

META-LEVEL COLLECTIVISM IN ESTONIA AND FINLAND

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Abstract. During recent years, a fascinating question has appeared at the crossroads of data and theory in the study of individualism and collectivism: Could it really be that Estonians, in a number of ways so close to the relatively individualistic Finns, are in fact the embodiments of conservative collectivism, as it has been implied in prominent cross-cultural writings (e.g., Schwartz 1994)? This study strove to find an answer to this question with a somewhat unorthodox method. First, Estonian, Finnish, and Russian (residing in Estonia) respondents answered to the Collectivism Scale (Realo and Allik 1999) items, getting scores on collectivism. The results showed no significant differences in the general collectivism scores for the Estonian and Finnish respondents and a remarkably and significantly higher collectivism score for the Russian sample. After that, the participants were asked to complete the Meta-Collectivism Scale by ranking their own and nine other nations along ten collectivistic statements. Among ten target nations, the Estonians were ranked rather low on collectivism – judges from three nations placed the Estonians on the seventh position between the Russians (the fourth position) and Finns (the tenth position). Thus, the results of the present study suggest abandoning the idea of Estonia as a landmark of collectivism.

Meta-level collectivism in Estonia and Finland

The theory of individualism and collectivism, or more expressly its numerous derivations, has been in the spotlight of the social sciences for a long and lasting

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period. Stemming from Hofstede's (1980) classical study of cultural factors, where the dimension of individualism-collectivism was revealed, there has been a constant flow of articles, some dealing mainly with elaborating the concept itself, some trying to find connections between the concept and various social phenomena. Harry C. Triandis with his co-workers has been one of the major contributors to this subject, introducing the terms *individualism* and *collectivism* to the household terminology of cross-cultural and social psychology (see Triandis 1995, for overview). Though criticized for its vagueness, the "loosely defined construct" (Fijneman, Willemsen and Poortinga 1996) seems to embody a number of universally accepted characteristics. The overview articles tend to characterize collectivistic cultures with key elements such as intimacy towards friends and co-workers (revealing personal information, for instance), social support and low crime rates, and individualistic cultures with good skills for superficial interactions (especially with peers), high divorce rates and loneliness (Triandis 1990, 1995).

While Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991) dealt exclusively with differences between national cultures, defining individualism-collectivism as one of the basic dimensions of cultural variation, later research has studied the constructs also at the individual level (see Triandis 1995). Furthermore, Triandis and his co-workers (Triandis et al. 1993) have suggested that cultures are not "monolithically collectivist" (or "individualist") and that the tendencies towards individualism and collectivism may vary substantially within a culture. Frequently, both individualistic and collectivistic inclinations are applied according to the target group (e.g., Hui 1984, 1988, Hui and Yee 1994) or the particular type of social relations towards which a person's behavior is directed (e.g., Allik and Realo 1996, Realo et al. 1997). According to Realo et al. (1997), for instance, collectivism is seen as a superior concept encompassing three hierarchically related, but relatively independent subtypes according to the nature of social relations concerned – family, peers, and society. The general, higher-order factor of collectivism that is likely to influence all kinds of collectivism has been found to be related with two relatively stable personality traits – closedness (as opposite to openness) and agreeableness (Realo et al. 1997). Also, the nature of self-construal (independent vs. interdependent, different vs. same) based on Markus and Kitayama's (1991) work, has provided ground for distinguishing between different species of individualism and collectivism. Correspondingly, the most important dimensions of individualism and collectivism, as found by Triandis (1993, 1995, 1996, Triandis and Gelfand 1998), are horizontal and vertical.

Despite the seemingly unanimous recognition among the researchers that individualism and collectivism, though closely related, are distinguishable and relatively independent constructs coexisting in different cultures, the dichotomous approach to the concept introduced by Hofstede (1980) is still frequently used for categorizing cultures into two major groups – countries where mostly individualistic values, norms and behaviors dominate as opposed to the countries where collectivistic tendencies are usually put into practice. As a rule, ever since

Hofstede's momentous work, the USA has been considered to be the clearest case of individualism with all other English-speaking countries ranking alongside, whereas Asian, African, Latin-American and East-European countries have proved to be prevalently collectivistic (see Triandis 1995, for example). A modern re-examination of Hofstede's study by Fernandez and colleagues (1997) established Russia and the USA as respective landmarks of collectivism and individualism. However, it also revealed a noticeable shift in many of the nine revisited countries (in Mexico, Chile, Yugoslavia, and Venezuela, for example), where a remarkable transition from rather strong collectivism to individualism had taken place.

Such, in outline, would be the description of the general scene in research of individualism-collectivism that provided the setting for our study. In our research, we strove to look closer into the phenomenon which has been described as "collectivism in an individualist culture" (Realo 1998). More specifically, we concentrated on the position of one culture, Estonia, on the dimension of individualism-collectivism in reference to its neighboring cultures.

The Position of Estonia on the Dimension of Individualism-Collectivism

This study was prompted by a puzzling discrepancy between two competing opinions – Estonians being a clear-cut case of Soviet collectivism (Keltikangas-Järvinen and Terav 1996, Lauristin and T. Vihalemm 1997; Narusk and Pulkkinen 1994) versus Estonians as individualists with long traditions of sibling rivalry, outdoing one's neighbors, and protest against authorities (the last has sometimes been offered as a reason for the survival of the Estonian national culture during the years of Soviet occupation, cf. Lauristin and P. Vihalemm 1997).

As it has already been observed in the latest literature (Realo 1998, Realo and Allik 1999), over the recent years a number of articles have been published where Estonians have been – by and large – declared to embody collectivistic values and tendencies. Some of the writings simply state the fact of Estonians' collectivism without prior empirical evidence, on the basis of some fifty years of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the Baltic countries after World War II. For example, Keltikangas-Järvinen and Terav (1996) used the above-mentioned way to establish Finland and Estonia as two opposites along individualism-collectivism dimension. Without getting into a discussion over the dimensionality of individualism and collectivism, it is at least debatable whether the national educational systems (that, according to the authors, is the mechanism by which culture operates) in countries under the Soviet occupation were really quite identical with the *Vospitanie* – a special system for educating the so-called new Soviet citizen. This is at least true in Estonia, where two competing histories – official and unofficial – were juxtaposed in people's minds during the occupation period, decreasing the influence of formal ideology (for more details, see Tulviste and Wertsch 1994). Following the above-mentioned pattern of cross-cultural comparison, another comparative study on

parent-adolescent interaction by Narusk and Pulkkinen (1994) contrasted Estonia and Finland *a priori* as countries with, respectively, influences of socialistic ideology versus traditional Western ideology in its attempt to establish larger socio-cultural context.

An even more controversial example of explaining cross-cultural research results via the individualism-collectivism theory comes from Egil Andersson (1997) who – finding Estonian schoolchildren more family-oriented than their Russian counterparts from Moscow – offered the partly rural origin (and thus proneness to collectivism and group pressure) of the Estonian sample as the source of these differences.

Other works referring to the Estonians' collectivism rely mostly upon Estonian teachers' (and students') results from value questionnaires (Schwartz 1994, Triandis 1993, 1995). In his cross-cultural study of human values, covering more than 38 nations, Schwartz (1994) used 45 values that were found to be equivalent in meaning across various cultures. He identified a dimension similar to individualism-collectivism, but labeled it autonomy (values like enjoying life, curious, broadminded, varied life) versus conservatism (values like social order, respect for tradition, preserving public image) to avoid pejorative implications. Finding Estonian schoolteachers high in conservatism and low in autonomy, he concluded that the Estonian sample was a collectivist one. However, as a study with the same methodology by Verkasalo, Daun, and Niit (1994) demonstrated, the intercorrelations between Swedish, Finnish, and Estonian students' value rankings were remarkably high, being mostly about 0.8–0.9. Therefore, it appears to be more than questionable whether there is enough ground to contrast Estonians and Finns along the line of individualist and collectivist values (see Realo 1998 for more details).

Also based on value surveys, a longitudinal (yearly measurement between 1991–1995) study with representative samples of Estonians, Russians (living in Estonia) and Swedes, claiming to register, among other things, changes in the Estonian value system during these years of transformation from a post-Communist to a Western-style society, was carried out (Lauristin and T. Vihalemm 1997). According to the authors, Estonia has been undergoing a process of national rebirth, starting the journey from strong vertical (national) collectivism, becoming acquainted with marketization and democratization on the way, and consequently adopting a softer form of horizontal collectivism, or possibly even rejecting collectivism while yielding to the pressure of growing individualism and hedonism. Unfortunately, once again, the researchers tend to jump to conclusions merely on the strength of their reflections on the socio-political situation in modern Estonia. Their empirical data, indeed, show a remarkable increase in hedonistic values (comfortable life and pleasant life) among the Estonians during the period of value measurement, but this fact alone does not justify such broad generalizations about the direction of the socio-cultural processes in Estonia. The increase in hedonistic value orientations, among other things, may as well reflect the change in consuming habits after free market economy was introduced to liberated Estonia.

From the other side, an Estonian linguist Hille Pajupuu (1995, 1997), known for her studies on cultural stereotypes and autostereotypes of Estonians and Finns, voices a conviction taken for granted by many Estonians, suggesting that the Estonian culture is (in all probability) typically individualistic. In her 1991 study on stereotypes held by Estonians and Finns, "collectivity" (*kollektiivsus*) was mentioned only in connection with Russians by the Estonian respondents; neither Estonians nor Finns used this word for describing Estonians (Pajupuu 1995). Another study on stereotypes and autostereotypes by Peabody and Shmelyov (1996) offered judgments concerning national characteristics given by Russian students in 1992 (additional data on evaluations concerning Estonians were received from the authors upon request). Estonians were perceived, among other things, as rather self-confident and independent, both characteristics clearly individualistic in their nature, whereas the autostereotypical rankings of the judges placed Russians at the opposite poles. Hence, it is apparent that Russians viewed Estonians as individualists rather than collectivists like themselves. Moreover, in an earlier study on stereotypes where the same scales were used, the Finns were ranked similarly to the Estonians along the mentioned scales by the German respondents (Peabody 1985). Thus, at least on meta-level, Estonians have been placed alongside Finns by their national characteristics.

Finally, two recent studies have shown that the Estonian students do not differ from their North American counterparts, at least in their collectivistic attitudes. In a study by Realo and Allik (1999), it was shown that the Estonians scored lowest in collectivism among student samples from Estonia, North America and Russia in all three subtypes of collectivism – family (items like "Family celebrations are the most important events during one's life"), peers (e.g., "Neighbors should live as one big family"), and society (e.g., "People who dedicate themselves to their nation deserve special recognition"). Also, there were no differences between Estonian and American students on collectivism measured through responses to the 16 INDCOL attitude items (developed by Triandis and colleagues) in a study of cultural influences on negotiation by Gelfand and Realo (in press).

Taken together, for many reasons, obvious to those who know the cultural-historical background, it is hard to think of Estonia as a landmark of pure collectivism – whether considering cultural closeness to relatively individualistic Finland on the one hand, or resistance to alien ideology that forced farmers into collective farms and young men offering bribes to avoid recruitment to the Soviet Army on the other hand, to bring only a few examples. Thus, in order to shed some light on the contradictory findings, it seemed necessary to look at the problem from another angle – the people's standpoint, and make an attempt to inquire how Estonians and Finns themselves answer the question of Estonian collectivism in a task of ranking different cultures. Also, a sample of Russians living in Estonia was asked to participate in this study to get some preliminary idea of how much influence the shared decades of Soviet socialization have had on the attitudes of the samples from Estonia.

The theoretical and empirical considerations mentioned above encouraged us to expect that Estonian respondents are significantly less collectivistic than their Russian compatriots, and very similar to the Finnish subjects. On the meta-level, we expected the Estonian respondents to rank their own nation less collectivistic than the Russian; we also expected Finns to rank Estonians in the same way. Also, to refute the opposition of Estonia and Finland, we assumed that the mean collectivism scores for Estonians and Finns given by two samples do not differ drastically and significantly from each other. Finally, we postulated that due to different historical background and the nature of cultural encounters, Estonian respondents may tend to rank Russians more collectivistic compared with Finnish respondents.

Method

Participants

The samples of this study consisted of 119 Estonian students from the University of Tartu (87 women and 24 men) whose age ranged from 17 to 30 with the mean age 21.5 ($SD = 3.2$), 127 Finnish students from the University of Helsinki (102 women and 25 men) whose age ranged from 19 to 35 with the mean age 24.2 ($SD = 3.6$), and 48 Russian students from the Tallinn Pedagogical University (39 women and 9 men) whose age ranged from 17 to 25 with the mean age 19.3 ($SD = 1.6$).

All participants were students of the humanities (see Verkasalo et al. 1994 on the importance of the respondent's major field of study), which accounts for the somewhat disproportionate gender distribution across samples. All respondents completed the tests during lecture time. A small number of respondents filled only one of the questionnaires, which explains discrepancies in sample sizes.

Measures

The subjects were asked to complete two attitude questionnaires. They were told it was a part of a cross-cultural study.

The Collectivism Scale. The Collectivism Scale (Realo and Allik 1999) comprises 21 items which measure three subtypes of collectivism – *familism*, *companionship*, and *patriotism*. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by *strongly disagree* (0) and *strongly agree* (4). The scale was already available in Estonian and Russian, but it was translated into Finnish for the present study.

Meta-Collectivism Scale. The Meta-Collectivism Scale (MCS) was originally developed in Estonian and translated into Finnish and Russian¹. Based on the idea of collectivism as a hierarchically superior concept encompassing different aspects of

¹ The Finnish version of the Collectivism Scale and the Finnish and Russian versions of the MSC were back-translated into Estonian to ensure equivalence in meaning (cf. Brislin 1970). In all translated versions, the items were found to be highly similar to their original counterparts in the Estonian language.

social relations, 10 items were constructed (for items, see the Appendix). The respondents were asked to rank 10 nations, including their own, along each collectivistic statement. The statements overlapped to a large extent with the respective items of the Collectivism Scale. These 10 nations were: Americans, Estonians, Italians, Japanese, Jews, Poles, Swedes, Germans, Finns, and Russians. Some of these were of special interest in the context of this study (naturally Estonians and Finns, but also Russians as important neighbors, and Americans and Japanese as typically least and most collectivistic cultures among the given nations), whereas some of the chosen nations acted mainly as 'fillers'. Each participant was asked to consider a given statement and range the 10 nations so that the one most illustrated by the collectivistic statement got 10 points, the nation least mirroring the particular qualities got 1 point, and all other nations got evaluations from 9 to 2 oints.

Results

The Collectivism Scale

The mean scores per sample were computed for all three subscales of the Collectivism Scale – Family, Peers, and Society – and, additionally, general collectivism indices (COL) were derived as the summary scores of the subscale values. The mean scores per sample are shown in Figure 1. Across all subjects, the Cronbach alphas of the subscales were 0.82 for Family, 0.55 for Peers, and 0.80 for Society, all of them quite similar to the alphas obtained by Realo and Allik (1999).

Across all samples, age was significantly and negatively correlated with the Family ($r = -.34$) and the Society ($r = -.24$) subscales, and with the COL ($r = -.26$) whereas gender had no significant effect on the COL, $F(1, 277) = 1.34$, $p = .25$. A two-way ANOVA for the COL across all respondents showed no interaction between gender and sample. Among the subscales, the interaction between sample and gender was significant only for the Society subscale, $F(2,273) = 3.08$, $p < .05$ being also significantly influenced by the respondent's ethnicity $F(2,273) = 16.39$, $p < .001$ but not by gender $F(1,273) = 2.45$, $p = .12$.

Cultural differences

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences among the samples in the general collectivism index COL, $F(2,277) = 32.16$, $p = .000$. A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences between samples also on all three types of collectivism: $F(2,277) = 70.17$, 29.33, and 15.97 for the Family, Peers, and Society subscales, respectively ($p = .000$). After obtaining statistically significant F -tests from the ANOVA, a series of post hoc tests (Scheffé) were performed with an aim to specify which samples used in the study were particularly different from each other on the general collectivism index COL as well as on all

three subscales of the Collectivism Scale (see also Table 1). As it was hypothesized, the Russian sample was significantly higher in the COL ($M = 6.32$, $SD = 1.34$) than the Estonian ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.67$) and Finnish ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.34$) samples, whereas the latter two did not differ significantly from each other ($p = .60$). The Russian students were also significantly more collectivistic in regard to family and society than the Estonian and Finnish students. Also, the Estonian students scored higher than Finnish students on the Family and Society subscales. However, the Finnish sample had a significantly higher score on the Peers subscale than the Estonian sample.

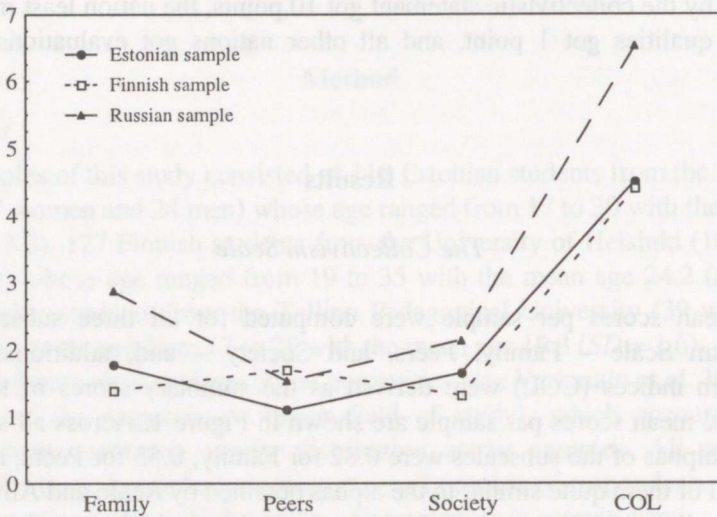


Figure 1. Raw mean values of three subscales of the Collectivism Scale and the general collectivism index (COL) per sample.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the collectivism scale subscales across samples

Subscale	<i>M</i>			<i>SD</i>		
	E	F	R	E	F	R
Family	1.75 ^{FR}	1.43 ^{ER}	2.83 ^{EF}	0.75	0.65	0.72
Peers	1.09 ^{FR}	1.69 ^E	1.46 ^E	0.67	0.50	0.61
Society	1.63 ^{FR}	1.30 ^{ER}	2.02 ^{EF}	0.84	0.71	0.82
COL	4.48 ^R	4.42 ^R	6.32 ^{EF}	1.67	1.34	1.34

Note. E = Estonian sample ($n = 104$); F = Finnish sample ($n = 128$); R = Russian sample ($n = 48$); COL = General Collectivism Index. Superscripts reflect significant differences among the samples at $p < .05$ as shown by the Scheffé test.

The Meta-Collectivism Scale (MCS)

For all cultural subscales of the MCS, general meta-collectivism indices (M-COL) were computed on the basis of the mean collectivism rank given to a particular nation by a sample. The M-COL scores and standard deviations per sample are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the MCS subscales across samples

Subscale	<i>M</i>				<i>SD</i>			
	All	E	F	R	All	E	F	R
Americans	5.15	4.35 ^{FR}	5.68 ^E	5.58 ^E	1.56	1.42	1.45	1.32
Estonians	4.87	4.95 ^R	4.95 ^R	4.40 ^{EF}	1.17	1.09	1.22	1.08
Finns	4.37	4.12 ^{FR}	4.90 ^{ER}	3.54 ^{EF}	1.21	1.13	1.14	1.02
Germans	5.29	5.33 ^{FR}	4.99 ^{ER}	5.87 ^{EF}	1.07	1.11	0.99	1.10
Italians	6.35	5.99 ^F	6.74 ^{ER}	6.05 ^F	1.30	1.42	1.16	0.97
Japanese	7.44	7.59 ^R	7.67 ^R	6.55 ^{EF}	1.29	1.17	1.33	1.02
Jews	7.32	7.33 ^R	7.63 ^R	6.60 ^{EF}	1.21	1.16	1.07	1.42
Poles	4.87	4.64 ^F	5.09 ^E	4.85	1.20	1.16	1.23	1.01
Russians	5.67	5.98 ^{FR}	5.13 ^{ER}	6.67 ^{EF}	1.46	1.27	1.27	1.30
Swedes	4.60	4.78 ^F	4.23 ^{ER}	4.96 ^F	1.22	1.25	1.15	1.15

Note. MCS = Meta-Collectivism Scale; All = All respondents ($N = 274$). E = Estonian sample ($n = 119$); F = Finnish sample ($n = 114$); R = Russian sample ($n = 41$). Superscripts reflect significant differences among the samples at $p < .05$ as shown by the Scheffé test.

A two-way MANOVA for the M-COL scores across all samples showed that the respondent's ethnicity had a significant effect on the results, Rao $R(20,516) = 9.44$ ($p < .001$) while the respondent's gender and the interaction between sample and gender did not influence the scores significantly. Across all subjects, age was significantly and positively correlated with the M-COL scores of the Finnish (.19), Jews (.18), Italians (.16), Japanese (.15), and negatively with Swedes (-.28), Germans (-.21), and Russians (-.16) subscales (all correlations were significant at $p < .001$).

Ranking 10 target nations

As expected, the Japanese received the highest ratings on collectivism among the ten target nations across all samples (see Table 2). Quite surprisingly, the Americans were positioned higher in collectivism than the Estonians and the Finns. The highest collectivism rankings were given by the judges from three samples to the Japanese (7.44) and Jews (7.32) whereas the Swedes (4.60) and Finns (4.37) were considered least collectivistic.

Cultural differences in collectivism rankings

The Estonian sample held the Japanese most and the Finns least collectivistic. The Finnish judges also ranked the Japanese highest, but the Swedes lowest in collectivism, and the Russian respondents considered their own nation most and the Finns least collectivistic.

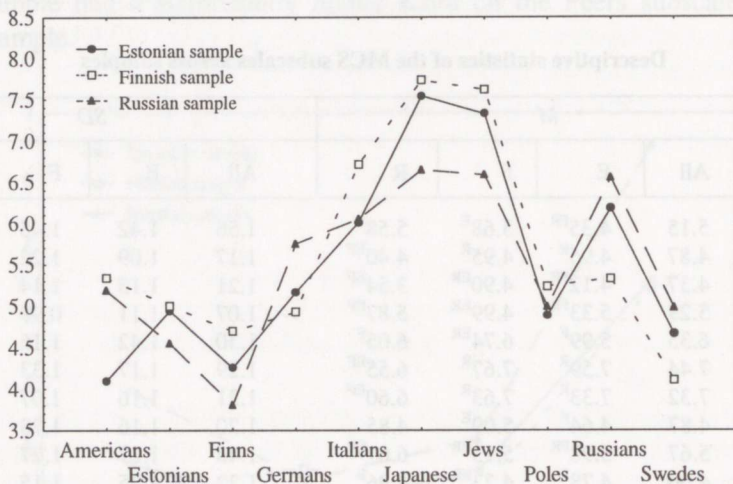


Figure 2. The M-COL scores of the subscales of the Meta-Collectivism Scale (MSC) per sample.

Figure 2 illustrates the M-COL scores of the MCS per sample, revealing a strikingly similar pattern of evaluations across three samples with only a few outstanding exceptions. Although many of the differences between the mean assessments given by the samples were statistically significant, the directions of the evaluations apparently follow a common trend. Spearman rank order correlations were used to determine the agreement on the ranking orders between the samples. Consensus was especially strong between the Estonian and Russian judges, $R = .81$, $p < .01$, but there was considerable accord also between the Finnish and Russian samples, $R = .73$, $p < .05$, as well as between the Estonian and Finnish respondents, $R = .71$, $p < .05$.

Judgments on the Estonians, Finns, and Russians

As it was expected according to the hypothesis, the Estonians ranked rather low in collectivism, occupying the seventh position among ten target nations (see Table 2). However, a closer look at the results per sample revealed quite an astonishing fact: the Estonian respondents gave to their own nation the highest mean ranking on collectivism among the judges from three samples, placing their country on the sixth position. Both the Finnish and the Russian judges' ratings

placed the Estonians lower in collectivism – on the eighth and ninth positions, respectively. As expected, the Estonian respondents ranked the Russians slightly higher in collectivism than the Finnish sample.

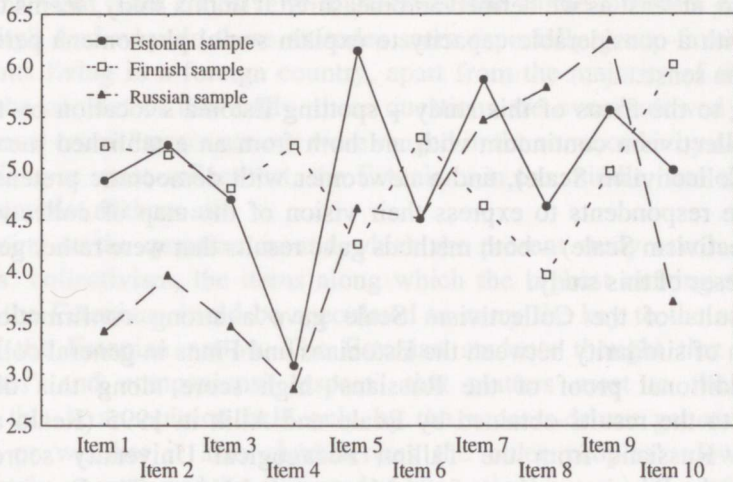


Figure 3. Mean rankings given by three samples to the Estonians subscale per item.

Ratings to the Estonians subscale

Looking at the mean rating scores given by the judges from three samples to the Estonians along all items (see Figure 3), ranking the Estonians seems to have caused considerable puzzlement between the judges, resulting in a rather fuzzy picture. There were no significant correlations between the judges' rankings given to the items of the Estonians subscale. The figure also reveals along which items the highest collectivism rankings were given. Focusing on the midpoint of this study, it appears that the Estonians got their highest collectivism rating from the Estonian sample along "The respect and regard of one's colleagues and companions is very important" (item 5), from the Finnish sample along "People are unanimously ready to defend their homeland if something threatens it" (item 10) and from the Russian respondents along "All walks of life are strongly influenced by the sense of national belonging; one's nationality is emphasized as often as possible" (item 9).

Discussion

Although the findings of this study are far from being final and sufficient, the results are truly promising. First and foremost, there really seems to be such a complex yet integrated phenomenon in the minds of students of humanities from

two countries and three nations as *collectivism*, which can be processed on the cultural level by “people from the street” without much prior knowledge about the concept. For those too timid to trust their eyes, the convergent rating patterns of the judges are proved by significant correlations between the rankings. Thus, collectivism, at least as we defined and measured it in this study, seems to exist as a theory with a considerable capacity to explain social phenomena perceived by our common sense.

Coming to the focus of this study – spotting Estonia’s location on the cross-cultural collectivism continuum with aid both from an established measurement tool (the Collectivism Scale), and a newcomer with democratic pretensions that allowed the respondents to express their vision of the map of collectivism (the Meta-Collectivism Scale) – both methods gave results that were rather generous to the hypotheses of this study.

The results of the Collectivism Scale gave a strong confirmation to the expectation of similarity between the Estonians and Finns in general collectivism, and an additional proof of the Russians’ high score along this dimension. Compared to the results obtained by Realo and Allik in 1995 (Realo and Allik 1999), the Russians from the Tallinn Pedagogical University scored rather similarly to the Russian students from Moscow and Narva. The Russian students from Estonia were less collectivistic towards society than their counterparts from Moscow, but strangely enough, in regard to two other subtypes of collectivism, the Russian samples from two capitals – Tallinn and Moscow – were even closer to each other than the Russian samples from different cities of the same country (i.e., from Tallinn and Narva). The students from the Narva Pedagogical School were less collectivistic towards their family and more collectivistic towards their peers than other Russian samples. The biggest difference between the Estonian samples from the two studies was an apparent decline in the family collectivism. Could it be that we are moving closer to the Finns in this respect? However, although the Estonians and Finns differed from the Russians in the general collectivism score, the Finns diverged from other samples with a rather different pattern of collectivism. Thus, the multifaceted nature of the construct was also implicitly confirmed.

Moving closer to the focus of this study, i.e., the rankings given to the countries by the respondents, the answer is still the same – according to the results of the present study, it is quite difficult to see Estonia as a landmark of collectivism. However, the scores of this scale are not as clearly interpretable as the results from the Collectivism Scale. For instance, while giving due acknowledgment to the significant correspondence between the rankings of the judges, it is difficult to explain the tendency of all respondents to place their own nation higher on collectivism than other samples did. Especially the Russians considered their own nation much more collectivistic (the first ranking on collectivism) than the Estonian (the fourth ranking) and Finnish (the fifth ranking) respondents. But this was also true of the Estonians, who ranked themselves sixth,

while the Finns and the Russians ranked them considerably less collectivistic (eighth and ninth rankings, respectively). The Finns were only a position higher on collectivism in their own opinion (the ninth ranking) than others thought of them (the tenth ranking). Could it be that peoples' attitudes towards their social institutions seem more cohesive to themselves than to the outsiders due to social desirability? And why do these attitudes seem especially group-favoring for the respondents living in a foreign country, apart from the majority of their nation? Still, in the context of this study, these questions are overshadowed by the fact that the most crucial target nations were ranged in the same order by all samples – the Russians as most collectivist, the Estonians in the middle, and the Finns as least collectivist of them all.

Returning to the question around which the present study revolved, i.e., the Estonians' collectivism, the items along which the highest ranking scores were given to the Estonians could be speculated to carry the key to the respondents' views of the Estonian nation. The Estonian students thought that it was the "colleagues' and companions' respect" that matters most to the Estonians. Whether this is an opinion held only by the success-driven generation of the students, or whether it also characterizes the older peoples' views, remains unfortunately unanswered by this study. Interestingly, regardless of the recent pessimistic observations in the Estonian press, where the Estonian younger generation has been declared to demonstrate rather feeble patriotic feelings (cf. Lagerspetz 1997), the Finnish sample seemed to think quite highly of the Estonians' willingness to defend their country, giving the highest rating to the Estonians along the respective item. However, the Russian students residing in Estonia did not think their host nation is particularly prone to defend itself (this item receiving only the seventh rating). Instead, they saw Estonians primarily as nationalists declaring their national belonging whenever the opportunity appears. Without some comparative data from Russians living in Russia, however, the origins of that opinion remain somewhat obscure.

Looking briefly at other crucial target nations, some surprising deviations appeared. Although the Japanese were voted unanimously most collectivistic by the Estonians and Finns, the Russians placed them only on the third position after their own nation and the Jews. In accordance with the latest findings that have cast some doubt on the trademark individualism of the American students (cf. Gelfand and Realo, in press, Realo and Allik 1999), the Americans in this study received across all samples a mean rating that positioned them a rank higher (sixth) in collectivism than the Estonians. Strangely enough, while the Finnish and the Russian students ranked the Americans respectively fourth and sixth in collectivism among ten nations, the Estonian students seemed to have a textbook view of the Americans, placing them on the penultimate position.

The limitations of this study do not allow extensive conclusions about the influence of the respondent's age on the obtained collectivism scores or given

rankings. Within these narrow age boundaries some rather low significant correlations did appear, but their interpretation seems to be beyond this study.

In conclusion, although this study answered a number of questions, it also raised quite a few. For an ambitious social researcher, Estonia remains a "hot potato": post-Soviet for some, Western for others, it appears to combine traits of Finno-Ugric, Nordic and West-European traditions capable of surviving half a century of suppression. Alongside with Russia's quest for a newly established place among the cultures of Europe (cf. Likhachev 1991), independent Estonia is reviewing and updating its value systems, looking for a new identity. The indefinite interplay of (sometimes seemingly contradictory) features has been noted and acknowledged by a number of Estonian social scientists (e.g., Allik 1998, Kivik 1998, Must 1998). Any cross-cultural comparison that fails to take heed of this complex state of affairs is bound to make a fundamental mistake.

It seems necessary to expand the range of cultural samples involved in this research (e.g., Russians living in Russia), as well as to vary the respondents' demographic characteristics to a greater extent. However, within these boundaries and along these lines the Estonian students of humanities were found to be situated closer to their Finnish "cultural cousins" than to their Russian compatriots. Furthermore, if Samuel P. Huntington (1996) is right in claiming that "again and again both Westerners and non-Westerners point to individualism as the central distinguishing mark of the West", then bearing in mind that according to Roberts and Helson (1997), individualism is in the process of declining in the American culture, Estonia seems to be in turn a Western society with increasing individualism according to the results of this study. After all, the Estonians ranked below the Americans in collectivism.

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APPENDIX

Items for the meta-collectivism scale

1. In all matters of life family interests are most important, personal interests are sacrificed to the well-being of family.
2. Family ties are very strong, different generations often live under the same roof.
3. Even as adults, the most important decisions in a person's life depend on the opinions of family members.
4. Between neighbors, close and friendly relationships dominate; living as one big family is often highly valued.
5. The respect and regard of one's colleagues and companions is very important.
6. Friends' interests are always in top priority; defending one's personal opinion is forsaken to avoid tension between friends.
7. The ancient customs and traditions of one's nation are highly valued.
8. Laws and authorities are accepted, one does not try to struggle against them.
9. All walks of life are strongly influenced by the sense of national belonging; one's nationality is emphasized as often as possible.
10. People are unanimously ready to defend their homeland if something threatens it.