Getting ready for the young generation to join the workforce: A comparative analysis of the work values of Chinese and Slovenian business students [*]

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Due to the ever greater cooperation between China and CEE countries, and especially the lack of research on the young generation's work values among the latter, we fill an empirical gap and conduct a comparative analysis of work values among Chinese and Slovenian business students. We explore the relationship between national culture and differences in expressed work values. While advancement was the top item within both samples, we found a stronger instrumental value dimension for the Slovenians and a stronger social-altruistic value dimension for the Chinese. Moreover, while national culture remains a factor for understanding the work values of the young generation, it is not the dominant one. Our results offer some support for a universal or crossvergence perspective on the work values of the young generation.

Aufgrund der sich intensivierenden Kooperation zwischen China und den MOE-Ländern sowie des Forschungsdefizits bezüglich arbeitsbezogener Werte der jüngeren Generation, soll diese komparative Analyse der chinesischen und slowenischen Wirtschaftsstudenten eine empirische Lücke füllen. Wir untersuchen die Relation zwischen Kultur und den Unterschieden in den genannten Werten. Während Beförderung der Hauptaspekt innerhalb beider Stichproben war, fanden wir eine stärkere instrumentelle Wertedimension bei den Slowenen und eine stärkere sozial-altruistische Wertedimension bei den Chinesen. Obwohl Kultur ein Faktor für das Verständnis dieser Werte bleibt, ist es nicht die dominierende Größe. Unsere Ergebnisse unterstützen eine universelle Perspektive auf die arbeitsbezogenen Werte der jüngeren Generation.

Key words: work values, young generation, national culture, China, Slovenia (JEL: M50, Z19)

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1.   Introduction

Workforce diversity is a given fact for most organisations in today's increasingly global environment. Traditionally, national culture has been one of the most studied sources of diversity in organisations (House et al. 2004; Hofstede et al. 2010). However, in the last decade a new stream of inter-generational research has gained momentum as young people, born in the last two decades of the 20th century, have started to enter the workforce (Wong et al. 2008, Macky et al. 2008; Ng et al. 2012). Yet this research has mostly focused on Western countries, and less is known about the young from elsewhere (Čater et al. 2013; Twenge 2006).

In particular, little is known about the strength of the impact of national cultures on work values in non-Western countries (Jaw et al. 2006; Čater et al. 2013), or about differences in work values across generations and national cultures (Susaeta et al. 2013). Age is known to be an important factor contributing to differences in work values (Richards et al. 2012). It is thus important to study the young generation as we may expect differences in their work values compared to other generations. This theoretical and empirical gap exists not only in terms of the young generation, but for most other organisational contexts, despite the long acknowledged variation of values, needs and work goals across cultures (Ronen/Shenkar 1985).

The study of the young generation and their work values also offers insights into the influence of globalisation on people (Levitt 1983), and in particular on the cross-country universality of work values among the young, who are believed to: be at the "forefront of globalization" (Strizhakova et al. 2012:43), share a common culture as global citizens (Fabris 2003), have more similar values (April/Blass 2010; Theimann et al. 2006) and lifestyles (Stapinski 1999).

Such a lack of evidence may pose a serious challenge for employers and organisational performance. First, the economic slowdown in Western markets and the economic rise of Eastern markets, especially China, are creating new job opportunities in organisations which are embedded in different kinds of socio-cultural contexts. In such organisational settings, cultural values act as "a central force in shaping managerial behavior" (Bird/Fang 2009:140). Second, understanding work values is an important foundation for effective workplace adaptation (Smola/Sutton 2002). Work value-related cross-cultural differences have been linked to changes in organisational performance (Connor/Becker 1975), commitment (Li et al. 2008), as well as to successful organisational transition in times of dynamic change (Li et al. 2008).

The aim of this paper is to analyse and compare the work values of future labour market entrants in China and Slovenia. While we do address cultural differences, the main focus of the study relates to the issue of the universality-contingency of the young generation's work values in China and Slovenia. We use secondary

national culture data and primary data for work values. We contribute to the understanding of workplace priorities, expectations and behaviours among the young generation so that employers can form appropriate policies and practices to attract, motivate and retain young talents. There are for several reasons why providing a better understanding of the young generation is particularly relevant in the case of China: (1) the Chinese young generation will represent future leaders of the world's largest superpower (Stanat 2005); (2) due to China's unique single-child policy and its impact on society; and (3) the exponential socio-economic transformation of Chinese society and its impact on culture (Faure/Fang 2008). Faure and Fang (2008) emphasise the paradoxical nature of Chinese culture – particularly values – with large differences between the value systems of the young and the old. Surprisingly, little empirical evidence exists about either the former (Yi et al. 2010) or the latter (Pan et al. 2010). The comparison of the work values of Chinese and Slovenian business students should also be understood in the context of the recent economic platform between China and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Finally, there has not been any systematic research on the work values of the young generation in Slovenia. Thus, our paper also fills this empirical gap in a broader CEE context. We also add to empirical evidence on the work values of the young generation in China, which is just starting to enter the workforce.

The paper starts by comparing the young generation's work values with those of other generations. This is followed by an overview of Chinese and Slovenian national cultures, and a short discussion of the importance of understanding regional cultures. We continue by comparing both cultures through the lens of existing cultural typologies. Research hypotheses, a description of our methodology and a presentation of our results then follow. We conclude by discussing possible implications for management in general, as well as human resource management in particular.

2.   Work values and the young generation

There are many definitions of values and explanations of how they shape individual behaviour. The definition by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987:551) is useful for our research because it shows how values reflect priorities and influence specific actions of individuals. It includes five elements: (1) concepts or beliefs about (2) desirable end states or behaviours which (3) transcend specific situations, (4) guide the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and (5) are ordered by relative importance. Similarly, a narrower concept of work values refers to beliefs about the desirability of and priority given to work-related issues and outcomes (Ros et al. 1999; George/Jones 1997). Work values shape the desired goals or rewards people seek through their work (Schwartz 1999). They provide an important input for building successful employment relationships. Work values influence the perceptions, attitudes and choices we form at work

(Meglino/Ravlin 1998). They serve as "the evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is 'right' or assess the importance of preferences" (Dose 1997:227-228).

Ample research shows how work values affect individual expectations related to work, behaviour and performance (Huff/Kelley 2004; Cennamo/Gardner 2008). However, the link between values and work behaviour is not direct, but indirect through goals, motivations and attitudes (Roe/Ester 1999). Nevertheless, this link has been proven to be strong enough for researchers aiming to identify relevant lists of work values and their underlying structure.

With regard to work value structures, there is general agreement among researchers about three dimensions of work values: (1) extrinsic or instrumental (e.g. pay, benefits, job security); (2) intrinsic or cognitive (e.g. an interesting job, challenge, learning); and (3) social, which emphasise relationships (Ros et al. 1999; Schwartz 1999). Other dimensions found in the literature are affective, altruistic and prestige (Elizur 1984; Schwartz 1999). Recent work by Lyons et al. (2010) outlines four dimensions: (1) instrumental; (2) cognitive; (3) social-altruistic; and (4) prestige values. We adopt this structure because Lyons et al. (2010) specifically studied inter-generational differences and constructed a 25-item scale including values which are particularly relevant for the young generation.

Increased interest in inter-generational differences first emerged in popular media and many discussions on the key characteristics of the young generation have produced specific values. Zemke et al. (2000) depicted the following values which define the young generation: optimism, respect for civic duty, sociability, confidence and achievement of goals. Later on, the interest spread from popular media to academia. Twenge's (2010) review of academic research on generational comparison found, as expected, weak evidence of specific work value patterns. However, she suggests that some clear characteristics can be depicted, such as work playing less of a central role and the young generation placing greater importance on extrinsic work values, like salary and promotion. This is also consistent with results comparing work-attitude drivers between Generation Y and Generation X in a world-wide study, where the former displayed more extrinsic and the latter more intrinsic work attitudes (Susaeta et al. 2013).

Ng et al. (2010) found that the young generation places the greatest importance on individualistic job aspects. For example, they express an opportunity for advancement as their top priority and have high expectations for rapid promotions and pay increases. Lyons et al. (2005) report how social values (e.g. interaction with others) and prestige values are more important for both Generation Y and X compared to older generations. Twenge et al. (2010) also suggest that the importance of leisure and extrinsic values is growing, while the importance of intrinsic and social values is decreasing for the young generation. According to Lipkin

and Perrymore (2009), the young generation values leisure time and good health. For them, it is important to live fully *now* (not after retirement), and thus work is becoming less central to their lives. They more actively seek a work-personal life balance. The young generation appreciates flexibility and an individual approach from employers to attend to their needs. When compared to older generations, which place an emphasis on economic and physical security, the younger generation values self-expression, subjective well-being and quality of life (Inglehart/Baker 2000). Exploring work values in five countries, Cogin (2012) found significant differences in work values between generations when controlling for nationality – with the young generation placing less emphasis on work itself and more on the work-life balance.

3.   Chinese and Slovenian national culture

China, an East Asian country, and Slovenia, a CEE country, are different in many ways. China is one of the largest and most populous countries, while Slovenia seems to be its opposite. China may be regarded as the longest continuous civilisation in the world, mostly developing in isolation from the rest of the world, and has a tradition of strong rule. Slovenia only became an independent state in 1991, and for most of history Slovenians lived under foreign rule, exposed to many different cultural influences. The main teachings in China – Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism – differ significantly from Christianity, which is dominant in Slovenia. After WWII, both countries established socialism. Yet, in China it has a stronger communist background.

Both countries experienced a gradual transition to a market economy in the 1990s; however, China is now one of the world's superpowers and fastest growing countries, while Slovenia is experiencing a serious financial and economic crisis. The absolute level of GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity is still much higher in Slovenia (around USD 22,000 in 2012) than in China (some USD 9,000). Yet, it has almost doubled in China over the last 10 years (IMF 2013). The unemployment rate in Slovenia is rising (close to 10% in 2012), more than twice China's level of 4% (IMF 2013).

Despite several apparent differences between China and Slovenia, there is merit in comparing the young Slovenian and Chinese generations' work values. First, it reflects the recent strengthening of economic and political ties between China and the 16 CEE countries. The increased economic collaboration in the form of foreign trade and investments as well as the growing numbers of China-CEE student exchanges call for a better understanding of the young generation from the two regions. While some might argue that Slovenia might not be the best CEE representative, we argue otherwise. Its geo-cultural position in Europe and history make it an ideal CEE 'yardstick'. Based on its Austro-Hungarian history, Slovenian culture encompasses a Central European cultural perspective, while its recent history provides a valuable South-East European perspective. Finally,

both China and Slovenia represent non-Western cultures and are suitable candidates for testing the Lyons et al. (2010) work values model in these cultural settings.

We next describe the Chinese and Slovenian national cultures in more detail. We define national culture as those beliefs and values that are widely shared in a specific society at a particular point in time (Ralston et al. 1993). Fang (2006a: 73) explains that such beliefs and values are "actively created (i.e. negotiated) by means of social interaction". While national culture is considered relatively stable, it should be noted that Faure and Fang (2008) and Fang (2012) emphasise not only the dynamic, but also the paradoxical and dialectic uniqueness of Chinese culture which also holds important managerial implications for organisations.

3.1 *Chinese national culture*

Chinese culture is influenced by three philosophical doctrines: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (Fang 2006b). Taoism is the influential native philosophy with its main concept of the "why of life" (De Bary et al. 1960). Buddhism provides spiritual guidance for Chinese to endure hardship and to look forward to a better life (Lee 1995). Confucianism is more a set of guidelines for proper behaviour and societal code of conduct. It has exerted a fundamental influence on Chinese thinking and behaviour for over 2,500 years. Confucianism considers proper relationships among human beings as the basic societal thread (Huang 2000). It identifies *San Gang* (Three Cardinal Relations) between individuals, namely between the: (1) king and subject; (2) father and son; and (3) husband and wife, so that each person knows their own place in society and standing relative to others (Littrell 2002). Confucianism prescribes an appropriate way of conducting and maintaining relationships at all levels of the social hierarchy to ensure social order and balance (Faure/Fang 2008). Besides the Three Cardinal Relations, the central principle of Confucianism is *harmony* (Huang 2000). Consequently, the benefit of the collective comes before that of the family or the individual in Chinese culture.

However, the number and magnitude of social changes, particularly since China's economic reforms, have transformed the impact of the Confucian tradition on Chinese society. They have brought to the forefront of Chinese society utilitarian thoughts with a greater emphasis on individualism and the specific interests, wants and needs of individuals (Wang 2002). Thus, Confucian-based collectivism is giving way to individualism in contemporary Chinese society.

A useful perspective on Chinese culture is further offered by Faure and Fang (2008) who emphasise the paradoxical nature of Chinese culture, illustrated by the Yin-Yang dynamic. The aforementioned shift from collectivism to individualism is a good example of such a paradox through which Chinese culture can today be described as still highly collectivistic, but at the same time displaying

strong individualistic tendencies (Fang 2012). Faure and Fang (2008) point out eight specific paradoxes in Chinese culture, namely: (1) guanxi vs. professionalism; (2) the importance of face vs. self-expression and directness; (3) thrift vs. materialism and ostentatious consumption; (4) family and group orientation vs. individuation; (5) aversion to law vs. respect for legal practices; (6) respect for etiquette, age and hierarchy vs. respect for simplicity, creativity and competence; (7) a longterm orientation vs. a shortterm orientation; and (8) traditional creeds vs. modern approaches. While these paradoxes have existed throughout Chinese history, globalisation and economic development are increasing the paradoxical nature of Chinese culture which manifests itself in both managerial values and behaviour (Fang 2010). Thus, it is becoming ever more difficult to describe Chinese culture using the traditional dimensions used in cross-cultural research, or by using traditional Western bipolar cultural typologies (Fang 2012).

3.2 Slovenian national culture

Unlike China's 5,000 year civilisation, the origin of Slovenian national culture is much harder to date. This is because the Slovenian people were historically governed by foreign rulers who imposed their own values and traditions. Following the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians after World War I (1918–1929) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1944), Slovenians were part of socialist Yugoslavia up until its turbulent disintegration in 1991 (Udovič 2011). It is only then that Slovenia for the first time became independent. While Croatia was historically closer to the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Slovenia was more closely historically, economically, politically and culturally linked to Austria (Prunk 1996). Hrastelj (2001) emphasises a strong Germanic imprint on Slovenian culture, which can be seen in its monochronic time orientation, low contextuality of communication, importance of organisation, structure, and a need for order.

In terms of religion, Slovenian culture was historically strongly influenced by Christianity and its values, first through Protestantism, later by the prevalence of Catholicism. The Protestant work ethic, which emphasises personal achievement and individual self-worth, importantly shaped Slovenian culture. In addition to being obedient, responsible, honest and hardworking (Musek 2000), Musek (1994) points to a lack of proactiveness and 'real' productivity in the Slovenian work orientation. In the Yugoslav period, the influence of Catholic religion gave way to the socialist philosophy and imprinted the importance of equality, solidarity and camaraderie in Slovenians. The important impact of the socialist ideology on Slovenian values was shown by Musek (2000) where socially-based values were the highest ranking set of values, followed by values related to security and democratic values. For other characteristics of the national culture, Žižek (1982) particularly emphasised the following: motherhood, homeliness,

nostalgia and historical rootedness, traditionalism, a family orientation, and an incomplete masculine identity. The latter is linked to the historical sense of 'victimisation' which is ingrained in Slovenian self-identity because of foreign political and economic over-rule (Vezovnik 2007).

Following the transition to a market economy, there was a notable shift in values (Rus/Toš 2005). Work became less central to life, personal development and advancement became more important, with increasing individualism. Hrastelj (2001) observed the importance of gaining a sense of accomplishment and acquiring things. The shift from collectivism to individualism was also emphasised by Zagoršek (2005), who further pointed to a low degree of assertiveness (giving way to solidarity and conflict avoidance) and a low degree of a humane orientation (dominance of self-interest and materialism) in Slovenian national culture. A study by Pučko and Čater (2011) also found that uncertainty avoidance is a strong cultural characteristic of Slovenians.

3.3   National vs. regional cultures

Understanding the importance of regional cultural differences is particularly important given China's geographic, ethnic and economic heterogeneity (Ralston et al. 1996; Dincer/Wang 2011). Littrell et al. (2012:318) pointed to different *cultural areas* within China, especially between the North and South, as well as between urban and rural areas. The authors found significant intra-national differences for 12 studied leader behaviour dimensions across four convenience samples of working people in Guangzhou, Macau, Zhengzhou and Suzhou. In summary, scores for all 12 leadership styles from the Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire were higher for Zhengzhou (east-central part), followed by Suzhou (south-east part), and then Guangzhou and Macao (southern and south-eastern Cantonese-speaking parts). Significant regional differences were also found in managerial values by Ralston et al. (1996). For example, the Guangzhou/Shanghai southern areas scored much higher on universalism, hedonism, stimulation and power. The Beijing/Dalian northern areas scored much higher on tradition, while the Chengdu/Lanzhou western and central areas scored relatively higher on conformity, benevolence and security values. In a study of regional differences in consumer decision-making styles, Zhou et al. (2010) found support for regional differences in consumer decision-making styles of adult consumers between the coastal and inland areas. Chinese coastal consumers were found to be more novelty/fashion and habitual/loyalty conscious than inland consumers, which corresponds to a higher degree of hedonic shopping orientation. A similar observation was also established in analysing regional differences (coastal-inland areas) between young-adult consumers by Yu and Zhou (2009).

Despite its small size, regional cultural differences can be observed in Slovenia like in any other country (Trstenjak 1991; Musek 1994), particularly because of

its different types of geographical, historical and socio-linguistic embeddedness. Compared to China, Slovenia is much less ethnically heterogeneous with only a few minorities. However, while the study of Slovenian values by Musek (2003) found some regional differences in the values of Slovenians, these seem to be more closely related to religious, cultural, democratic and emotional values. There appear to be less apparent regional differences in other types of values, which might have a stronger influence on work values. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined regional differences in work values or the work values of the young generation in Slovenia. In general, any kind of research on work-related values of the young generation is itself still very limited for Slovenia (Mihelič/Lipičnik 2010; Pučko/Čater 2011).

3.4   Comparing Chinese and Slovenian national cultures

There has been a lot of cross-cultural research from which we can draw data for comparing Chinese and Slovenian cultures. In his original study, Hofstede (2001) found that both China and Slovenia (at that time still part of Yugoslavia) scored highly on collectivism and power distance. China scored lower on uncertainty avoidance and higher on masculinity. In terms of values, Schwartz (1999) found higher scores for hierarchy, mastery and conservatism for China, while Slovenian scores were higher for autonomy, harmony and egalitarianism. Overall, work was more central to life for Chinese than Slovenians. Using Schwartz's survey, Ralston et al. (2011) provided scores for individual-level and society-level values for 50 countries on a sample of business professionals. For society values, China scored higher only on hierarchy, and only on power for individual values. For all the other dimensions, the Slovenian scores were higher, with the largest differences in societal values for harmony and egalitarianism, followed by hedonism, security, self-enhancement, openness to change and individualism at the individual level.

The GLOBE study was conducted across matched samples of middle managers and only showed moderate differences between the two cultures (House et al. 2004). Slovenians scored higher on both values and practices for gender egalitarianism, while Chinese scored higher for institutional collectivism[2], a humane orientation[3] and uncertainty avoidance. In terms of a performance orientation, future orientation and in-group collectivism[4], Slovenian value scores were substantially higher than Chinese. This was, however, opposite for practices. Assertiveness, which also refers to being confrontational and aggressive in relationships with others, is the only value dimension on which Chinese scored higher

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[2]   Institutional collectivism relates to organizational and societal institutional practices encouraging and rewarding collective distribution of resources and collective action.

[3]   Humane orientation encompasses encouragement and rewards for individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.

[4]   In-group collectivism relates to expressed pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness to organizations or family.

than Slovenians; yet practices scores were lower. For managers in both countries, a performance orientation came out highest and power distance lowest among the nine GLOBE cultural dimensions.

On the cultural map of the world (Inglehart/Welzl 2010) – based on the World Values Survey (WVS) – Slovenia and China have similar, relatively high scores on the rational-secular dimension. However, a notable difference occurs with Chinese having highly expressed survival values, while Slovenians have higher self-expression values. Comparing data directly from the WVS data set[5], we can observe that for both countries family is the most important value. Work is the second-ranked value in China and the third in Slovenia. In both countries, work is perceived as a duty to society but, when asked about the importance of job outcomes, Slovenians seem to ascribe more importance to almost all elements of work, with Chinese numbers dropping slightly for two consecutive periods of the survey, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Share of World Values Survey respondents regarding a certain work-related element important (in %)

Element of work	Slovenia (1994-98)	China (1994-98)	China (1999-2004)
Good pay	89	76	65
Not too much pressure	73	36	27
Good job security	93	68	68
To have a respected job	77	56	58
Good hours	77	46	33
Opportunity to use initiative	78	41	34
Generous holidays	47	15	11
Can achieve something	90	50	31
Responsible job	65	26	22
Interesting job	91	42	18
Job meets one's abilities	87	63	59

Source: World Values Survey, 1981-2008 OFFICIAL AGGREGATE v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org).

4.   Hypotheses

In the previous section we described differences in national and regional cultures. While there appear to be some similarities, we believe the differences be-

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[5]   Data was gathered from the official World Values Survey website, 1981-2008 OFFICIAL AGGREGATE v.20090901, 2009.

tween the Chinese and Slovenian cultures can also translate into work value differences. In the first hypothesis, we follow the argument of those researchers who believe that national culture is a dominant factor in shaping general and work values (Kluckhohn/Strodtbeck 1961; Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004; Jaw et al. 2007).

> *Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences in work values between Chinese and Slovenian business students.*

Since there is sufficient evidence regarding the influence of national culture characteristics on work values, we developed a set of three sub-hypotheses related to the dimensions of work values described by Lyons et al. (2010). The first one is related to instrumental work values. Schwartz (1999) suggests that an emphasis on self-sufficiency (e.g. financial rewards) is compatible with individualism. Following the argument by Fromm (1976) about individualistic societies thriving on "having", we can connect the whole set of extrinsic or instrumental values to individualism. Because Slovenia consistently shows higher scores for individualism than China, and has experienced a considerable shift towards individualism (Jazbec 2007), we hypothesise that Slovenians will express a greater degree of instrumental work values. In the WVS, a larger share of Slovenians indicated that extrinsic job elements are important to them (Table 1). In times of crises, individualism and instrumental values become stronger (Elliot 2010). Due to the much stronger negative impact of the current crisis on the Slovenian economy, we can again find a basis for our first sub-hypothesis. The unemployment situation is difficult for the young all over the world, even in China. They struggle despite the fast economic growth and university graduates often have to take low-paying, unattractive jobs. Nevertheless, in Slovenia there is a higher risk of youth unemployment with an almost 20% rate of unemployment among the young in 2012 (compared to 13% in China) (ILO 2013).

> *Hypothesis 1.1: Slovenian business students will score higher on the instrumental dimension of work values than their Chinese peers.*

There is evidence of the young Chinese becoming increasingly individualistic (Yi et al. 2010). On the other hand, young Slovenians highly value relationships and friendship (Ule/Kuhar 2002; Mihelič/Lipičnik 2010). With a strong tradition in China of satisfying social needs over individualistic needs (Schwartz 1999) and Confucianism emphasising harmony and altruism, we still expect young Chinese to have stronger social and altruistic work values. We find further support for this from the National Character Survey (NCS) scores in Terracciano et al. (2005), based on matched samples of young adults. NCS reports a higher agreeableness score for China. On the other hand, Slovenians score higher on neuroticism and conscientiousness. We can thus predict Slovenian behavioural responses to be much more 'temperamental' and energetic. Further, a replication of Hofstede's study by Jazbec (2007) suggests a big shift towards individualism

in Slovenia. Since Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) found individualistic and collectivistic values to be universally opposite, we can expect the higher individualism to be reflected in lower social and altruistic work values.

Hypothesis 1.2: Chinese business students will score higher on the social-altruistic work values dimension than their Slovenian peers.

Chinese culture scores higher on hierarchy (Schwartz 1999) and consistently displays higher scores for power distance than Slovenia (House et al. 2004; Jazbec 2007). In addition, in the WVS (Table 1) Chinese rated good pay and a respected job relatively highly compared to other job outcomes. On the other hand, Slovenians value egalitarianism and score higher on femininity vs. masculinity (Hofstede 2001; Schwartz 1999). Both of these reduce the importance of prestige values.

Hypothesis 1.3: Chinese business students will score higher on the prestige work values dimension than their Slovenian peers.

With regard to cognitive work values, the evidence is quite mixed. We therefore cannot hypothesise differences between Chinese and Slovenian business students. Learning is one of the key concepts of Confucianism and is closely linked to cognitive work values. Sun and Wang (2010) describe self-development as the most important value of the young generation in China. It is linked to both Confucianism, as well as the increased competition among China's large population and its resource-constrained environment. The Chinese school system is much more competitive than the Slovenian one so personal achievement and the opportunity to excel are important for the Chinese student. In this regard, Chinese youth prepare years in advance for the infamous *gaokao* national university entrance exam (Yu/Suen, 2005).

On the other hand, the cultural map of the world (Inglehart/Welzl 2005) shows that Slovenia scores higher on self-expression values than China. Table 1 also shows that interesting work and achievement are much more important for Slovenians. According to Schwartz (1999), autonomy, which is a value expressed highly by Slovenians, is linked to intrinsic, cognitive rewards. However, because there are elements which would enhance cognitive values in both cultures we cannot propose that either group of students would score higher in terms of cognitive values.

While research hypothesis 1 and its three sub-hypotheses reflect the general belief that there is a strong link between national culture characteristics and work values in general, the role of national culture is not all that clear when we look at the young generation. Wills et al. (2011) compared the young in Quebec and the United Arab Emirates, and found little difference in both inter-cultural and inter-generational work values, despite the large cultural differences. Yet Zhang et al. (2007) found significant differences in work values among French and Canadian (Quebec) business students, despite a common language and cultural origins.

Similarly, Froese (2013) found many differences in the work values of students in China, Korea and Japan, even though all three countries are Confucian-based cultures. Susaeta et al. (2013) also found significant diversity in work-attitude drivers within culturally similar Latin American countries. Karakitapoglu Aygun et al. (2011) studied work values among Turkish and US university students and established that the Turkish students expressed higher scores for the Protestant work ethic and all contemporary work values than the American students.

This mixed evidence prompts an exploration of the strength of national culture in combination with other demographic characteristics when studying the work values of the young generation. Besides nationality, Warr's (2008) literature review identified the following most frequently used demographic factors affecting work values: age, gender, educational background, and employment status. Because we are already studying a relatively homogenous group of the young with regard to their age and educational background, our analysis focuses on gender and work experience (a proxy for employment status). Since the aim of this paper is to explore the strength of factors affecting work values, we will not hypothesise further how gender and work experience in particular affect work values, but simply test the strength of the influence of these two demographic factors compared to nationality (culture). Accordingly, we form the second hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 2: National culture is not the dominant factor creating differences in the work values of Chinese and Slovenian business students. Gender and work experience also play an important role in shaping work values.*

This second hypothesis challenges the view that national culture is the dominant factor, thus taking more of a convergence approach to national culture influences. From this perspective, national cultures are becoming more alike (Inglehart/Baker 2000) because social interaction between cultures is growing due to globalisation and easier communication through information technology (Fabris 2003). This is especially true for the tech-savvy young generation. Some even believe that a common global youth culture is developing (Gidley 2001) with the young around the world being more alike, compared to older generations in their respective countries. Due to the convergence of national cultures, their impact on shaping different work values may be weakened, at least for the young generation. Thus, some researchers propose that the impact of national culture on values may be overrated (Lebo et al. 1995; Gahan/Abeysekera 2009). Therefore, the strength of the impact of national culture on work values seems to be a relevant venue to explore.

5.   Methodology

Our study analyses work values of the young generation in China and Slovenia. It connects them to national culture characteristics, as well as other demographic

factors, particularly gender. Data for the analysis were collected in the spring and summer of 2013 using a convenience matched sampling approach, usually employed in cross-cultural research (Cavusgil/Das 1997; Schwartz/Sagie 2000).

The Slovenian sample was obtained through an online survey administered at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, among undergraduate students in the first and second years of study from different business majors (i.e. management, entrepreneurship, banking and finance management, marketing etc.) who were taking a course on human resources management. For the Chinese sample, online data collection was supplemented by paper data collection in the classroom to ensure the appropriate number of valid cases. The participation of all students was voluntary and anonymous. Data in China were collected at Fudan University (Business School) in Shanghai. The Fudan University student body is composed in such a way that 35% of the students are originally from Shanghai, while the rest come from other parts of China. Outstanding results are required at the *gaokao* national university entry exam to enter the Fudan University Business School. Most students are from single-child families. The surveyed students were taking a course on cross-cultural communication and in their third year of undergraduate studies. They came from two different majors: industrial and business management, and financial management. Both schools are leading internationally-accredited business schools. Ljubljana and Shanghai were selected as urban commercial centres in both countries.

In our data, we control for both the educational background of the respondents (undergraduate business students in their 2nd and 3rd year) and age (93.8% of students were born in 1990–1993). In addition to matching the education level, it is important to examine homogenous age groups (Parry/Urwin 2011) since generational cohorts usually span over 20 years. Age differences could result in potential differences among members due to different lifecycle stages. In terms of gender, there are more female students in the sample (overall: 58%; China: 62%; Slovenia: 55%). With regard to work experience, Slovenian respondents had significantly more work experience (mean: 2.6 years; including student work) compared to the Chinese respondents (mean: 0.3 years). This is consistent with the fact that Chinese single-child students are more dependent on their family for financial support and have a high study workload (Yu et al. 2012). At the same time, part-time jobs are also not part of the Chinese culture, and there are actually limited opportunities for students to work part time in China even if they want to.

Work values were measured with the Lyons Work Values Survey (LWVS) because it features items relevant to the modern workplace and has been validated across cultures on comparable samples. The 25-item format based on Lyons et al. (2010) asks respondents to report how *important* various factors are in terms of work. We decided to use the four-group classification of work values (instrumental, cognitive, prestige, and social/altruistic work values).

The survey instrument was administered in the Slovenian and Mandarin languages after a translation-back translation procedure. Multiple translation-back translation rounds were needed for the Mandarin version to find the optimal translation. The survey produced acceptable levels of internal reliability, with the corresponding Cronbach alpha being highest for the instrumental work value items (0.78), followed by the cognitive (0.76), prestige (0.71) and social-altruistic work value items (0.67).

After performing descriptive analyses and rank-ordering the most and least important work value factors in both countries, we proceeded with variance decomposition. We worked with three two-group MANOVAs (using the general linear model procedure in SPSS), where the four work value dimensions were entered as dependent variables along with selected combinations of salient demographic variables as independent factors.[6] After the multivariate models were established, mean differences were examined in more depth through a series of univariate ANOVAs.

6.   Results

Table 2 presents the six most and least important work values for both student samples. *Advancement* is the most important work value among the Chinese and Slovenia business students. Further, *achievement* and *friendly co-workers* are two other factors which rank among the top six work values in both countries. Among the bottom six work values, *influence*, *authority* and *impact* are the same for both countries. Interestingly, all of them relate to prestige work values.

Table 2: Most/least expressed work values of the Slovenian and Chinese business students

Top six work values		Bottom six work values	
Slovenia	**China**	**Slovenia**	**China**
Advancement	Advancement	Influence	Authority
Interesting work	Continuously learn	Prestigious job	Impact
Salary	Co-workers	Social interaction	Use abilities
Achievement	Fun	Impact	Help people
Information	Achievement	Variety	Freedom
Co-workers	Job security	Authority	Influence

We performed a multivariate test to determine if the means of the four work values are significantly different between the two student samples. Pillai's Trace value of 0.66 was significant (F=15.38; df=4; p=0.000), indicating the centroids

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[6]   For example, nationality as a single factor; nationality and gender as two independent factors; nationality and gender as independent factors, along with working experience as a covariate.

of the mean vectors of the two groups were different. This offers initial support for Hypothesis 1, generally indicating significant differences in work values between the Chinese and Slovenian business students.

We continued with a series of univariate tests (ANOVAs) to determine specific items with statistically significant mean differences between the two samples. Table 3 shows that instrumental, social-altruistic and cognitive work values differ significantly between the two samples. Slovenian business students scored significantly higher on instrumental and cognitive work values, while Chinese business students scored higher on social-altruistic values. This confirms only two of the three H1 sub-hypotheses. We can confirm Hypothesis 1.1, showing that Slovenian business students attribute greater importance to instrumental values, as well as Hypothesis H1.2, showing that social-altruistic values are more important among Chinese business students. Regardless of finding support for Hypothesis 1.1 and Hypothesis 1.2, we observe relatively small standardised effect sizes in both cases, indicating that the mean differences are not very large between the two samples.

*Table 3: ANOVA results for the Chinese-Slovenian student work values comparison*

Work value dimensions	Slovenia (n=549)			China (n=281)			Hedges g (std. effect size)	Sig.
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean		
Instrumental	3.97	0.56	0.023	3.88	0.45	0.027	0.18166	0.013
Social-altruistic	3.65	0.74	0.032	3.83	0.50	0.030	-0.26047	0.000
Prestige	3.32	0.70	0.030	3.32	0.64	0.038	0.00120	0.987
Cognitive	3.90	0.59	0.025	3.80	0.47	0.028	0.18165	0.013

We also performed another multivariate test with two independent factors (i.e., country and gender) at the same time. The multivariate result was significant for both culture (Pillai's Trace=0.077; F=16.8; df=4; p=0.000), gender (Pillai's Trace=0.065; F=14.15; df=4; p=0.000), as well as marginally significant for the interaction between culture and gender (Pillai's Trace=0.012; F=15.35; df=4; p=0.000). This supports the claim that – besides culture – gender, as well as the interaction between national culture and gender, affects differences in work values between the two samples (in support of Hypothesis 2). Considering both national culture and gender, we again found evidence of statistically significant differences based on national culture for the instrumental (*p=0.001*), cognitive (*p=0.001*) and social-altruistic work values (*p=0.001*). In addition, we found that the same differences also exist for gender – namely for the instrumental (*p=0.000*), cognitive (*p=0.023*) and social-altruistic work values (*p=0.001*) –

and that a weak statistically significant difference exists for the interaction between gender and national culture for social-altruistic work values (*p=0.071*).

Figure 1 shows a detailed comparison between female and male students in both countries. Slovenian female students stand out with the highest score for instrumental work values, while Slovenian male students stand out with the lowest score for social-altruistic work values. Overall, the results presented in Figure 1 show that, although national culture is an important factor in shaping work values, gender plays also a very important role.

Figure 1: Comparison of work value dimensions for the Slovenian and Chinese business students according to their nationality and gender (5-point ordinal scales)
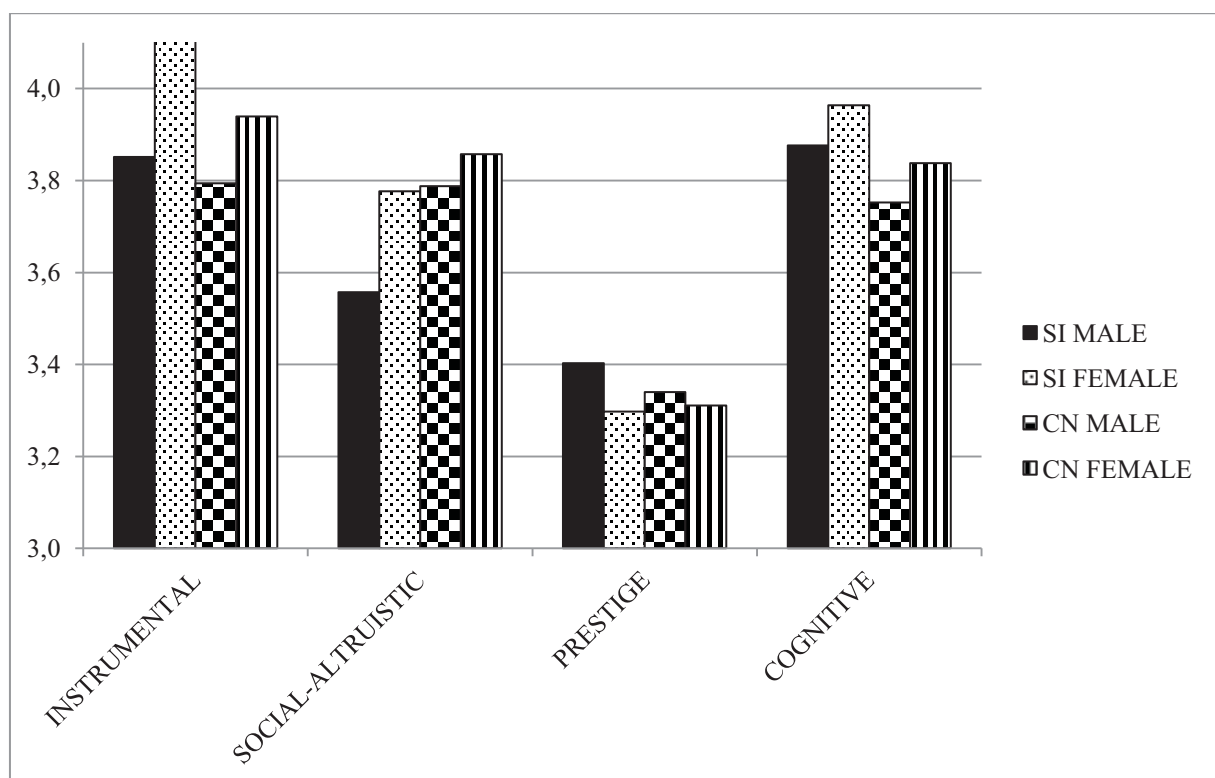
We also controlled for the effect of work experience. Multivariate results were significant for both factors and the covariate (Pillai's Trace was 0.02 for work experience, 0.067 for national culture, 0.068 for gender and 0.013 for interaction between national culture and gender; all *p<0.05*). A more detailed examination reveals that work experience significantly affects prestige (*p=0.002*) and cognitive (*p=0.022*) work values. Even after introducing work experience as a covariate, gender still significantly affects social-altruistic (*p=0.001*), cognitive (*p=0.034*) and instrumental *(p=0.000)* work values. However, national culture now significantly affects only social-altruistic (*p=0.000*) and instrumental (*p=0.002*) work values. These results offer further support for Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2, as well as Hypothesis 2. Therefore, while some variability in the work values of business students can be attributed to the national culture, the latter is

not the only demographic factor shaping the work values of business students, let alone the most salient one.

7.   Discussion and implications

Our research results confirm our second hypothesis, showing that both gender and work experience have an important impact on expressed work values. Hence, national culture cannot be considered as the dominant factor in explaining work value differences, but merely as one of the influencing factors. Instead of pursuing either divergence or convergence perspectives, we find support in our empirical evidence for the so-called crossvergence perspective which "provides an integrative alternative that might be characterized as the melting pot philosophy of values formation" (Ralston et al. 2008:10). Following this perspective, national culture is still important but, due to globalisation, increased social interaction between members of different cultures and learning, national culture and its influence on organisational contexts are changing (Faure/Fang 2008). While the complexity of a comprehensive analysis of the antecedents and determinants of this crossvergence falls outside the scope of our two-country comparison, we believe our results can be explained by a more dynamic understanding of culture (Bird/Fang 2009). Further, the young generation is believed to be at the "forefront of globalization" (Strizhakova et al. 2012:43) and its generational culture is in particular shaped by globalisation-induced learning driven mainly by the Internet (Fang 2012). In addition, we believe the young generation and their work values also illustrate Douglas and Craig's (2011) concept of *glocal* identity, as well as Fang's (2012) emphasis on understanding culture as a dynamic, multidimensional and multilevel learning process.

Our comparison of Chinese and Slovenian business students' work values also points to some differences, even though they are not large and not always in the predicted direction according to national culture characteristics. While we found higher predicted values for instrumental work values among Slovenian business students, they also scored higher on cognitive values, especially with regard to interesting work and freedom. The former confirms the importance of the so-called hedonic dimension of values among the young, both universally, as well as in Slovenia (Musek 1995). It is consistent with Ule and Kuhar's (2002) results from studying values of the young in Slovenia and with their third (self-expression) dimension linked to excitement. It is also consistent with the results related to the values of Slovenian business students obtained by Mihelič and Lipičnik (2010), as well as more recently by Čater et al. (2013), which found freedom to be a fundamental value of the young in Slovenia.

On the other hand, Chinese business students scored higher on continuous learning. This may be connected to the influence of Confucianism, where moral cultivation and life-long learning are seen as central pillars (Ghauri/Fang 2001). The importance of learning within the Chinese sample is also consistent with

previous empirical evidence on Chinese work attitudes and values by Sloman (2007) and Yi et al. (2010), which found this to be true across different generations of Chinese business people. A possible explanation for the absence of significance related to prestige work values could be that students perceive the importance of influence and impact differently than those who are already employed and used to working in more hierarchical power structures. It also needs to be mentioned that Fudan is a leading university in China. Most students enter Fudan based on their outstanding gaokao results. For such students, prestige may not be that explicitly important since in accordance with the Shanghai 'culture' they are much more business- and money-oriented; less so on prestige (Yu/Zhou 2009).

Our research also revealed that the most important work-related value (Table 3) is the importance of *advancement* in both samples. This is consistent with the ambitious nature of the young generation (Goldman/Schmaltz 2006). Work advancement has been shown to be particularly important in both Slovenia (Novak 2007) and China (Yi et al. 2010). Connecting this to the background of the two matched samples, one could argue that advancement is equally important in Ljubljana, as well as in Shanghai, despite apparent differences in these cities' sizes and population-based competitiveness. Thus, while representatives from the two samples are embedded in quite different contexts, the need for advancement seems to be a universal glocal value.

The much higher importance of an interesting job, as the second most important value within the Slovenian sample compared to only rank 12 within the Chinese sample, is further consistent with evidence from the WVS, where the Slovenian score of 91 was more than twice the Chinese score of 42 (see Table 1). A similar, albeit smaller difference can also be observed from the WVS scores regarding the importance of *payment* (salary), and is consistent with the third most important value within the Slovenian sample.

A surprising result was the high rank of *fun* for the Chinese sample, as we could see that in a sample for business professionals hedonism was not valued as highly by Chinese (Ralston et al. 2011). While this may be true at the national level, people from Shanghai score much higher on hedonism than people from elsewhere in China (Ralston et al. 1996; Zhou et al. 2010). The background of Fudan business students should also be again taken into account. The high importance of fun might be connected to both the extraordinary study efforts invested to achieve an outstanding gaokao result to enter the university, as well as *hedonism*, which is a prevalent feature of the Shanghai cultural area, particularly among the young generation (Zhou et al. 2010). The greater importance of fun at work among the Chinese sample might also be connected to the more individualistic (Liu 2005), self-centred and anti-traditional nature of the young generation, compared to other Chinese generations (Elegant 2007). Further, the general hedonic characteristic of the young generation (Cardoso/Pinto 2010) might also

manifest itself through both excitement-seeking (fun) and high social interaction-based behaviour with co-workers. Like with the importance of advancement, the different type of social, cultural, historical and even political embeddedness seems to be counterbalanced by similar patterns of upbringing (i.e. single children), globalised 'generational time', as well as economic, urban and competitive pressures between the two countries. We believe this is consistent with a more dynamic understanding of the impact of culture and other types of embeddedness on work values between the young generations in China and Slovenia.

It is also surprising that the importance of co-workers was ranked third by the Chinese sample. One possible explanation for this could be that having good co-workers might not be so much related to collectivist values, but more to the importance of work-related socialisation and a sense of workplace enjoyment (Yi et al. 2010). Although former research found that most Chinese college students put economic reward alongside personal development in first place (Wang 2007), salary ranked only seventh within the Chinese sample. This may be a result of the fact that single-child families provide a good economic safety net and reduce the importance of salary for the Chinese young generation. On the other hand, salary is ranked third in Slovenia, probably reflecting the current economic difficulties facing the young in Slovenia due to the economic crisis. Further, increased individualisation is linked to an expressed "need to have" in Fromm's (1976) terms, and this may also be the reason that instrumental values are overall ranked the highest for young Slovenians.

In preparing for the young generation employers competing in the global talent markets should be aware that, while national culture does play a role in determining their applicants' and potential new hires' work values, other salient demographic factors should be considered as equally important. Simply scrutinising cultural differences (which on the surface are very salient when comparing young Slovenians and Chinese) could mistakenly lead multinational companies to conclude that culture is the main source of variability, and make an erroneous management decision. If companies want to understand the variability in work values among members of the young generation our results suggest that a balanced diversity perspective is more appropriate than a focus on cultural differences alone. This calls for a more universalistic approach to managing representatives of the young generation across cultures (i.e. less localisation in practices for attracting and managing them). At the same time, companies should also consider the more intense adaptation of work and HR practices with other salient characteristics of this cohort, such as gender and experience, as well as an urban lifestyle and the breadth of their access to modern ICT.

Our analysis revealed advancement is the top individual work value for the young generation in both cultures. Therefore, organisations could improve their image in the eyes of this cohort by highlighting the possibility of a fast track for

top performing young talents, as part of their value proposition. At the same time, they should make sure that this option is accompanied with a realistic pre-view of advancement possibilities to prevent unrealistic expectations. On the whole, due to the fact that advancement is highly desired among the young gen-eration, and considering their lack of practical knowledge of organisational ca-reer realities, companies would benefit from continuous open communication about promotions and other developmental career opportunities.

Nevertheless, cultural differences remain one of the distinguishing factors among members of the young generation. Organisations wishing to employ young-generation individuals from CEE countries and China should thus pay more attention to the differences between the implications of instrumental and social/altruistic work values when designing HR practices or developing an em-ployee value proposition. For example, young-generation applicants from CEE countries might be easier to attract with employee value propositions highlight-ing features such as job security, flexible work hours, a sufficient flow of rele-vant information, and a good salary. Their Chinese counterparts might be easier to attract by arranging work settings that include good co-workers, social inter-action and opportunities to help people.

However, it is hard to develop work and HR practices that would simultaneously represent and communicate instrumental and altruistic work values. Thus, or-ganisations employing representatives of the young generation from both Chi-nese and CEE countries (e.g., Slovenia) should emphasise work and HR policies that support the matching cognitive value dimension. At the same time, they should try to avoid those practices that propagate undesired prestige values. A work setting that would accommodate work value profiles, and is likely to em-power young people from both countries, could thus be founded on the empha-sising of continuous learning, challenge, interesting work and advancement, and avoiding excessive authority, along with the desire to exert power and influence.

8.   Conclusions

Our results allow the conclusion that while national culture may be important for understanding the work values of the young generation, it is not the dominant factor, particularly if one takes into account regional cultural variations in China, similarities in cultural ecologies, as well as the prevailing influence of dynamic cultural learning across multiple cultural levels and dimensions (Fang 2012). However, while we observe certain trends of the crossvergence or convergence of work values, some important differences still exist. They are more related to individual items (e.g. the high value of continuous learning and fun for Chinese vis-à-vis interesting work and freedom for Slovenians) than to any particular work value dimension. Gender seems to be a very important determinant of work values, especially in Slovenia, which corresponds with evidence provided by Lindsay and Knox (1984) who found that gender explains differences in

work values among young adults due to differences in their socialisation processes and social learning.

Our results add information to the growing body of knowledge on the work values of the young generation between two very different cultural ecologies and types of social, cultural, historical and political embeddedness. Given the increased co-operation between China and CEE, our results provide important insights for employers there about their future workforce. A valuable contribution of our research is that we conducted an unprecedented comparative analysis of work values in China and Slovenia (a CEE country). Further, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to use the Lyons et al. (2010) questionnaire in a CEE country.

We also acknowledge that our research is subject to several research limitations. We should mention the unbalanced size of our two samples. Given the relatively big gender differences in work values, matched gender samples would be a good option for studying combined effects. The generalisability of our findings is also reduced because we only included one business school in each country; however, we tried to match both schools in terms of their 'quality' as much as possible (international accreditations). Moreover, the different data collection approaches may have had some effect on the reported results, although the data reliability statistics do not seem to suggest this. The last limitation already leads us to future research recommendations. We used secondary data for national culture characteristics. We also did not measure any personality traits or contextual characteristics. This is often a problem with cross-cultural studies, where national culture is taken as given. However, especially when conducting research for the young generation we have to take into account that national culture characteristics may change with generations (Keating et al. 2002). When conducting research using student samples, it would also be useful to measure some variables related to the characteristics of the education systems. For example, it has been proven that socialisation during education also affects work values (Choi et al. 2010). It would also be beneficial to include even more countries to increase the cultural diversity. This is precisely what we hope this research will motivate, especially in a wider CEE context where the Lyons WVS has still not been employed.

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