

Cultural Diversity and Change in Post-Cold War Europe

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Akaliyski, P. 2017. "Sources of Societal Value Similarities across Europe: Evidence from Dyadic Models." *Comparative Sociology* 16:447–70. doi: 10.1163/15691330-12341432.

Paper 2

Akaliyski, P. 2019. "United in Diversity? The Convergence of Cultural Values among EU Member States and Candidates." *European Journal of Political Research* 58:388–411. doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12285

Paper 3

Akaliyski, P. 2019. "Clashing Values: Cultural and Geopolitical Transformations of Post-Cold War Europe." (Status as of May 2019: Under Review in *American Sociological Review*)

SUMMARY

Why are the cultures of European societies different? Are any of these differences increasing or diminishing in the wake of the Cold War? These questions are important with regard to the processes of European integration, but the empirical investigations thus far have been surprisingly scarce. Universalist and diffusion theories assume that with modernization and closer cross-country cooperation, the cultural differences between nations will gradually diminish. Cultural inheritance theories, by contrast, claim that deeply ingrained historical legacies provide resistance to cultural change and may even lead to a culture clash that will push societies further apart. The unprecedented integration of European states into the EU offers a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of cultural change. This dissertation reevaluates and builds upon these theories to provide a revised framework for analyzing cultural change at a societal level. The empirical analyses are based on repeated cross-sectional nationally representative surveys in the World Values Survey and European Values Study series taken from 1990 to 2014.

The first paper, titled “Sources of Societal Value Similarities: Evidence from Dyadic Models” and published in *Comparative Sociology*, discusses the relationship between various sources of cultural variation and the cultural distances between European countries. Historical legacies are disentangled into multiple factors and compared to economic development, geographic distance, and climate in their explanatory power over cultural distances between countries. Each of these factors is associated with cultural differences and similarities in Europe, and they all overlap and complement one another in their explanatory power to varying degrees. Classifying countries into cultural groups based on single factors is thus reductive and inaccurate. Socio-economic development and historical backgrounds account for approximately equal amounts of between-country variation in cultural distances. This fact suggests that some differences may dissipate under the right conditions, while others are more durable.

The second paper, titled “United in Diversity? The Convergence of Cultural Values among EU Member States and Candidates” and published in *European Journal of Political Research*, explores the changes within two specific cultural constructs—emancipative and secular values—between 1992 and 2011, with a focus on European

integration. I hypothesize that countries participating in EU integration would converge culturally due to the intentional promotion of certain values by EU actors, an increased level of interaction within the EU, and a convergence in living standards. My analysis confirms that between 1992 and 2011, cultural distances among EU member states decreased; and in the period between 2001 and 2008, most official EU candidates also moved towards Western Europe's mean cultural position. Meanwhile, since 1992, countries not participating in the EU integration process have diverged culturally from the EU average, even though these countries began as equally distant culturally as potential new members in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. This pattern remains unchanged, even while controlling for differences and changes in the level of economic development, which suggests that the EU integration process itself may indeed be a force for cultural change.

The third paper, currently under review, more closely explores the cultural polarization between EU members and Eastern European countries that remain outside of the integration process, particularly members of the newly formed Eurasian Economic Union, which encompasses five former Soviet states. I demonstrate that the cultural restructuring of Europe closely coincides with the geopolitical transformation of the continent after the collapse of communism. I argue that this is due to differences in supranational identities, which are based on the predominant religious traditions and imperial legacies, which align European countries in two geopolitically opposed camps, with some countries—most notably Ukraine—showing a divided identity between East and West. In contrast to Catholic and Protestant countries, which cooperate closely in the EU, most Orthodox and Muslim countries (though not all) define their identities in distinct opposition to the strong emancipative values promoted by the EU, and this acts as a shield against the diffusion of values from the West. The empirical analysis demonstrates that changes in emancipative values are influenced most strongly by the accessibility of free media and the level of individual freedoms in a society, including democratic governance. I argue that authoritarian leadership, more common in non-EU countries, uses mass media to promote traditional values in order to legitimize their rule and project soft power into the geopolitical competition with the EU.

INTRODUCTION

It is baffling how many people from other continents talk about Europe as if it is one country sharing a common culture. Despite some common inheritance from Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and Christianity, the reality is that Europe's culture is enormously diverse. Most European nations speak their own language, eat different foods, have different political and social welfare systems, are religiously diverse, have fought cruel wars against each other for most of their history, and differ immensely in their attitudes, beliefs, lifestyles, child rearing, and core cultural values. Europe is home to both the most and least democratic countries in the world, the most and least tolerant and liberal, the most and least religious, and the most and least satisfied with life. Three of the most prominent cultural maps of the world—drawn by Inglehart and Baker (2000), Schwartz (2006), and Welzel (2013)—have depicted Europe as way more culturally diverse than any other continent in the world. In fact, the cultural distance between the most different European countries is far larger than that between any other two non-Western nations on any of the three cultural maps. These maps also clearly depict distinguishable Eastern and Western European cultural clusters, as divided by the former Iron Curtain.

Despite predictions to the contrary (Fukuyama 1992), history did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Europe continued changing, and my goal in this dissertation is to follow its cultural transformation. The most significant geopolitical transformation has been the deepening of the EU and its enlargement to the east—initially with East Germany; then with Austria, Finland, and Sweden; followed a decade later by 10 Central and Eastern European countries; two years later by Bulgaria and Romania; and lastly by Croatia in 2013. As of now, several other Balkan countries are official candidates, and other former communist states aspire to be considered potential candidates. The further east the EU expands, the more significant the cultural differences become (Fuchs and Klingemann 2002; Gerhards 2007; Gerhards and Hoelscher 2003). The motto of the EU—“United in diversity”—is inspiring and implies that cultural diversity is not an obstacle for European unity; and, indeed, instead might be a source of Europe's strength, as it fosters creativity and innovation. The EU is for many a huge success story, an example for the world how former archenemies, having spilled the blood of millions in two self-destructing wars, are now living peacefully and prosperously and are shaping their common future. The momentum of this success has

spilled over to the new member states too, as they democratize and increase their economic wellbeing.

However, cultural differences are not irrelevant. Political scientists and historians consider sharing certain cultural values the essential prerequisite for establishing and maintaining effective democratic institutions and practices (Inglehart and Welzel 2010; Welzel 2013; Welzel and Dalton 2017; Welzel, Inglehart, and Klingemann 2003), and they mold the level of tolerance and acceptance of migrants (Leong and Ward, 2006; Schiefer et al. 2010). Cultural differences are an important predictor of international economic exchange (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2009; Lewer and Van den Berg 2007; Melitz 2008; Tadesse and White 2010), migration flow (Belot and Ederveen 2012), and even interstate conflict (Bove and Gokmen 2016). Cultural differences between the old, new, and candidate member states of the EU are considered an obstacle for their successful integration (Gerhards 2007; Gerhards and Hoelscher 2003). When the crises period in the EU began in 2008, it became increasingly evident that value differences, reportedly rooted in the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, are a source of misunderstandings that impede collective action (Hien 2017). Hence, congruence of basic cultural values may be essential to solve these problems and achieve further integration (Guiso, Herrera, and Morelli 2016).

Despite its motto of being united in diversity, the EU has established itself as a “community of values” (Oshri, Sheaffer, and Shenhav 2016). The foundational values of the EU are enumerated in the “Treaty on European Union” (Toggenburg and Grimheden 2016), and their promotion is one of the main goals of the EU. Therefore, in its drive to achieve “ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007), EU integration has spilled over from initially only economic, to political, and lastly, cultural as part of a “third wave” of integration (Lahdesmaki 2016). This aims to strengthen social cohesion by drawing on shared cultural heritage and values upheld by all EU members.

Meanwhile, after the initial process of disintegration following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new political and economic organization among several post-Soviet countries began to take shape in juxtaposition to the EU. The newly emerged Eurasian Economic Union embodies Russia’s ambition to revive its influence in the post-Soviet space and strengthen its position in international relations. According to Russian

president Vladimir Putin (2011), this is “a powerful supranational union, which is able to become one of the poles in the modern world.” The integration process was formalized with the formation of the Eurasian Customs Union in 2010 (Henley 2014), and it has deepened with the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 (Kimball 2014). The success of this regional organization is also supposedly dependent on the cultural homogeneity of the participating countries. These geopolitical dynamics—integration in Western and Central Europe, the collapse of the former Eastern Bloc, and subsequent attempts to reintegrate parts of it in opposition to the Western political structures—are the context of my empirical investigation.

The question of cultural diversity, its causes, and future developments in Europe is particularly important for understanding the formation of these two competing regional blocs and their potential for successful integration and enlargement within countries that remain unaffiliated. Values are increasingly entangled in the geopolitical competition of winning the hearts and minds of people and governments in Europe (Edenborg 2018a; 2018b; Gerber and Zavisca 2016; Orenstein 2015). Therefore, knowing how different European countries are in terms of cultural values, whether we can reveal distinguishable cultural clusters, and whether the differences are diminishing or growing can enhance our understanding of the possibilities and the forces of integration in Europe. The goals of this dissertation are to understand the predictors of cultural differences in Europe and to examine and explain the patterns of cultural change since the end of the Cold War.

The following sections discuss what exactly I mean by culture and cultural differences. The section afterwards presents the different theoretical perspectives that may explain cultural differences and cultural change over time. Following this is a description of my data and analytical strategy. After I discuss a few ethical problems with pursuing cross-cultural research, I finish up with a summary of the papers, conclusions, and a discussion of possible further research.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL VALUES

Culture is the central object of interest in this dissertation. In this section, I discuss some defining concepts, principles, and controversies in this field of research.

What is Culture?

Lane and Ersson (2002) describe culture as one of the broadest and vaguest terms in the social sciences. A review by Faulkner et al. (2006) found more than 300 definitions of culture. For Israeli social psychologist Shalom Schwartz (2006), culture is “the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms, and values prevalent among people in a society” (p. 138). A pioneer in the quantitative research of culture, the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010:6). The Bulgarian social anthropologist Michael Minkov (2013) defined it as the “amalgamation of potentially related and relatively durable societal characteristics that describe an identifiable human population, such as nation or ethnic group” (p. 17). Summarizing recent reviews of cultural definitions, Ronald Fischer (2012) concluded that “New re-conceptualizations converge around similar key characteristics, seeing culture as information or meaning (i.e., the content consists of either knowledge, or values, beliefs or other psychological constructs that provide meaning) that is shared to some degree and passed on through socialization” (p. 14).

Two commonalities emerge among these various definitions. The first is that, as underlined in Hofstede et al. (2010), “Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment” (p. 6). Though the degree of sharedness is disputable and will be discussed later, the collective nature of culture is certain. The second common view is that culture consists of different elements, which can be either objective or subjective (Minkov 2013). The objective culture can be visible artefacts such as artwork, clothing, food, instruments, architecture, literature, etc., while the invisible elements consist of institutions, for example, religious, political, and educational ones. The subjective culture resides in people’s minds as their values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms. Following this classification of culture, the object of this dissertation is the subjective elements, especially cultural values. Although a group of people who comply to similar cultural values become a cultural unit only by identifying with the same community, it should be emphasized that group identities cannot be regarded as part of culture in the sense that is used in this dissertation (Minkov 2013). This is because identities refer to the group(s) people subjectively feel attached and belong to, but this does not always

correspond to sharing the same culture and values. Moreover, groups that share very similar values may be very divided and even hostile in their identity, for example, Serbia and Bosnia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and currently Russia and Ukraine.

Coming up with precise definition of culture that combines all definitions across the social sciences is impossible, but neither is it necessary for the work presented in this dissertation. According to Minkov (2013), it is not crucial to fit one “correct” and widely accepted definition but rather to provide one that is clear and sensible for readers. For this dissertation, I focus on a specific element of culture, namely cultural values. In the next section, I discuss the different layers of culture and elaborate on the status of cultural values as the most fundamental element of culture.

Cultural Values

To every traveler or migrant, it is evident that people in different societies look, think, and behave differently. Most observable elements of culture (e.g., clothing, food and drinks, rituals, practices, gestures, and symbols), however, cannot be meaningfully compared across *all* societies. We may compare how often Norwegians and Swedes go cross-country skiing per winter, which would give us important indications of some of the cultural specificities of Norwegian and Swedish cultures. However, it would be completely nonsensical to compare this indicator with Kenya or many other countries where most of the residents have never seen snow. To compare cultures on a global scale, we need to use measures that are more abstract and fundamental. To use the same example, frequencies of cross-country skiing can be indicative of more abstract characteristics of these societies, such as the importance of unity with nature, leisure time, and health. These can be further aggregated into higher-order psychological constructs, such as Inglehart’s materialistic vs. post-materialistic values. Frequency of leisure activities would then be just one of the indicators of a broad latent construct of a particular value dimension. Thus, by combining and aggregating a number of indicators, we may draw conclusions about the underlying value priorities of societies.

Culture consists of different layers in terms of depth and abstraction. This can be illustrated with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) onion diagram, where the shallowest layer is that of symbols (words, gestures, pictures, and other objects), followed by heroes (characters who serve as models for behavior or a focus of admiration), then rituals

(collective activities), and values in the center of the diagram. Symbols, heroes, and rituals comprise the visible aspects of culture, and therefore they are subsumed as practices, while values are the invisible and most abstract element of culture. Another way to exemplify this is that practices are culture “as it is,” while values are culture “as it should be”—the guiding principles behind the visible culture. For this reason, culture is also often illustrated as an iceberg, where the tip is only visible and is much smaller than the invisible part, which consists of people’s values.

The definition of values varies somewhat between authors. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), “The core of culture...is formed by values. Values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (p. 9). Furthermore, they expanded that values deal with subjective evaluations of binaries such as good vs. evil, clean vs. dirty, safe vs. dangerous, moral vs. immoral, rational vs. irrational, and so on. Schwartz (2006, p. 143) outlined several specific characteristics that values meet: values (1) are beliefs that are linked inextricably to affect, (2) refer to desirable goals that motivate action, (3) transcend specific actions and situations, (4) serve as standards or criteria, (5) are ordered by importance, and (6) their relative importance guides action. Similarly, referring to Kluckhohn (1951) and Rockeach (1973), Welzel (2013) described values as “utilities that people desire—so much that their actions are targeted towards pursuing them” (p. 58). Many authors underline the functional importance of values, for example, Boer and Boehnke (2016) sum up that “values contribute to human well-functioning by offering a system and assessment of needs fulfillment as well as for behavioral guidance leading to functional adjustment with regard to self-definition, well-being, and social functioning.” (p. 134).

The view that values are the most central feature of a culture has been held by some leading social scientists in this field (e.g., Hofstede 1980; Inglehart 1977; Schwartz 2006; Weber 1958). Here I relate to the three most prominent approaches to comparing cultures quantitatively, which originate from three different social science disciplines—these by Geert Hofstede (management), Shalom Schwartz (social psychology) and Ronald Inglehart (political science)—as well as these authors’ close collaborators, such as Michael Minkov and Christian Welzel. Within these social sciences, culture is conventionally operationalized by the predominant cultural values in societies. Many sociologists, such as Jürgen Gerhards, Bart Bonikowski, Loek Halman, Paul Dekker, Ruud Luijkx, and Hermann Duellmer, have also engaged in value

research, resting on the same assumptions. Value dimensions are widely used also in economics, e.g. in trade and international migration research. However, cultural sociologists, sociologists of culture, and most anthropologists operate within qualitative approaches to culture, which are inherently different from the quantitative ones within which I place my research. Thus, it should be underlined that my research is nested within a widely used, but not universally shared, understanding of values as the most central element of culture. A slightly more disputed question is the degree to which values are shared within and between societies, which is discussed in the next section.

National Culture and Within-Country Diversity

Despite diverse definitions, culture is generally considered a group-level phenomenon. Values can be both individual and at the societal or other group level, but their structure differs, and it is questionable if they are sufficiently similar to be used interchangeably (Fischer and Poortinga 2012; Fischer et al. 2010). The value frameworks of Inglehart and Hofstede explicitly refer to the country level, and Hofstede (1980) warned against the use of these dimensions at the individual level. Schwartz (1994; 2006) developed two separate frameworks for the individual and national levels, even though operationalized using the same items. At the individual level, they form 10 distinctive dimensions (Schwartz 1994), while at the national level, their structure has three dimensions (Schwartz 2006). Hofstede et al. (2010) discussed different layers of culture as individuals participate in many different significant social groups, which they called moral circles, such as organizations; social classes; generations; gender; regional, ethnic, or linguistic groups; and lastly, the nation. One may argue that nations also cluster in higher order cultural units, called civilizations or cultural zones (Brunkert, Kruse, and Welzel 2018; Huntington 1996; Schwartz 2006), and there are some common cultural elements across all societies, known as human universals (Brown 1991). All these levels of analysis deserve research attention; however, this dissertation focuses on the differentiation of cultural values between nations, which many authors have argued is the most meaningful level of aggregation.

The analytical concept of *national* culture has been elaborated by a number of scholars, for example, Hofstede (1991), Inglehart and Baker (2000), Minkov and Hofstede

(2012; 2014a; 2014b), Schwartz (2006), Inglehart and Welzel (2005), and Welzel and Inglehart (2016). Inglehart and Baker (2000), for example, stated that “Despite globalization, the nation remains a key unit of shared experience and its educational and cultural institutions shape the values of almost everyone in that society” (p. 37). Schwartz (2006) noted that “Almost all large, comparative, cross-cultural studies treat countries as their cultural unit” (p. 153), and after his analysis, he confirmed that “These data demonstrate that the similarity of cultural value orientations within countries, when viewed against the background of cultural distance between countries, is considerable. Taken together, the findings support that countries are meaningful cultural units” (p. 154). National culture is not only well-conceptualized and tested against various potential fallacies, but it has also proven to have a high utility. Cross-cultural differences measured at the national level have been used in numerous studies across the social sciences and have been linked to a wide range of social phenomena. Thus, external linkage—that is, the predictive power for conceptually related outcomes—also validates national culture as an analytical concept (Welzel and Inglehart 2016). These cultural values are conventionally measured at the individual level using surveys, but their aggregates are indicative of a macro-level phenomenon (national culture), which in turn is linked to other macro-level outcomes, such as political institutions and the functioning of intergovernmental organizations (Welzel and Inglehart 2016).

Despite the salience of national culture in all major cultural frameworks and all the evidence that supports it, I have encountered three main sorts of skepticism towards the use of this concept: (1) differences between individuals are much larger than those between societies, (2) there is a large within-country value polarization, and (3) there are significant cultural differences between regions in a country. While each of these arguments have some merit, I will explain below why they do not represent any serious threat to the analytical concept of national culture.

Nations are, of course, not homogenous. But do they have to be in order to compare cultures cross-nationally? There are both empirical and theoretical arguments involved in answering this question. Fischer and Schwartz (2011) questioned the concept of national culture as shared values because they found that there is more agreement than disagreement between societies on individual values and that values differ more between individuals than between countries. Nevertheless, Fischer and

Schwartz (2011) and Schwartz (2009; 2014) did not deem national culture meaningless. They argued that sharedness is not a required qualification of national culture. National culture is something external to individuals, and it affects each individual in different ways depending on experiences, circumstances, genetics, and so on. Using Hofstede's analogy of the software of the mind, they argued that culture is rather the programmer and not the software itself. National culture is then regarded as "the latent normative value system, external to the individual, that underlies the functioning of societal institutions [and] does not require consensus at the individual level" (Fischer and Schwartz, 2011:1140). Moreover, they argued that even small differences in the values aggregated at the national level are indicative of significant institutional differences and policies, which "may generate substantial intergroup and international conflict" (Fischer and Schwartz, 2011:1140). This view on culture resonates with that of Minkov and Hofstede (2014a), who regarded culture as shared values at the group, not individual, level. Regarding the value constructs that I use in Papers 2 and 3, namely emancipative and secular values, Welzel (2013) confirmed that there is much more variation in the means in emancipative values across societies than the deviations around these means within societies, which also underlines the sharedness aspect of these values.

Intra-societal value polarization is a rising research interest considering its explanatory potential for support for populist political parties across Western democracies (e.g., Alexander and Welzel 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2018). Alexander and Welzel (2017) indeed demonstrated a polarization regarding attitudes towards liberal sexual norms and political disaffection between subjectively-defined social classes in advanced democratic societies, which they used to explain public support of anti-establishment parties. Their analysis, however, showed that this polarization is relatively insignificant considering the small segment of societies that differ from the national mean—this is typically a tiny fraction of people who self-identify as lower class. Welzel (2013) showed that societies exhibit strongly mean-clustered and unimodal distributions regarding emancipative values. Additionally, Welzel also demonstrated that differences in emancipative values between societies outsize intra-national differences along the lines of education, gender, generation, residence (rural vs. urban), and occupation. I acknowledge that value polarization is an important hypothesis and is of particular relevance today, but I would also argue that within-country polarization is a different research problem than the ones at the center of this dissertation. The two research

agendas do not undermine but could potentially complement each other. For my analyses, there is no evidence that within-societal value polarization is a significant issue undermining the validity of countries as analytical units.

Most people are aware of cultural differences between regions or ethnic/religious/linguistic groups in their country of origin, for example between northern and southern Italy or between Walloon and Flemish Belgium. These perceived differences are, however, *often* anecdotal and exaggerated, and in many cases exist primarily at the level of identity or other, more shallow elements of culture but not in fundamental cultural values. Minkov and Hofstede's (2012; 2014a) studies were the only ones to systematically examine the value heterogeneity between national regions using large datasets, the World Values Survey (WVS) and European Social Survey (ESS), respectively. For Europe, the authors divided the nations into 313 regions and let the data determine how they clustered together based on their level of similarity on 21 value-related items used for operationalization of Schwartz's value orientations. With a few exceptions, the European sub-national regions clustered well in their respective national clusters. Curiously, even newly formed Eastern European nations appeared culture-wise fairly homogenous; the percent of all regions grouped together in one unique cluster were 100% for Estonia, 100% for Croatia, 48% for Ukraine, 75% for Slovakia, 100% for Czechia, 60% for Russia, and 83% for Slovenia. The authors concluded that "there is an invisible gravitational force that pulls together the regions of a given nation while separating it from the regions of other nations" (Minkov and Hofstede 2012:147). There are, however, a few exceptions, one of the most prominent being the Belgian Walloon and Flemish regions, which form two independent clusters, though by no means very distant culturally from each other. Minkov and Hofstede (2012) followed a similar procedure and discovered that national regions from around the world, including new and ethnically/linguistically heterogenous African and Asian nations, group in their respective national clusters. Furthermore, Minkov and Hofstede (2014b) tested whether religious groups within countries from all over the world share similar personal values and values they find important for their children. Contrary to Huntington (1993), their analysis demonstrated that this is indeed nearly always the case (e.g., Bulgarian Orthodox and Muslims cluster together just as Russian Orthodox and Muslims; Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholics; German Protestants and Catholics; Swiss Catholics and Protestants; Dutch Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics; and so on share similar cultures). This

provides evidence that even though a complete within-country homogeneity is impossible to imagine, countries are remarkably coherent cultural units.

Dimensions of Culture

More than four decades since Hofstede proposed the first quantitative approach to measuring and comparing culture, Maleki and de Jong (2014) described the state of the art in this field of research “with two words: enriched and messy” (p. 107). Hofstede’s approach constituted a paradigm shift in cross-cultural research. The idea that the mysterious concept of culture can be measured quantitatively by using survey items and distinguishing between different dimensions of culture was revolutionary. With over 200,000 Google Scholar citations, Hofstede has become one of the most influential social scientists of all time. He has been praised for his contribution but also criticized, and his framework has undergone substantial modifications and recently a major re-evaluation. Numerous other approaches to measuring culture resembling Hofstede’s have emerged, and recent contributions question the validity of his cultural dimensions (Beugelsdijk and Welzel 2018; Minkov 2017; Minkov et al. 2018). This points to the fundamental ontological and epistemological problems in cross-cultural research, that is, the number of cultural dimensions and how they should be measured.

In cultural research, we do not know the number of cultural value dimensions because they do not exist objectively; dimensions are created by researchers (Hofstede 2002). The level of constructivism varies on a continuum from formative index construction (strongest constructivism) to confirmatory factor analysis (medium constructivism because the researcher determines the dimensions but the data decide how well they fit) to exploratory factor analysis (weakest constructivism because the data alone decide how many dimensions will be obtained). Using exploratory factor analysis, dimensions reflect an objectively existing pattern in the data, however, it is impossible to argue that any existing survey data contain an exhaustive number of items related to cultural variability. Thus, the cultural variability these statistical methods can unveil are inevitably limited.

Hofstede was guided by the patterns in his data and later on, he finds the theoretical basis for his (initially) four cultural dimensions: individualism–collectivism, power distance, masculinity–femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Inglehart and Baker

(2000) used factor analysis to select items that correlate highly with each other and extract two value dimensions—traditional vs. secular-rational and survival vs. self-expression—which they used to build their theory of societal value change. Welzel (2013) later updated these two dimensions to be more conceptually coherent and methodologically thorough; his two dimensions—sacred-secular and obedient-emancipative—are used in two of my papers. Schwartz (2006) derived his three dimensions—autonomy vs. embeddedness, egalitarianism vs. hierarchy, and mastery vs. harmony—from *a priori* theorizing and later empirical confirmation using a multidimensional scaling technique. Beugelsdijk and Welzel (2018) attempted to unify Hofstede’s dimensional approach with Inglehart’s dynamic cultural framework, arriving at three distinct value dimensions: collectivism–individualism, duty–joy, and distrust–trust. Minkov (2018) also revised Hofstede’s model and proposed a two-dimensional solution: collectivism–individualism and monumentalism–flexibility. Many other approaches exist, one of which proposes as many as 18 dimensions of values and practices (House et al. 2002). In an attempt to bring more clarity to the problem, Maleki and de Jong (2014) analyzed the different classifications both conceptually and statistically and proposed nine exclusive (independent) cultural dimensions.

In response to such debates, Hofstede (2006) elaborates on the “epistemological status of dimensions. Dimensions should not be reified. They do not ‘exist’ in a tangible sense. They are constructs, ‘not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviours and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behaviour’(Levitin, 1973, p. 492)”(pp. 894-895). This clearly underlines the constructivist foundation of values. In his book *Culture’s Consequences*, Hofstede (2001) responded to one of the common criticisms that “Four or five dimensions are not enough” (p.73) as follows: “Additional dimensions should be both conceptually and statistically independent from the five dimensions already defined and they should be validated by significant correlations with conceptually related external measures; candidates are welcome to apply” (p. 73). Thus, Hofstede pointed to another convention in this field of research, which is validating the existence of dimensions by external linkage. That is, dimensions should be created only as long as they can be used to explain, or be explained by, other social outcomes. External validity is also a focal point in the defense of emancipative values posited by Welzel and Inglehart (2016) and Brunkert et al. (2019). In conclusion, the problem with

dimensionality of culture is not yet settled and will probably never be. Any number of dimensions can be created and used as long as they are useful in (and thus can be validated by) explaining other societal outcomes. As Maleki and de Jong (2014) underlined, “The final decision about what dimensions are useful and applicable obviously depends on the analyst’s objective and focus” (p. 130).

Operationalization of Culture in this Dissertation

In each of my three papers of the dissertation, I address the problem of dimensionality of culture in a different way: (1) a dyadic approach, (2) a two-dimensional approach, and (3) a most relevant-dimension-approach. The dyadic approach used in Paper 1 avoids the problem of dimensionality altogether by taking into account cumulative distances in responses to approximately 100 survey questions on values and attitudes. It is arguable whether this is the optimal approach because many of the items may relate to the same latent value dimension, thus amplifying its relative significance. On the other hand, this may not necessarily be a drawback because some value dimensions are surely more important than others, e.g., individualism–collectivism is the most universally replicated dimension with strong correlates to numerous social outcomes (Maleki and de Jong 2014; Minkov 2017). The questions in the WVS and European Values Study (EVS) are supposedly selected based on their salience as social problems and interest among social scientists. Therefore, by giving each question equal weight in the value distance score, we may more accurately capture the meaningful cultural issues that distinguish societies. As my initial interest in Paper 1 was to elaborate on the cross-sectional patterns of value differences, another potential issue was not evident to me at that point. The data I borrowed from Spolaore and Wacziarg (2015) were averaged across the whole period from 1981 to 2010, assuming that values are relatively stable over time, as it is commonly believed in the literature (e.g., Hofstede et al. 2010; Schwartz 2006). As I discovered later in Papers 2 and 3, this was not exactly the case, and merging several waves of WVS data inevitably conceals any temporal value changes in the data. On the other hand, some of the random measurement error in particular waves would be averaged out, thus producing more robust estimates. A more optimal solution might have been to use a measure averaging two to three consecutive waves of WVS/EVS data and infer about cultural distances at a more

specific time point, however, I opted for using a measure that was elaborated and used in previous peer-reviewed research.

In Paper 2, I use a well-elaborated framework of cultural values introduced by Welzel (2013), which consists of two value indices: obedient–emancipative and sacred–secular. This is a refined version of the earlier framework by Inglehart and Baker (2000) distinguishing traditional vs. secular-rational and survival vs. self-expression values. The difference from the earlier approach is that Welzel’s values are additive indices, which do not rely on factor analysis to validate the internal structure of the dimensions. Instead, the items are chosen on the basis of their conceptual integrity. These items are in most cases highly correlated, but Welzel (2013), Welzel and Inglehart (2016), and Brunkert et al. (2019) underlined that this is not a criterion for the validity of the constructs, contrary to Alemán and Woods’ (2016) and Sokolov’s (2018) criticisms. As explained earlier, dimensions are often justified by being consequential for other outcomes. Emancipative values, for example, are found to predict democratic development (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2011; 2013; Welzel and Dalton 2017; Welzel et al. 2003), altruism, strong social capital, and peaceful collective action (Welzel 2010), pro-environmental attitudes (Welzel 2013), while emancipative and secular values both predict cooperation and protection of property and pro-social behavior (Kistler, Thoni, and Welzel 2015).

In Paper 3, I focus only on the emancipative values index. This index has been given considerably more attention in previous research because of its link to economic development and democracy in human empowerment theory (Welzel et al. 2003). However, this was not the only reason to exclude sacred–secular values from this analysis. Secular values may have other important consequences that have not yet been sufficiently investigated. There are three reasons for my choice: (1) the salience of emancipative values in previous research underlines their importance for democracy, (2) there is a much larger variation in emancipative values relative to secular values, and (3) there is a close conceptual overlap between emancipative values and the so-called European values promoted by the EU and embedded in its legislation. In Paper 2, I discover that a much larger share of the value convergence and divergence is due to changes in emancipative values rather than secular ones. Secular values also exhibit different geographical patterns than emancipative values. Many former communist societies experienced a systematic suppression of religion which led to their

secularization; however, after the fall of communism, many of them underwent a process of religious revival. Therefore, the level and changes in this value index between Eastern and Western Europe is partly driven by different processes. Lastly, I argue that emancipative values resemble those values promoted by the EU, such as freedom, democracy, equality (including gender equality), and tolerance (including to ethnic, sexual, and other minorities). In Paper 3, I also argue that these values have intertwined with Western identity, which are likely to be rejected by nations with non-Western identity, at least in Europe. This, however, does not imply that emancipative values should be understood as Western values. Indeed, Welzel (2013) argued that there is nothing exclusively Western in striving for human emancipation and demanding individual freedoms and gender equality. He also demonstrated that the intercorrelation between the constructs' items is more related to the cognitive mobilization of nations than their degree of "Westernness" (Welzel 2013; Welzel and Dalton 2017).

Given the different alternatives, the choice of operationalization of the dependent variable ultimately depends on the research question. If we are interested in the total value distance between societies, as in Papers 1 and 2, then either using a composite measure of distances on a large number of items or a total distance on well-established cultural value dimensions are meaningful approaches. If the goal is to test a theoretical model with regard to a specific facet of cultural values, then one needs to choose a value dimension that relates most closely to the problem at hand. This is my approach in Paper 3.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

In this section, I present the overarching theoretical framework this dissertation revolves around. Each of the three papers includes a large theoretical part that needs no repetition; however, I do briefly recapitulate the main theoretical standpoints and the way I operationalize their concepts. All three papers relate to two big camps stemming from the theoretical traditions of the classic sociologists Karl Marx and Max Weber, which I label *universalist* and *pluralist* theories, respectively. In Paper 1, I refer to these theories as modernization and culturalist, respectively; however, now I include modernization theory as one of the main strings in a slightly broader universalist camp,

while I believe the label pluralist is more informative than culturalist, which is less self-explanatory. In addition to this rich body of literature, this dissertation underlines the significance of a potential third camp, which I call *diffusion* theories. This grouping of theories into universalist, pluralist, and diffusion is to some extent fictitious because few authors fit entirely into only one of the categories. Therefore, I also present a separate group labelled *middle ground*, in which I include theoretical approaches that combine elements of both universalist and pluralist theories.

Universalist Theories

Under the umbrella term universalist theories, I combine all theoretical approaches that view culture as a product of modernization and therefore argue that cultural differences are indicative of the stage of development societies are in. To avoid misunderstandings, the universalism in these theories does not lie in that they claim the existence of a uniform human culture. Instead, the mechanism that places societies on different positions on an underlying scale of cultural variation is the same, namely modernization. For instance, on a hypothetical scale of traditional-vs-modern values, China does not take a particular position because this position is inherently Chinese but because this position reflects China's stage of development in the process of modernization. Moreover, modernization is supposed to be an isomorph process: it has different stages but countries at the same stage share basic features. This classic version of modernization theory can be traced back to early sociologists such as Karl Marx, Emil Durkheim (Eisenstadt 2000), and to some degree also Max Weber. It draws justification from Talcott Parsons' (1964) concept of "evolutionary universals in society," and it was subsequently revived primarily in the works of Ronald Inglehart (Inglehart 1977; 1990; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2010), human development (empowerment) theory (Brunkert et al. 2018; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2011; 2012; 2013; Welzel and Dalton 2017; Welzel et al. 2003), functional-evolutionary theory (Chirot 2001), and arguably world polity (or world society) theory (Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer et al. 1997).

Human development theory claims that societies follow a universal pathway of development. Economic development, change towards emancipative values, and establishment of liberal democracy are presented as three stages of the human

empowerment process that fulfil intrinsic desires in every society for more individual freedoms (Welzel et al. 2003). According to Inglehart's post-materialism theory, cultures change when societies get wealthier and take survival and existential security for granted (Inglehart 1997). Inglehart describes specific cultural transformations that are associated with the transition from agricultural to industrialized society (towards secular/rational authority) and then from industrialized to a service economy (towards self-expression and subjective wellbeing). The West underwent this process first, but developmental theorists argue that there is nothing uniquely Western about it and that all societies can follow the same path, irrespective of their cultural traditions (Welzel et al 2003).

Similarly, institutional isomorphism (i.e., world polity or world society) theories could also be regarded as universalist theories because they argue that innovative institutional and cultural practices that offer evolutionary advantages to some societies diffuse to others where domestic elites deliberately adopt the obviously successful institutions to sustain their society's competitiveness (Meyer et al. 1997), thus leading to cultural convergence (Guillen 2001). Functional-evolutionary theories do not only argue that this is possible but that it is necessary in order to avoid suffering and cultural clashes: "social evolutionary pressures will force all societies to modernize, so that the major technological and cultural gaps between various parts of the world will greatly diminish in the future" (Chirot 2001:341).

In the first paper, I operationalize development using three indicators: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, life expectancy, and share of the service sector of the economy. In the second paper, I am less interested in the effects of modernization, but I include (changes in) the difference in GDP per capita as a control variable. In the third paper, I consider the effect of multiple measures of socioeconomic modernization and existential security: average schooling years, state fragility index, uneven economic development, life expectancy, GDP growth, unemployment rate, Human Development Index, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, GDP per capita, and employment in services.

Pluralist Theories

An opposing view comes from a group of theories that I summarize under the umbrella term pluralist theories. I chose this term because what unites these theories is the premise that culture as a concept is plural, that is, there is not one universal modernity but multiple distinct modernities that are not bound to merge into one in the near future. In this view, China's position on a given scale of cultural variation does not reflect this country's stage in a universal process of modernization but is the result of China's very own pathway into modernity. To this group of theories belong multiple modernities theory (Eisenstadt 2000), Said's (1978) Orientalism, the Asian values thesis (Bomhoff and Gu 2012; Inoguchi and Newman 1997; Thompson 2001), and—most prominently—the clash of civilizations thesis (Huntington 1993; 1996). This intellectual tradition can be traced back to classical sociologist Max Weber (1958), who argued that values originate in the religious traditions of societies and have their own autonomous influence on societal institutions. Within this school of thought, national cultures are believed to be able to resist the forces of globalization and to accommodate economic and technological modernization. These theories regard cultural differences as a result of the cultural heritage, primarily religious, of the countries rather than the level of modernization (Huntington 1993). Multiple modernities theory goes so far as to claim that all contemporary societies are equally modern but differently so (Eisenstadt 2000).

The most prominent spokesman of this school of thought is the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1993; 1996), whose famous clash of civilizations thesis has provoked controversies since the 1990s. According to this thesis, the post-Cold War period will be dominated by new supranational political actors, namely several world civilizations based on centuries-old religious and historical traditions. The uniqueness of the civilizations with regard to their culture and identity, Huntington argued, becomes more apparent in present times when the contact between nations intensifies with the advance of globalization. According to many interpretations, Huntington treated cultures as static and cultural differences as irreconcilable and bound to clash, though these claims remained ambiguous in his texts.

I give this theoretical position considerable attention, especially in Papers 1 and 3. In the first paper, I decompose the broad concept of cultural background into its consisting elements, namely religion, language, past empire membership, and

ideological/institutional traditions. Among these, I discovered that religion and communist vs. democratic past were the strongest predictors of cultural differences. In the third paper, I demonstrate that the relevance of the communist background in explaining cultural differences decreases, while religion remains a strong predictor for both cross-sectional differences and temporal changes in emancipative values.

The Middle Ground

As mentioned earlier, few theories could be placed entirely in either of the above two boxes. Instead, theorists who are seriously engaged in empirical investigation of cultural differences are aware of the complexity of its drivers and find some sort of a middle ground between the two extreme camps. Perhaps the most prominent study to mention is that by Inglehart and Baker (2000), who argued that economic development is indeed related to cultural change, as universalist theories suppose; however, the historical background of the countries also matters. Their emblematic cultural map of the world demonstrates that countries could be grouped into cultural zones resembling those of Huntington's civilizations. Therefore, they proposed a so-called revised modernization theory whereby economic development leads to a non-linear change in a predictable direction but also in a path-dependent manner that does not suppose cultural convergence between countries. This theoretical approach was confirmed in later studies by Inglehart, Welzel, and their colleagues (e.g., Brunkert et al. 2018; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013; Welzel and Dalton 2017). Similarly, Schwartz (2006) also argued in favor of multiple predictors of cultural variation, mainly economic, historical, and demographic. Among his value orientations, embeddedness vs. autonomy is more strongly linked to economic development, while harmony vs. mastery hardly so. One of the most recent contributions that reconciles the two camps is the work by Beugelsdijk and Welzel (2018), who synthesized Inglehart's and Hofstede's approaches and explained the variation in their three value dimensions not only by economic development but also by various factors of precolonial geography and colonial history. Additionally, a study by Bonikowski (2010) claimed to also be middle ground; however, given his distinctive approach, I would categorize his study in the next group.

Diffusion Theories

The defining characteristic of diffusion theories is that they do not regard countries as completely independent units of analysis. They do not necessarily reject the importance of economic development, nor that of cultural heritage; however, they suppose that cultural elements also diffuse across cultures. World polity (society) theories (Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer et al. 1997) suggest that certain institutions and cultural practices are transmitted across cultural borders, if they are perceived by the elites of the adopting countries as role models of success that need to be imported for society's own good. This happens mainly through international organizations, which are carriers of these cultural scripts and oblige participating countries to internalize them. Their arguments remain mostly at the level of institutions, however. Bonikowski (2010) developed this idea further and argued that countries engaged in more intense cross-country interactions would be more likely to diffuse their values and therefore converge culturally. He argued that cultural diffusion operates through three different channels: (1) institutional contact, which includes three types of interactions: economic (trade and investment), political (intergovernmental organizations [IGOs]), and social (civil society); (2) social network diffusion, which includes micro-level interactions such as migration, tourism, and social media; and (3) cultural production and consumption (media imperialism theories), which supposes borrowing of culture through exposure to foreign cultural products.

In the context of the EU, I employ two other concepts that can explain the diffusion of values from the EU institution to member states and other countries: the EU as a value entrepreneur (Gerhards 2008; 2010; Gerhards and Lengfeld 2006; Gerhards, Schafer, and Kampfer 2009) and Normative Power Europe (Manners 2002). These two theoretical approaches assume that the EU projects itself as a community of values, which it aims to instill within its member states in the first case and exports to other countries as a soft power tool in international relationships in the second case. In this context, I also refer to the concept of "Europe as a network of transnational attachment" developed by Deutschmann et al. (2018). Within that framework, it becomes evident that the structure of transnational attachment is disproportional, and a few large Western European countries receive most of the attachment from the rest of the EU countries. This also suggests that the cultural transmission is not even but directed from the culturally attractive Western European countries to these not

considered cultural vanguards. In the contrary position are so-called hybridization theories, which argue that in the realm of culture, borrowing operates in both directions or even more strongly from the less developed to the more developed countries (Holton 2000; Kraidy 2002; Pieterse 1994).

In the first paper, I argue that some associations between historical background and cultural similarity might be due to cultural diffusion, while in the second, I speculate that the cultural convergence among EU members is at least partly due to the diffusion of values from the EU institutions and among the member states. In the third paper, I operationalize diffusion in several different ways. Firstly, I use the index of globalization as well as its components—economic, political, and social—as I expect countries that are more open to globalization would also be more likely to embrace liberal values. Second, I use geographic distance from Brussels (both hosting the most important EU institutions and also located centrally in northwestern Europe) and bordering another EU state as indicators of diffusion potential, as closer geographic location to the EU would ease diffusion. Furthermore, I test the legal diffusion from the EU by the degree of incorporation of the accumulated legislation by the EU known as *acquis communautaire*. Lastly, following world polity theory, I compute a variable which denotes the diffusion potential through shared membership in IGOs with other countries adjusted by their emphasis on emancipative values.

Other Theories

These three umbrella theories were the main focus in my analysis, as they were most relevant for my guiding research questions. However, there are also other theories explaining value differences that deserve mentioning. A central place should be given especially to the importance of climate, as it may constitute the only truly exogenous cause of differences in culture that precede every other subsequent correlate of culture discussed in this dissertation (Welzel 2013). Welzel (2013) argued that specific climatic conditions that include three components—cold winters, continuous rainfalls throughout the year, and navigable waterways—typical for northwestern Europe are the initial conditions that triggered the economic and cultural transformations in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The reason is that these climatic conditions allow autonomous farming in contrast to drier and hotter areas, where

central irrigation systems require more exploitative hierarchical social organization. This theory also relates to more broad theoretical approaches, such as ecological or subsistence theories, which focus on the different means our ancestors had for securing their subsistence as consequential for the cultural development of populations (Talhelm and Oishi 2019; Talhelm et al. 2014). Furthermore, colder climate is also associated with lower prevalence of contagious diseases which increases existential security and decreases child mortality thus allowing women to have fewer children and marry later in their life (Welzel 2013). These demographic changes might be of crucial importance for female emancipation, increased human capital and subsequent technological advancement in the West (Welzel 2013).

The climatic perspective was considered in Paper 1, as the effect of climate might have long lasting consequences for the cultural diversity in Europe. I operationalized the concept with the use of the same index Welzel (2013) used for his analysis, namely the Cool Water Index (CWI). I experimented with other data such as average, minimum, and maximum temperatures, which were also associated with cultural differences but to a substantially smaller degree than CWI. In Papers 2 and 3, I focus on more recent cultural changes, and I consider the climatic difference to not play any substantial role, though this may not be decisively excluded as a possibility. In an exploratory analysis conducted for Paper 3, I discovered that CWI is also associated—though not strongly—with change in emancipative values since the early 1990s. This could either be a spurious association, or it could indicate that climate continues to affect societies' trajectories of cultural development. I did not include climate in the final model because the association was not as strong as those of the other factors and because I preferred to focus on more recent factors, which I can relate to a coherent theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the question of whether some cultural and psychological differences are linked to genetics in a so-called culture-gene coevolution framework is controversial, but it is gaining credibility (Chudek and Henrich 2011; Fischer, Lee, and Verzijden 2018; Inglehart et al. 2014; Laland, Odling-Smee, and Myles 2010; Minkov and Bond 2000; 2015; Minkov, Welzel, and Bond 2016; Way and Lieberman 2010). There are important ethical considerations in this line of research, as findings for biological predispositions of cultural differences could feed essentialist interpretations of culture. However, as our understanding of genetics advances rapidly over time, it would seem

unreasonable not to apply this knowledge to the cross-cultural field due to ideological dogmatism. The above authors have focused primarily on the prevalence of genes related to neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine between different populations and their relation to individualism–collectivism and psychological outcomes, such as neuroticism. Another reason why genetic differences may be associated with cultural differences is that populations that have been geographically separated for longer durations are likely to be more distant genetically and also to differentiate culturally. This is not due to specific genetic traits but because genetic differences are indicative of geographical barriers to the diffusion of culture between populations (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2009). In my explorative analysis for Paper 1, I tested the association between some genetic variations used by Minkov and Bond (2000; 2015) and found that there is a strong correlation; however, I did not include them in the final model due to too many missing cases. Similarly, the data on cultural distances by Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza (1994), used by Spolaore and Wacziarg (2009) only include several European populations.

As mentioned, climatic and genetic differences are often combined in a coherent theoretical framework of gene-culture coevolution. Thereby, climatic conditions interplay with culture in natural selection, which over time brings to the front genetic traits that are culturally desirable because they offer survival advantages. Both climate and genes are relatively fixed, and thus they would lend credibility to pluralistic theories. The nature of these two factors is, however, not related to the historical background and cultural legacies like the other comprising elements of the pluralistic theories.

Cultural Differences vs. Cultural Change

The above theories can be used to explain both cultural differences and cultural change, even if that seems counterintuitive in some cases. How can time-constant factors contribute to cultural change? The whole logic of using country-fixed-effects regression is that any sources of endogeneity not changing over time are controlled for because they are fixed within the units of analysis (countries). Therefore, one may expect that any change in values would be a result of factors that also change over time, such as economic growth, spatial diffusion, democratization, or even change in the religious

composition of countries or level of religiosity. However, in each of my three papers, I argue that time-constant factors such as predominant religion, spoken language, and EU membership can also result in continuous changes in culture. These factors may set countries on different trajectories of development, or they can serve as a source of identity that leads to different patterns of interactions and moderate value diffusion.

Theoretical Contribution of this Dissertation

This dissertation speaks to the grand and well-established theories of culture described above. The relatively modest theoretical contribution I make in each paper lies in synthesizing aspects from different frameworks. In Paper 1, I outline the multiple mechanisms that may link different factors to cultural distances. Most of these have been considered and tested in isolation, but I present a more comprehensive framework, which underlines what may influence the associations between factors and culture. Another intention in that theoretical framework was to introduce the concept of cultural diffusion as a possible mediator between common cultural heritage and cultural similarities. The second paper also operates within well-established theories of cultural diffusion, such as world-polity theory, but it links them to a particular geographic region and process—that of European integration. This paper also brings together a plethora of literature on normative and institutional diffusion of the EU into a more comprehensive framework of cultural value diffusion in the context of EU integration. In this paper, I already imply the significance of identity as a moderator of cultural diffusion, but Paper 3 focuses extensively on the dividing role of religious (civilizational) identities. There I argue that identity is indeed the crucial factor that explains value polarization in Europe; thus, I elaborate on the mechanism that may stand behind the association between cultural background and cultural differences. Additionally, I highlight two mechanisms that could prove most influential in contemporary cultural changes, namely individual and media freedom. Recent technological advancement and media innovations offer tools for intentional manipulation, which may prove effective in changing public attitudes and even values.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Sources

I begin this section by describing my data. I also discuss the rationale of choosing these data over the alternative sources. The main data source on cultural values in my dissertation is the WVS, which in Papers 2 and 3 is complemented with data from the EVS in order to increase country–year coverage. The WVS is the largest non-commercial, cross-national, time series survey of human values ever executed. It consists of high-quality nationally representative data from about 100 countries around the world, covering about 90% of the global population and practically 100% of Europe’s population. The surveys began in 1981 with a geographical coverage limited mostly to Western societies, but after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, it expanded to the whole European continent and most corners of the world in subsequent waves. Surveys were initially conducted at 9-year intervals, but after 1990, they have been conducted in 5-year intervals. Thus far, six waves of WVS data have been conducted, and the seventh wave is currently underway (the full release is expected by the end of 2019).

For every wave, the initial questionnaire is developed in English by an international team of social scientists. The questionnaire is then translated to the national language(s) in each country and, in some cases, also back-translated to English to ensure accuracy of the translation. Pre-tests are also carried out in order to identify problematic translations. Most of the questions are retained in each wave to allow comparisons over time, but some questions are dropped in subsequent survey waves due to limited value or comparability. As a rule, the sample size in each country is no smaller than 1200 individuals, though this varies between approximately 1000 and 3000 depending on the population size of the country and available funds. Samples are representative of the countries’ residential populations aged 18 and above. Data are usually collected through face-to-face interviews on paper or digitally, unless another method of data collection is requested by the country’s investigators and approved by the WVS Association’s Executive Committee. Phone interviews, for example, might be carried out in more remote areas of a country. The surveys are conducted in each country by professional organizations, coordinated by a principle investigator and in

accordance with the rules and guidelines set by the Scientific Advisory Committee. More details and documentation can be found at the WVS website: www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

The WVS originates in the first wave of EVS surveys conducted in the early 1980s but then separated from the EVS and began to conduct its own waves of surveys starting in 1989. Both the EVS and WVS count the initial wave of surveys in 1981-83 as their first wave. In 2017, the seventh wave of the WVS was carried out again in collaboration with the EVS in most of the European countries. The EVS follows a similar methodology of sampling and data collection, and most of the questions overlap with the WVS (<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/evs-methodology/>), which makes it possible to combine them for research concerning the core questions in both surveys. This significantly increases the coverage of the data to practically all European countries with the exception of micro-states (e.g., Liechtenstein, San Marino, Vatican State). Aside from Andorra, Kazakhstan, and Kosovo, all European countries have been surveyed at least twice, which allows for tracking changes over time. The total number of country-year observations since 1981 is 200, of which 184 occurred after 1989 (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, the exact survey year varies from country to country, and therefore for Papers 2 and 3, I linearly interpolated the data in order to increase precision and prevent countries from dropping from the sample because they were surveyed a year or two earlier or later than the other countries.

The most viable alternative data source on values would have been the ESS, which is also a high-quality nationally representative dataset covering most of the European countries. I began my cross-sectional analysis for Paper 1 using ESS data. However, I became increasingly convinced of the higher utility of the combined EVS/WVS data. The main reasons are that the ESS has surveyed significantly fewer European countries and none of the Central Asian post-Soviet countries and the availability of time series data are more limited compared to the EVS/WVS (see https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/country_index.html). The ESS is conducted every other year, which seems like an advantage; but the survey only began in 2002, and values require longer spans of time to change. The advantage of the ESS is that the last survey was conducted in 2016 (the 2018 data are still not released), which is more recently than the last EVS/WVS data collected from 2011 to 2014 (data

from the seventh wave of the WVS are still not fully released). Only very few questions from the ESS overlap entirely with the EVS/WVS though, which made using the ESS a limiting factor.

Table 1. Data Availability

Country	AL	AN	AZ	AT	AM	BE	BO	BG	BR	CR	CY	CZ	DK	ES	FI	FR	GE	GR	HU	IC	IR	IT	LA	LT	LU	MA	MD	MN	ND	NO	PL	PT	RO	RU	SE	SL	SO	SP	SW	SZ	TU	UR	MA	GB	NI	KO	Row total					
1981						1							1		1	1		1				1	1															1				1	1		11							
1982						0							0		0	0		0		1		0	0																	0	1		0	0		3						
1983						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0				1													0	0		0	0		1						
1984						0							0		0	0		0		0		1	0																	0	0		0	0		1						
1985						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0																	0	0		0	0		0						
1986						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0																	0	0		0	0		0						
1987						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0																	0	0		0	0		0						
1988						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0																	0	0		0	0		0						
1989						0							0		0	0		0		0		0	0																	0	0		0	0		2						
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2014				0		0			0	0			0	0	0	0		0		0		0	0	0	0																							0	0		1	
Column total	3	1	2	3	3	4	2	5	5	3	3	4	4	5	6	5	4	7	2	6	4	4	5	4	4	2	4	4	3	6	5	6	2	6	6	3	5	6	8	7	4	6	5	3	6	4	1	200				

Note: green (0) = interpolated data; blue (1) = survey data.

I collected data from various other sources and included them in the analyses as independent or control variables. I describe these data at the appropriate sections in each paper. For Papers 1 and 3, I considered many alternative data sources, and ultimately I chose those that had the fewest number of missing cases and were conceptually most closely related to the factor of interest. For Papers 1 and 2, I performed dyadic regression analysis, which required considerable restructuring of the data and posed some challenges when merging data from different sources due to differences in country coding and the complexity of dyadic data, where each row of data is identifiable by two ID variables, Country 1 and Country 2. Many variables came in dyadic form, for example, geographic distance between countries or number of shared intergovernmental organization memberships per dyad. Other continuous variables had to be computed as the absolute difference between the two countries in

the dyad. Binary or categorical data had to be computed in different ways: either denoting that a dyad is the same in a certain category or that it is different.

Here I should also clarify that throughout this dissertation I use the terms ‘society’, ‘nation’ and ‘country’ somewhat interchangeably, although they are not identical. I do that mainly to avoid repetition. In the interest of precision, I should refer to my units of analysis as countries (or country-populations more precisely), because nearly all my data are on the country level. More precisely, the EVS and WVS survey all residents of the country, regardless of their nationality or citizenship. Only a few countries were surveyed separately, for example Great Britain and Northern Ireland, East and West Germany, and Greek and Turkish Cyprus. In my analyses, I included Great Britain and Northern Ireland as separate cases, as the data were readily available this way. Germany was analyzed as a unified country. For Cyprus, I analyzed only the Greek surveys due to very limited data on the Turkish part of the country.

Sample

Next, I define the scale of my investigation. Given my research problem in relation to the restructuring of the post-Communist space and the geostrategic competition between the EU and the Eurasian Union, I intend to focus on the widest possible definition of Europe, which includes also countries that are party in Europe, such as Turkey and Russia, and other central Asian countries that were part of the Soviet Union. Such a wide definition is disputable, and it would be more precise to define my sample as “Europe and the post-Soviet space”; however, for convenience, I refer to my sample as Europe throughout my dissertation. The boundaries of Europe to the east are not clearly defined anyway, and they differ from case to case. Strictly geographically speaking, Europe ends with the Ural and Caucasian mountains, but different organizations adhere to their own definitions.

I had four main reasons for including all post-Soviet republics: (1) to maximize the dataset and thus the power and generalizability of the results, (2) because these countries have been exposed to European culture by being included in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for a few centuries, (3) because they have a similar starting position as the rest of the former communist societies in the early 1990s, and (4) because they participate or have the potential to be part of the Eurasian integration

project, which is the focus of my third paper. The inclusion of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia in the analysis is more easily justified. On the official website of the EU, these three countries are classified as other European countries (https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries_en#other_european_countries); are also members of the Council of Europe, which consists only of European countries as full members (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states>); are surveyed by the EVS; and participate in the Eurovision Song Contest and the European Cup (the latter alongside Kazakhstan). Membership in these organizations is not a clear indicator though, because Israel also participates in the ESS, European Cup, and Eurovision (also Australia), without this implying a European status. Given the ambiguous boundaries of the continent and the nature of my research question, I believe it is not unreasonable to include the post-Soviet space in my sample.

Research Strategy

In this section, I briefly explain the analytical strategy of my papers and their relationship to the overarching research problem. The goal of this dissertation is to explore the patterns in cultural differences in Europe both cross-sectionally and over time. The three papers build on each other in that respect. In Paper 1, I begin by disentangling the predictors of cultural distances between the European countries, and in Papers 2 and 3, the focus is on examining and explaining the change in these distances over the past few decades.

To explain the differences and similarities between the cultures of European countries, I use a dyadic approach in Paper 1 (Kenny, Kashy, and Cook 2006). Although I am not aware of the use of this method in the relevant literature aside from Bonikowski (2010), I believe it is suitable for my research question because it offers some important advantages over conventional regression methods. First of all, it is more parsimonious because it allows for operationalizing cultural distance with just one dependent variable. The alternative would have been to model each of the value constructs separately, which would not only require more space but also would not provide a unified answer to the question about total cultural differences. Secondly, the dyadic approach offers more flexibility with regard to the type of explanatory variables one can include in the model. Geographical distance, for example, is one of the factors that

previous research has used to define cultural clusters. One could, in principle, use dummy variables for different geographic regions, but this would be less precise, and it requires *a priori* definition of geographic regions assumed to be culturally similar. Another possibility is to do a spatial regression analysis, which can control for spatial autocorrelation; however, the interpretation of the results is much less intuitive. Instead, I use geographic distance between pairs of countries, which is a more precise and parsimonious way to quantify any spatial dependence in values. Similarly, I hypothesized that linguistic similarities would be related to cultural similarities, which could be tested in dyadic regression; however, I had no hypothesis about certain language families having stronger or weaker emphasis on specific values.

I begin the exploration of the changes in cultural distances over time with the dyadic approach. My goal was to find out whether the cultural distances between the European countries have been increasing or decreasing since the beginning of the 1990s. The simple finding was that there was not any convergence or divergence overall in Europe; however, the explorative analysis revealed clear patterns of convergence and divergence along two lines: EU membership and religion. Given the scale of each of these two factors, I decided to deal with each of them in two separate papers. I continued using the dyadic approach in Paper 2 as I wanted to study whether there was a narrowing of cultural gaps among EU member states. I did this using country-fixed effects (Alison 2009), where I estimated the change in the distance between different groups of countries based on their EU membership status. Another pattern also became evident in that paper; there is not only convergence among countries participating in the EU integration but also divergence between these countries and those remaining outside of the process. This divergence and the association between religion and cultural change became the focus of the third paper.

In Paper 3, I began with depicting the pattern of polarization in Europe using visualization tools, namely plots and graphs. My next goal was to explain what drove this value polarization. The dyadic approach could still be applicable but perhaps not as necessary as in the first two papers. The reason is that I focused on only one value dimension and that the pattern of divergence, that is, the increase and decrease in emancipative values among different groups of countries, was much simpler. Therefore, I decided to use conventional regressions because by finding out what factors explain the change in emancipative values (both increasing and decreasing) it

would be straightforward to conclude what explains the polarization of values. The challenge with national-level data is of course the limited number of cases, while the number of potential predictors could be very large. The solution I applied was to select a more manageable number of the most important predictors using a supervised machine learning technique called random forests (Breiman 2001). This method ranks a large number of predictors by their explanatory power, taking into account collinearity, interaction effects, and nonlinearity. Finally, I related the most important variables to each other in a plausible causal network, demonstrating the associations between the variables using simple linear regressions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Comparisons and Stereotyping

The overarching goal of cross-cultural research is to understand cultural differences across populations. This has the potential to improve communication between cultures as it allows us to step outside of our own cultural frames and realize that other societies may share different values, beliefs, and traditions, on which they base their institutions, policies, and behavior (Schwartz 2006). This research field is of relevance for other scientific disciplines and has practical implications for politics, business, the travel industry, diplomacy, etc. Despite the potential benefits this field of research brings, there are also certain potential problems that should also be discussed. One of the dangers is that it may reinforce cultural stereotypes. Quantitative cultural research is engaged in measuring societal values, commonly by using nationally representative surveys. Consequently, the findings from such surveys can be generalized as applicable to the whole population of the country, and differences between nations can be compared with a certain degree of statistical confidence. Many researchers also classify and group countries based on their differences and similarities, as I argue in my first paper, often using arbitrary bases for clustering. This can easily feed stereotypical images of certain countries and groups of countries and justify setting boundaries between “us” and “them.”

Emphasizing cultural differences, pointing to their deep historical roots, and claiming that they are irreconcilable and the utmost source of conflicts in the post-Cold War world—found in the clash of civilizations thesis (Huntington 1996)—may exacerbate prejudices. Some of these propositions can also have empirical evidence. A study by Norris and Inglehart (2002), for example, found a large and further widening gap in the public opinion between Western and Muslim societies regarding issues of gender equality and sexual liberalism. To exemplify, according to data from WVS from 2001, 99.9% of respondents in Egypt reported that homosexuality is never justifiable (answering 1 on a 10-point scale), and 83.4% believed that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.” In contrast, 59% of those in Sweden reported that homosexuality is always justifiable (answering 10 on a 10-point scale), and only 2% shared the view that men should have more rights to jobs (data from WVS, 2011). Should researchers report such “dangerous” findings that can foster stereotypes of certain cultures? If Middle Eastern culture is already stigmatized as oppressive of women and homophobic, then survey research can be used as “hard facts” that support such essentialist beliefs. This poses an important ethical question or perhaps a clash of two opposing aspects of research ethics. From one point of view, researchers are obliged to conduct independent research guided by the principles of integrity, objectivity, and impartiality. From another, they also need to consider the societal consequences of their research.

To deny that certain cultural differences between populations exist and that they matter to individuals and societies, however, would be nonsensical and unethical. What researchers need to point out more often is that cultural values apply at the aggregate, national level and not the individual. This is an important distinction. Making inferences about individuals from a group-level analysis is a type of ecological fallacy. If one population emphasizes some cultural characteristics (e.g., high levels of religiosity) more than another, it does not mean that every single individual in the first society is more religious than any other member of the other society. Welzel (2013), for example, compared the distribution of emancipative values between Sweden and Iraq, which respectively scored the highest and lowest in the world, and the graph showed that a small portion of the populations overlap. That is, some Swedes emphasize emancipative values to a lesser degree than some Iraqis—even if that is a very small share. What such national scores measure is the general tendency in a population, but the value diversity among individuals within societies is large. A remedy against the

dangers of stereotyping would be to underline the difference in the levels of analysis and emphasize that one cannot make conclusions about individuals based on the cultural characteristics of the society they belong to.

Moreover, many of the national stereotypes are subjective perceptions with questionable empirical backing and may therefore be refuted using survey research and statistical evidence. For example, most European nations express a view that Greeks are the “laziest” nationality in Europe (*Economist*, 2012). Those stereotypes are largely at odds with national statistics of average working hours, which show that Greeks have the longest workweek in Europe—on average 7 hours more than Germans, who are unanimously rated as the hardest working. Some may continue arguing that it is a matter of efficiency and that Greeks do not work as hard as Germans, but this is a concept that can also be refuted by research in labor economics. Survey data from the EVS (2015) also show that by some indicators, Greeks have a stronger work ethic than Germans. This can be explained by post-materialism theory, which states that with higher economic development, people begin to deemphasize hard work and material gains and instead focus more on their subjective wellbeing (Inglehart 1997). What might explain this widespread stereotype about the work ethic of Greeks and Germans among the European public could be related to another cultural characteristic of societies—monochronic vs. polychronic cultures (Hall 1966). In monochronic cultures such as Germany, work tasks are usually performed sequentially (one at a time), while polychronic cultures, which Greece represents, are more likely to multitask, which may seem chaotic and inefficient to monochronic cultures. Whether a culture is mono- or polychronic speaks little about the effort, duration, or attitudes towards work among their populations that adjectives such as lazy and hardworking imply. Unless they possess exceptional intuition and an ability to distance themselves from the object of their research, most people’s evaluation of culture would inevitably be biased by the lenses of their own culture and personal experiences and prejudices. This exemplifies how cross-cultural research can be beneficial for breaking some cultural stereotypes instead of reinforcing them. In other cases, if a culture is for example intolerant, hiding this would be against the principles of science. It is the duty of researchers, media, policymakers, and the public to use research findings responsibly.

Cultural Relativism vs. Universalism

The disagreement between cultural relativism and universalism is not so much about whether cultural differences exist but about how we normatively evaluate those differences. In other words, are all cultures created equal? Even though this question is rarely discussed directly, the answers can be easily inferred, and they differ from one research framework to another. Geert Hofstede (1991) underlined that each culture has its comparative advantages and disadvantages regarding the international division of labor. For Hofstede and many others, cultures are established mechanisms to adapt and cope with the specific circumstances and challenges each society faces, be they natural (e.g., cold climate, long drought periods, prevalence of infectious diseases) or social (e.g., frequent foreign invasions, high population density). For that reason, culture cannot be good or bad; it is the way society has learned to survive and thrive.

Contrary to that view, from a functional-evolutionary perspective, one can infer that some cultural characteristics were useful in the past, but since the world has changed and continues changing with increasing pace, they may now be outdated (Chirot 2001). Furthermore, one often adds the negative connotation to that, describing such seemingly dysfunctional values as “backward.” Thus, nations that are not able to adapt to the new realities and do not have a competitive edge in the global economy may suffer. Some authors normatively evaluate the advantages of certain cultural traits. For example, Welzel (2013) stressed that emancipative values offer the most conducive environment for democratic development and are linked with various positive social outcomes, such as quality of governance, social trust, civil engagement, general wellbeing, and even protection of the environment (Welzel 2010; 2013). Because of these benign qualities, these values are described as normatively desirable (Welzel 2013), especially in Western publics.

Emancipative values and their predecessors, self-expression values, are empirically linked to actual levels of democratic performance in numerous studies, both cross-sectional and longitudinal (Brunkert et al. 2018; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel and Dalton 2017; Welzel et al. 2003). Schwartz (2006) also underlined the conceptual overlap between Welzel’s emancipative values and his autonomy–embeddedness and hierarchy–egalitarianism, concluding the same causal links to democracy. While the theoretical and empirical evidence is solid and hardly challenged, what does it mean for our perceptions of the cultural differences? Does it create and reinforce an image

of cultural superiority of the West, where these values are more prevalent, over a less developed and “backward” rest of the world? Certain cultural elements are normatively evaluated not only by researchers but also by politicians, organizations, and the public at large (Hofstede et al. 2010). Freedom, equality, gender equality, and tolerance of diversity are examples of such values almost universally accepted as highly desirable that are embedded in many national constitutions and legislations as well as those of international organizations such as the United Nations and EU. Many cultural practices are also in violation of international human and animal rights, thus facing pressure to change. From that perspective, honor killing, female genital mutilation, and cruelty to animals for entertainment or rituals can hardly be defended by even wide standards of cultural neutrality. However, they can be defended through the logic of the society in which they exist. An isolated Papua New Guinean tribe, for example, would explain that cannibalism makes sense because they have very little food, thus their survival has priority over any sort of notions of sacredness of the human body. A hundred years ago, homosexuality was illegal in nearly all countries around the globe (same-sex sexual activity was decriminalized in Norway only in 1972, though it was considered a so-called “sleeping law” before that), while in a hundred years from now, eating meat might be judged as barbaric. Our standards of morality are not absolute; they change from society to society and from one historical period to another.

Implicitly in my first two papers and explicitly in the third paper, I restrain from any normative evaluation of culture, although this was not an easy task given the normative framework of the EU. While the empirical evidence on the positive effects of emancipative values—including individualistic and egalitarian—seem convincing, this may not be a full account of their cultural associations. There might be other cultural aspects that slip the attention of researchers who are more likely to work in Western research institutions. Individualism, for example, is closely linked with low fertility rates and long life expectancy, which may have dire consequences on advanced economies with aging populations. Furthermore, we know that values change, but we may need a better understanding of the psychological consequences of rapid cultural change, including relationships between generations and maintaining societal cohesion. Accelerated cultural change may lead to a “cultural backlash” within societies where a part of the population feels left behind by the process, and their growing resentment towards liberal elites surfaces in support for populist parties (Norris and Inglehart 2018). Furthermore, enforced cultural change may also provoke a backlash

in whole societies by triggering defensive mechanisms in nations that perceive foreign cultural influence as an existential threat, as I argue in Paper 3.

SUMMARY OF THE PAPERS

Paper 1: Sources of Societal Value Similarities across Europe: Evidence from Dyadic Models

Cross-cultural studies have found that various socioeconomic and historical background indicators predict cultural differences; however, a systematic investigation on what makes societal cultures similar and different has not yet been performed. Moreover, rich data on European countries are available, but comparative cross-cultural studies have rarely been conducted specifically on Europe. This paper investigates the sources of cultural differences and similarities in Europe primarily by comparing the predictive power of two dominant theoretical approaches, modernization and culturalist theories. I first disentangle the factors of historical background and outline the variety of possible explanators of value similarities, considering various causal and spurious mechanisms leading to associations.

Next, I test the importance of these predictors on a cumulative cultural value distance score between pairs of countries using dyadic data on 40 European countries from the WVS. Multiple factors are associated with cultural similarities: political-institutional traditions, religion, language, imperial legacies, socio-economic development, geographical distance, climatic differences, and European integration. Overall, three indicators of socio-economic development have about equal explanatory power as do four indicators of the historical background of societies, which provides support of both modernization and culturalist theories. The substantial overlap among all predictors, however, diminishes the absolute importance of any of the explanatory factors. The single most powerful predictor of cultural distances is the former Iron Curtain, with 32% explained variance, followed by religion, with 30%. The multiple overlapping determinants of value differences challenges the precision of grouping national cultures into cultural zones based on single formative factors. Instead, I conclude that the cultural diversity of Europe is a result of multidimensional explanatory structure, which disallows reductive classifications.

Paper 2: United in Diversity? The Convergence of Cultural Values among EU Member States and Candidates

The cultural diversity of the EU has increased significantly with recent expansions to the east. At the same time, the EU claims to be a “community of values,” for which shared principles such as freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, and tolerance are increasingly necessary to strengthen cohesion and provide democratic legitimacy. Surprisingly, no study until now has focused on finding out whether the EU has been successful in bringing European nations closer in terms of core cultural values. I suggest three mechanisms which could have allowed such cultural convergence. First, cultural values that are embedded in the EU legislation may trickle down vertically from the institutions of the EU to the populations of the member states and candidates. Second, following hybridization theory, values may diffuse horizontally through intensified interactions on the elite and population levels, and these interactions are enabled by the EU, thus leading to homogenization of the cultures. Lastly, the EU enables access to a large market and redistributes some of the wealth to the poorer European regions; thus, following modernization theory, an equalization of the standards of living among the EU countries would also lead to cultural change in a common direction. By contrast, following the clash of civilizations thesis, differences in cultural identities may prevent value convergence across countries, and growing awareness of such differences can even increase the pre-existing value differences. Therefore, I hypothesize that cultural distances between the EU members and countries remaining outside of the integration process may grow larger over time.

To test these hypotheses, I compare distances in emancipative and secular values across pairs of countries using combined repeated cross-sectional data from the EVS and WVS collected between 1992 and 2011. The cross-sectional analysis reveals that the longer a country has been part of the EU, the closer its values are to the EU founding countries, which in turn are the most homogenous. Investigating the pattern of change over time, it becomes evident that new member states experienced substantial cultural convergence with old member states after 1992, as did the current official candidates for EU membership between 2001 and 2008. Initial cultural distance to the core EU values appears irrelevant to becoming a member or an official candidate. However, the direction of change was fundamentally different for the countries that engaged in the EU integration process compared to those that did not. Since 1992, nations not

participating in the integration process have diverged substantially from the EU members, essentially leading to a cultural polarization of Europe. The analyses control for differences and change in economic development differences and therefore underline the importance of cultural diffusion as a mechanism leading to cultural change.

Paper 3: Clashing Values: Cultural and Geopolitical Transformations of Post-Cold War Europe

Europe has experienced a major geopolitical restructuring since the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. A dozen former communist states joined the EU and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), while most former Soviet republics remain outside and even in opposition to the process of EU integration. In this paper, I aim to investigate whether these geopolitical processes also coincided with a cultural transformation of Europe. Using nationally representative survey data from the EVS and WVS between 1990 and 2014, I assess the direction of change among European countries in terms of emancipative values, which indicate to what degree societies embrace freedom of choice and equality of opportunities.

The exploratory analysis reveals that the former Iron Curtain was an overestimated cultural boundary in Europe at the end of the Cold War, and it has even further faded away as the former communist states that joined the EU have converged culturally with the West. A new, and steeply growing, cultural gap has emerged between the current EU members and their neighbors in the East. In particular, the two competing geopolitical formations—the European and the Eurasian Unions—have diverged in their fundamental values in recent decades. Western European countries, led by the Protestant ones, have continued to increase their emphasis on emancipative values. On the other hand, most Orthodox countries retain about the same level of emancipative values as in the early 1990s, while nearly all Muslim countries have changed their values in the opposite direction of the West.

I speculate that the divergence could be explained by clashing supranational identities based on the religious traditions of societies, which determine the possibility of inclusion in Western political structures. Furthermore, I suggest that authoritarian

political actors in non-EU countries, particularly Russia, are using mass media to manipulate public opinion for achieving political and geostrategic interests, thus preventing the rise of emancipative values. I use a supervised machine learning algorithm called random forests to assess the relative importance of a large number of possible explanators of the value changes. This analysis supports the primary importance of religion, democracy, and access to free media as explanators of change in emancipative values from the early 1990s to 2014. The study contributes to the literature on cultural change and European integration by linking these processes to civilizational identities and geopolitical rivalry between competing regional integration projects in Eurasia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation aims to juxtapose two prominent approaches to explain cultural differences and change, namely universalist and pluralist theories. The findings from my first paper do not contradict the two major camps; instead, they offer a reconciliation of the two. When it comes to cultural differences in Europe, manifold predictors can be held accountable; Europe is so diverse because of its uneven level of economic development as much as because of its differences in the historical background and climate of the countries. This conclusion suggests that cultural differences may be overcome in the future to some extent if the differences in economic development between countries levels off.

My second and third papers bring about two other important factors, which combined can explain short-term cultural change in Europe: cultural diffusion and supranational identities. My longitudinal analysis concludes that EU membership and religion are the two most significant factors of cultural change in Europe in the last three decades. I link EU membership to diffusion theories as I suppose that the cultural convergence in the EU is a result of diffusion of values from the EU institutions to the populations of the member states as well as of the interactions among elites and people of the participating countries. I link the predominant religion of countries to their supranational (civilizational) identity, and I argue that this is the crucial factor for

orientation and acceptance in the Western political structures, which would allow the diffusion and growth of values important to the EU.

Additionally, I claim that authoritarianism and access to free media are the most important mechanisms that can explain value divergence in Europe, while socio-economic development is of secondary importance. This, however, does not necessarily mean that pluralist theories are superior to universalist theories. I should acknowledge that I analyze a rather short-term process of cultural change, which might be only a small fluctuation in a much larger modernization trend that follows development over centuries. Indeed, the emancipative drive of the West can be traced back at least to the sixteenth century, or even in the agricultural organization and family structures dating back to the Middle Ages (Welzel 2013). What this dissertation contributes is a demonstration that a more serious consideration of the role of religious identities, diffusion, and political and media actors is needed, at least if we are to understand the cultural transformation of Europe between 1990 and 2014. It would be, however, premature to reject the importance of socio-economic modernization. One needs to examine longer trends in order to make stronger conclusions in favor of either grand theoretical approach. I would rather suggest a revision of modernization theory that also includes these additional factors in the equation.

Given the ambitious scope of the project, there are some limitations that come along with it, which should be addressed in future research. As with most research, data limitations are of course an issue here as well. My goal was to investigate the cultural changes after the end of the Cold War until present; however, at the time of the investigation, most European countries were surveyed via WVS/EVS until 2008 and just 15 of them between 2008 and 2014. The patterns of cultural change along EU membership and religious affiliation are rather clear; however, they may refer only to a specific historical period. With the arrival of the Great Recession in 2008, the EU entered a period of continuous turmoil. Going through a financial crisis, sovereign debt crisis, refugee crisis, rise of anti-EU populist parties, and Brexit, the European project has been challenged. Therefore, I believe it is imperative to further investigate the processes of convergence and divergence in the context of EU integration. The interest in this topic was until recently surprisingly low. A few months after my second paper was published, a new study using ESS data from 2002 to 2016 investigated the same topic (van Houwelingen, Iedema, and Dekker 2018). The authors concluded that a

convergence in core political values within the EU could not be observed in that period. The upcoming EVS/WVS data from 2017 to 2018 need to be utilized to answer vital questions about the cultural development of the EU post 2008. An analysis from an ongoing collaboration with the authors of the above-mentioned study using a pre-release of the latest wave of EVS/WVS data (which includes only nine EU countries) revealed that for some dimensions, the convergence continued, but for others, there is marked divergence since 2008.

The second limitation comes naturally from the scope of the study. My focus has been on the big picture of cultural differences and change in Europe; therefore, with a few exceptions, I did not have the opportunity to zoom in on particular cases in more detail. All my conclusions are only probabilistic. For example, I find that, in general, official EU candidates converge swiftly with the Western European cultural blueprint. As I show in Paper 2, Turkey is a significant outlier from this pattern; however, I did not dwell on the reasons for this. I come back to this problem in the third paper, where I argue that the differences in identity also play a role, but I still do not explain developments in specific countries, with the exception of Russia, which appears to be a major player in the cultural development of Europe. Some Western countries also seem to be outliers from the mainstream development. Finland, for example, has surprisingly decreased its emphasis on emancipative values between 1990 and 2008, while Italy has significantly lagged behind the other older EU members. These might be interesting cases to investigate in more focused studies. Another major paradox that seems to contradict my findings on cultural convergence between the old and new member states is the democratic backlash in Hungary and Poland. This might be indicative of a completely different process from the one I have focused on in my study, and it would be fruitful to investigate if this development is more in line with the cultural backlash theory (Inglehart 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2018). On the other hand, the geopolitical confrontation between the West and Russia has escalated significantly since 2008, especially after the Maidan revolution in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Since then, Russia has more clearly turned in a conservative direction, which may have deepened the value polarization of Europe, depicted in the third paper.

Furthermore, related to the scope, I focus only on national culture, my rationale for which I explained earlier in this introductory chapter. Some within-country differences

would still be meaningful and even important to investigate. There is growing interest in within-country polarization in relation to cultural backlash theory, which argues that as a result of rapid cultural change, some parts of the population, mostly older and less educated ones, feel left behind and like strangers in their own land, thus transforming their feeling of estrangement into support for authoritarian populist parties (Inglehart 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2018). Therefore, a fruitful line of research would be to investigate to what extent societies change their values as a whole or what new cleavages emerge along lines of education, social class, urban and rural residents, and age cohorts. No less interesting would be to investigate the process of the cultural adaptation of migrants (e.g., Wimmer and Soehl 2014). European nations have become significantly diverse in recent decades, whereby cultural gaps between locals and immigrants may fuel anti-migrant sentiments and support for populist parties.

Lastly, as in almost all social research without experimental designs, which for obvious reasons were impossible in this case, the issue of causality casts its shadow on this dissertation as well. The first paper is especially inconclusive when it comes to causal relationships. The goal there was to outline multiple possible mechanisms that may link different factors to cultural distances, but the analysis was entirely correlational. Investigating the causal relationship of historical processes is an extremely challenging task given not only the scarcity of historical data but also the complex interplay between the different factors and outcomes. Large research teams, including various social and natural scientists, need to collaborate in order to dig into the causal relationships that led to the current cultural differences. The second and third papers were somewhat more conclusive when it came to the drivers of changes in values in the last three decades. Still, a significant amount of work can be done to further test the causal relationships I propose in the third paper. My hope is that with this dissertation I have made a small dent in our understanding of cultural differences and change, at least in the case of Europe. I have utilized volumes of work by previous researchers, but I anticipate many more volumes to follow up in order to disentangle the full story.

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