

Research Article

Universalism and Innovation: The Influence of Impartiality and Inclusiveness on National Innovativeness

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The innovative capacity of a country is a key factor in its economic development. While classical approaches primarily emphasize technological and economic aspects, cultural and moral influences are increasingly coming into focus in research. In particular, the treatment of out-groups and the intensity of in-group preferences play a crucial role, as expressed in the societal contrast between social cohesion and individual freedom. A central aspect of this debate is the moral dimension, particularly the tension between universalism, relativism, and particularism. This study examines the impact of universalism on a country's innovativeness by situating the concept within cultural theory and analyzing it empirically. The findings provide new insights into the relationship between cultural values and innovation potential with regard to moral capital in a society.

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1. Introduction

The innovative capacity of a country is a central prerequisite for its economic development. Therefore, the question of which factors have a significant influence on national innovative capacity are intensively discussed in scientific literature. In recent discussions, institutional, cultural and moral factors have been increasingly come to the fore. One of these factors is the treatment of outgroups in relation to one's ingroup respectively the intensity of ingroup preferences.

The general question of the relationship between ingroup and outgroup is not strictly new. Bertrand Russell^[1] sees nations historically in a continuous struggle between social cohesion and individual freedom. Social cohesion thrives on values which strengthen the ingroup such as loyalty, while individual

freedom leads to openness in a society in a cosmopolitan sense. Similarly, Amartya Sen^[2] raises the question for today's world in which migration is increasingly leading to pluralistic societies. He perceives the central distinction between "plural monoculturalism" in which people retreat into their cultural ingroup and the society is fragmented, and multiculturalism with a lively interaction between different cultural groups.

The moral dimension of this question is often discussed in literature under the term universalism or its opposites, relativism or particularism. National cultures differ to a high degree in this regard which can lead to accusations against members of different cultures in intercultural cooperation. This is particularly true for questions concerning ingroup preferences and universalism^[3]. This paper aims to examine the effects of universalism of a country in the national capacity to innovate.

To this end, the next chapter will define the term universalism more precisely and distinguish it from relativism and particularism. Then, universalism is placed within the framework of cultural theories to formulate a hypothetical relation between universalism and national innovation capacity. This hypothesis is tested empirically in the following chapter using statistical methods on available data from different cultural theories. The paper ends with a conclusion which summarizes the main results regarding the relationship between universalism and national innovativeness.

2. Universalism

In general, there are two slightly different ways of understanding the term universalism. The first interpretation contrasts universalism with relativism. Universalism in this sense means that there is a possibility to find moral values which are universally valid for all cultures^[4]. This interpretation particularly aims at human dignity and the fundamental human rights that derive from it^[5]. Relativism, on the contrary, is the empirical position that "there are deep and widespread moral disagreements across different societies, and these disagreements are much more significant than whatever agreements there may be"^[6]. Essentially, the question is whether there are universal values such as the human rights of the United Nations which serve as a moral foundation for all cultures or whether there are no such values and there is moral cultural diversity. Of course, the answer to this question also has normative consequences.

The second interpretation contrasts universalism with particularism. In this view, universalism claims that all human beings have the same moral importance^[7]. Particularism, on the other hand, assumes that members from the same group should take precedence over others, be it members of the same

community or the same nation^[8]. Essentially, this interpretation raises the question of the intensity of ingroup preferences (ingroup versus outgroup), i.e. the question between equal treatment of members of the outgroup(s) in comparison to the ingroup (universalism) or the favoritism of the ingroup in comparison to the outgroup(s) (particularism). Universalism in this sense does not deal with a prescription for a certain way of life but simply rejects the exclusion, exploitation or repression of other groups of people^[5].

The central foundation of this view of universalism is impartiality in the evaluation of the claims of different groups of people as an expression of social fairness in a society. This basis has its philosophical roots in the “fair and impartial spectator” of Adam Smith^[9] who should be consulted in moral questions. Impartiality is a crucial component of utilitarian consequentialism where it means both impersonality as well as equal treatment in the sense of equal consideration of interests. Jeremy Bentham’s “Greatest Happiness Principle” used in utilitarianism is subject to the dictum attributed to Bentham: “everybody to count for one, nobody to count for more than one”^[10]. John Stuart Mill^[11], in his defense of utilitarianism, refers to an impartial observer in a similar vein as Adam Smith when he demands from everyone: “As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator”. Henry Sidgwick^[12] even evokes the universe as an impartial observer in his classic *The Methods of Ethics* when he writes that “[...] the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other”. And Peter Singer^[13] speaks in this context of an “impartial standpoint: advancing the interests of all, impartially considered” which should be taken in moral questions.¹

In modern ethical discourse key approaches focus on impartiality and fairness. John Rawls^[14] sees fairness as the foundation of justice. He achieves impartiality through the “veil of ignorance” behind which participants of his thought experiment find themselves when they decide about the institutional rules of society without knowing which position they will occupy in this society. From this thought experiment, he derives values such as personal freedom and equal opportunity for a just society^[15]. Amartya Sen^[16] distinguishes between closed impartiality and open impartiality. Closed impartiality only considers all viewpoints from one society, nation or culture, while open impartiality also includes viewpoints from outside one’s own culture. Adopting culturally foreign viewpoints can lead to a more balanced perspective in moral decisions^[17].

3. Universalism in Cultural Theories

The understanding of the term universalism in cultural theories and the methods of intercultural management derived from them are based more on the contrast between universalism and particularism than between universalism and relativism. Usually, the aim is to gain an understanding of cultural differences and to create a common basis through communication for people from two or more cultures in order to resolve or prevent conflicts. The question is not if or to what extent the conditions in a country should be universally valid^[18]. This usually implies fairness and impartiality for the people involved. Universalism in this sense is explicitly evident in the cultural theories of Fons Trompenaars^[19] and Shalom H. Schwartz^[20] as well as in the surveys on this topic by the Benjamin Enke and colleagues^{[21][22]}. Trompenaars^[23] defines universalistic behavior as behavior that is guided by abstract moral rules which are universally valid in a culture, e.g. the Ten Commandments in Christianity. In contrast, particularistic behavior is strongly related to the circumstances of the situation and mainly guided by the relationships of the people involved. Therefore, particularistic behavior favors people from the ingroup over people from the outgroup.

In the ten values of his cultural model, Schwartz^[20] explicitly names one value Universalism and defines it as “understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of *all* people and for nature”^[24]. In his definition, he takes a very broad approach, as his definition includes environmental protection in addition to tolerance and social concerns. There is no explicit value assigned to particularism in his model. However, in his study on universalism, Schwartz^[25] uses several items of his model as a contrast to universalism. These items deal with the wellbeing of affiliated people (Benevolence) and the interest of one’s own ingroup (Conformity, Tradition and Security) and can be interpreted collectively as constituting particularism. Furthermore, he limits universalist values to items from the areas of tolerance (Broadmindedness) and social concern (Social Justice, Equality, World at Peace) while not including environmental protection in his analysis. This shows that, in this study, Schwartz^[25] takes a much narrower view of universalism excluding anything not related to people.

Enke et al.^[22] define universalism as “the extent to which people exhibit the same level of altruism and trust towards strangers as towards in-group members”. This definition includes both preferences (altruism) as well as beliefs (trust) with regard to members of ingroup and outgroup. According to Enke et al.^[22], the level of altruism and trust varies with social distance or group affiliation: With increasing social distance, they distinguish between domestic ingroup, domestic outgroup, foreign ingroup and foreign

outgroup. They therefore distinguish between three forms of universalism: domestic universalism (between domestic ingroup and domestic outgroup), foreign universalism (between domestic outgroup and foreign outgroup), and global universalism (between foreign ingroup and foreign outgroup). The total amount of altruism and trust of a person remains the same in their concept. That means that a total universalist possesses the same level of trust and preferences towards members of the ingroup as towards members of the outgroup. In contrast, a particularist possesses a higher level of trust and preferences towards members of the ingroup than a universalist, but a lower level towards members of the outgroup^{[26][22]}.

4. Universalism and Innovation

According to the Oslo Manual of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development^[27] innovations are products or processes that fulfil two requirements: they are new or significantly better than their predecessors and they are already available on the market or are in use within a company. Innovativeness is the capability “for a system to continuously – not just intermittently – induce innovations”^[28]. National innovativeness can be defined as “a country’s potential [...] to produce a stream of commercially relevant innovations”^[29], respectively, “the ability of a country to produce and commercialize a flow of innovative technology over the long term”^[30]. It is based on a network of actors and institutions such as entrepreneurs, private enterprises, public research institutions, and universities which is called National System of Innovations (NSI). This network generates and disseminates technological knowledge in a nation so that product and process innovations can be created based on this knowledge^[31]. Innovations are usually characterized by properties such as complexity and uncertainty which result from the central criterium of novelty. Therefore, they often cause conflict and resistance, both during development as well as during diffusion on the market, and often require cooperation in a diverse team to find an effective and acceptable solution.

A possible impact of universalism on innovativeness stems from one central argument put forward by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill in *The Subjection of Women* against the exclusion of women from economic life: The inclusion of women in economic life means “doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity”^[11]. The same argument can be made for the inclusion of other parts of the population and with regard to innovativeness. The positive effects result both from the sheer number of talents as well as indirectly from the stimulation provided by participation and competition. This means, applied to innovativeness, that universalism should lead to a larger number of

talented individuals in a society participating in innovation activities and spurring each other on in these activities.

A further influence could arise from the fact that universalism increases the diversity of the group of people participating in the innovation activities of a society. Greater diversity generally leads to an improved innovative capacity of a group. This goes so far that a group of individuals with average talents from diverse backgrounds is superior in creative problem-solving to a group of highly talented individuals from a similar background: “collective ability equals individual ability plus diversity” or “diversity trumps ability”^[32]. For a society as a whole, this means that inclusive political and economic institutions have a positive impact on innovativeness and economic development of a country^[33].

These arguments are supported by some empirical findings from previous research. Although, according to the knowledge of the authors, there has been no direct empirical evidence for a relationship between universalism and national innovativeness, there has been some research on related concepts. Particularism is related to in-group collectivism which is expressed in countries through familism and clannism. In-group collectivism can be shown to have a negative impact on national innovativeness^[34]. The opposite of collectivism is individualism which usually shows a positive impact on innovativeness in research literature^{[35][36][37]}. Broszies and Hahn^[8] call the combination of universalism and individualism cosmopolitanism. Thus, the two concepts are not identical, but they often occur together and are partly interdependent. In-group collectivism is characterized by a high kinship intensity in a country. High kinship intensity can lead to a low degree of innovativeness through increased loyalty to the in-group and the exclusion of out-groups. This excessive loyalty is usually expressed in nepotism and corruption inhibiting the innovative capability of a country^[38].

In the definition of universalism, the terms trust^{[26][39]} and tolerance^[20] are used by cultural theories. The degree of general trust in a society is usually part of the concept of social capital as described by Putnam^[40] and Fukuyama^[41]. Several authors find a positive relationship between social capital and innovativeness^{[42][43]}, especially when tolerance is included in the definition of social capital in addition to trust^[44].

5. Research Method

Based on the findings outlined above, our hypothesis for the empirical analysis is that the degree of universalism in society has a positive influence on national innovativeness. This hypothesis is tested

using diverse correlation and regression models. As a dependent variable, the Global Innovation Index (GII) is used, both the average of the data from 2020–2023 as well as data from 2019 (before the Corona pandemic). As an independent variable, three different measures of universalism are used which are derived from the cultural theories described above:

Enke et al.^[22] use the “bystander money allocation game“, a variant of the dictator game, to determine the degree of universalism in a country. In this game, participants are asked to divide a certain amount of money between two people from different groups without benefiting or harming themselves. Using data from the Gallup World Poll 2020, Cappelen et al.^[21] analyze different scenarios in which the amount of money is divided between different groups: between a member of the domestic ingroup and any domestic resident (domestic universalism) and between any domestic resident and any foreigner (foreign universalism). The proportion of money allocated to the member of the outgroup is used as a measure for universalism. The mean value of the two sub-forms of universalism, domestic and foreign universalism, is used as an aggregate value for composite universalism. Our analysis is based on the data provided by Cappelen et al.^[21] which have been collected as part of the Gallup World Poll 2020. The survey comprises 64,000 participants from 60 countries, for 59 of which GII data is also available.

Trompenaars^[23] uses three scenarios to measure his cultural variable of universalism. Every scenario raises a moral question which the participants in his survey have to answer:

- Scenario 1 “The car and the pedestrian”: Would you lie under oath for a friend who has caused an accident with a pedestrian?
- Scenario 2 “The bad restaurant”: As a journalist, would you write a flattering review about your friend’s bad restaurant?
- Scenario 3 “The doctor and the insurance company”: As a doctor, would you tone down your doubts on your friend’s health in a report for an insurance company?

The percentage of respondents from a country who respond in a universalistic way (i.e. negate the question) is indicated. For our analysis, the data from the fourth English edition of the book *Riding the Waves of Culture* are used, as Trompenaars’ database seems to have been continuously updated over the years^{[23][45][46][19]}. We use data presented in the diagrams of the book, since we do not have access to Trompenaars’ database. This data appears to have been preselected from the database for illustrative purposes and includes far fewer countries than the total number of 124 countries stated in the book. The fourth edition presents data from 49–50 countries for the individual scenarios^[19]. For 49 of these

countries, there is also data available from the GII. The responses to the scenarios are tested individually and as an equally weighted mean (Trompenaars score).

Schwartz^[25] develops an Index of Moral Inclusiveness based on his model of cultural dimensions which is based on eight values from his model. The four values of Social Justice, Broadmindedness, Equality and World at Peace represent universalism, while the four values of Benevolence, Conformity, Security and Tradition represent a particularistic attitude. In his index, he statistically calculates the universalist values that form a separate domain distinct from particularist values. If universalist values don't form a separate domain, then they are essentially applied to the own ingroup in this culture. If they form a separate domain, people from outgroups are also included. He thus calls this value the "moral inclusiveness score". The score ranges between 0 (all universalist values are mixed with particularist values, i.e. high particularism) and 4 (all universalist values form a separate domain, i.e. high universalism). Data is available from 107 samples (sample size between 89 and 2,339 participants) of 66 countries. For 63 of these countries, there is also data available from the GII.

6. Empirical Results

The econometric analyses performed on the data confirm a positive relationship, the indices of Trompenaars and Schwartz show a statistically significant correlation with national innovativeness. Since the measurement of the respective indices "precedes" the measurement of innovativeness, a connection seems highly probable. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the Trompenaars score and the average GII is shown in Table 1. A linear relationship with the Trompenaars score can also be seen in the scatter plot and the regression analysis displayed in Figure 1.

		GII 2020-2023	Universalism by Trompenaars
GII 2020-2023	Pearson Correlation	1	.745**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	49	49
Universalism by Trompenaars	Pearson Correlation	.745**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	49	50

Table 1. Pearson correlation of universalism by Trompenaars and average GII (Source: own representation)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

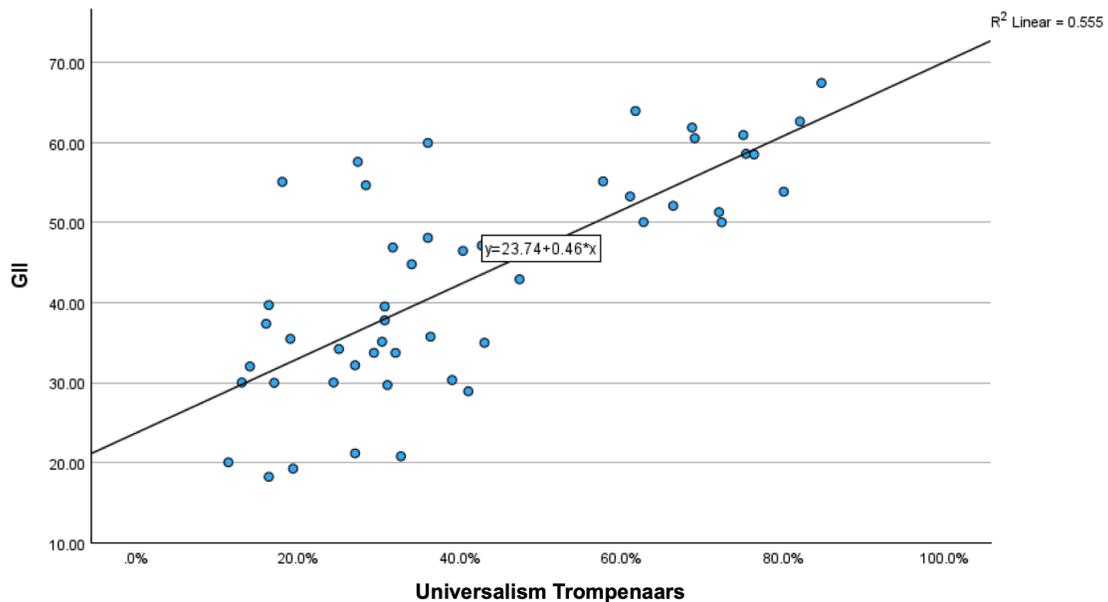


Figure 1. Scatter plot of the average GII against the Trompenaars score of universalism (Source: own representation)

As can be seen in Figure 2, countries with a high Moral Inclusiveness according to Schwartz^[25] have a higher innovativeness as measured by the GII as countries with a low value.

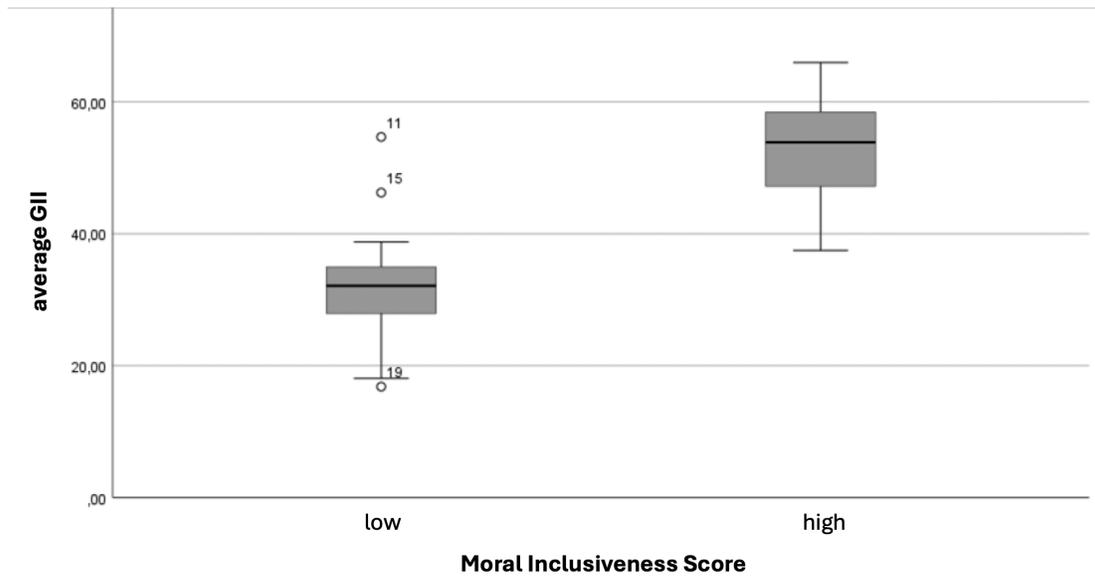


Figure 2. Boxplot of the GII for low and high moral inclusiveness according to Schwartz (Source: own representation)

The universalism according to Enke and colleagues shows no significant relation to national innovativeness in the correlation analysis, as can be seen from the values of Spearman's rho in Table 2. There is no statistically significant correlation of the GII, neither to composite universalism, nor to its parts (domestic universalism, foreign universalism).

		GII 2020-2023	Composite Universalism	Domestic Universalism	Foreign Universalism
GII 2020-2023	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.050	-.119	.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.705	.368	.768
	N	59	59	59	59
Composite Universalism	Correlation Coefficient	-.050	1.000	.844**	.851**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.705	.	<.001	<.001
	N	59	60	60	60
Domestic Universalism	Correlation Coefficient	-.119	.844**	1.000	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.368	<.001	.	<.001
	N	59	60	60	60
Foreign Universalism	Correlation Coefficient	.039	.851**	.494**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.768	<.001	<.001	.
	N	59	60	60	60

Table 2. Correlation table (Spearman's rho) of universalism according to Enke and colleagues and average GII (Source: own representation)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

7. Discussion of the Results

Our empirical analysis finds no relationship between national innovativeness and universalism according to Cappelen et al.^[21]. This is surprising at first glance, since universalism according to Enke et al.^[22] shows a positive relationship to trust in society and even includes trust in the definition of universalism. As

already described, social capital which is based on trust in society has a positive relationship to innovativeness of a country^[44]. However, Enke et al.^[22] determine trust as the difference between trust in one's ingroup and trust in one's outgroup. In the analysis of Deckert et al.^[44], the "index for generalized trust" by Welzel^[47] is used which consists of the weighted addition of trust in ingroup and outgroup.

Trust in the analysis by Enke et al.^[22] is an "either/or" relationship: either trust in the ingroup or trust in the outgroup. In the analysis by Deckert et al.^[44], trust is a „both/and“ relationship: trust in the outgroup builds on trust in the ingroup. National innovativeness requires both trust in the ingroup (bonding) as well as trust in the outgroup (bridging). Universalism according to Enke et al.^[22] consequently has a negative impact on social networks. Universalistic individuals have fewer friends, spend less time with them, and feel lonelier. Since innovation is often achieved through cooperation or at least benefits from inspiration of a large social network, a negative relationship between this form of universalism and national innovativeness is to be expected.

This reflects a tension between cosmopolitan attitude and attachment to one's own community which seems to underly national universalism. According to Moral Foundations Theory by Jonathan Haidt^[48], two types of moral values can be distinguished: On the one hand, there are the more liberal values of fairness, care, and freedom. These values are rather universalistic, since they promote the inclusion of a diverse range of people. On the other hand, there are the more conservative values of loyalty, authority, and sanctity which are more closely tied to ingroup preferences. These values are rather particularistic and aim at strong social cohesion. An increasing emphasis of universalistic values leads to increased inclusiveness of a society, while at the same time threatens social cohesion which is a prerequisite for the capacity of cooperation. A greater emphasis of conservative values strengthens social cohesion of a group but runs the risk of degenerating into a society of particularized and mutually exclusive groups of individuals unable to cooperate. A universalistic society must therefore not completely lose its touch with its ingroup, as also Haidt^[49] argues. At least, the data about national innovativeness suggest that the ingroup should not be played off against the outgroup, but that trust and impartiality should apply equally to both².

Our analysis reveals a positive relationship between the three scenarios of Trompenaars^[23] and national innovativeness. Impartiality in the sense of law-abidance (scenario 1) and ethos of vocation (scenarios 2 and 3) seems to have a positive impact on national innovativeness. Impartiality to a larger group of people seems to lead to a stronger engagement in innovation activities. It also stands for the reliability of a society which creates the stability necessary for entrepreneurship in a society. Similarly, the Moral

Inclusiveness Score by Schwartz^[25] shows a positive relationship to national innovativeness. This shows that the inclusiveness leads to higher innovativeness through stronger involvement of outgroups into innovation activities, possibly – as argued above – through a larger number and greater diversity of participants.

The results should be interpreted with caution, as they are all based on small data sets (between 48 and 63 countries). Due to reasons of data availability, the data set includes more data from developed countries than from less developed countries. Furthermore, the analysis of the cultural dimension by Trompenaars is based on preselected data. Therefore, the results may be subject to bias and constitute only a first approximation of the topic until better data is available. However, the results fit very well with the current understanding of universalism.

8. Conclusion

The French philosopher François Jullien^[50] sees two meanings in the universal: the uniform and the common. He argues that in a pluralistic society we should focus on the common and not the uniform. In a similar vein, Kwame Anthony Appiah^[51] refers to this idea with the slogan „universality plus difference“. Universalism in this sense is based on impartiality and fairness and thus has as a special characteristic „a certain kind of neutrality with respect to different ways of living“^[52]. Apart from impartiality, there are no specific guidelines concerning individual lifestyles. The common element is equal treatment in terms of law-abidance and ethos of vocation as expressed in the concept of Trompenaars^[23] and in terms of applying social values to outgroups as they are applied to the ingroup, as expressed in the Moral Inclusiveness Score by Schwartz^[25]. This allows the tension between cosmopolitan attitudes and commitment to one’s native country which underlies universalism to be partially resolved. Universalism in this sense seems to have a positive influence on national innovativeness.

As already described, social capital in the sense of general trust in society has a positive influence on national innovativeness. Jonathan Haidt^[49] contrasts the concept of social capital with that of moral capital which he defines as “resources that sustain a moral community” which deliver the moral values “to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperation possible”. In our opinion, this is mainly expressed via universalism in comparison to particularism. While moral capital ensures the impartiality of a society, social capital provides the general trust of society. The connection of the two concepts is the tolerance in society as a prerequisite for the creation of diversity: “[...] tolerance provides procedural minima for dealing with diversity and conflict that do not violate other fundamental values, such as justice, liberty,

and equality”^[53]. Social capital and moral capital can be combined to form a value for the sense of belonging in society in the sense of Cohen^[54]. In our view, this could be the reason why both forms of capital have a positive effect on national innovativeness.

Our empirical analysis refers to single nations and thus to closed impartiality in the sense of Sen^[16]. However, migration and international cooperation in innovation activities force countries to engage with the values and beliefs of other cultures and thus open impartiality. Peter Singer^[13] argues in this context for an expansion of the radius of moral equality beyond the borders of one’s own nation. This is also reflected in the concept of moral inclusiveness by Schwartz^[25] which seems to have a positive relation to national innovativeness.

Of course, a country’s innovativeness does not solely depend on the degree of universalism in its society. As already described, there are further cultural dimensions such as individualism or social capital which influence this capacity. In addition, there are a number of political, institutional, and geographic factors that affect the innovativeness of a nation and that should be included as additional variables in future research. However, universalism seems to be an important variable that is likely to play an increasingly important role, especially in times of increased migration and pluralistic societies.

Footnotes

¹ Impartiality is also expressed in deontological ethics, for example in the Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant^[55], especially in its second formulation.

² Furthermore, Enke et al.^[22] define universalism as described above in terms of a person’s altruism with regard to his outgroup and determine it via the “bystander money allocation game“, a variant of the dictator game of behavioral economics. In the dictator game, the amount of money which the “dictator” shares with the other person in the game decrease, *ceteris paribus*, with increasing social distance (see e.g. Engel^[56]). Thus, the dictator game is in principle suitable to detect universalistic tendencies. However, the “dictator” suffers a disadvantage when he shares money with the other person in the game, as he has less money at his own disposal. In the analysis of Enke et al.^[22] the person who divides the money has no direct disadvantage – neither through costs nor reciprocity. There is only a disadvantage for his ingroup. However, altruism is usually defined that the help offered to a person in need is associated with cost for the helper (see e.g. McCullough^[57]; Singer^[13]). This raises the question of whether it is really altruism which is measured in this case.

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