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Socio-cultural Cleavages in Europe*

Abstract

This paper investigates socio-cultural differences among European countries. The theoretical roots of our defined socio-cultural dimensions are elaborated in a multidisciplinary field. According to the considerable scientific literature, various socio-cultural aspects such as trust, tolerance, civic norms and social networks have a serious impact on the development potential of a country or a region. We empirically tested the characteristics of these socio-cultural aspects on the European Social Survey database. The main conclusion of the paper is that there is a definite socio-cultural cleavage between the northern/western and the Central and Eastern European countries.

Keywords: Socio-cultural differences, Europe.

Introduction

The paper examines whether socio-cultural differences are discernible among various areas of Europe. The question has an interdisciplinary relevance, as much cited publications with economics, sociological, historical, political science or regional science approaches have also dealt with this topic (for example: Fukuyama 2007, Hofstede et al. 2010, Huntington 2005, 2014, Inglehart–Norris 2003, 2004, Inglehart et al. 2004, Knack–Keefer 1997, Norris 2012, North 1990, Putnam 2000). These studies revealed positive correlation between the analysed countries/nations socio-cultural development and their progress in economic, democratic issues. From one perspective, because of the general correlation, it would be easy to embed the research question theoretically, however, the issue is complicated by the many different approaches that exist. The motivation behind the work was to empirically test if there are any socio-cultural gaps between the selected European countries. It could be argued that this paper simply aims to justify “old evidence”, as there are well-known differences between the European countries, mostly between the “western” and the “post-

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socialist ones” (e.g. Adam 2007, Fidrmuc–Gërkhani 2005, Halman–Voicu 2010). However, Popper's “falsificationism” epistemology warns us that a scientific statement has to stand the probe of testability again and again. Thus, if this paper does not reveal any, so far unknown results, the findings themselves necessarily have to be new because of the research's own methodology and dataselection. Consequently, instead of an in-depth theoretical explication, the focus was more on the task of elaborating an adequate approach to the analysis of the national socio-cultural environment on as broad scale as is possible, relying on the European Social Survey's (ESS) latest, 6th wave data. The results of recent Hungarian papers on this research topic also support our belief that disparities in Europe, and Hungary's characteristics regarding these trends, constitute an important issue requiring thorough study (Albert–Dávid 2012, Boda–Medve–Bálint 2012, Giczi–Sik 2009, Hajdu 2012, Keller 2010, 2013, Tóth 2009).

Prior to covering the methodological and empirical details, the choice of title requires clarification. Instead of ‘social capital’, the term chosen is ‘socio-cultural’, although it has a root in psychology (Vygotsky 1978, Cole 1996, Wertsch 1991, 1998). Socio-cultural theory explains how the mental functioning of the individuum is related to a complex cultural, institutional, and historical context. This perspective focuses on the roles and effects that participation in social interactions and culturally-based activities have on individual psychological development. Based on this approach, it is important to emphasize that the socio-cultural environment is not just determinative, but barely changeable. A point that is often doubted by some social capital researchers.

For a similar reason, ‘cleavage’ is used as a key phrase, despite the term's attachment to political science (for example: Inglehart 1977, Lijphart 1984, Lipset–Rokkan 1967, Neto–Cox 1997, Rae–Taylor 1970). If it is true that cleavages between a given state's communities have an influence on electoral behaviour, affiliation (which school, union, club, or newspaper to choose) as well on societal identity-creation, then major socio-cultural gaps between different societies could have broad economic and politically related consequences. Thus, the meaning of our ‘socio-cultural cleavage’ is not disharmonious with the original phrase comes from political science.

Dimensions to Be Examined

We have specified nine dimensions essential for describing socio-cultural characteristics. These are not without scientific antecedents, as most of them are frequently used in different areas of research. However, the following dimensions are not typically used together in one analysis. We chose this approach for two reasons. First, we would like to examine the socio-cultural characteristics on a wide scale, to ensure that the outcomes are more in accordance with reality. If we accept that these well-known dimensions are equally relevant, then to leave out any of them would be a mistake. Secondly, we agreed that if these socio-cultural characteristics are harmonising, then they strengthen each other, and by this, the measured outcome of a given country. However, if they are disharmonising, it is also a significant result as it confirms the authors belief that with just one or two aspects, it is precarious to conclude a comprehensive finding in the socio-cultural environment.

The dimensions, which based on previous studies' methods, are the following: 1) generalised trust, 2) institutional trust, 3) political participation, 4) civic participation,

5) relational capital, 6) tolerance, 7) happiness and life satisfaction, 8) satisfaction with public affairs, 9) personal freedom of choice over fate. A brief overview of their meaning here is outlined.

Generalised trust (social or interpersonal trust) is a frequently used indicator to measure socio-cultural characteristics. It refers to our expectations about the behaviour of any member of a community or society. How an individual can have trust in another, what people think about others, are they fair in any interactions, or do they care about more their own interests (see for example: Bjørnskov 2006, Hooghe et al. 2009, Kim 2014, Kuovo 2011, Reeskens–Hooghe 2008).

Institutional trust is another term often used in describing socio-cultural contexts. It gauges the confidence of individuals in various institutions, including political (parliament, government, local self-government, president of the republic), judiciary (constitutional court, courts of justice), law enforcement agencies (police, military), and supranational co-operations (European Union, United Nations, NATO) (see: Bäckström–Edlund 2012, Boda–Medve–Bálint 2014, Dekker 2012, Halapuu et al. 2014, Hutter–Braun 2014, Newton–Norris 1999).

We believe social cooperation to be a socio-cultural aspect of similar importance. To describe this we use the following three dimensions. *Political participation* means here the activities of individuals intended to safeguard their interests at a political level or to accomplish a political goal. Hence, it is about the intention to take part individually in a politically motivated collective action, and by this, how people are ready to take a share in collective responsibility (e.g. Alesina–Giuliano 2009, Norris 2003, Stolle et al. 2005).

Civic participation differs from it in the non-political character of the activity. The general meaning behind this indicator is the similar to the previous one; however, the nature of the activity slightly differs. It is more about voluntary “sacrifice” for the community, about individual commitment and engagement for the collective good, about solidarity, and joint efforts for non-political common goals (see: Angermann–Sittermann 2010, Howard–Gilbert 2008, Staetsky–Mohan 2011, Stolle–Howard 2008).

Relational capital is also a dimension of importance. It expresses the density and intensity of social interactions and the cohesion of a given society. It is not just about individual's social network and how extensive these links are, but more about the primary purpose of these relationships. Are these interactions frequent and intimate, do they contribute to the cohesion and collective strength of the community; or are these relations more for individual interests and to gain different benefits? (Giczi–Sik 2009)

Tolerance is also an important dimension in the research. Although it has been rarely researched empirically in Hungary, it is not without antecedents (Florida 2001, 2002, 2005, Florida et al. 2007, Florida et al. 2009). If we accept the view that the level of openness and the acceptance of others can be deduced from the level of generalised trust, then tolerance might become an important factor in refining the picture. The term usually refers to social norms like equal rights for men and women; the level of acceptance of ethnic, national and religious minorities; accepting homosexuals and lesbians; attitude towards immigrants; acknowledging the freedom of various subcultures and respecting the views and opinions of those in political opposition.

The indicator of personal freedom of choice over fate has been used as a relevant socio-cultural aspect in the Hungarian literature by Tóth (2010) and Keller (2010). Sharing their

views, we also apply this term, meaning here the subjective perception of individuals about their opportunities for shaping their life. Specifically, their chances for self-education, promotion, happy relationships, a secure financial background and achieving their goals. We shall use this socio-cultural dimension as a “self-confidence indicator”.

Although satisfaction cannot be regarded as a social value, norm or attitude, if we combine it with the dimensions listed, it can be very useful. Namely, satisfaction with one’s private life or with public affairs (economy, politics) can be considered as a social resource, since higher levels evidently contribute to the efficacy of a society (Bureekul et al. 2011, Pedersen–Schmidt 2009, Rodríguez-Pose–von Berlepsch 2012, Tichy 2013).

Methodology

We shall analyse our dimensions with regard to the recent 6th wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), on the basis of its national data from 29 participating countries. From its official website, the ESS “is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years across Europe since 2001”. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of different European societies. It contains standard and regularly changing questionnaire blocks, with altogether usually more than 200 questions, among them detailed ones about the interviewee’s socio-demographic characteristics.

Our dimensions have been created using the method of principal component analysis (PCA) on individual level data. This methodology allows us to summarize the relevant information regarding socio-cultural indicators. Measuring the differences between the societies, we use the country PCA mean scores. To verify the significance of the observable differences in country scores, we applied the analysis of variance method (ANOVA) and its post hoc test. Values indicated in the figures are the original values of indicators transformed to a common scale within the dimensions.

The sum of the question-values represents the value of the dimensions in case of all countries. According to the methodology of the ESS, we used the weighted sum value.¹ In accordance with the requirements of additivity, we used the scale-transformation. The formula of the scale-transformation is: $y = \min B + (x - \min A) * (\max B - \min B) / (\max A - \min A)$, where $\min A$ and $\max A$ are the original scale minimum and maximum value; $\min B$ and $\max B$ are the new scale minimum and maximum value. We used scale-transformation in case of the first question of tolerance (original scale was 1–5; new scale is 0–10), the second question of relational capital (original scale was 0–6, new scale is 1–7), the first question of civic participation (original scale was 1–2, new scale is 1–6), the third, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th questions of happiness and life satisfaction (original scale was 1–4, new scale is 0–10), the 8th and 9th questions of happiness and life satisfaction (original scale was 1–5, new scale is 0–10).

The scale of generalized trust, where 0 – the minimum value – is low trust (a degree of passivity) and 10 – the maximum value – is high trust (active participation), was the base for cases where we had to change the question’s minimum/maximum value for common

¹ Weighting European Social Survey Data(2014)
http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/ESS_weighting_data_1.pdf

orientation. Thus, in our analysis the low values always refer to negative/passive, while the high ones to positive/active aspects.²

Forming Groups of Countries

All twenty-nine countries in the 6th round of the ESS survey have been included in our study, forming 5+1 categories. Three Scandinavian EU member countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and two northern non-EU members (Iceland and Norway) have been classified as the “*northern group*”. Based on their similar historical, political and cultural characteristics, they can legitimately be placed in the same group.

Seven countries are labelled as the “*western group*”, of which six are EU members. Switzerland, the only non-member, belongs to this group due its French–German linguistic and cultural bonds and its embedded nature in continental Western Europe. The other six countries actually form three “pairs”: Belgium and the Netherlands constitute the core of the three “Low Countries”; Ireland and the United Kingdom are in a kind of unity despite or because of their tense historical relationship; whereas, France and Germany are two dominant countries of continental Europe.

The “*Mediterranean group*” has been based on factors that include cultural bonds, similar historical, political and economic development paths, however close coherence among Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Spain was not presupposed.

The Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been divided into two categories, based on EU membership and its presumable Europeanisation effects. The first one is “*CEE EU members*” including Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia as well as two Baltic countries, Estonia and Lithuania. The other is the “*CEE non-EU members*” consisting of Russia and the Ukraine plus two Balkan countries, Albania and Kosovo.

Israel constitutes the +1 category, which is not European, but there are several and strong cultural, historical and social bonds between them. Most of its population has European roots in both the west and east, leading to a socio-cultural divide; although, the development path of both the country and its society is clearly “western”.

Besides analysing the socio-cultural characteristics, the validity of the above classification based on the assumptions will be either justified or refuted.

Analysis of the Empirical Data

Generalised Trust

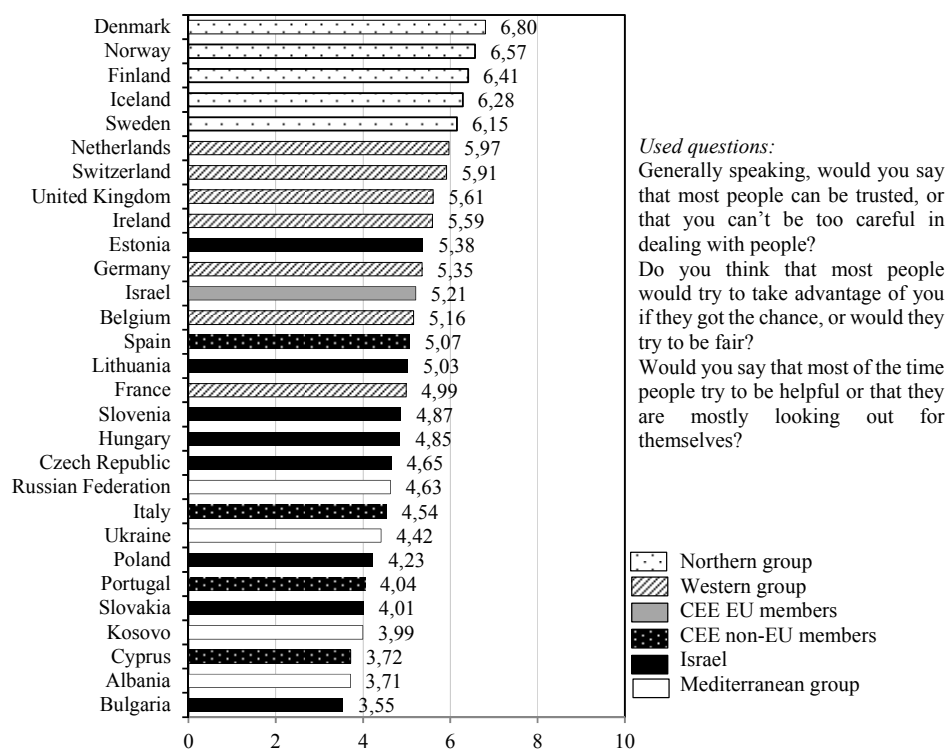
The ranking of countries based on generalised trust (Figure 1) clearly shows that trust toward people is the strongest in the northern group of countries, but is also strong in the western one. Most of the countries belonging to these two groups are ranked high. Two CEE EU members reach the threshold of the western group: Estonia closely follows Ireland, and Lithuania is not significantly behind Germany. At the same time, Belgium and

² We did this transformation related to some questions of the following dimensions: political participation, civic participation, tolerance, happiness and life satisfaction, and personal freedom of choice over fate.

France are lagging behind the northern–western block with their values considerably lower than even that of Germany, which undoubtedly belongs to this block.

Figure 1

Countries ranked based on generalised trust (dimension values converted to 0–10 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

From among the Mediterranean group, only Spain is close to the western block, the others – that is Cyprus, Italy and Portugal – can be found among the Central and Eastern European countries having lower levels of trust. In the lower half of the ranking, the already mentioned Mediterranean countries are together with two from Central and Eastern Europe. Russia's value does not differ significantly from those of Czech and Hungary, but it is higher than the level of trust in Poland and Slovakia.

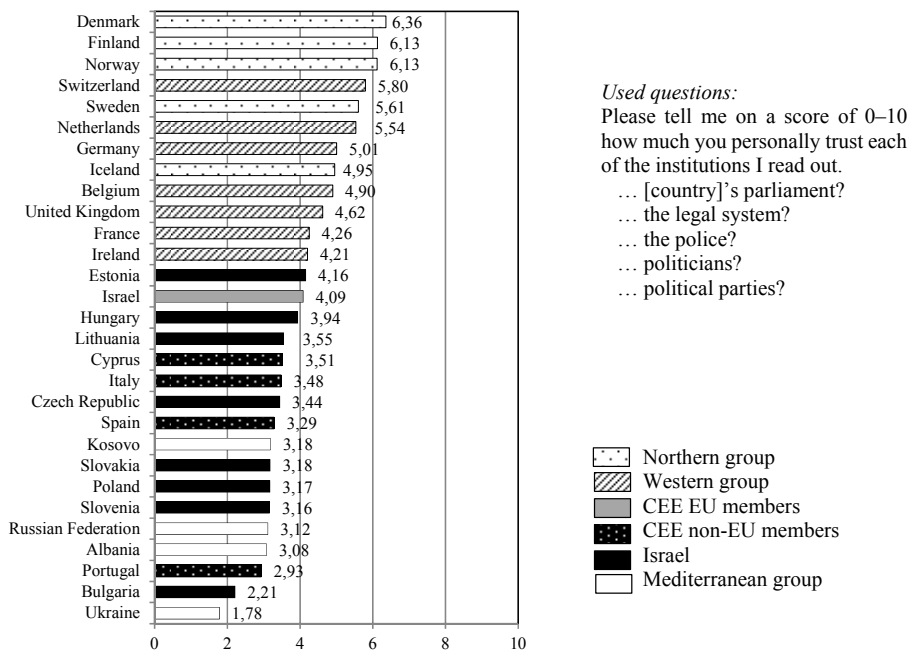
Based on the level of generalised trust, Israel is located between the northern and western groups, plus two Central and Eastern European countries.

Institutional Trust

Similarly to generalised trust, this indicator also ranks the northern and then the western countries at the top of the chart. However, France and Ireland do not belong to this block. They are closer to the CEE EU members, ranking relatively high, primarily to Estonia and Hungary, but they are not far from Lithuania and the Czech Republic either.

Figure 2

Countries ranked based on institutional trust (dimension values converted to 0–10 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

At the same time, the rest of the EEC EU members – namely Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and particularly Bulgaria – are more like the countries belonging to the CEE non-EU members.

Institutional trust is not uniform in the Mediterranean group, although all these countries can be found in the lower half of the ranking. The values of Cyprus and Italy are significantly higher than that of Spain, while Portugal is behind all of them.

Israel's place is similar to the one it had in the case of generalised trust.

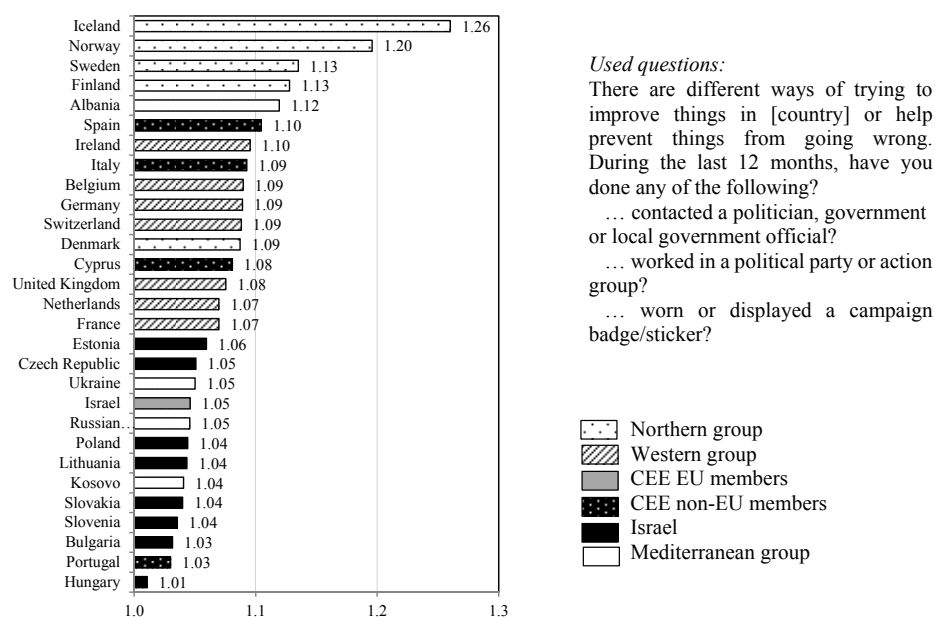
It can be concluded that in respect of both generalised trust and institutional trust, the citizens of the northern and the western, i.e. the “old”, democracies have more trust in their fellow citizens and institutions than have those living in countries belonging to the other three categories. In spite of this, on the basis of the 6th round ESS data, we can find no substantial gap between various groups of European countries in these two dimensions, since the values of some western countries are similar to those of the CEE EU members. At the same time, it is also true that, except for “Mediterranean” Portugal, all other countries with low trust levels are “new democracies” from Central and Eastern Europe, some EU members, some not. Compared to its group members, Hungary has a relatively high level of trust.

Political Participation

To measure political participation, – instead of the usually applied voter turnout – another indicator gauging “more active participation”, namely, contacts with politicians, involvement in political organisations and in campaigns, has been applied.

Figure 3

*Countries ranked based on political participation
(dimension values converted to 1–2 scale)*



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

The pattern here is similar to that found in the case of the two dimensions of trust, i.e. the top northern group is followed by the western one. Albania’s high ranking, preceding almost all of the western countries, was a surprise. The values of this indicator in the Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Portugal) are much higher than in the case of trust, approaching the northern and the western groups.

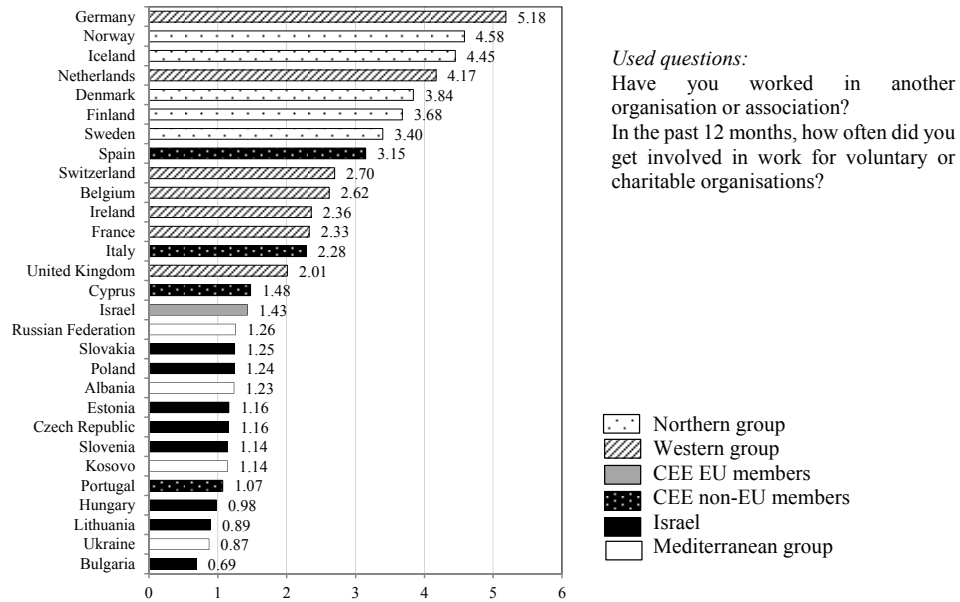
The two Central and Eastern European groups of countries belong to the passive political participation category, with only small differences. Israel and already mentioned Portugal also belong here.

Civic Participation

Two aspects of civic participation were studied. The first includes active participation in civil society organisations and voluntary work. In this respect, the situation is similar to the previous one. Citizens of the northern and western countries are the most active, followed by the Mediterranean Spain and Italy. Israel can be found between the northern/western and the two Central and Eastern European groups.

Figure 4

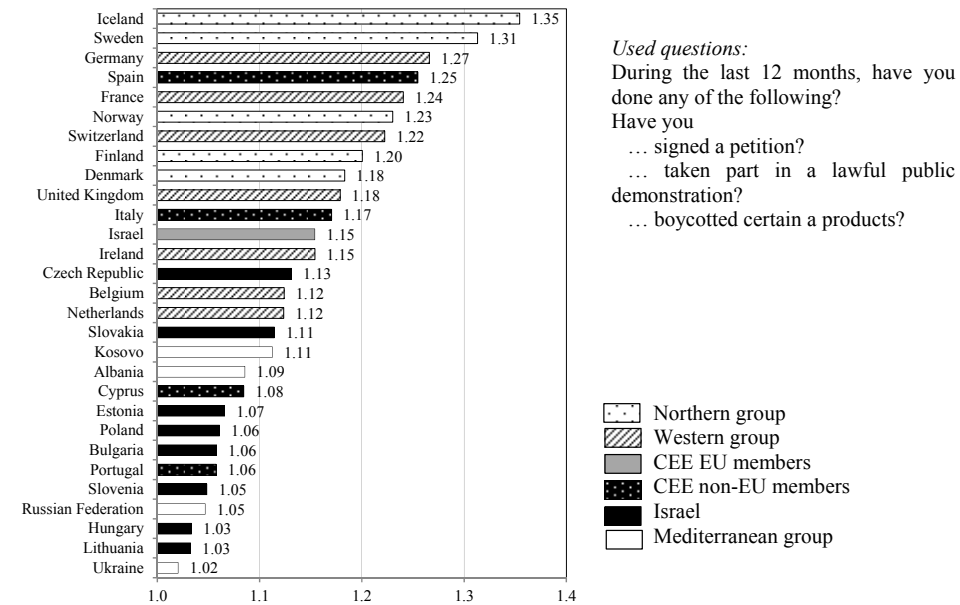
Countries ranked based on civic participation I. (dimension values converted to 0–6 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

Figure 5

Countries ranked based on civic participation II. (dimension values converted to 1–2 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

Similarly to political participation, the lower half of the ranking includes the two Eastern and Central European groups of countries plus Portugal. The cleavage is clear here: there is significant difference between the last western country (United Kingdom) and the first CEE-group country (Russian Federation). Countries in the two Central and Eastern European groups show very little differences, indicating that the level of civil participatory activity and voluntary work is equally low in all of them.

The other studied aspect of civic participation also relates to active involvement, namely, writing protest letters, taking part in demonstrations, and boycotting certain goods.

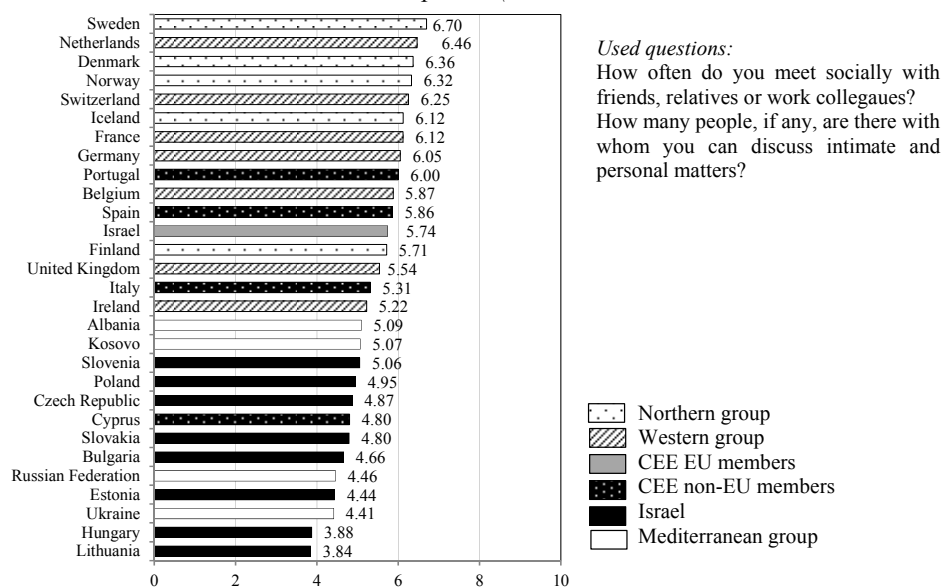
The distribution of countries is similar to the former indicators. In addition to the northern and the western nations, we can also find Mediterranean Spain and Italy in the first half of the ranking. However, the dividing line between the northern/western and the two Central and Eastern European groups is less distinct here; the Czech values are very close those of the Irish, Belgian and Dutch. Again there is little difference between the countries in the two Central and Eastern European groups. Hungary – as in the case of the other aspect of civic participation – is located in the lower half of this block and is last in relation to the whole of Europe (with no significant difference compared to Ukraine and Lithuania).

Relational Capital

Two aspects of relational capital have also been examined. The first relates to the frequency of meeting friends, relatives and colleagues, as well as to the size of the personal, intimate social network.

Figure 6

Countries ranked based on relational capital I. (dimension values converted to 0–10 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

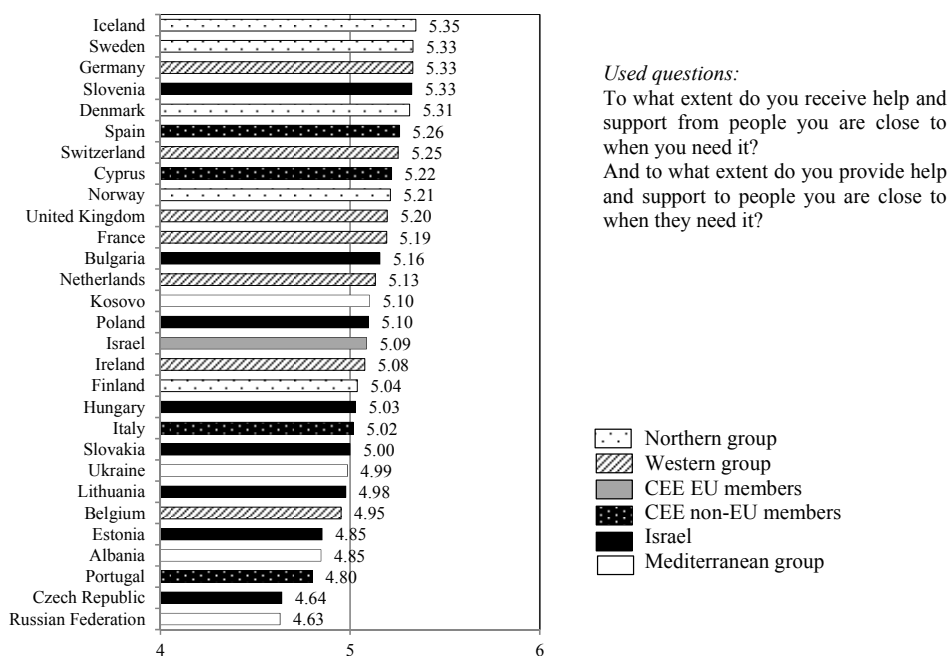
Here again, the northern and the western countries occupy the first half of the ranking. It is interesting to note that from this aspect, Finland’s position worsens and differs significantly from the other northern countries. At the same time, the Mediterranean countries’ position improved, taking higher rankings, as is the case with Portugal, which has so far been in the lower third.

A dividing line between the northern/western and the Central and Eastern European countries can be found here too, but it is not distinct. The best ranking Central and Eastern European countries (Albania, Kosovo, Slovenia, and Poland) do not significantly differ from Ireland and Italy.

The Central and Eastern European countries form a rather homogeneous group; however, Hungary at the bottom of the list is considerably lagging behind the others.

Figure 7

Countries ranked based on relational capital II. (dimension values converted to 0–6 scale)



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

The other aspect of relational capital was measured by answers given to questions about providing and accepting help within the social network.

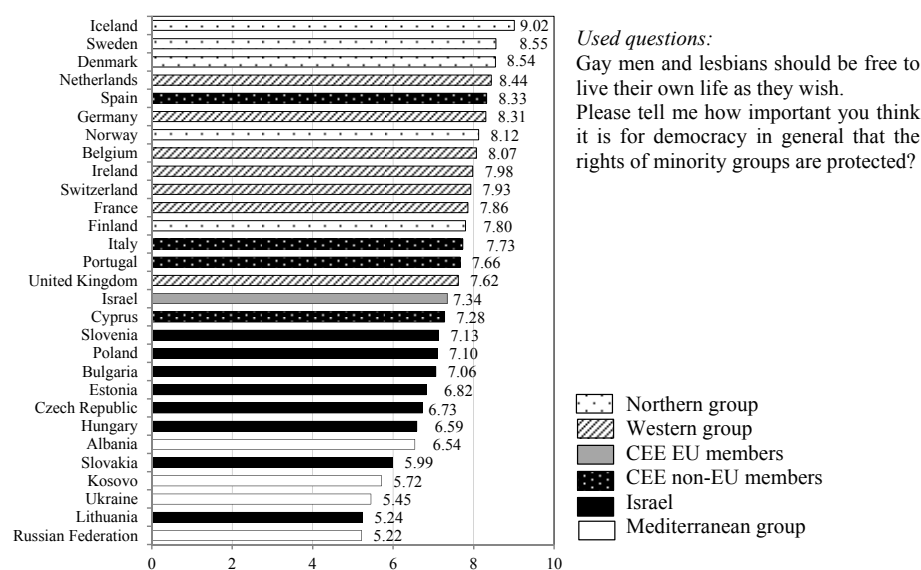
Contrary to what has been experienced so far, here we can see real heterogeneity. Although the northern and western countries still have some dominance, the picture is not as unequivocal as it was earlier. For instance, the CEE EU members Slovenia and Mediterranean Spain are almost at the top of the list, and the so far lagging Bulgaria has a value here similar to some western countries and Finland. Hungary is positioned with Finland in this respect.

Tolerance

In respect of tolerance, there is again a divide between the northern/western and the two Central and Eastern European groups of countries. Even Slovenia, the highest ranking country in the Central and Eastern European groups, has a significantly lower value than the western countries (except the United Kingdom).

Figure 8

Countries ranked based on tolerance (dimension values converted to 0–10 scale)



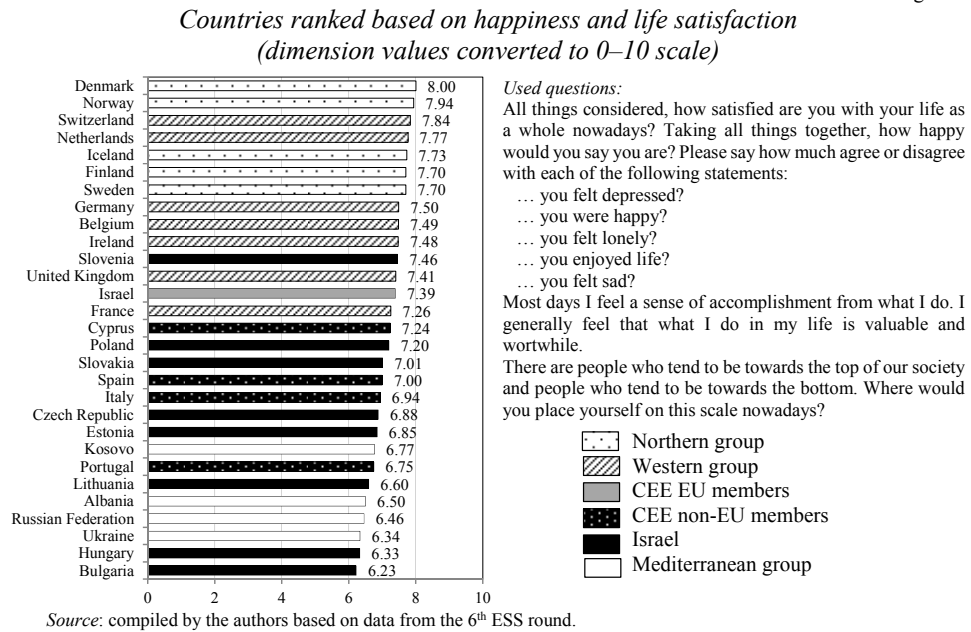
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

The Mediterranean countries – with the exception of Cyprus – are closer to the northern and western groups than earlier. Spain, for example, ranks significantly higher than two northern countries, namely, Finland and Norway. With its value significantly higher than Slovenia, Israel belongs to the western group.

Happiness and Life Satisfaction

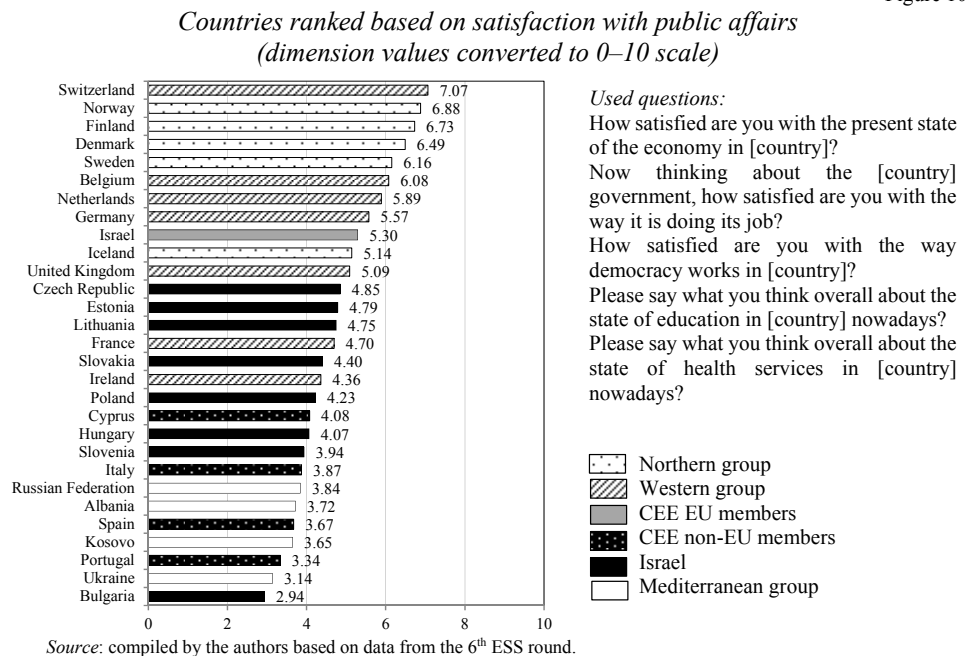
The dividing line between the northern/western and the two Central and Eastern European groups of countries can also be found in the case of personal satisfaction. The only “irregularity” is produced by Slovenia where happiness and life satisfaction is high, reaching the German, Belgian and Irish values, thus having a rightful place in the northern–western block in this respect. In addition to Slovenia, Poland also differs here from the “dissatisfied” societies in Central and Eastern Europe. Except for Portugal, the Mediterranean group is relatively uniform and its countries’ data only fall slightly behind those of the Central and Eastern European countries. Hungary, however, does not belong to the block of these latter countries, it can be found at the lower end of the list together with Lithuania, Albania, Russia, the Ukraine and Bulgaria.

Figure 9



Satisfaction with Public Affairs

Figure 10



In general, citizens of the northern and western countries are more satisfied with public affairs than those of all other countries. The values of the Mediterranean countries are quite similar to those of the countries in the two Central and Eastern European groups.

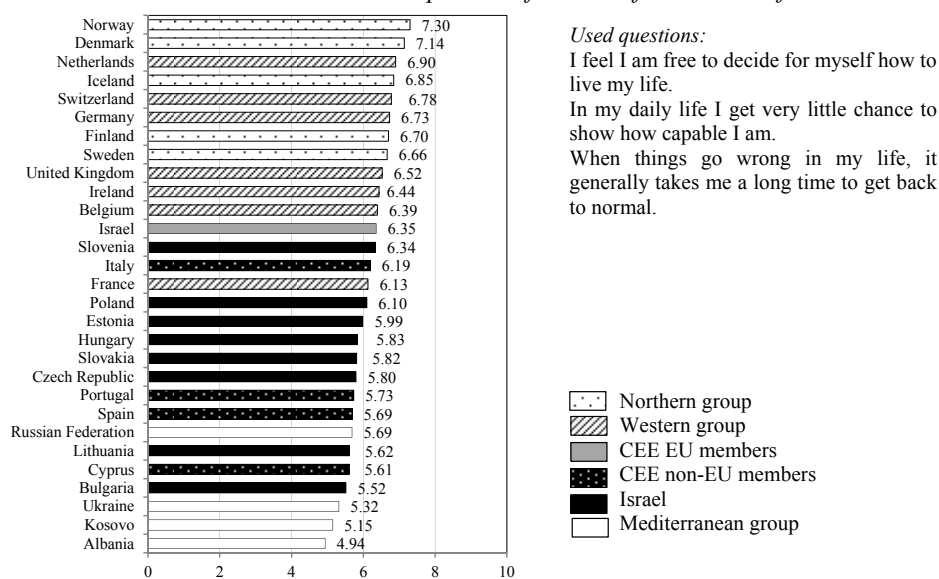
The already mentioned dividing line can also be found here, as there is a significant difference between the data of the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. From this aspect, France and Ireland do not belong to the northern–western block. Except for Ukraine and Bulgaria, the countries in the two Central and Eastern European groups do not show much difference. The Mediterranean countries seem to be coherent in this respect as all of them are in the lower half of the ranking.

Personal Freedom of Choice over Fate

Similarly to the dimension of personal satisfaction, Slovenia again reaches the level of the northern–western societies in this aspect. Just as in the case of satisfaction with public affairs, France, having data similar to those of Poland or Estonia, can be ranked among the countries of the two Central and Eastern European groups.

Figure 11

Countries ranked based on personal freedom of choice over fate



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the 6th ESS round.

From among the Mediterranean countries, Italy belongs to the western group, while the others to the two Central and Eastern European groups. There is some difference between these two groups of countries about their perception of personal freedom of choice over fate. Except for Lithuania and Bulgaria, the CEE EU members have higher values than the CEE non-EU members.

Conclusions

Following our main finding, we shall present our results relating to the chosen dimensions, groups of countries, individual countries, and specifically to Hungary. Instead of a summary we would rather attempt to give possible explanations for the results, raise questions about them and initiate a discussion.

Our primary conclusion is that there is a definite socio-cultural cleavage between the northern/western and the Central and Eastern European countries. This “divide” is most conspicuous with regard to the following dimensions: tolerance; and within relational capital: the frequency of meeting friends, relatives and colleagues, and the size of the personal, intimate social network. The cleavage mentioned is also relevant when related to the other dimensions, which is visibly illustrated as none of the northern and western countries have been ranked in the lower third in respect of any dimension.

It might be misleading that the Mediterranean countries come between the Central and Eastern European ones in several aspects, thus seemingly lessening the importance of the cleavage. However, this is not the case, because, in respect of tolerance and relational capital, the Mediterranean countries are not at all “eastern”, but are rather close to the northern and western groups. This is all the more important, as the studied aspects of tolerance and relational capital are crucial, since if citizens of a society seem to prefer exclusion to acceptance, they are weakly co-operating and strongly atomized, as well as passive in the primary forms of collective activities, like meeting relatives and close acquaintances, well, in such a society, there are problems with the foundations of collective mentality.

As to the dimensions applied, it is worth noting that the clear and many times tested indicators of trust, often used in economic development policy research, also proved to be reliable here. Still, it may be misleading to derive complex socio-cultural characteristics solely from the various aspects of trust, as is clearly shown by the dimension of tolerance also used by us. Namely, the cleavage in the case of tolerance is much more marked than in that of trust. Of course, less tolerance in a society does have its impact on interpersonal trust. Therefore, we have to amend our former statement about the level of Russian generalised and institutional trust being significantly higher than the Portuguese, since Portuguese society is much more tolerant than the Russian.

The results support our hypothesis that the dimension of personal freedom of choice over fate can be interpreted as a kind of “self-confidence indicator”. Fine tuning them, it is in harmony with the two indicators of trust. We deem it worth comparing the dimension of personal freedom of choice over fate with the indicators of generalised trust and institutional trust, as individuals can only trust their institutions if they live in an atmosphere of trust in their community. At the same time, they can only trust others if they can trust themselves.

Satisfaction with public affairs can complement institutional trust. The results of these two dimensions are in harmony, which is not accidental. Since the level of institutional trust is often volatile in many countries, it may be worth regularly comparing it with that of satisfaction with public affairs. The latter is also volatile, but studying them together may provide a more comprehensive picture.

When we compare the two indicators of satisfaction, we get an interesting outcome. Generally, the two data series are in harmony, that is, a high level of personal satisfaction goes together with a similar level of satisfaction with public affairs, and vice versa; when personal satisfaction is low, so is satisfaction with public affairs. It is interesting to note that the countries where personal satisfaction is significantly lower than satisfaction with public affairs all belong to Central and Eastern Europe, while it is just the opposite, that is, personal satisfaction is greater than satisfaction with public affairs, in those countries from the northern, western or Mediterranean group (the only exception is Slovenia). This is relevant, as it draws a clearer picture about the dimension of personal freedom of choice over fate, and through this, the dimensions of trust. Where citizens of a society are more satisfied with public affairs than with their own life, there must be something wrong with believing in the possibility of shaping one's own life and prosperity, i.e. self-confidence.

As already mentioned, we have not used the usually applied voter turnout to measure political participation, but instead, some other indicators gauging more active involvement. This proved to be correct, since the chosen indicator made the distinction between the northern/western and the Central and East European countries very clear, which would not have come out so unequivocally on the basis of voter turnout. Our indicators express the differences in political participation in the community more effectively. If we combine this dimension with the two indicators of civic participation, the cleavage is even more marked, the gap in relation to acting collectively and taking responsibility becomes significantly wider.

The two dimensions of relational capital call attention to a contradiction. The indicator relating to the frequency of meeting friends, relatives and colleagues and that measuring the size of the personal, intimate social network both presuppose real social activities, that is, active participation in social interactions, from which some conclusions can be drawn regarding the coherence of the community.

In the case of the other relational capital indicator, namely, providing/accepting help within the social network, the intensity of interactions is not measured, as it might simply be doing a favour for someone and/or asking for it. Hence, it is important to compare these two indicators, since where the value of the former is low while that of the latter one is high, we may justifiably suppose interrelations based on interests. This situation is not characteristic of many countries, but for us it is relevant, as Hungary is one of those countries (we shall return to this below).

As regards the groups of countries, we find it justified to create two groups, namely, the northern (the Scandinavian "five") and the western one (the countries of "core Europe") as these countries form heterogeneous groups. Although the concerned countries are quite similar from a socio-cultural aspect, and there is no sharp dividing line between these two groups, it is necessary to separate them as there are some differences. These "old democracies" dominate the first third, sometimes even first half, of the ranking in all dimensions.

Coherence within the Mediterranean group is insignificant. In the case of most dimensions, two countries are positioned in the first half of the ranking, with two in the second one. Although Portugal lags behind the northern and the western countries the most, based on its values in tolerance and relational capital (friends, relatives and colleagues, the

size of social network), it definitely does not belong to the Central and Eastern European block. Italy approaches the western countries, but it significantly behind in respect of trust.

On the basis of our results, the two Central and Eastern European groups do not exist as separate categories. EU membership and the ensuing “accession” to the Europeanisation mainstream have not brought pronounced changes in the socio-cultural environment of the ex-communist countries. These two groups form one block as regards political and civic participation, relational capital as well as trust. A few countries may stand out in one or other aspect, coming somewhat closer to the western countries, but this is not characteristic of any of them in general.

Some countries should be mentioned separately. The Scandinavian nations are on the “leader board” in all dimensions. However, it should, be noted that Iceland in institutional trust and Finland in tolerance are a little behind the others. In the first case, this situation could be explained as an aftermath of the national bankruptcy a few years ago, whereas explanation of the latter would need thorough investigation.

In the western group, France, Belgium and Ireland lag slightly behind the others in a few dimensions. Although not a cleavage, it would still be worth examining the old issue as to whether or not there exists a kind of socio-cultural Protestant–Catholic “dividing line” within the northern–western–Mediterranean groups.

From the Central and Eastern European group, Bulgaria requires comment – with the exception of providing and accepting help – it figures in the lowest third of the ranking in all dimensions. The exception is not necessarily a positive social phenomenon, as we have already mentioned. Estonia approaches the western countries in the dimensions of trust and satisfaction with public affairs; however, it is deeply embedded in the eastern block from every other aspect. The same holds true for Slovenia and the Czech Republic; only the dimensions are different. Consequently, our research has refuted the everyday assumption that “westernisation” has typically progressed – including the socio-cultural field – in those ex-communist countries, which are close to the “western border”, have a more developed economy and infrastructure, and also higher living standards.

The intensively developing Russia, which is playing an increasing role in the world economy and international politics, is definitely “eastern” from a socio-cultural aspect. It is not located in the first half of the ranking in any dimension, while in respect of both tolerance and providing and/or accepting help, it falls behind the others.

The data of Israel, additionally included in our European analyses, has supported our hypothesis that its western as well as eastern immigrants and their descendants cannot be clearly classified on the basis of our concluded socio-cultural cleavage. At the same time, several data suggest that it has been approaching the west.

Finally, the conclusions for Hungary are not very promising. From a socio-cultural point of view, Hungary has not been affected by the Europeanisation process that has had a heterogeneous effect on Slovenia, Estonia and the Czech Republic. Moreover, in respect of several indicators, it undeniably belongs to the “core countries” of the “eastern” block.

It seems warranted to comment on some of the dimensions. We would like to emphasise that while relational capital in Hungarian society is weak as regards the frequency of meeting friends, relatives and colleagues, and the size of the personal, intimate social network, it is nonetheless strong in the field of providing and/or accepting help. It is reasonable to suppose that this phenomenon is the reflection of the “relation sensitive

culture” described by Endre Sik (2012), in which the most important issue in interpersonal relations is doing favour and requiting it.

In addition, both political and civic participation is very weak in Hungary. It follows from this that Hungarian citizens’ propensity for participating in community affairs, taking responsibility and acting collectively is modest; that is, it is a factious, atomised society not willing to co-operate in collective matters. If we also take into account the conclusions regarding relational capital, it can be stated that personal lobbying prevails over community interests and collective thinking in Hungary.

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