

## The meaning of cultural symbols in the psychological paradigm

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The preliminary idea for this report was to discuss the experimental procedure and the results of a study. The aim was to discover the emotion and assessment reactions of Sofia's citizens toward twelve signs, featuring a part of the capital's cultural symbolism. Among these were symbols that referred to the totalitarian ideological legacy; other symbols were part of the traditional municipal culture or universal cultural symbols. The purpose of the study was to establish the degree of similarity according to the assessment features and to define the factors that are valid for the formation of semantic sign space. Osgood's method of the semantic differential was used, despite some of its insufficiencies. In our case this method was suitable because of the metric and dimensional assumptions of the degree of similarity.

The results of this study did not bring much surprise. The ideological signs provoke negative attitudes. The traditionally cultural and universally cultural signs distribute between themselves positive judgment in the space defined by scales: 'noble — mean', 'formidable — repelling', 'clever — stupid'. Certainly in this study there are interesting details from the point of view of social psychology. For example — the signs of urban culture without political meaning, but built during the totalitarian period, have a high degree of similarity to the ideological patterns.

I am not going to discuss the results in more detail here. Much more important for me are the methodological points, provoked by the study, on which I intend to make some comments.

A principal problem in the practice of research is the relationship between the material to be assessed (stimuli or signs) and the responses to them after the perception. Two questions appear immediately. When and how does the stimulus become a sign? How does the response correspond to the real signs of the research procedure and to the abstract signs of decision making?

In his book *Semiotics in the United States*, Thomas A. Sebeok says: