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## Romania's National Culture in Hofstede's dimensions through the Eurobarometer Standard 90 (2018)

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the relationship between the results achieved by Hofstede four decades ago and the Standard Eurobarometer 90 of 2018 (EB.90). The case study of my study is Romania. For this purpose, I selected a series of questions from the EB.90, which I considered relevant to analyse each of the four Hofstede cultural dimensions. By relating the data collected by Hofstede and the results obtained to the contemporary reality, it can be observed that his study is still current even though the manifestations of the national culture have changed over time.

**Keywords:** Romania, Standard Eurobarometer 90, Hofstede, national culture, European Union

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### Introduction

ONE OF THE FIRST ANTHROPOLOGISTS who have studied national culture, E.B. Tylor, defined this term as "an entire complex comprising knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, rights, habits, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society." (Stocking 1963). Based on this definition, different approaches were developed subsequently of the subject, but one of the most notable researchers in the field remained Geert Hofstede, who became famous through his study of cultural dimensions.

The study of national culture is fundamental to understanding the political behaviour of a state, but the lack of recent data questions the accuracy of Hofstede's theories. For this reason, the data achieved about four decades

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ago need to be re-evaluated and translated into a more current framework, challenging them by the Standard Eurobarometer 90. This is an impartial tool to measure the society's opinions, generally, accepted by institutions and population as an efficient means of collecting and comparing data at European level. The purpose of this paper is to contribute new information to a controversial topic and to check whether there is indeed evidence to support criticisms directed at the possible inaccuracy of Hofstede's results. For this purpose, I chose Romania as a case study.

This article focuses on the relationship between the results achieved by Hofstede four decades ago and the Standard Eurobarometer 90 of 2018. Due to the legitimacy of the Eurobarometers, their objectivity and transparency, they represent a solid reference point in formulating arguments. The questions addressed to the citizens of the member states of the European Union can be subscribed to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede by the presence of key concepts or ideas described in the theoretical framework of the Dutch researcher.

Regarding the research methodology, I used primary and secondary sources, mainly national and European surveys and reports. They had the role of providing specific and up-to-date data, as well as having at least two reference points in the study. Similar data obtained between the national and European surveys reinforce the results, while a difference between the two plans indicates a margin of error for the conclusions obtained, thus limiting their legitimacy. For the case study I relied on a comparative analysis method, comparing the data from the most recent Eurobarometer to the results obtained by Hofstede in his study on culture. The key concepts defined by it for each dimension are still found in national cultures, but in different forms. In order to be able to verify to what extent the culture of a state has changed, it was necessary to analyse the latest data and to correlate them with the existing ones.

If we analyse the contemporary global political and economic situation, we can see that there is no doubt that there are numerous changes from one day to another. The 46 years since the data collection for the study by Hofstede is a very long time, if we consider the speed with which innovations are developed, and changes in the companies. Although it seems that the temporal dimension is capable of altering the national cultures rooted so far, the changes produced are rather superficial. The ways of manifestation and the means of affirming the ideas are no longer the same, but, in the substrate, the cultures have remained unchanged. There are, however, a few factors that have contributed to the adoption of new ways of reacting or behaving to current situations.

Firstly, globalisation has a substantial impact both economically, politically and socially. The need to be in permanent contact with people, communities or companies hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, even

involuntarily, influences national cultures. The same result applies also to multinational corporations, which often manage to spread internal values over new employees or markets to which they are addressed. An example of this would be the American fast-food chains, which have brought about a change in lifestyle in both Europe and Asia or Australia. Fast food has become a defining part of many people's lives, representing, in a sense, an adaptation of American culture.

Secondly, access to the Internet and information is a crucial factor in the evolution of national culture. At the level of the European Union, in 2017, 87 percent of all households had Internet access, of which 72% use this daily service. In addition, approximately 57 percent used it for online services such as training courses or purchases of goods (Eurostat 2019). These statistics reveal both the importance of globalisation, and the level of addiction that people have at the moment to the digital dimension. This is not only a convenient way to access any information, but also a means of having the various services that people would need. Constant contact with the virtual world, with people in different states or with news from the other end of the globe inevitably determines changes in societal perceptions.

Finally, the young generations today are considerably different than those of three or four decades ago, closer to the time of Hofstede's study. The education system conversion and the changes in the mentality caused a domino effect in society. The most relevant example is Swedish educational model, which is regarded as a measure of success due to the emphasis on skills and development. It encourages independence and entrepreneurship, in the long term, resulting in a society focused on innovation and development (Hoppe, Westerberg and Leffler 2017).

Hofstede's purpose was never to analyse all forms of manifestation of a particular pattern, but to pursue theorizing and defining the dimensions of a national culture. As a result, in order to ascertain to what extent the aforementioned factors have produced a change in the collective mind, a more detailed analysis of it is required. Consequently, Romania will serve as the basis for the detailed observations in this article, because of the significantly different values resulting from Hofstede's study.

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### Methodology

To analyse the level of constancy or change in the Romanian society, I selected a series of questions from the Standard Eurobarometer (EB.90) of 2018, which I considered relevant for each of the four dimensions stated by Hofstede. From their point of view, I aim to demonstrate the level of actuality that Hofstede's indexes in contemporary society still have. Also, in the last part of

this article I focused on the changes produced by European mobility and the influence of the Romanian diaspora on the national culture.

EB.90 is published twice a year, and in the present paper I used as a basis the study from December 2018, for which the data were collected in November 2018 ([European Commission 2018](#)). Due to its current status, as well as to the European level it reaches, this is the closest form of Hofstede's method of collecting data.

Questions included in EB.90 are designed to keep the EU closer to citizens, by measuring their attitudes towards issues such as democracy, access to information or opinions on the future of the EU. Comprising a wide range of questions and answers, I thought this would be the ideal base to compare national cultures defined in Hofstede's dimensions and contemporary national culture.

In order to correlate the two studies, I selected from the Eurobarometer some questions that I considered relevant for each of Hofstede's dimensions. The methodology used in their selection was based on the concepts and explanations put by the Dutch researcher for each of the four dimensions.

First, for PDI, I followed a series of questions relevant to the perception that people have towards power and to civic involvement. The first topic addressed, trust in national and European institutions, is defining for this dimension, as it also expresses the way citizens feel represented in these institutions. The importance of personal input in political decision making is major in a society with low PDI, but in Romania, for example, this aspect is much neglected. This fact is highlighted in the results obtained at the second question I selected, focusing on the effect that the voice of the citizen has at national level.

Secondly, in terms of size PDI, I chose to focus on the role of groups in society and differentiation is made between them and the economic component. The questions chosen refer to the key elements defined by Hofstede for this dimension and the results are analysed to define the relevance of the current opinions to the individualist or collectivist sphere.

For the dimension of masculinity, I selected two questions, relevant due to the possibility of framing the answers in the sphere of femininity or masculinity. The first topic addressed focuses on people's priorities on topics of interest to the EU in the near future and in election campaigns. The areas of interest can be categorized as characteristic of a male society (economic progress, security and defence or the fight against terrorism) or a female society (social protection, climate change or human rights promotion). For this reason, it is important to follow and analyse the answers given by citizens and their

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analysis in relation to the current political-economic context. The second selected question emphasizes a feminine trait, namely cooperation, which is why the percentage of respondents who agree with it is important for the national culture. If the answers are predominantly positive, then it can be estimated that in society there are predominantly feminine traits or vice versa.

Finally, in order to define the actuality of the size of the UAI, I have extracted three important questions for different reasons. The first one refers to the perception of citizens about the near future and not only measures the degree of comfort in the face of uncertainty, but also the pessimism or optimism that defines an unknown period. This is particularly relevant for estimating people's ability to deal with uncertainty. The following two questions are intended to highlight the extent to which the perception of citizens defines the conception of personal as well as European problems. These two results are especially important in relation to the PDI, because it details the differences between the opinions regarding the personal / national plan and the European one.

Cultural Dimension	Selected items of EB.90
<b>PDI</b>	For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. <i>Political parties</i>
	For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. <i>The Romanian Government</i>
	For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. <i>The European Union</i>
	Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. My voice counts in Romania
<b>IDV</b>	Please tell me to what extent do you personally agree or disagree with the following statements: In Romania, the political decisions are applied consistently to all citizens.
	In Romania everyone has a chance to succeed in life.
	Could you please tell me for each of the following, whether the term brings to mind something very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? Protectionism
	Could you please tell me for each of the following, whether the term brings to mind something very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? Competition

<b>MAS</b>	What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?
	And on which of the following would you like EU budget to be spent? <i>Development and humanitarian aid</i>
<b>UAI</b>	At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, <i>In Romania</i>
	At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, <i>in The European Union</i>
	And personally, what are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?

Source: [European Commission 2018](#)

In conclusion, the questions discussed in this article have been selected because of their particular relevance to each of the dimensions defined by Hofstede. They were chosen in such a way that they could be correlated with the basic principles for each index, eventually demonstrating whether the Hofstede theory still has a real basis in society, despite the many changes that have occurred in recent decades.

## Romania’s National Culture by EB.90

### Distance from power

Romania recorded a value of 90 on the PDI dimension, in Hofstede's study. In order to verify whether this value still reflects the current national culture, I have chosen two main topics that underline the relationship between citizens and power.

- *Confidence in political parties and national governments*

The European average of positive response to the confidence in the political parties is 19 percent, compared to the distrust asserted by 77 percent of Europeans. Romania is one of the states where scepticism prevails in politics, which is also visible in this statistic. The positive response rate is only 17 percent, while 81 percent of the respondents say they do not trust the political parties ([European Commission 2018](#)).

The main problem regarding this subject is the social dichotomy between politicians and citizens. In Romanian society, these two classes seem

to be rather opposed than to interlock, or as long as the political elite does not make an effort to approach the citizens, the rate of mistrust will not be able to decrease. The differences in economic terms or in terms of the benefits granted by the position are very important in the society and have a reflection also at the level of the national culture. Some examples in this regard would be the special pensions of local elected officials and parliamentarians (Cioroabă 2016) or the immunity of politicians to justice (DIGI24 2016). In addition, the high level of corruption further widens the distance between the population and the authorities. According to Transparency International, Romania ranks 61st out of 180 in terms of corruption, with an index of 47/100, with 0 being "very corrupt" and 100 meaning "very transparent" (Transparency International 2019).

In terms of people's perception of the government, the rate of mistrust remains high, at 76 percent. Romania is the sixth state in the European Union to this chapter according to EB.90 (European Commission 2018), a statistic that is also reflected in the numerous protests against the government in recent years. These events only echoed in May 2019, in the European Parliamentary elections, where 51.07 percent of Romanians expressed their opinion on the reforms desired by the government, granting a "penalty" vote for the leading Social Democratic Party (PSD) (European Parliament 2019). The results of the European Parliamentary elections were a direct consequence of the distance from power, namely the fact that citizens do not feel represented in politics, and their views are not considered by the representatives of power.

- *Confidence in the European Union*

Paradoxically, in the case of Romania is the difference in attitude towards the institutions that should be close to the citizens, such as the government or the national parties, and the European ones. Asked about the level of confidence they have in the EU, 52 percent of Romanians said they trusted this, which puts Romania above the European average of 42 percent in this regard (European Commission 2018).

The main reason behind this statistic is just the disappointment of citizens to national institutions. Accustomed to the idea that political parties are anyway corrupt and that their opinion does not matter, most people see in the EU a kind of salvation, an ideal of democracy. Asked what the reasons would be why they would vote in the European Parliamentary elections, 45% of Romanians said it was their duty as citizens, which may be associated with reinforcing the feeling that they are Europeans. The next two common responses were to express dissatisfaction with their lives (29 percent) and to express dissatisfaction with the national government (27 percent). These two answers intersect at the national level and serve as an explanation for the distrust expressed towards the Romanian institutions or parties.

From these statistics it is surprising that Romanians perceive the EU closer to them than their own elected representatives, which is reflected in an increasing Europeanism at national level.

- *My voice matters in the country*

Asked to what extent they consider that their voice matters in making political decisions in the state, only 41 percent of Romanians have responded positively, while the rest have stated that personal choices or priorities are not considered by political elites ([European Commission 2018](#)). This statistic reveals both the distance from power and the level of dissatisfaction of the people with the disinterest expressed by politicians regarding the representation of the interests of the citizens who voted for them.

The protests in recent years against the Government and the emergency ordinances adopted without consulting public opinion are the most concrete manifestation of the high PDI index. The moment "Colectiv" represented a marking moment with visible results, namely the resignation of Prime Minister Victor Ponta and the change of Government ([Citre 2016](#)). This event symbolized a trace of hope in the Romanian mentality regarding the respect of citizens' wishes, but the effects were not sustainable. The period of peace and prosperity provided by the technocratic government of Dacian Cioloş also established a comfort in the perception of the people, a situation that left its mark at the time of the parliamentary elections of 2016.

At the next general election, with a turnout of only 39.49 percent ([BEC 2016](#)), PSD has secured the leadership for another four years, which brought the population in a state of continuous alert due to rapid changes in legislation, justice and economy. Despite the ongoing protests, the results were not the same as before. Public opinions were no longer taken into account, being considered illegitimate as long as they were not expressed in the most democratic way, namely the vote. This sequence of events culminated in the massive turnout at the May 2019 European Parliament vote, which I mentioned earlier.

Due to the distance between politicians and citizens, legal problems also arise. Elected local officials sometimes tend to commit abuse in office only to secure their positions, a fact also reflected in the "New People in Politics" initiative. Even though the civil society has expressed its desire by signing a petition, some mayors have invalidated the signatures without having a legal basis. This action resulted in the rejection of the initiative at national level and the confirmation, once again, that the voice of the people does not matter for some politicians ([Citre 2019](#)).



## Individualism

In Hofstede's study, Romania registered an index of 30, which indicates a predominantly collectivist society. Manifestations of this index should, according to the theory, be found in a domination of the state in the economy, as well as in a different application of the laws depending on the group. The next two topics addressed are precisely these defining factors for a collectivist culture.

- *In your country, political decisions apply equally to all citizens.*

According to Hofstede's theory, rules in a collectivist society differ from group to group. Faced with the above statement, only 21 percent of respondents to the Eurobarometer agreed with it, while 56 percent believe that laws are applied differently. At European level, 32 percent of people confirm the statement, while 48 percent disagree with it, which places Romania below the European average at this point ([European Commission 2018](#)).

Collectivist societies place a strong emphasis on cooperation and harmony, but there is also a strong discrepancy between groups, especially between citizens and politicians. This is due to the correlation between IDV and PDI, as a large distance from power requires a larger group to draw attention to a problem. In the case of Romania, however, sometimes the large protests did not manage to fill the distance until the authorities, but these events managed to strengthen the collectivist mentality.

The differentiation between groups is also illustrated in people's answers when asked if, in their country, they seem to have the same chances of advancing as anyone else. While 58% of respondents at European level think so, only 38 percent of Romanians share the same opinion. This is due both to the level of corruption in the state and to the economic impossibilities of some disadvantaged groups. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in July 2017, only 56.4 percent of the country's population lived in urban areas, and the rest in rural areas ([INS 2017](#)). The access to facilities differs considerably between the two scenarios, so this is a possible explanation for the citizens' conception of the personal future and the individual chances of success.

- *The connotations of the terms 'protectionism' and 'competition'*

In a collectivist national culture, the involvement of the state in the economy is more often encountered than in an individualistic culture. In order to understand how citizens perceive this aspect, we have selected two questions that concern terms that fall within the domain of state domination in the economy, namely "protectionism" and "competition".

When asked about the connotation of the term "protectionism", 59 percent of Romanians consider it a positive thing, well above the European average of 37 percent ([European Commission 2018](#)). This statistic can be associated both with the need for state involvement in the economy in order to defend and support the citizens' opinion, as well as with the specific patriotism of the collectivist national culture.

Cooperation and harmony are some of the basic objectives in countries with low IDV. However, economic competition does not necessarily affect wellbeing, but may even amplify it by creating a prosperous environment for citizens. As a result, the term "competition" has a positive connotation in the case of 70 percent of Romanians, a percentage equal to the European average.

Looking at the sphere of IDV and the answers given by Romanians to Eurobarometer questions, collectivism is still very much present in the national culture.

### Masculinity

Romania registered an index of 42 in Hofstede's study on the dominance of the masculine or feminine traits in the national culture. In order to correlate this value with the actuality level of the results, we have chosen two topics included in the 2018 Eurobarometer, relevant for this dimension. The first topic focuses on national priorities, if they are focused on female or male goals, and the second topic concerns the attitude of the population and the state towards helping people from developing states.

- *What topics should be discussed at European level as a priority?*

In March 2019, 59 percent of Romanians considered that the economy and development should be the main concern at European level. This objective is catalogued as a masculine one in Hofstede's conception, but it does not define the entire national culture of Romania as a masculine one. The current economic problems have turned the attention of citizens to this sector, but the following three priorities defined by the Romanians fall within the sphere of femininity. As a result, 51 percent of Romanians consider it important to fight unemployment among young people, 45 percent want to promote human rights and democracy, and 44 percent opt for consumer and food protection ([European Commission 2018](#)). Consequently, although the first theme mentioned by the Romanian citizens is a masculine one, it is counterbalanced with the following objectives which are strongly feminine, due to their inclusion in the sphere of well-being and cooperation.

The Romanian Institute of Evaluation and Statistics (IRES) conducted a national survey that included questions about how Romanians see the future. It is important to mention the similarity with the results obtained in the Eurobarometer, as these statistics strengthen the legitimacy of the data collected at European level. In the IRES study, when asked about what plan is prioritized in the near future, 83 percent of Romanians think, first of all, about family issues (IRES 2017). This answer also falls within the sphere of femininity, approximating the actual results obtained in surveys from those analysed by Hofstede.

- *How important is it to help people in developing countries?*

Cooperation and support are considered feminine traits, so the answers received are relevant to the description of the Romanian national culture. At European level 87 percent of the respondents consider this aspect to be very important (42 percent) or important (47 percent), which places Romania below the European average, with 84% of the citizens who consider this area a priority (European Commission 2018).

The statistics measured in the Eurobarometer are also illustrated globally, as the EU is the largest donor in development assistance. With a total of € 75.7 million directed to this area in 2017, the amounts collected by EU Member States represent 57 percent of Official Development Assistance. More precisely, 0.50% of the gross national income (GNI) of the EU was allocated to this sector (ICD 2018), Romania contributing, in the same year, with 0.11% of the GNI to the total amount (MFA 2019).

Although Romania does not occupy the first places in terms of the perception regarding the granting of aid for the developing states, the national average that considers this subject important is nevertheless a high one. In addition, this conception is also reflected in the state policies, Romania becoming, starting with 2018, a participant in the Assistance and Development Committee (OECD 2018).

### Uncertainty Avoidance

The very high index, of 90, recorded by Romania in Hofstede's study, can be verified at the present moment by analysing the answers given to three of the questions in the Eurobarometer in 2018. These are relevant because they measure the degree of comfort in relation to the uncertainty in the perception of people, both at the personal level, as well as at European level.

- *At present, do you consider that, in the country, things are going in the right or wrong direction?*

This question not only measures the degree of optimism of the society, but also the way in which an uncertain situation is perceived. If in the case of consolidated democracies such as Luxembourg, Austria or Finland people are predominantly optimistic about the future, although they have no certainty in the end, Romania is at the opposite pole. It ranks 4th in the EU, with 69 percent of citizens considering that the country is led in the wrong direction, compared to the European average of 49 percent who share the same opinion ([European Commission 2018](#)).

If we analyse the national political and economic situation from the perspective of the last 2-3 years, the uncertainty often gets negative valences. This is mainly due to the political class and major changes, in the form of laws, adopted without prior warning or consultation. Although condemned by public opinion, the president and the EU ([Presidency of Romania 2019](#)), the Government continued legislating without taking into account the criticisms. This behaviour has brought the citizens into a state of constant alert, in which any unexpected change represents a threat.

In areas such as entrepreneurship or investment, the state of instability is especially dangerous because there can be provided a clear result. People's perception that things would go in the wrong direction adds to this problem, resulting in decreased foreign investment, as well as relocation of companies or giving up on opening new businesses.

- *At present, do you think that, in the EU, things are going in the right or wrong direction?*

Despite the fact that at the national level most Romanians are considerably more pessimistic about the future, as far as the European plan is concerned, things change a little. 63 percent of the people surveyed believe that things are going well and are optimistic about the future of the EU. From this point of view, Romanians exceed the European average of 58 percent ([European Commission 2018](#)).

There is an obvious correlation between this side of the UAI and the PDI, both intersecting in a strong Europeanism. The dichotomy manifested between the perception of the national and the European plan is, however, paradoxical. At least in the case of the UAI, there is no factor that would create more stability at European level than at the national level, so that it can influence people's opinion. As a result, the only logical deduction is that Romanians have more confidence in the EU than in their own government.

- *Personally, what are the two biggest problems you face?*

Sudden political changes in recent years have created an uncertain situation regarding the national currency. The Romanian leu has devalued from 4,562, the value of one euro on June 9, 2017, to 4,721 on the same date, two years later (European Central Bank 2019). For this reason, the main fear of citizens is represented by rising prices and inflation (31 percent). Given that about 60% of Romanians have financial obligation, this inflation affects the national level much more than would be normal. In addition, according to the same study from 2018, 37 percent of Romanian citizens live from day to day and cannot afford to save (KRUK 2018).

In an economic situation that is so difficult for most of the population, the fear of a health problem or the uncertainty that they will benefit from social aid increases proportionally. As a result, the second biggest problem Romanians are facing is health and social security (22 percent). The state allocates only 4.9 percent of GDP for health, while the European average is at 9.9 percent (European Commission 2019b). In these circumstances, the possibility of each citizen to receive proper treatment from the state budget is very small, often reaching bribery for priority treatment or private clinics, if personal income allows.

Overall, the political problems at national level also create a strong state of uncertainty at the population level. This is reflected in people's fears about the future and the precariousness of their situations. In the absence of long-term stability, the UAI index would not be able to fall, as it lacks the necessary basis, namely security.

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## Final Remarks

Analysing the results obtained from the 2018 Eurobarometer in terms of cultural dimensions of Hofstede, it is interesting to look at two things: the actuality of the theory and the Europeanism manifested by the Romanians.

First of all, the changes brought about by globalization and technological innovations should be a decisive factor for national cultures. If we refer to the Romanian society from the 70s-80s, when the data for Hofstede's study were collected and published, the transformation is obvious, but this fact is due to the change of generations rather than the reformation of the mentalities of that time. Even so, we can speak of a superficial change, in the sense that the manifestations of the indices calculated for each dimension have altered and adapted to the contemporary reality, but the essence of the thought has remained very similar. In the case of IDPs, for example, we can now talk about

petitions, protests or direct debates with elected officials, which should contribute to reducing the distance to power, but in reality, according to the results obtained in the Eurobarometer, people do not yet feel represented, listened to or relevant to the political classes. The same scenario applies to the other dimensions, but under other manifestations, according to the defining factors stated by Hofstede.

Secondly, the most surprising finding from the analysis of the results obtained in the Eurobarometer is the difference in the perception of Romanians between the national authorities and the future of their country and the European ones. The emergence of a strong Europeanism in the culture is clearly visible in the answers related to the dimensions of the PDI and the UAI. Despite the distance between the Romanian citizens and the EU, they seem to feel more represented by this than by the government or national parties. In a sense, this paradox is quite logical, as people perceive the EU as a salvation, a beacon of democracy and fairness, attributes they do not find in the national system. Also, migration plays a crucial role in defining opinions and culture against the European dimension. Most of the Romanians living abroad have changed and adapted their mentality to a different national culture, which, inevitably, also influences the Romanian culture.

In conclusion, by relating the data collected by Hofstede and the results obtained to the contemporary reality, it can be observed that his study is still current. Of course, the manifestations of the national culture have changed and, as far as IDPs are concerned, at least a positive change is expected to reduce the distance from power. However, in order to be able to establish with certainty if there is really any difference in the collective mind, a longer period of stability is needed, in which the new culture will be established and maintained.

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