adoption of the Latin alphabet, in particular, brought about a radical transformation, aiming not only to increase the literacy rate but also to reshape the future generation's connection to the past and its vision for the future in an ideological context, as noted by Yağlı (Yağlı, 2024, s. 187). From a public relations perspective, efforts were made to inform the public through the Anadolu Agency, to instill social consciousness through the Türk Tarih Kurumu -Turkish Historical Society- and Halkevleri -People's Houses / community centers-, and to influence international public opinion through iconic examples like the Karadeniz Vapuru. These projects can be seen as public relations efforts, albeit indirect ones.

The transition to a multi-party system brought with it different ideologies and, consequently, transformations in the social structure. In the following years, concepts such as Conservatism, Nationalism, Liberalism, or "Leftism" began to find a place in the political arena and, in parallel, to lead to changes in social life. The increasing political and social tension prepared the ground for the military coups of 1960 and later 1980. Ultimately, after the '80 coup, Turkey entered a process of radical transformation again in every area of life, especially the economy, within the framework of neoliberal policies. Turkey, "opening up" to the outside world, turned towards intercultural interaction with the "Globalization" movement, which had become a global ideal. Located at a geographical crossroads, with existing relationships with foreign countries and its own internal "other" through history via migrations, wars, and trade, it began to transform into a society where different cultures coexist, understand each other, and in some way, head towards mutual change with a global vision. The foundations of contemporary Turkey were formed after the politically, socially, and economically turbulent 1990's. The 2000s saw the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party, a transformation in the media sector, the proliferation of new communication technologies, and a shift in economic parameters (Yılmaz, 2020, s. 2-6)

3.2. The Shift Towards Public Diplomacy, International Public Relations, and Intercultural Public Relations

"Soft power," conceptualized by Joseph Nye in 1990, became one of the main focal points in post-millennium Turkey. Adapting to the global world and competing with the West not only in the military but also in economic and cultural fields was seen by the state as most effectively achieved through public diplomacy, while institutions, foundations, media, and other sectors turned to international public relations efforts. An effort to manage Turkey's image abroad and create a sphere of influence largely shaped its foreign policy during this period. The establishment of new relationships or the strengthening of existing ones in different geographies where cultural, religious, or historical ties existed—primarily in the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus—became the main focus of these efforts. Both state-supported and private initiatives, especially TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) and the Yunus Emre Institute, have been conducting intensive, long-term, and ongoing work on Turkey's international visibility, identity, and image through education, cultural events, and commercial collaborations (Ekşi & Erol, 2018, s. 16-23)

However, the "Davos" incident in 2009, the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War, internal turmoil in countries like Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict have gradually reduced the soft power moves, paving the way for a more aggressive foreign policy. Although the international public relations activities carried out up to this period continued, the wave of migration that increased This shift occurred especially after 2011, fundamentally changing the focus of communication strategies. Factors within Turkey, international students, immigrants, worries about unemployment or crime in areas with many migrants, have forced the country to shift from focusing on international public relations to developing policies and communication strategies that help different cultures live together. This change was a transformation dictated by a demographic necessity rather than a strategic choice.

3.3. The Turn to Intercultural Public Relations in Turkey: The Syrian Crisis

The mass migration wave that began in 2011 has placed Turkey under ongoing intense pressure, stemming from its geographical proximity to conflict zones and its role as a transit point to Europe. The increase in the polyphony of individuals from different cultures and subcultures—especially with social media—has heightened interaction in social life. Resolving disagreements between different cultures and establishing positive relationships during the migration process has made constructive communication strategies, and therefore public relations, a necessity.

Although immigrant integration is often perceived as a one-sided effort—that is, studies aimed at helping immigrants adapt to their host country—the process is actually two-sided. Immigrants are urged to adjust to their new country, but the local community must also adapt to the presence of migration and immigrants. While it is possible to achieve this mutual adaptation through assimilation, the main goal is to enable immigrants to preserve their own cultural identities and for the local community to accept them in peace with this identity.

From the public sector perspective, the Presidency of Migration Management, established in 2013 under the Turkish Ministry of Interior, and the Migration Board, which took its final form with its last meeting in 2018, regulate policies in this area. Indeed, the Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which came into force in 2013, has determined the legislation in the relevant field. However, practices that will encourage intercultural communication and facilitate harmony are being carried out through projects in this area, beyond these official institutions and legal articles. Projects run by the Directorate General of Migration Management, like neighborhood meetings, discussions with community leaders, public and NGO harmony meetings, and support programs for international students, aim to promote understanding and cooperation between local people and immigrants. On the other hand, activities such as Migration Advisory Centers, YİMER 157, or the 18th of December International Migrants Day can be considered communication-oriented public relations efforts (Republic of Turkey Ministry Of Interior Presidency of Migration Management, 2013).

The role of the private sector in this process is evident through several selected social responsibility projects. For instance, Turkcell's "Hello Hope" (Merhaba Umut) project focuses on language learning and adaptation through technology (Turkcell, 2016). Koç Holding's comprehensive "Gender Equality Movement" also addresses the empowerment of refugee women through partnerships with organizations like UN Women (Koç, 2022). H&M Turkey has initiated a program for "Refugee Employment in the Supply Chain," which concentrates on legal employment and workplace integration (H&M Group, 2021). Other initiatives, while not exclusively targeting refugees, are highly relevant to integration efforts. These include Vodafone Turkey's "Digital is My Job" (Dijital Benim İşim), which provides women with digital literacy and marketing training (Turkey Vodafone Foundation, 2025), and Türk Telekom's "Life is Easier with Digital" (Dijitalde Hayat Kolay), offering digital marketing training to disadvantaged groups under its "accessible communication for all" principle (Turk Telekom, 2025).

When examining the intercultural public relations activities of Civil Society Organizations regarding immigrants, although there are numerous activities by organizations whose main field is humanitarian aid, many civil society organizations, such as the Social Development and Solidarity Association (SGDD-ASAM) with its Harmony Meetings (SGDD-ASAM, 2025), the campaigns run by the Mülteci-Der (Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği, 2025), and Hayata Destek Derneği (Hayata Destek Derneği, 2025) and YUVA Derneği (Yuva Derneği, 2025), in addition to aid campaigns, carry out work to support the adaptation, education, and integration of refugees in different areas of social life (education, work life, social rights).

3.4. The Process from an Intercultural Public Relations Perspective

The atmosphere of "hospitality" that was dominant in Turkey at the beginning of the Syrian crisis has evolved into a complex and at times tense social dynamic as the process became permanent. Managing the relations between the Turkish society and immigrants and ensuring social cohesion has become one of the most critical tests of the process. Considering the negative reflections in the media, it can be seen that different themes such as "security threat," "economic burden," "source of crime," and

"cause of job loss" have emerged (Livberber, 2021, s. 1009). Therefore, in addition to the necessity of including the local community in the adaptation process, negative perceptions that need to be managed through national media for the entire society still exist.

Overall, this process reveals Turkey's implementation of a dual-purpose public relations strategy. On the one hand, efforts aimed at immigrants are intended to accelerate the immigrant-local community harmony within the country, while on the other hand, they highlight feelings of compassion and benevolence in a way that contributes to Turkey's global image. An in-depth ideological analysis reveals that these efforts also articulate a position against the world, particularly Europe, in relation to international policy. On one hand, the region's defender role is being reinforced, and on the other hand, it is being used as a leverage point, particularly towards the European Union, to secure economic and political demands (Tsourapas, 2019, s. 466-467).

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the complex and interdependent relationships among interculturalism, ideology, social structure, and public relations within the context of Turkey. The theoretical framework reveals that understanding these concepts in isolation is not possible, as they are dynamic processes that continuously shape each other. Ideology functions as a belief system that regulates these interactions and often sharpens in-group/out-group distinctions (Zmigrod, 2022, s. 1075-1076). Social structure, in turn, provides the concrete ground, woven with institutions and relationships, where these interactions and ideological struggles take place.

The case of Turkey strikingly demonstrates the practical reflections of this theoretical framework. The processes of modernization and nation-state building since the founding of the Republic are an example of how a specific ideology has shaped the social structure. The outward-looking, "soft power"-focused international public relations strategies pursued in the 2000s had to give way to an urgent domestic issue—intercultural public relations—with the 2011 Syrian crisis. This forced transformation has shown that public relations has evolved from being an image management tool to a vital mechanism for social cohesion and stability.

Projects carried out by public, private, and civil society organizations showcase the various applications of intercultural public relations in Turkey. However, these efforts face structural challenges such as negative representations in the media and deeply rooted ideological prejudices. The activities' dual-purpose nature, which involves both promoting internal harmony and leveraging it in international politics, highlights the ethical and strategic tensions inherent in public relations practice.

Ultimately, the future of intercultural relations in Turkey depends on how the interaction among these four fundamental concepts is managed. Public relations, situated at the center of this complex equation, has the potential to soften ideological conflicts, draw attention to inequalities in the social structure, and establish meaningful dialogue among different cultural groups. However, the full realization of this potential will be possible not only through project-based interventions but also through a more

comprehensive and holistic strategic approach that questions dominant ideologies and rigid social structures.

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