

COLLECTIVISM IN AN INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE: THE CASE OF ESTONIA

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Abstract. In this article the position of Estonia on the map of individualism-collectivism, is examined. Since Schwartz's (1994) worldwide study of human values, covering more than 40 cultural groups in 38 nations, Estonia has occupied a firm position among the collectivistic countries in cross-cultural literature. The Estonians themselves, however, seem to have quite a contrary opinion on that matter: being labeled as "collectivists" is in sharp contrast with the Estonians' own national myth about their extreme individualism. In addition to the Estonians' autostereotype, several other factors speak against the Estonians' excessive collectivism – a number of recent cross-cultural studies has shown that at least the Estonian students do not differ significantly from their Finnish and North American counterparts in individualistic-collectivistic attitudes. It is concluded that the dissonance between the results of various empirical studies, on the one hand, and between the public opinion of the community of cross-cultural researchers and the Estonians' autostereotype, on the other hand, is most likely due to the all-embracing definition of the individualism-collectivism constructs that holds and tolerates a wide range of miscellaneous opinions.

Psychological concepts enjoy Warholian fame. Individualism and collectivism may be at their zenith, as once were achievement motivation or traditionalism-modernity in cross-cultural social psychology. Or, they may be the best cultural syndromes yet invented (Segall 1996:542).

1. Introduction

During the last decades, the term of individualism-collectivism has become a magic word in the social sciences, opening the gates both for explaining and understanding the prodigious world of cross-cultural differences. According to Hofstede's (1991) definition, "*Individualism* pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or

herself and his or her immediate family. *Collectivism* as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (p. 51). Research suggests that the cultures of North America, North and Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand tend to be individualistic; whereas those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America tend to be collectivistic (Hofstede 1980, see Triandis 1990, 1995, for overview). This broad classification does not mean that collectivism applies solely to agricultural or non-industrial countries – prevalent opinion holds (e.g., Bond and Smith 1996, Triandis 1997) that various forms of collectivism are also found in parts of Eastern Europe, in Southern Italy and rural Greece.

In the social sciences, especially in political and economic philosophy, the terms of individualism and collectivism have been used for more than 200 years (for a detailed overview, see Triandis 1995). *Individualism* – promulgated first by such theorists as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith – included the ideas of the maximum welfare and freedom of the individual, with society existing only for the sake of its members. *Collectivism*, in contrast, has been used to denote a political or economic system in which the interests and welfare of the collective group are of greater importance than the interests of any individual. Syndicalism, communism, communalism, bolshevism, Marxism, socialism, etc. are usually considered subforms of collectivism (cf. Drechsler 1995).

In psychology, the topic was of no particular interest until the year of 1980 when a book by Geert Hofstede – *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* – was published. Hofstede (1980, 1983), in his extensive study of 50 national cultures and three multicountry regions, empirically identified and elaborated four basic dimensions of cultural variation: power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity¹. The dimensions were based on work-related value surveys administered to *circa* 117,000 employees of IBM corporation. *Culture's Consequences*, belonging nowadays to the obligatory list of references in almost every article on individualism-collectivism, was apparently "a conceptual Eureka!" (Bond 1994:68) for many social scientists – but out of the four dimensions, individualism-collectivism was the one that irresistibly appealed to cross-cultural psychologists. Hofstede's work evoked such an amount of research that the 1980s have been often called "the decade of individualism-collectivism in cross-cultural psychology" (Kagitçibasi 1994:52).

¹ It is a common claim that Hofstede's dimensions were empirically derived. In fact, this is only partially true. The questions in the survey were developed according to the results of the pilot study that had already revealed the distinctive themes of cultural variability, but also following theoretical distinctions in the literature. In the final, so-called "ecological factor analysis", actually only three factors emerged: individualism-collectivism and power distance constituted together the first factor and were later separated for conceptual reasons (see Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen, 1992 for more details).

The tremendous success of Hofstede's study could be mainly attributed to two factors. First, Hofstede managed to reduce the vast amount of cultural variability to a limited set of basic dimensions that altogether explained more than one-half of the variance in country-to-country differences. Second, the number of national cultures (more than 50) in Hofstede's survey made the results universally applicable in every area of human behavior, in spite of the narrow scope of Hofstede's research – work-related values and attitudes. As usual, Hofstede's study attracted not only fervent admirers but also suspicious detractors. Much of the criticism, for instance, has been addressed to the effect of sample type – subjects were drawn from a single company and, therefore, they were hardly true representatives of their national populations, especially in the Majority World² (Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen 1992, Schwartz 1994). Still, despite all these *pro* and *contra* arguments, the importance of Hofstede's study cannot be overestimated. As it was nicely summarized by Michael H. Bond, a distinguished cross-cultural psychologist: "For me, Hofstede's scholarly tome *Culture's Consequences* (1980) provided the integration I was seeking. ... At last, a cross-cultural navigator had an empirically charted map to guide and inform our journey. ... For me it was a godsend" (Bond 1994:68).

2. The position of Estonia on a map of individualism-collectivism

Since Schwartz's (1994) worldwide study of human values, covering more than 40 cultural groups in 38 nations, Estonia has occupied a steady position among the collectivistic countries in cross-cultural literature (Triandis 1993, 1995). Another reason for such classification obviously lies in the past – "the collectivist attitudes of Estonians are clearly an outcome of Soviet 'bloc culture,' combined with the collective national values" (Lauristin 1997:40) – indeed, as a part of the former Soviet Union, Estonia continuously holds a reputation of being a previous "Soviet collectivist culture" (Keltikangas-Järvinen and Terav 1996:714). Unfortunately, the authors of such statements usually take it for granted that "life behind the Iron Curtain ... on the scale of *Individualism-Collectivism*, it meant prevailing collectivism" (Lauristin 1997:40), lacking frequently either interest or resources to examine the real meaning and applicability of the collectivism concept to the places and people behind these slogans.

The Estonians themselves seem to have quite a contrary opinion on that matter: being labeled as "collectivists" contrasts sharply with the Estonians' own national

² Instead of the "Third World" or "Developing countries" I use the term of "Majority World", as recently suggested by Ç. Kağıtçıbaşı (1996): "The developing countries are not getting any closer to the developed countries (if anything, the gap is widening), and with the collapse of the "Second world", the "Third" does not make much sense. Majority World, referring in fact to the majority of the worlds' population, emerges as a preferable term" (p. xviii).

myth about their extreme individualism. One can easily find a number of relevant statements from the Estonian press. For example, "Estonia is definitely a very individualistic country: the Estonians have strong personal opinions about everything" (Pajupuu 1996) or "The Estonians blame themselves for their excessive individualism and meager collectivity. This is emphasized as a national characteristic" (Raagma 1996:28). To some degree, such belief may be based on a comparison with the Russians, who are usually considered quite collectivistic. When asked about the meaning of the terms of individualism and collectivism³, a 84-year-old Estonian woman answered: "Well, the Russians are definitely collectivists, they have always liked to sit together on the bench in front of the house. And the collective farms – [made it so] that all could be equally lazy." Maybe even more typical is the following response, given by a 34-year-old Estonian man: "Both individuals and nations may have an inclination towards one or another [individualism or collectivism]. Speaking of nations, the Estonians' individualism and the Russians' collectivism cross my mind as examples – the private farm culture from one side, where everybody minds one's own business and the community from the other side, hoeing together in the fields accompanied by *bylinas*."

In addition to the Estonians' autostereotype, several other factors speak against the Estonians' excessive collectivism. In several studies on cultural stereotypes (see Kants 1997 for overview), for instance, the Estonians have been described by typically individualist characteristics by judges from other nationalities (by Finns and Russians, respectively). Also, in a study of meta-level collectivism⁴ in Estonia and Finland (Kants 1997), the Estonians were ranked fairly low on collectivism. Likewise, a number of recent cross-cultural studies has shown that the Estonian students do not differ significantly from their Finnish and North American counterparts in individualistic-collectivistic attitudes. In the aforementioned study of meta-level collectivism (Kants 1997), the Russian students were significantly more collectivistic than the Estonian and Finnish students, whereas Estonians and Finns did not differ from each other. North American and Estonian students did not differ on individualism-collectivism measured through responses to the 16 INDCOL attitude items (developed by Triandis and colleagues) in a study of cultural influence on accountability in intergroup negotiation (Gelfand and Realo, submitted). Furthermore, comparing Estonian, North American, and Russian

³ During a seminar on cross-cultural issues in psychology held in the spring semester of 1997 at the Department of Psychology (University of Tartu), I asked students to conduct a brief survey on the meaning of the terms individualism-collectivism among their relatives from different age-groups with various social and demographic background. Altogether, 33 Estonians participated in this trial study (22 females and 11 males with mean age 46.1 years, $SD = 20.1$).

⁴ The participants from three nations (Estonians, Finns, and Russians living in Estonia) were asked to rank their own and nine other nations along ten collectivistic statements. Judges from three nations (Estonians, Finns, and Russians) placed the Estonians on the seventh position between the Russians and the Finns (the fourth and tenth position, respectively).

students (Realo and Allik, in press), the Estonians were even the least collectivistic in all three areas of social relations – family, peers, and society. Along with the results of the empirical studies introduced above, the demographic factors as urbanism and family size that were outlined by Triandis and colleagues (Triandis, McCusker and Hui 1990) as antecedents of individualism rather support the image of Estonia as an individualistic (non-collectivistic) country. According to the 1989 census the share of urban population in the total Estonian population was 71.6% and the average size of an Estonian family was 3.7 persons (Hindov 1993, Jõeste 1993). Furthermore, “Individualism is really a Protestant, north-western European idea, whereas collectivism is more Catholic, southeastern European” (Funder 1997:325; see also Sabini 1995). For many centuries, the traditional Estonian religion has been Lutheranism – in the short period of independence (1918–1940), over 80% of the Estonian population belonged to the Lutheran church. In June 1995, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church had 172,000 members, about six times more than the Orthodox Church and sixty times more than the Roman Catholic Church.

Taken together the examples given above, the position of Estonia on the map of individualism-collectivism, nevertheless, remains ambiguous. One possible solution to this puzzle may lay in the conceptualization of individualism-collectivism itself. Since its sudden and victorious emergence in cross-cultural psychology at the beginning of the 1980s, the construct has undergone numerous elaborations. Nevertheless, individualism and collectivism still tend to be loosely defined, too broad and all-embracing categorizations (cf. Fijneman, Willemsen and Poortinga 1996) – the boundaries of the area the map is supposed to represent are unsettled – and, therefore, the constructs are quite difficult to be uniformly measured or even described. As it was said by Marshall Segall (1996:542):

Individualism and collectivism are words that carry lots of baggage⁵. They are value-laden terms, suggesting different things to different people. ... the concepts seem to have such powerful heuristic value that some may be tempted to use them carelessly, to explain any difference that is noted to exist between groups that are labeled individualistic or collectivistic, as if that is what they really are and as if all the other things they are do not matter as much.

There are, indeed, many reasons for the discrepancy between the Estonians' autostereotype and the deep-rooted belief held by the cross-cultural research community. First and foremost, it is possible that the lay conceptualization of the Estonians is a form of self-deception that is in dramatic contrast with the results of the objective measures of individualism-collectivism carried out by psychologists and sociologists. At the same time, however, one cannot blindly believe in the validity and reliability of these “objective” studies – the proposed collectivistic values in Schwartz's (1994) worldwide research on human values (that remains

⁵ Already in 1905 Max Weber wrote of the catch-all word *individualism* that it covers “the most heterogeneous things imaginable.” (p. 22).

the only extensive cross-cultural study of Estonian individualism-collectivism so far) may not be, for one or another reason, the best representatives of the individualism-collectivism construct. On that account, one may speculate that Estonia has been classified among the collectivistic cultures by some attributes that are occasionally associated with collectivism but that are not the essential components of collectivism. Thus, to pinpoint the location of Estonia on the individualism-collectivism map requires first a little expedition to this boundless and partly unexplored territory of cross-cultural differences. To accomplish this purpose, several issues critical to individualism-collectivism (e.g., levels of analysis, definition, dimensionality, etc.) will be examined in the following sections.

3. Levels of analysis

Generally, individualism and collectivism are seen as characteristics of culture. At the same time, however, the constructs are also considered to be personality attributes by which an individual differs from the other members of the same cultural group. Such a twofold connotation, on the one hand, has forced psychologists to go deeper into the heart of individualism-collectivism to define and interpret the concepts in more precise terms. On the other hand, it has also complicated matters making the application and conceptualization of the constructs more difficult both at the theoretical and methodological levels.

In *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede (1980) dealt exclusively with differences between national cultures, comparing not "different personalities, but different societal contexts within which children grow up and develop their personalities" (Hofstede, 1994, p. x). Hofstede was also among the first researchers to emphasize that constructs observed at the cultural level may be quite different from the same constructs observed at the individual level. For instance, the concept of individualism-collectivism may be unidimensional at the cultural level but multidimensional at the personal level (Hofstede 1980 1994). In a way, the whole issue of different levels came up entirely because of Hofstede's worldwide research: the preceding cross-cultural studies usually examined just one or two exotic cultures in reference to the normative North-American one and, therefore, it was both impossible and meaningless to treat cultures (instead of individuals) as single subjects in comparative analyses. At the present moment, at least according to the mainstream, the cultural and individual levels must be separated for both conceptual and empirical purposes (cf. Hofstede 1994, Kim, Triandis, Kagitçibasi, Choi and Yoon 1994, Smith and Schwartz 1997), despite the fact that in some studies they have found to be functionally interrelated and highly congruent (Bond 1988, Schwartz 1994). To distinguish the personality constructs from the cultural, the use of other terms at the individual level, such as *idiocentrism* and *allocentrism* (Triandis, Leung, Villareal and Clack 1985) or *individual loyalties*

and *group loyalties* (Kagitçibasi 1987) has been proposed. Unfortunately, the new labels have not won much recognition among researchers: the more popular terms of individualism and collectivism are frequently used both for cultural and personality assessment.

Quite surprisingly, one of the most substantial questions in this matter – operationalization of the individualism and collectivism constructs at the two levels described above – has received relatively little attention. At the individual level, measurement is easier, depending first and foremost on the researcher's definition of the constructs in question. Operationalization of the constructs at the cultural level is obviously far more complicated. For example, in Hofstede's (1980) study, the so-called country-level (or cultural level) factors were derived from individual value responses, averaged to yield country scores which, in turn, were later subjected to factor analyses to yield culture-level factors. In other words, the country-level scores were nothing but arithmetical averages of individual responses. As Michael H. Bond (1994:73) pointed out:

To me, this procedure [Hofstede's] has never yielded a satisfactory portrait of country-level collectivism The problem is that the input to the factor analysis was not country-level in any sense but the statistical. For me a country-level score is one that makes sense only when taken as a single score from that unit. For example, proportion of GNP devoted to education, percentage of women in the workforce ... , and so on – all derive from forces at play within a country as an organic whole.

Another problem that deserves attention here is the common belief that if sample/culture means are entered into analyses, not individual responses, then “the culture-level dimensions are derived exclusively from variance across cultures and are in no way affected by individual difference variation within cultures” (Smith and Schwartz 1997:113). Indeed, the use of country-level scores in cross-cultural research obviously smoothes the individual differences – but not to the whole extent. Such belief, as expressed by Smith and Schwartz (1997), is actually based on an implicit assumption that a sample used in a research project represents all people from the country involved. In other words, it says that all people in one country are similar to each other and share the same culture in the same way. In fact, the sample selection criteria and procedures always slightly vary across cultures – due to the limited sample size that is usually taken to represent a whole population, there is no guarantee that the culture-level score is not influenced by certain demographic characteristics of the sample. Furthermore, it has been shown that the differences between various subgroups in a country may be even larger than those between different countries (Verkasalo, Daun and Niit 1994, see also Marshall 1997, Realo, Allik and Vadi 1997). Therefore, the intercultural differences do not reflect solely the differences between cultures but also, at least to some extent, the differences between individuals.

Turning back to the cross-cultural studies on individualism-collectivism (Kants 1997, Realo and Allik, in press, Schwartz 1994) that have compared the Estonians

with the representatives of other nationalities and cultures, the question of levels might be a source of contradictory results. In both studies, the mean scores on the value dimensions (Schwartz 1994) or attitude scores (Kants 1997; Realo and Allik, in press) for each entire sample were compared. However, the two studies differ in the way the relevant dimensions were derived. In Schwartz's (1994) research, the sample/culture means were entered into the analyses and, accordingly, the so-called culture-level value dimensions⁶ were derived. The three types of collectivism⁷, used by Kants (1997) and Realo and Allik (in press), were derived from individual differences within a sample, that is, from intracultural variance. The existence of the three related subtypes of collectivism, focused on relations with *family*, *peers*, and *society* was first detected in the study of the Estonian population (Allik and Realo 1996, Realo et al. 1997); later, the three dimensions emerged also in a pancultural⁸ factor analysis based on a cross-cultural sample including Estonian, North American and two Russian groups. Thus, there is a slight possibility that the disagreement in the results of the two studies described above is due to the different levels of analysis, cultural or individual, at which the dimensions were derived. Until a new thorough research is conducted, the issue remains open to speculation.

⁶ Also, the cross-cultural research on values takes place at two levels of analysis, personal and cultural. At the personal level, Schwartz (1990:142) defines values "as people's conceptions of the goals that serve as guiding principles in their lives". At the cultural level, according to Smith and Schwartz (1997:83), values are "the socially shared, abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society or other bounded cultural group".

⁷ The three forms of collectivism can be briefly described as follows: "(a) family-related collectivism (*Familism*) implies dedication of one's life to the family putting its interests higher than one's personal aspirations. Family security, honoring parents and elderly people, respect for traditions and reciprocation of favors serve as guiding principles in a familist's life; (b) peer-related collectivism (*Companionship*) can be described by tight relations between an individual and his/her neighbors, friends, or co-workers and focusing on the needs of his/her in-group; (c) society-related collectivism (*Patriotism*) means dedication to serve one's nation by surrendering one's personal comforts to the latter" (Realo and Allik, in press).

⁸ Besides the "cross-cultural" or "ecological-level" analysis (cultural level) and the intracultural analysis (individual level), there is the third option to analyze the data – the "pancultural" way (see Leung and Bond 1988, Triandis 1995, Triandis et al. 1993). A common example frequently given in the literature is the following: Suppose one has 100 responses, to 20 items, from 10 cultures. The *ecological* (cross-cultural) factor analysis, producing cultural dimensions, is based on the 20 by 20 matrix of correlations, based on 10 observations per variable, where the observations are the sum of the 100 responses to each item. The *intracultural* factor analysis, producing individual-level dimensions, would be based on the 20 x 20 matrix, based on 100 observations per variable in each culture. The *pancultural* factor analysis, in its turn, is based on the 20 by 20 matrix, based on 1,000 observations (as if they came from one culture) per variable. According to Triandis (1995:189): "This kind of analysis gives the universal factors that underlie this data set".

4. Culture-level approaches

4.1. Dimensionality

A crucial topic in the development of the individualism-collectivism construct – briefly introduced in the previous sections – has been its dimensionality. As mentioned earlier, Hofstede (1980) described the concepts as bipolar at the cultural level, with individualism and collectivism on opposite ends of a single dimension. A significant contribution to this conceptualization was made in the middle of the 1980s by Harry C. Triandis and his colleagues (Triandis et al. 1986, Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai and Lucca 1988, Triandis et al. 1990), who suggested that individualism and collectivism may not be two opposite poles of a single dimension but rather two independent factors both at the cultural and personal levels (see also Freeman 1996, Gelfand, Triandis and Chan 1996, Rhee, Uleman and Lee 1996). Moreover, it was shown that at the individual level, both individualism and collectivism are most likely the multifaceted constructs – each composed of many different subforms (e.g. Hui 1988, Triandis et al. 1986). This elaboration, asserting that the concepts are not mutually exclusive, gives a potential explanation to apparent controversies between the results of the studies that measure *either* individualism *or* collectivism – as it appears, both an individual and/or a culture may be characterized as individualist and collectivist in the same breath.

An alternative culture-level approach has been introduced by Shalom H. Schwartz, who proposed that at least two *cultural* dimensions, confounded in the individualism-collectivism literature, should be distinguished: “a dimension opposing conceptions of the person as autonomous versus embedded or related (*Autonomy* versus *Conservatism*), and one opposing pursuit of personal goals versus collective goals (*Mastery* and *Hierarchy* versus *Egalitarian Commitment* and *Harmony*)” (Schwartz 1994:117)⁹.

In Schwartz’s (1994) cross-cultural study, the Estonian teacher samples (both from town and countryside) were extremely low on *Autonomy* and *Mastery* (individualistic value types) and high on *Conservatism* and *Harmony* (collectivistic value types). According to Smith and Schwartz (1997), in high *Conservatism* cultures the individual is viewed as a part of a collective, finding meaning in life largely through social relationships and through participation in the shared way of group life. Cultures with high *Harmony* “accept the world as it is, trying to preserve rather than to change or exploit it. This value type emphasizes fitting harmoniously into the environment” (Schwartz 1997:100).

⁹ The Schwartz individual-level value types (*Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-Direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security*) are somewhat better known than his culture-level value types (*Hierarchy, Mastery, Affective and Intellectual Autonomy, Egalitarian Commitment, Harmony, and Conservatism*). Although the culture-level and individual-level dimensions are conceptually related, the composition of the similar value types at two levels is not identical (see also Schwartz 1994, Smith and Schwartz 1997).

5. Individual-level approaches

At the personal level, one of the first multidimensional conceptualizations of the individualism-collectivism¹⁰ concept was a so-called *target-specific* approach, introduced by Hui and Triandis (1986). According to Hui (1988), people may exhibit varying degrees of individualism and collectivism in relations with people from different target-groups (e.g., family, friends, co-workers)¹¹. Since the narrowly defined target-groups failed to form coherent and internally consistent dimensions to be successfully measured, researchers continued the search for more meaningful divisions of the individualism and collectivism constructs. At the present moment, the most important species of individualism and collectivism, as found by Triandis (1993, 1995, 1996, Triandis and Gelfand 1998), seem to be horizontal and vertical ones. The typology is closely related to Fiske's (1992) model of four elementary forms of sociality and the theory of independent and interdependent selves as by Markus and Kitayama (1991). Both types of collectivists define the self as an interdependent part of a group – horizontal collectivists emphasize equality whereas vertical collectivists accept inequality among the members of a group. Both kinds of individualists define the self as independent and autonomous – again, horizontal individualists stress equality and vertical individualists accept and tolerate inequality. To some extent, the horizontal-vertical dimensions correspond to the culture-level dimensions identified by Schwartz (1994). The Schwartz dimension of *Autonomy* versus *Conservatism* (autonomous vs. embedded) is similar to the Triandis horizontal individualism-collectivism; *Mastery* and *Hierarchy* versus *Egalitarian Commitment* and *Harmony* resembles the dimension of vertical individualism-collectivism¹².

5.1. Definition and basic attributes

Up to the present day, researchers continuously work on finding better and more exhaustive ways of portraying individualism and collectivism – there is a myriad of miscellaneous ways of analyzing and structuring the constructs in the literature. Such a pursuit, on the one hand, has resulted in a huge amount of new knowledge about the dimensionality and attributes of the individualism and collectivism constructs. On the other hand, it has led to the fragmentation of the

¹⁰ In this section, although I observe allocentrism and idiocentrism, I will use the more popular terms of collectivism and individualism.

¹¹ The INDCOL Scale (Hui 1984, 1988, Hui and Yee 1994), constructed to measure these target-specific collectivisms (the relevant target groups included: spouse, parents, kin, neighbors, friends, and colleagues), is probably the most frequently used instrument in this field – despite its relatively meager psychometrical properties.

¹² In contrast to Schwartz's idea that the basic cultural dimensions form a complex circular structure, Triandis considers vertical and horizontal individualism/collectivism to be orthogonal attributes (cf. Smith and Schwartz 1997).

constructs – the discussion of the individualism and collectivism constructs, as formulated by Harry C. Triandis (1993), reminds one often of “the parable of the blind men, each touching a different side of an elephant” (p. 157). With the aim of combining the single parts into a meaningful and coherent whole that everyone would similarly recognize and describe, Triandis (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) suggested that individualism and collectivism should be characterized as *cultural syndromes*, that is, patterns of “beliefs, attitudes, self-definitions, norms, and values that are organized around some theme that can be identified in a society” (Triandis 1994:2). In the case of individualism, the central theme is the autonomy of the individual. With respect to collectivism, the organizing theme is the centrality of the group – family, work organization, nation, etc. According to Triandis, the four universal attributes that define individualism-collectivism as cultural syndromes are: (a) the meaning of self – the definition of the self is *interdependent* in collectivism and *independent* in individualism (Markus and Kitayama 1991); (b) the structure of goals – personal and communal goals are closely aligned in collectivism, but not in individualism; (c) behavior is a function of norms and attitudes – cognitions that focus on norms, obligations, and duties guide social behavior in collectivistic countries, those that focus on attitudes, rights, needs guide social behavior in individualistic countries; (d) focus on the needs of the ingroup or social exchanges – an emphasis on relationships (even on disadvantageous ones) is common in collectivistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, the emphasis is on rational analyses of advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a relationship (Triandis 1995:43–44). In addition to these four basic and universal traits, Triandis has identified more than 60 attributes that also *may* be found in some individualistic or collectivistic cultures. Along these lines, he suggested that constructs of individualism and collectivism should be defined polythetically:

In zoology, a few attributes (e.g., feathers or wings) are used to define a “bird,” and many additional features are used to define hundreds of species of birds. Similarly, in the case of cultures we can use the above-mentioned four attributes to decide whether a culture is on the whole collectivist or individualist. Then we can use the 60 additional attributes to decide what species of collectivism or individualism is found in that culture (Triandis 1996:410).

In other words, there are different elements that play the key role in explicating the concepts of individualism-collectivism across the cultures. At first sight, Triandis’ definition seems to give some rational order to the numerous elements and attributes related to the individualism-collectivism constructs, at least on the theoretical level. When trying to operationalize the concepts on the empirical level, however, the definition emerges as incomplete and nonexhaustive – the question of which aspects of culture or human behavior are covered by the concept and which are not, still remains unclear. Furthermore, in empirical studies most of the researchers usually focus on only one or two attributes, investigating, for example, how people define their selves or how important is to maintain

harmony within the ingroup in a particular culture or social group. This focusing on a single element of the individualism-collectivism construct has the benefit of allowing the measurement instruments to be more reliable (high coefficients of internal consistency). However, such focusing allows one to describe only fragments of the broad concept of individualism-collectivism, giving neither a coherent nor systematic picture of how the various elements are related to each other.

5.2. Situation and target specific vs. trait-like stability

Another problem that remains unsolved while defining individualism-collectivism as cultural syndromes, is to what extent the individualism-collectivism constructs are situation and target specific and to what extent they have a situation-independent trait-like stability (cf. Kagitçibasi 1987, 1994). As formulated by Triandis (1993:162) "Individualism and collectivism can coexist and are simply emphasized more or less in each culture, *depending on the situation*". Also, as shown by Hui (1988), individualistic and collectivistic tendencies appear to be target specific: "One may be very collectivist with regard to *friends* but totally independent and isolated from the *family*" (p. 20). At the same time, dominantly individualistic persons, for example, have been found to be less prone to emotional stress but also more hedonistic, competitive and achievement-motivated than collectivistic persons (Bond and Smith 1996, Triandis et al. 1988). An obvious question arises here: what (if any) are the relations between the individualism-collectivism constructs and personality traits.

With the aim of finding solutions to several unsolved problems related to the concepts of individualism-collectivism, an alternative model of the construct was proposed by Realo et al. (1997). With respect solely to collectivism, it was suggested that collectivism could be best "understood as a hierarchical concept: the general notion of collectivism is a superordinate concept with many specific subordinate components" (Realo et al. 1997:95). According to this view, collectivism is a system of values and attitudes which differ from one another by the extent individuals are involved in the domain of social relations. In the study of collectivistic attitudes among the Estonian population, it was shown that at least three hierarchically related, yet clearly distinguishable, types of collectivism focused on relations with *family*, *peers*, and *society* can be distinguished. Furthermore, different analyses revealed that these three types of collectivism share a common core that is likely to affect all types of collectivism and that is based on two relatively stable personality traits – Openness to Experience and Agreeableness. Thus, the various kinds of collectivism can be distinguished from one another by the type of social relations they are focused on (e.g., family, peers, and society) and united on the basis of trait-like attributes that are based on the "Big Five" factors Closedness (as opposite to the Openness to Experience) and Agreeableness (Realo et al. 1997).

The idea that Openness-Closedness can affect social attitudes is actually not new (see McCrae 1996, for overview). The variations in Openness, for example, have been found to be the major psychological determinants of political ideology and affiliation in political parties. According to McCrae (1996), Openness versus Closedness is also a fundamental element in the explanation of the authoritarian personality. Moreover, as shown by Dollinger and colleagues (1996), out of the "Big Five" dimensions Openness to Experience best accounts for what people value in their lives. Using the Rokeach Values Survey (Rokeach 1973, 1979) and various versions of the Costa and McCrae's NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI, Costa and McCrae 1985, NEO-FFI, Costa and McCrae 1989, NEO-PI-R, Costa and McCrae 1992), they found that Openness to Experience was significantly positively related to the *Maturity* and *Self-Direction* value composites (e.g., WORLD OF BEAUTY, IMAGINATIVE, and BROADMINDED) and negatively to the *Achievement* and restrictive *Conformity* value composites (e.g., SOCIAL RECOGNITION, SALVATION, BEING CLEAN, OBEDIENT, RESPONSIBLE, and SELF-CONTROLLED)¹³.

Speculating on the origins of Openness, Dollinger with colleagues (1996) proposed that since "values like IMAGINATIVE, OBEDIENT and CLEAN predict a person's levels of Openness, it is reasonable to hypothesize that early experience with and encouragement in these directions will have profound influence" (Dollinger, Leong and Ulicni 1996:35). In contrast, recent genetic studies suggest that there is substantial heritability for traits related to Openness (Bergeman et al. 1993, Loehlin 1992). For instance, Bergeman et al. (1993) found that about 40% of the variance in Openness is due to genetic differences between the individuals whereas the influence of shared rearing environment is relatively modest, accounting only for 6% of the variance.

Using Schwartz's Value Survey (1992) and the NEO-PI (Costa and McCrae, 1985, 1989), Luk and Bond (1993) found that Agreeableness, in its turn, was the most predictive dimension of values in the Chinese culture. Agreeableness was most strongly and positively related to *Benevolence*, *Tradition*, and restrictive *Conformity* value composites and negatively to *Achievement*, *Hedonism*, and *Power*. As said by Luk and Bond (1993), an agreeable person, in order to gain approval or appreciation from others (particularly in a collectivist culture), would emphasize values that serve collectivistic interests and are socially desirable leading to social acceptance and devalue socially undesirable egoistic/individualistic values.

Summing up, Openness may be regarded as the underlying personality dimension that predisposes individuals to value BROADMINDEDNESS and IMAGINATION vs. SOCIAL RECOGNITION, OBEDIENCE, and SELF-CONTROL

¹³ Dollinger and colleagues (1996) grouped 27 of the 36 Rokeach values into seven clusters (using unit weighting) following Schwartz and Bilsky's (1990) research on the universal structure of values. The clusters were labeled as follows: *Enjoyment*, *Maturity*, *Prosocial*, *Security*, *Achievement*, *Restrictive Conformity*, and *Self-Direction*.

(Dollinger et al. 1996). Together with Agreeableness, Closedness (as the lack of Openness) predisposes the individual to absorb collectivistic elements from the culture into his/her cognitive scheme (Realo et al. 1997). Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that “the variability of collectivistic beliefs is determined by a particular combination of general (personality trait-like) and specific (cultural-situational) factors” (Realo et al. 1997:113).

6. Effect of sample type

To what extent were the opposite results obtained by Schwartz (1994) vs. Kants (1997) and Realo and Allik (in press) dependent on the sample type? Would samples with different sociocultural backgrounds yield similar orders of cultures involved? In the last mentioned two studies, the subjects were university students while Schwartz (1994), in his report on a cross-cultural study of human values, drew most of the conclusions on the results based on the schoolteacher samples. However, for 26 nations (out of 38) in Schwartz’s research, data were available from both schoolteacher and university student samples in the same cities or regions. To assess the concordance of the teachers’ and students’ value preferences, the scores based on both samples were correlated – Pearson correlation coefficients for each value type ranged from .53 (*Mastery*) to .77 (*Conservatism*) and from .71 to .83 for the two basic culture-level value types, *Conservatism* vs. *Autonomy* and *Egalitarian Commitment+Harmony* vs. *Hierarchy+Mastery*, respectively. These correlations – quite high but still far from being maximal – suggest that teacher and student samples, in fact, might differ in their value preferences. As mentioned earlier in this article, the Estonian teacher samples (both from town and countryside) were extremely low on individualistic culture-level value types as *Autonomy* (exemplary values are CURIOSITY, BROADMINDEDNESS, CREATIVITY, PLEASURE, EXCITING LIFE, VARIED LIFE) and *Mastery* (AMBITION, SUCCESS, DARING, COMPETENCE) but, at the same time, high on collectivistic value types as *Conservatism* (SOCIAL ORDER, RESPECT FOR TRADITION, FAMILY SECURITY, SELF-DISCIPLINE) and *Harmony* (UNITY WITH NATURE, PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT, WORLD OF BEAUTY)¹⁴. In contrast, there were no significant differences between the Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish students in stressing the single conservative values like SOCIAL ORDER, NATIONAL SECURITY, or FAMILY SECURITY in the study of Verkasalo and colleagues (1994). The Estonians, indeed, but also the Finns scored higher on POLITENESS than the Swedes whereas both the Swedes and the Finns placed significantly more emphasis on values like EQUALITY and OBEDIENT than the Estonians. Swedish

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that according to the results of the study of Realo et al. (1997), the teachers were relatively less collectivistic than the other cultural and sociodemographic groups of the Estonian population.

students, for instance, stressed also being HUMBLE, WORLD AT PEACE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, and PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT significantly more than the Estonians. Thus, one may speculate that the order of nations in Schwartz (1994) research would have been different had it been based on student samples instead of using teacher samples¹⁵. How representative are the students (but also the teachers) of general population in regard to individualism and collectivism – that is altogether a different question (cf. Leung and Iwawaki 1988, Realo et al. 1997, Triandis et al. 1990).

7. Changing values

Last but not least, when evaluating the problem of the Estonians' individualism-collectivism, the radical changes in Estonian economical, political and social life during the last ten years need to be considered. According to M. Lauristin and P. Vihalemm (1997)¹⁶, the Estonian transitional process during 1987-1997 could be divided into the three major stages: (a) 1988–1991: Political breakthrough (Singing Revolution); (b) 1991–1994: Laying the foundations of the Estonian state; and (c) 1994–1997: Economic and cultural stabilization. Schwartz (1994) reported data that were gathered during the 1989–1990 period (see Schwartz and Sagiv 1995), that is, during the first stage of transition that might be characterized by the “outburst of strong national feelings” and “identification with the common goals” but also by “the rapid economic decline” and “hyperinflation” (Lauristin and P. Vihalemm 1997:82–83). Unlike Schwartz (1994), Realo and Allik (in press) and Kants (1997) based their analyses on data collected during 1995–1996, that is, at the beginning of the third stage of the Estonian transitional process characterized by a “stabilization of economy” and “slowly growing living standard” but also by the “decreasing role of national values” (Lauristin and P. Vihalemm 1997:82–83). To what extent are the results of the studies influenced by a gap between the periods of time the surveys were carried out?

The findings of the value surveys based on the ratings of 25 values from the Rokeach Value Survey measured yearly from 1991 to 1995 on three representative national samples – Estonians, Estonian Russians, and Swedes (Balticom research program, Lauristin and T. Vihalemm 1997) shed some light on this matter. According to Lauristin and T. Vihalemm (1997:256), “a strong post-modern shift toward an individualisation of values” has taken place among the Estonians during the period of 1991–1995. In 1995, the Estonians placed significantly more

¹⁵ This speculation does not conform with Schwartz's (1994) opinion, in which the concordance correlations given above provided “considerable support for the generalizability of the order of nations found with the teacher samples” (p. 116).

¹⁶ The periodization is based on the theory of three-stage transition of post-Communist transformation introduced by Z. Brzezinski (1994).

emphasis on values like EQUALITY, COMFORTABLE LIFE, PLEASANT LIFE and less emphasis on values like TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT and FREEDOM than five years earlier. At the same time, the importance of a so-called conservative value FAMILY SECURITY (see also previous paragraph) showed no change throughout the whole period, being at an equal level with Swedes in both 1991 and 1995 (Lauristin and T. Vihalemm, 1997). These results indicate that value preferences among the Estonians have undergone, indeed, more or less significant changes during the last years, but unfortunately, taking into account the theoretical elaborations introduced in the previous paragraphs, the shift in the value orientations towards hedonism and egalitarian commitment does not say much about the strength and nature of the Estonians' individualism-collectivism either in 1991 or in 1995. Therefore, once again, one may only speculate that "in the process of marketization and democratization, the strong (vertical) collectivism of Estonians will be confronted with new cultural, social and political realities, and, as a result, will either be softened into horizontal, less confrontational forms of collectivism, or fade away under pressure from growing individualism and hedonism" (Lauristin and T. Vihalemm 1997:247). Even on the assumption that the final part of the sentence was true, a trend towards hedonism does not implicitly impose that the starting point is a dominating pattern of vertical collectivistic relationships among the Estonians and not the "asceticism" forced upon them by their somewhat stagnant and opportunity-deficient lifestyle during the last 50 years. In other words, if a society is subjected to a set of radical changes, it obviously will bring along changes in people's attitudes and value preferences. Unfortunately, the existing data concerning Estonia does not allow one to say that these changes, first and foremost, reflect a shift from collectivism to individualism.

8. Finale

Given the theoretical elaborations introduced above, both the definition of individualism and collectivism as of cultural syndromes and the conceptualization of collectivism as an hierarchical system imply that the individualism-collectivism construct may have a different structure and hence quite different meanings in different cultures. For example, people in one culture may consider devotion to one's family as the most important indicator of collectivistic attitudes, whereas those in another culture may define collectivism as unquestioning loyalty to one's nation and country. Furthermore, in one culture, the emphasis on values like HONORING PARENTS AND ELDERS and FAMILY SECURITY may, indeed, denote the extreme conservatism, i.e., "maintenance of the status quo, propriety, and avoidance of actions or inclinations of individuals that might disturb the traditional order ... appropriate in settings where the self lacks autonomous significance ..." (Schwartz 1994:101), whereas in other cultures these values may merely carry the meaning of a reasonable awareness of mature responsibility. If

so, the Estonians may really think of themselves as of extreme individualists and, at the same time, put relatively higher emphasis on conservative values as compared to the other nations around the world. Thus, as suggested at the beginning of this article, one may reach a conclusion that the dissonance between the results of various empirical studies, on one hand, and between the public opinion of the community of cross-cultural researchers and the Estonians' autostereotype, on the other hand, is most likely due to the all-embracing definition of the individualism-collectivism constructs that holds and tolerates a wide range of miscellaneous opinions. Although Harry C. Triandis with colleagues (1986) advised more than a decade ago to abandon the simplistic concept of individualism-collectivism as opposite poles of a single dimension, it will take some time to fully accept the idea that "true" individualism involves the existence of a certain amount and particular form of collectivism, in other words, one cannot be really individualist without being somewhat collectivist at the same time (cf. Drechsler 1995, Kwan, Bond and Singelis 1997). One might hope that the case of Estonia – an individualist culture with a certain degree of collectivism – will become a classic and an illustrative example of this new understanding.

Acknowledgements

In writing this article I greatly profited from most valuable discussions with Prof. Jüri Allik. I am also indebted to him for very useful detailed comments on earlier versions of this article. Helpful critical comments provided by Michael Bond, Wolfgang Drechsler, and Kathryn Wycoff are gratefully acknowledged.

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INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM: THE CASE OF ESTONIA

It is evident that the... (The text is extremely faint and largely illegible, appearing to be a scan of a document with significant bleed-through or low contrast. The visible fragments of text are difficult to decipher but seem to discuss cultural values and research findings.)