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PREMISES FOR SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT OF EASTERN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Radu-Lucian BLAGA^{1,2}, Florin-Lucian ISAC¹, Vanina-Adoriana TRIFAN^{1,3}, Oana BRÎNZAN⁴, Eugenia ȚIGAN⁴, Simona GAVRILAȘ^{4,*}

¹Faculty of Economics, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, 10 Paul Chinezul Str., Arad, Romania

²Center for Research in Sustainable Bio-Eco-Economy, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, 77 Revoluției Bd., Arad, Romania

³Center for Applied Ethics Studies, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, 10 Paul Chinezul Str., Arad, Romania

⁴Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, 2-4 Elena Drăgoi Str., 310330 Arad, Romania;
Corresponding author email: simona.gavrilas@uav.ro

Abstract: Culture and entrepreneurship are complex and interrelated social concepts. The paper aims to determine the importance of national culture for entrepreneurship progress in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region. The article focuses on a meta-analysis of the inputs integrated into a European Union Policy Index. It aimed to underline the nature of specific interrelation mechanisms of the cultural dimensions that could contribute to developing a performant entrepreneurial environment. The correlation analysis used in the paper detects the most "sensitive" pairs of variables related to national culture and entrepreneurship activities. Results show a highly significant relationship between the Motivation Towards Achievement and Success index and a large part of the dimensions of the sustainable entrepreneurial development of EaP countries, especially Internationalization and Support Services for Small and Medium Enterprises SMEs and start-ups. Another significant relationship is between Individualism and the Development of Entrepreneurial Activities in the analyzed countries.

Keywords: cultural dimensions, business progress, advancement of enterprising activities, Eastern Partnership countries, correlation analysis, economic well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In its general acceptance as an attitudinal and productive factor, entrepreneurship is widely believed to contribute to the economic development and prosperity of communities, regions, and countries ([Ordeñana et al., 2020](#)). As Anderson et al. stated ([Anderson, 2000](#)), entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial performance are a product of the businessperson and the context, the social and economic circumstances in which they perform.

Public policies pursue ambitious initiatives to help SMEs (small- and medium-sized firms) innovate and create jobs, benefit from digitalization, and become global leaders in sustainable practices ([Ahadi and Kasraie, 2020](#), [Gaweł and Mińska-Struzik, 2023](#), [Jha et al., 2018](#), [Nica, 2021](#)).

The European Union (EU) regards successful entrepreneurial activity as strategically essential for economic well-being. Therefore, the EU aims to streamline SMEs

entrepreneurship. EU and six neighboring countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, created the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a joint initiative that aims to help the economies of these countries become more inclusive and resilient to shocks.

Sustainable entrepreneurship, which successfully merges traditional business objectives with environmental and social considerations, is becoming increasingly significant globally. In the specific context of Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, fostering sustainable entrepreneurship presents a variety of noteworthy benefits that are integral to economic and social development.

Promoting sustainable entrepreneurship can be crucial in effectively addressing pressing environmental challenges. Encouraging businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices creates opportunities for innovation and the development of new markets, ultimately

yielding significant economic benefits. This dual focus helps mitigate environmental degradation and supports sustainable economic opportunities for local communities.

A strong emphasis on sustainable practices can improve resource efficiency and enhance small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) competitiveness. By optimizing their use of resources and implementing sustainable business models, these enterprises can reduce operational costs, thereby improving their overall financial performance in a competitive marketplace.

A proper alignment with European Union sustainability standards can serve as a critical stepping stone for EaP countries, potentially easing the pathway to future integration with the EU. By adopting these standards, businesses in the region enhance their credibility and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability, which can positively influence trade relations and investment opportunities.

Promoting sustainable entrepreneurship will likely attract impact investors and increase access to green finance. As the demand for socially and environmentally responsible investment grows, firms prioritizing sustainability may find it easier to secure funding, allowing further growth and innovation.

So, future research should delve into the influence of cultural factors on adopting sustainable entrepreneurship practices in the EaP region. Understanding these dynamics will be essential for tailoring approaches encouraging widespread acceptance and implementation of sustainable business models, ultimately contributing to the region's long-term economic and environmental resilience.

The literature review in the field determined us to settle the paper's aims. The first one seeks to *evaluate the importance of national culture for sustainable entrepreneurship development in the Eastern Partnership region*, organized around the SBA (Small Business Act) principles.

The second objective was to *settle the importance of national culture for entrepreneurship durable expansion* in the Eastern Partnership region, organized around the SBA principles. The SBA assessment is a

key tool for improving the businesses in EaP countries and strengthening institutions and good governance ([OECD et al., 2020](#)).

Considering the data from the literature analysis, we hypothesize that *certain dimensions of national culture influence particular dimensions of entrepreneurial expansion* in Eastern Partnership countries. Hence, we formulated the following assumptions, which underwent testing in the paper:

H1: *The cultural dimension of Hofstede's model, known as Motivation Towards Achievement and Success (formerly the dimension of masculinity), impacts The Advancement of Entrepreneurial Activity.*

H2: *As a cultural dimension in Hofstede's model, Individualism impacts The Advancement of Entrepreneurial Activity.*

The Hofstede's specific elements in this study are derived from analyzing the national cultural background. The aim was to understand influential behaviors and values better. Such aspects provide a useful framework for understanding cultural differences and facilitating intercultural interactions, especially in business.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Method

This study analyzed the results of applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions model statistically. The method consists of a theoretical framework developed by researcher Geert Hofstede that helps understand cultural differences between nations and groups. Hofstede conducted extensive research in several countries, analyzing human behaviors in the context of cultural diversity. The pattern is based on the identification of six cultural dimensions, which are characteristics that describe fundamental differences between national cultures. It can be used to better understand the dynamics of international interactions, as in business media, and to explain behavioral divergences between individuals or groups from different cultures.

Materials

The statistics evaluated were integrated into the SME Policy Index: Eastern Partner Countries

material in 2020. The Hofstede (six) data express culturally motivated attitudes and social reaction patterns, which can be attributed to country inhabitants or territories. Our data, Hofstede's six cultural dimension matrix (HOF-6) is of 6 x 6 size, reflecting the countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, and the equivalent Hofstede scale, Table 1. The Hofstede data was chosen because it covers a longer period and exists for most European countries.

Table 1 Cultural dimensions according to Hofstede

Cultural dimensions	Abbrev.	Operational definitions
Power distance	POW	The degree to which the less powerful in society expect and accept unequal power distribution.
Individualism/Collectivism	IND	Individualized responsibility and problem-solving vs. more collective variants. The former leans towards egoism, while the latter borders on unconditional group loyalty.
Motivation towards achievement and success (Masculinity/Femininity)	MAS	A high score (Decisive) on this dimension indicates that society will be driven by competition, achievement, and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in the field. A Consensus-oriented society is one where quality of life is the sign of success, and standing out from the crowd is not admirable.
Uncertainty Avoidance	UNC	Expresses a degree of risk aversion.
Long Time vs. Short Time Orientation	LTO	LTO values future payoffs, planning, and patience; STO values fast payoffs, possibly in response to social uncertainty or instability.
Indulgence vs. Restraint	IDL	Indulgence allows for the gratification of basic, natural human drives of, i.e., enjoying life and having fun." Restraint" applies strict social norms instead.

Note: All values are within [0-100]. Abbreviations introduced in column two are used later in our data analysis.

Source: interpreted after <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool>

The other data matrix we confront is the 6 x 12-twelve SME Policy Index for EaP dimensions matrix (SME EaP-12), which has analog complex entrepreneurial activity indicators described in Table 2.

Table 2 The detailed SME assessment framework and its links to the Small Business Act Principles-Statistical dimensions for assessment of sustained expansion

SBA principle	Abbrev.	SME Policy Index dimension	Related sub-dimensions
1. Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded.	ENT	Entrepreneurial learning and women's entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial learning; Women's entrepreneurship
2. Ensure that honest entrepreneurs who have faced Bankruptcy quickly get a second chance.	SEC	Bankruptcy and Second Chance for SMEs	Preventive measures; Survival and bankruptcy procedures; Promoting second chance
3. Design rules according to the "think small first" principle.	TSF	Institutional and regulatory framework for SME policy	Institutional framework; Legislative and regulatory simplification and application; Public-private consultations (PPCs)
4. Make public administration responsive to SMEs.	RES	Operational environment for SMEs	E-government services; Business licences and permits; Company registration; Tax compliance procedures for SMEs
5 Adapt public policy tools to SME needs.	PPN a.	Support services for SMEs and start-ups	SME support services provided by the government; Government initiatives stimulating private business development services
	PPN b.	Public procurement	Public procurement
6. Facilitate SME access to finance and develop a legal framework and business	FIN	Access to finance for SMEs	Legal and regulatory framework; Bank financing; Non-bank financing;

environment supportive of timely payments in commercial transactions.			Venture capital; Financial literacy
7. Help SMEs benefit more from the opportunities the Single Market offers.	SIMA	Standards and technical regulations	Overall coordination and general measures to adopt EU product standards and regulations; Approximation with the EU Acquis; SMEs Access to Standardisation
8. Promote the upgrading of skills and all forms of innovation.	INNO a.	SMEs skills	SMEs skills
	INNO b.	Innovation	Policy framework for innovation; Government support services for innovative SMEs; Government financial support for innovative SMEs; Non-technological innovation and diffusion of innovation
9. Enable SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities.	ENV	SMEs in a green economy	Environmental Policies; Incentives and instruments for greening SMEs operations
10. Encourage and support SMEs to benefit from growth markets.	INT	Internationalisation of SMEs	Export promotion; Integration of SMEs into global value chains; OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators; SME use of e-commerce

Note: Abbreviations from column two are the short names used later in our data analysis, and column Source: (OECD et al., 2020).

The independent variable of *national culture* was selected due to its constant evolution. The conceptual content of these dimensions was derived from Hofstede's works and those of his collaborators (Hofstede et al., 2012, Hofstede et al., 2004). The values for these dimensions were obtained from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/fi/product/compare-countries>. The numerical values of this variable were converted into categorical variables based on

Sturges H's model for all six cultural dimensions.

The dependent variable, generically called *The Advancement of Entrepreneurial Activity* of EaP countries, is represented by the SME Policy Index for EaP, the unique multi-criteria benchmarking tool, representing a key tool for the progress of the business environment and SMEs in the EaP region. It is calculated based on SBA principles and contains dependent random variables because they do not satisfy a mathematical property of probabilistic independence. The indicator's calculation method and data collection are set by SME Policy Index (OECD et al., 2020). These variables are categorical and obtained through qualitative analysis using indicators and methods starting from applying questionnaires, focus groups, and statistical analysis data (Agresti, 2012, Ataei et al., 2020).

The current study's objectives were met by applying multivariate analysis to ascertain correlations of two categorical data sets, following the Spearman and Kendal techniques as non-parametric alternatives to Pearson's correlation. The reduction of detailed measurements into ordinal numbers enabled the evaluation of complex data based on specific criteria. Analysis of ranked (categorical) data typically mandates the employment of non-parametric statistics (Tofallis et al., 2022). They allow the identification of simultaneous correlation relations between two or even more matrices (Chen et al., 2021) with different features (columns).

The research approach initially considered was designed based on the four possible situations: *a strong direct possible association between the data*, *an indirect link between them*, *none possible*, or *one of uncertainty that needed a deeper consideration at the level of subsidiary components*. Spearman and Kendal's correlations follow curvilinear, monotonic relationships for ordinal (categorical) data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the Spearman and Kendal correlation analysis, for Hofstede's six cultural dimensions and the twelve dimensions of the advancement of entrepreneurial activity, through the SME

Policy Index for Eastern Partner Countries (EaP), it emerges that certain cultural dimensions evolve in the same sense and direction as dimensions of entrepreneurial progress so that only an absence of correlation was identified, that between *Power distance* (1) and each dimension of entrepreneurial progress. The most "sensitive" pairs of variables related to the culture and entrepreneurial activity advance of EaP countries can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 Most influential seven absolute correlations from HOF-6 vs. SME EaP-12 for Correlation Analysis (CA)

No.	Hofstede-6 dimension	SME Policy Index for EaP-12 dimension	p-value	Linear correlation coefficients from CA ¹
1	Motivation Towards Achievement And Success/ Masculinity (3)	Internationalization-INT (9)	0.02	+0.878
2	Individualism (2)	Institutional and regulatory framework for SME policy-TSF (1)	0.04	-0.828
3		Internationalization-INT (9)	0.04	-0.828
4		Support services for SMEs and start-ups (Business development services-BDS)-PPNa. (10)	0.04	-0.828
5	Motivation Towards Achievement And Success/Masculinity (3)	Support services for SMEs and start-ups (Business development services-BDS)-PPNa. (10)	0.13	+0.683
6	Long term orientation (5)	Access to finance for SMEs-FIN (6)	0.25	-0.555
7	Long term orientation (5)	Support services for SMEs and start-ups (Business development services-BDS)-PPNa. (10)	0.25	-0.555

Source: Author's computation.

¹ Correlation coefficients according to Spearman

Table 4 Most influential seven absolute correlations from HOF-6 vs. SME EaP-12 for Correlation Analysis (CA)

No.	Hofstede - 6 dimension	SME Policy Index for EaP-12 dimension	p-value	Linear correlation coefficients from CA ²
1	Motivation Towards Achievement And Success/ Masculinity (3)	Internationalization-INT (9)	0.05	+0.775
2	Individualism (2)	Institutional and regulatory framework for SME policy-TSF (1)	0.06	-0.730
3		Internationalization-INT (9)	0.06	-0.730
4		Support services for SMEs and start-ups (Business development services-BDS)-PPNa. (10)	0.06	-0.730
5	Motivation Towards Achievement And Success/ Masculinity (3)	Support services for SMEs and start-ups (Business development services-BDS)-PPNa. (10)	0.13	+0.602
6		Institutional and regulatory framework for SME policy-TSF (1)	0.28	+0.430
7		SMEs in a green economy (Green economy)-ENV (12)	0.28	-0.430

Source: Author's computation.

The cultural dimension identified by Hofstede, *Motivation Towards Achievement and Success/Masculinity*, is the most sensitive to the entrepreneurial activities improvement at the level of the EaP countries. From the data analysis, we can say that this cultural dimension positively influences a large part of the dimensions of the entrepreneurial activities durable expansion in the analyzed countries: *The Institutional and Regulatory Framework for SME Policy Development, The Business Environment, The Competencies of SMEs, Access to finance, Public Procurement, Internationalisation, Business Development Services, Innovation Policy*. But, at the same time, it negatively impacts other dimensions of entrepreneurial failures, such as *Bankruptcy and Second Chance, Standards and Regulations*, and the *Green Economy*. It is relatively statistically significant, with values close to p-values equal to 0.05, Tables 3 and 4.

² Correlation coefficients according to Kendall

The more the EaP countries have a larger number of potential entrepreneurs characterized by a more pronounced masculinity, the higher they will succeed in penetrating the international market ([Shneor et al., 2017](#)), while at the same time increasing the profitability of internationalized firms ([Gaganis et al., 2019](#)). The Eastern Partnership countries are less oriented towards achievement and success (in particular: Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova), less competitive and sensitive to material rewards or financial efficiency, and therefore less concerned with developing international partnership relations.

Adapting public policy instruments to the needs of SMEs through Business Development Services (BDS) is an element of progress in entrepreneurial activities that is sensitive in the context of our research. In the case of most EaP countries, with a low *Motivation Towards Achievement and Success/Masculinity*, adapting public policies to the needs of the business environment has no chance of developing positively in the given cultural context. Public institutions are mainly incentives for economic activity, but in societies where the masculinity index is reduced, they discourage entrepreneurship; people are less ambitious and daring and do not support the action with current measures. On the other hand, the entrepreneurship approach is less in societies oriented toward the cultural dimension of femininity ([Celikkol et al., 2019](#), [Huggins and Thompson, 2012](#)).

The relationship *between Motivation Towards Achievement and Success/Masculinity* and SMEs in a green economy (*Green Economy*) explains the relationship in the opposite direction. Countries with a cultural orientation towards feminism (such as Belarus, Moldova, and Ucraina) are more oriented towards unpolluted resources and prefer supporting SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities ([Pelau and Pop, 2018](#)). This cultural trait may predispose these societies to more readily embrace sustainable business practices and green policies. Thus, environmental policies, incentives, and operational tools for greening SMEs can be better considered in these countries. The *Green Economy* dimension assesses how well

countries support SMEs adopting sustainable practices and technologies. Such vision includes policies promoting energy efficiency, adopting renewable energy, reducing waste, and eco-innovation among small businesses. Improving performance in this area is crucial for long-term economic resilience and environmental sustainability in the EaP region.

In conclusion, the *Motivation Towards Achievement and Success*, as a cultural dimension of Hofstede's model, influences the advancement of entrepreneurial activity, especially about the dimensions of *Internationalization and Support Services for SMEs and start-ups (Business Development Services)*, thus confirming the study's first hypothesis.

Considering the results obtained it would be advisable to create an enabling environment that encourages motivation to achieve and succeed, to stimulate the progress of entrepreneurial activity in terms of internationalization and development of SMEs and start-ups. Such a goal could be obtained by combining financial, educational, and technological support, developing international partnerships and an environment in which risks are strategically managed. Thus, entrepreneurs will be motivated to build successful businesses and expand them into global markets.

The cultural dimension of *Individualism* identified by Hofstede is sensitive to the forward movement of entrepreneurial activities at the level of the EaP countries. It is relatively statistically significant, with values close to p-values of 0.05, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. It interacts in the opposite direction with each dimension of entrepreneurial progress, except for certain dimensions, namely *Bankruptcy and Second Chances*, and *Green Economy*. *Individualism* does not negatively affect these dimensions of entrepreneurial feasible evolution, i.e., they move in the same direction.

When analyzing the correlation between the cultural dimension of *Individualism* and the dimension of the *Institutional and Regulatory Framework for the Development of SME Policies*, a statistically significant high-confidence correlation is

observed, which shows that the increase of the first causes the second decrease.

The dimensions of entrepreneurial progression strongly negatively affected by the growth of *Individualism* are *Internationalisation and Business Development Services*. The Spearman correlation shows that the more the cultural dimension of *Individualism* increases, the more the dimension of entrepreneurial advancement *Internationalisation* decreases. The data have a highly reliable and statistically significant correlation. All these aspects related to *Individualism* confirm the second hypothesis from which the research started.

Accepting the last assumption could give policymakers the direction for encouraging and supporting an entrepreneurial culture that promotes personal autonomy, individual initiative, and responsibility. In societies with a strong emphasis on individualism, entrepreneurs are often motivated by the desire to build their businesses and pursue their dreams. In such conditions it is essential to support personal initiative and the desire for individual success, but also to provide concrete support through policies and instruments that support entrepreneurial autonomy, encourage personal responsibility, and facilitate access to strategic resources. Ensuring such conditions will motivate entrepreneurs to follow their vision and build sustainable and innovative businesses.

Given all these research results, it is considered appropriate to mention that the opposite of *Individualism* is *Collectivism* and that all the countries analyzed have a specific common collectivist history. The results of the research carried out are, to some extent, confirmed by the literature in this area. Some authors ([Autio et al., 2013](#), [Wennberg et al., 2013](#)) propose that *Collectivism* can be detrimental to business entry, but it promotes business growth in the case of emerging economies. Pinillos and Reyes show that a collectivist culture tends to increase entrepreneurial behavior in countries with emerging economies ([Pinillos and Reyes, 2011](#)). At the level of individual firms, a stronger association between innovation and growth can be observed in collectivist cultures ([Cacciotti and Hayton, 2017](#)).

The countries considered in this study are in a period of transition and development, and their economic, educational, and technological development situation varies significantly. High-tech integration is an area of rapid growth, but there are still large disparities between countries. While Ukraine and Armenia have made significant progress in IT and education, Moldova and Belarus face greater challenges. Azerbaijan and Georgia are on track to rapidly diversify and modernize their technology sectors.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The first limitation of the study is the consideration of the relationship between culture and entrepreneurial performance of the emerging countries analyzed without including data sets covering complementary variables such as GDP, education levels, and technology adoption. This holistic approach could represent the starting point for a new research perspective. Another constraint of this research was the limited data available on the countries of EaP paternity.

Results may also be checked against adding cultural dimensions other than Hofstede's. The statistical analysis highlights certain common aspects of the six EaP countries, taken into research, namely that certain cultural traits statistically significantly impact certain entrepreneurial dimensions. Of course, on a broader look, these cultural dimensions probably do not represent a characteristic of this country in particular. They are elements that generally affect certain aspects of durable entrepreneurial improvement. The specificity of the research is that it highlighted that these influences are statistically significant.

As *improving market access* and *internationalization* represented the weak bridges in the past, gradually improved from the analysis of the evolution of entrepreneurial advances in these countries, can be seen. Still, the current research shows us some levers contributing to this breaking and certain cultural dimensions.

In the case of *Individualism*, it is not considered a bad or good dimension but only an

excess of a certain social/cultural trait dimension that can boost or even inhibit the development of entrepreneurship in a certain direction. For this reason, it is considered that observing these aspects, they can be rebalanced by civil societies in the six EaP countries. It is believed that for entrepreneurial progress in EaP countries, a vital factor is the education of young people, continuous training in the field, and the promotion of good practices inspired by the experience of other cultures.

Integrating sustainability principles will be crucial as EaP countries continue to develop their entrepreneurial ecosystems. Policymakers should consider how cultural factors might influence adopting sustainable practices and tailor their approaches accordingly.

Given Hofstede's aim to contribute to understanding cultural differences between nations, the present study considered countries with great aesthetic, religious, and political diversity. However, they share a common history, with geopolitical conflicts of recent decades, which makes the region dynamic and complex in terms of international relations.

Religious differences profoundly influence relationships among Eastern Partnership countries, often intertwining with existing political and social divides. A salient example can be observed in Georgia, where the Orthodox Church exerts significant influence over both the political and cultural landscape. This institution has actively opposed European Union-supported anti-discrimination initiatives, thereby generating tensions that complicate Georgian aspirations for EU integration and alignment with Western democratic values ([Rahimov, 2024](#)).

Similarly, in Ukraine, the government has strategically utilized the establishment of an independent Orthodox Church, enhancing the societal sway of religious institutions while simultaneously fostering a climate of increased intolerance toward religious minorities ([United, 2023](#)). The resurgence of religious identity in the post-Soviet context further complicates the inter-country relationships within the region. Most of the population in various Eastern Partnership countries now identifies with a

religion, predominantly Orthodox Christianity or Roman Catholicism.

This revival of religious affiliation has contributed to more conservative social attitudes, particularly among younger generations in Central and Eastern Europe. These individuals exhibit lower levels of acceptance towards Muslims, Jews, same-sex marriage, and legal abortion compared to their peers in Western Europe. The resulting religiously-based social perspectives can significantly hinder regional cooperation and alignment with European Union values, thereby straining relationships between more progressive and conservative EaP nations.

Recent internal conflicts and external influences can rapidly alter cultural and social dynamics. Hofstede's dimensions are built on general trends but do not consider in detail how national identities evolve in different contexts, where regions and ethnic groups may have very different visions. Its research bases consisted of a relatively small sample, relying mainly on employees of an international organization. Based on this consideration, it could be said that his results apply primarily to the business environment and may not fully reflect the cultural variability of the entire population of a country. When religious and national traditions play a significant role in daily life, applying Hofstede's dimensions may ignore important aspects of social or political behavior.

A study of Hofstede's cultural dimensions applied to the countries mentioned in this study can provide a general view of cultural differences but must be used cautiously. It is essential to consider each country's political, historical, geographical, and religious context and recent developments that may significantly influence learned values and attitudes.

Future research will consider the expansion of the investigation context on other influencing factors on entrepreneurship, such as well-being, GDP, the level of education, degree of digitization and computerization, etc., but also on some comparative analyses with other European countries. Another future direction of research could be one oriented toward the role of organizational culture in shaping entrepreneurial orientations.

Using Hofstede's dimensions can be useful for understanding differences and similarities between cultures, especially if the study is conducted with an updated framework that considers current socio-economic and political realities. These could provide important insights for managing diversity in business environments, in education, and in the context of international relations, but must be conducted with attention to the complexity and rapid changes in different regions of the world.

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