

Intercultura

105

Il trimestre
2022

Atti dell'XI Forum on
Intercultural Learning
and Exchange

Evoluzione dei valori nelle
maggiori ricerche europee
ed internazionali

Come cambiano i valori nel
corso di un'esperienza di
studio all'estero

**11th FORUM ON INTERCULTURAL
LEARNING AND EXCHANGE**

**Colle di Val d'Elsa
4th-6th November 2021**

THE VALUES OF LIVING TOGETHER

How to assess their evolution within intercultural student exchanges

In questo numero

**11TH FORUM ON
INTERCULTURAL
LEARNING AND
EXCHANGE
COLLE DI VAL D'ELSA
4-6 NOVEMBRE 2021**

REDAZIONE

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DIRETTORE RESPONSABILE

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GRAFICA E IMPAGINAZIONE

Lorenzo Pini

STAMPA

Grafica 90 - Roma

Registrato il 04/05/2010
presso il Tribunale di Siena al n. 3

Finito di stampare
nel mese di aprile 2022

Questo numero contiene gli atti dell'XI Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange organizzato ed ospitato dalla Fondazione Intercultura a Colle di Val d'Elsa (Siena) dal 4 al 6 novembre 2021. Vi hanno partecipato - nonostante le restrizioni imposte dalla pandemia - esperti di molti Paesi europei e del Nord America, mentre altri si sono collegati in videoconferenza. Il tema intorno a cui si sono svolte presentazioni e discussioni è stato quello dei valori che possono mutare nel corso di un'esperienza di studio all'estero in età adolescenziale. Introdotti da Anat Bardi (Royal Holloway University of London), i lavori sono proseguiti con i contributi di Ferruccio Biolcati e Riccardo Landini (Università Statale di Milano), di Tarek Mostafa (OCSE) e di Roberto Ruffino e Mattia Baiutti (Fondazione Intercultura). Il Forum è un evento biennale che approfondisce temi di educazione interculturale nell'ambito degli scambi internazionali di studenti.

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La Fondazione Intercultura Onlus

La Fondazione Intercultura Onlus nasce il 12 maggio 2007 da una costola dell'Associazione che porta lo stesso nome e che da oltre 60 anni accumula un patrimonio unico di esperienze educative internazionali, che la Fondazione intende utilizzare su più vasta scala, favorendo una cultura del dialogo e dello scambio interculturale tra i giovani e sviluppando ricerche, programmi e strutture che aiutino le nuove generazioni ad aprirsi al mondo ed a vivere da cittadini consapevoli e preparati in una società multiculturale. Vi hanno aderito il Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione internazionale e il Ministero dell'Istruzione. La Fondazione è presieduta dall'Ambasciatore Roberto Toscano; segretario generale è Roberto Ruffino; del consiglio e del comitato scientifico fanno parte eminenti rappresentanti del mondo

della cultura, dell'economia e dell'università. La Fondazione Intercultura promuove convegni internazionali su temi legati alle culture e organizza annualmente incontri tra interculturalisti di vari Paesi. È ente di formazione accreditato al MIUR e propone corsi e seminari per docenti e dirigenti scolastici. Sostiene ricerche sull'apprendimento interculturale; ha condotto un progetto pilota di scambi intra-europei con l'Unione Europea. Raccoglie donazioni per borse di studio di enti locali, fondazioni ed aziende a beneficio dei programmi di Intercultura. Gestisce l'Osservatorio nazionale sull'internazionalizzazione delle scuole e la mobilità studentesca (www.scuoleinternazionali.org).

■ fondazioneintercultura.org

On Values As They Evolve: A Presentation of the World Values Survey and the European Values Study

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1. INTRODUCTION

This contribution aims to look at values as they change across birth cohorts. Specifically, we will analyse how the values of younger cohorts differ from those of older cohorts. We will also consider whether these changes follow similar or different patterns across the globe. The focus will be on three value domains strictly connected to cultural diversity, which is crucial for intercultural exchange: attitudes towards immigrants, homosexuality and gender equality. While this approach is far from the specific context of intercultural student exchanges we are interested in, we think it is crucial to understand the scenario where these exchanges take place. Moreover, the wider value changes across cohorts can lead us to draw some relevant implications for value change at the individual level, namely, the kind of change that takes place in an intercultural exchange experience.

The article is structured in five sections. After the introduction, the second section illustrates the theoretical tools available to the social sciences to deal with value change, starting with modernization theory. The third section focuses on the empirical tools at our disposal, in other words, the European Values Study (EVS) and the World Values Survey (WVS). In the fourth section, we apply the theoretical and empirical tools to the aforementioned three issues. The article ends with some brief conclusions.

2. THEORETICAL TOOLS

When analysing value change, the golden standard is given by modernization theory, which Ronald Inglehart started to develop in his 1977 book about the so-called “silent revolution”. The American political scientist assumes a close relationship between economy and culture, following classical scholars such as Karl Marx and Adam Smith. Specifically, economic and technological develop-

ment favours the transition (revolution) from materialistic values to those that Inglehart calls “post-materialistic values”. When resources are scarce, people need to use a large part of them to ensure their own safety and that of those closest to them. Consistently with this need, individuals adopt values such as group loyalty, conformity and obedience to authority, all of which are functional to the communities entrusted with guaranteeing their material security: the family, the company, the local community, the parish, etc. When economic and technological development takes place, people are largely relieved of this need and free to devote themselves to self-expression and self-fulfilment, cultivating their own uniqueness, autonomy and independence.

Recently, Inglehart updated his theory, hypothesizing a sort of cultural backlash following the shift from materialistic to post-materialistic values (Norris and Inglehart 2019) in which some groups – the Interwar generation, non-college

graduates, the working class, white Europeans, the more religious, men and residents of rural communities – would become estranged from cultural tides that they strongly reject. It would result in an authoritarian reflex and “finding reassurance from a collective community of like-minded people”, in which “strongman leaders express socially incorrect views while defending traditional values and beliefs” (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 16). Moreover, these dynamics would be exacerbated by worsening economic conditions and a rapid growth in social diversity.

Modernization theory pinpoints social structures as the engine of value change, particularly in variations induced by economic and technological development, which thus assume a bottom-up dynamic. A concurrent approach, namely the institutional approach (March and Olsen 1989), assumes a top-down dynamic. According to this different perspective, the elites in the different realms (economic, political, communications systems, etc.) modify the norms of the institutions they belong to, while the change applies to the general population through conformism mechanisms. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of intercultural exchange, since socialization agencies – and therefore schools – are among the institutions that constitute a source of change.

Before moving to the next section, we would like to introduce two key concepts for understanding value change: period effect and cohort effect. The period effect refers to historical events or conditions that change the attitudes and behaviours of the population as a whole, in a uniform way: for example, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the current pandemic. Instead, if these same events and conditions have a selective effect on the maturation and socialization phase of individuals born in that period, we speak of cohort effects. Beyond watershed events such as those mentioned above, birth cohorts tend to differ because they are socialized in different historical contexts.



The European Values Study (EVS) is an infrastructure for the collection of comparative (European) and longitudinal survey data on individual values and attitudes.

3. EMPIRICAL TOOLS

The European Values Study (EVS) is an infrastructure for the collection of comparative (European) and longitudinal survey data on individual values and attitudes. In this context, we would like to focus your attention on these terms: infrastructure, survey data, comparative and longitudinal.

First, consider that the development of infrastructures – such as the particle accelerator at CERN in Geneva, to name one of the best-known examples – is increasingly important for the development of scientific research. These infrastructures are managed by several research groups that collaborate with each other and are willing to share the infrastructure itself with other research groups. This model of science organization applies to natural sciences but also to social sciences. From this point of view, EVS can be considered a research infrastructure as different research groups cooperate in order to collect data in the various countries: they make the data available to the entire social sciences community, from the most prestigious professors to first-year university students.



Secondly, the survey data are collected through an interview with a questionnaire (therefore with a large prevalence of closed-ended questions), administered to individuals who are selected through specific sampling procedures to be representative of some population (in this case, the national population). Thirdly, the data collection has a comparative nature, as it takes place in different countries following comparable procedures (for defining the questionnaire and selecting the sample). This way it becomes possible to study how various kinds of differences (economic, institutional, cultural, etc.) between countries can partially explain individual divergences. Finally, the survey is referred to as longitudinal as it is repeated over time, therefore offering the possibility of studying changes in values and attitudes in different countries.

EVS came about in the late 1970s from the activities of an informal group of university professors, the European Value Systems Study Group (EVSSG). At that time, the discussion revolved around two topics: on the one hand, the process of secularization which was beginning to manifest its effects more and more clearly; on the other hand, questions over the existence of common European values on the eve of the first elections for the European Parliament in 1979. There was an

evident overlap between the two themes, leading to the question of how much European values were shaped by Christian ones. To answer these and other questions, in 1981 the first survey was organized in ten European countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. Since then, data has been collected every nine years, from an increasing number of participating countries, particularly since the 1990 survey when EVS pushed its borders further east. Thirty-five countries participated in the latest survey, which began in 2017. For the details of the participating countries, see the EVS website: <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

EVS covers different topics: attitudes towards work; religiosity; gender attitudes and attitudes towards family, marriage, children and homosexuality; politics, the state, democracy, national identity, electoral behaviour, Europe; attitudes towards immigrants; environmentalism; well-being; social participation; social distance; and interpersonal and institutional trust.

After such an extensive introduction to the EVS project, we can afford to be much more concise for the World Values Survey (WVS). This project was spawned by the 1981 EVS and can be thought of as its extension on a global scale. Since then it has been repeated every five years – more frequently than EVS – and the seventh survey began in 2017. Ronald Inglehart, father of the modernization approach to value change, also played a central role in the development of WVS, a telling sign of the importance of the close relationship between theory and empirical research in the development of knowledge on a specific theme. About 80 countries joined the latest survey: a map of the participating countries, along with much more information, can be consulted on the WVS website: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>. All of the continents are adequately covered, with the significant exception of Africa, in particular the sub-Saharan countries. Obviously, the two human value surveys (EVS and WVS) share many questions (about 70%), enabling comparison of the answers from different European and non-European countries.

4. VALUE CHANGE, CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

To assess value change, we have focused on values from a sociological perspective by looking at attitudes towards cultural diversity, for example immigrants, and self-expressive attitudes, for example homosexuality and gender equality. To account for the heterogeneity across contexts, we have considered six different clusters of countries, using a classification that largely overlaps with Inglehart and Welzel's well-known world cultural map.¹ Although the classification provides a simplified representation of the world, it identifies groups of countries sharing similar values as well as geographical and historical/cultural characteristics. The groups are as follows (the countries included in the analyses are in parentheses): North-western Europe (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom), Mediterranean Europe (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain), Post-Communist Europe (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), US and Oceania (United States, Australia, New Zealand), Confucian Asia (China, Japan, South Korea) and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico). In order to explore value change from a medium/long-term perspective, we only included those countries which had taken part in at least four WVS or EVS surveys in the analysis.

To what extent do values differ across contexts? How have values varied over the last thirty years? Can we find a common pattern of value change independently from the context and the set of values analysed?

We have tried to answer these questions by first analysing attitudes towards cultural diversity, here measured in terms of attitudes towards immigrants. When looking at **Figure 1**, which shows the percentage of people agreeing with the statement “when jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to natives rather than migrants” by cohort, survey year and country group, we can make several considerations. First,

when focussing on the most recent period (2017–2020), we detect a high level of heterogeneity across contexts: people living in Post-Communist Europe and Latin America show a strong aversion towards immigrants. On the contrary, in North-western Europe and the US and Oceania, the prevalence of anti-immigrant attitudes is considerably lower, despite being spread among large portions of their population (nearly half of the respondents in the US and Oceania, about 40% in North-western Europe). In Mediterranean Europe and Latin America, the majority of respondents also agree on giving priority to natives when jobs are scarce. Second, if we look again at the most recent years, in every country group the youngest cohort shows the lowest level of hostility towards immigrants, with the partial exception of Post-Communist Europe and Latin America. Instead, differences across cohorts are stronger in Mediterranean Europe and Confucian Asia compared to other contexts. Third, when comparing the trends, a certain degree of heterogeneity across contexts can still be detected. North-western Europe shows a progressive decline in hostility towards immigrants, as does Latin America, while in the other contexts there is substantial stability over the last two decades. Overall, the analysis suggests that cohort effects can explain the variation in time of attitudes towards immigrants in most of the contexts, as there are differences across cohorts in all of the study years and in all contexts, with the exception of Post-Communist European countries. Together with cohort effects, we cannot rule out that period effects could also play a role in explaining the overall declining trend in hostility towards immigrants detected in North-western Europe and Latin America, as the shape of the trend is similar for every cohort. Therefore, the analysis shows no evidence of a cultural backlash (see Norris and Inglehart 2019) leading to an increasing divergence over time in attitudes towards cultural diversity across cohorts, in the light of a reaction on the part of certain categories – such as the Interwar generation – to the processes of modernization.

¹ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=Findings>

When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to natives rather than immigrants

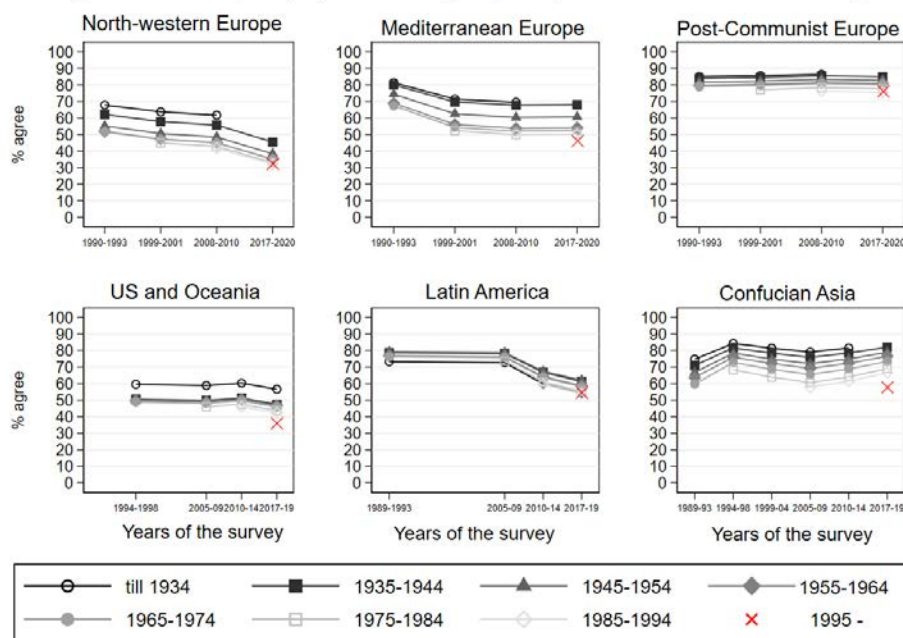


Fig. 1 - Percentages of agree strongly/agree answers to the item "when jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to natives rather than migrants" by survey year, cohort and country group (EVS/WVS data)

Our first analysis suggests that we cannot explain value change without accounting for the characteristics of the context. For instance, European Social Survey data show that anti-immigration attitudes have only risen in recent years in countries where the immigration issue was strongly politicized by right-wing political leaders, even in the absence of worsening economic indicators or an increase in immigrant numbers (see the examples of Poland and Hungary, Molteni 2019). In a similar vein, other studies show that a higher prevalence of immigrants only

leads to more positive attitudes towards immigrants when there are economic factors that favour social cohesion and integration (Hoxhaj and Zuccotti 2021).

Nonetheless, when looking at other attitudes, we can find different patterns and trends between countries. As to self-expressive attitudes, here we consider gender role attitudes. Similarly to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows the percentage of people agreeing with the statement "when jobs are scarce, men should have the priority over women". Like in the

case of attitudes towards immigrants, people coming from North-western Europe and the US and Oceania show the highest level of gender egalitarianism: in these contexts in the most recent years, only a tiny minority agreed with the statement supporting gender inequality. When comparing the trends, we see a substantial degree of heterogeneity across contexts. While anti-egalitarian positions have declined during the last three decades in North-western Europe, the US and Oceania, and even Mediterranean Europe, the same does not apply to other contexts: in particular, Confucian Asia has experienced a recent increase in anti-egalitarian attitudes. In a similar way to attitudes towards immigrants, gender-egalitarian attitudes are more widespread among the younger cohorts, in line with modernization theory. For every country group, in any year of the survey, the younger the cohort, the more gender-egalitarian the attitudes. Nonetheless, in this case, we can suggest a stronger period effect in explaining the substantial decrease in people supporting gender inequality. This is particularly evident in North-western Europe and the US and Oceania, which have experienced a convergence between cohorts over time. While modernization theory explains value change mostly in terms of generational replacement – as modernization processes cause younger cohorts to have more progressive values, generational replacement leads to an increase in progressive values at

the entire population level – **Figure 2** shows that differences across cohorts are not constant in these contexts, but that they have reduced over time. Although not explicitly tested, we suggest that this period effect could be interpreted by considering the role of institutional factors in explaining value configuration and value change. For instance, previous research has shown that family support policies go some way to explaining country differences in gender role attitudes: a higher degree of

support for dual-earner families proved to be associated with more positive attitudes towards female labour force participation (Sjoberg 2004). In addition, Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2017) have shown that societal gender inequality can even influence gender role attitudes among pre-adolescents. In light of the previous literature, we suggest that the convergence towards gender egalitarianism across cohorts in North-western Europe and the US and Oceania could be in part explained by a changing

societal and institutional context in which the media discourse and the positions of the elite have become more sensitive to gender equality issues.

The last analysis focuses on another indicator of self-expressive values, that is, attitudes towards homosexuality. In **Figure 3**, we show the mean level of the justifiability of homosexuality (on a 1-10 scale) by survey year, cohort and country group. In this case too, we can see a high degree of heterogeneity across contexts when focussing on the most recent years. For instance, while homosexuality is very often justified in North-western Europe, this is very rarely the case in Post-Communist Europe and Confucian Asia. Nonetheless, there is some indirect evidence that modernization theory could explain the dynamics of attitudes towards homosexuality in every context under analysis: the younger cohorts always show more liberal attitudes than the older ones, the trend of justifiability has increased in every group of countries and there is no convergence across cohorts over time. This does not mean that the institutions' role in explaining the variation of these attitudes over time is irrelevant. In a brilliant recent article, Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2022) show that in the European context, acceptance of homosexuality has increased more steeply in those countries that adopted same-sex legislation earlier.

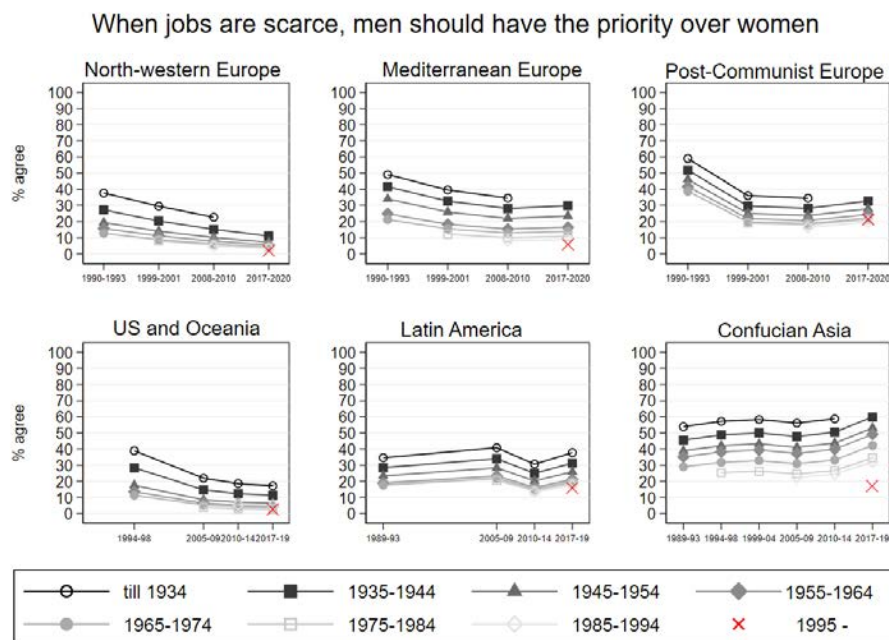


Fig. 2 - Percentages of agree strongly/agree answers to the item "when jobs are scarce, men should have the priority over women" by survey year, cohort and country group (EVS/WVS data)

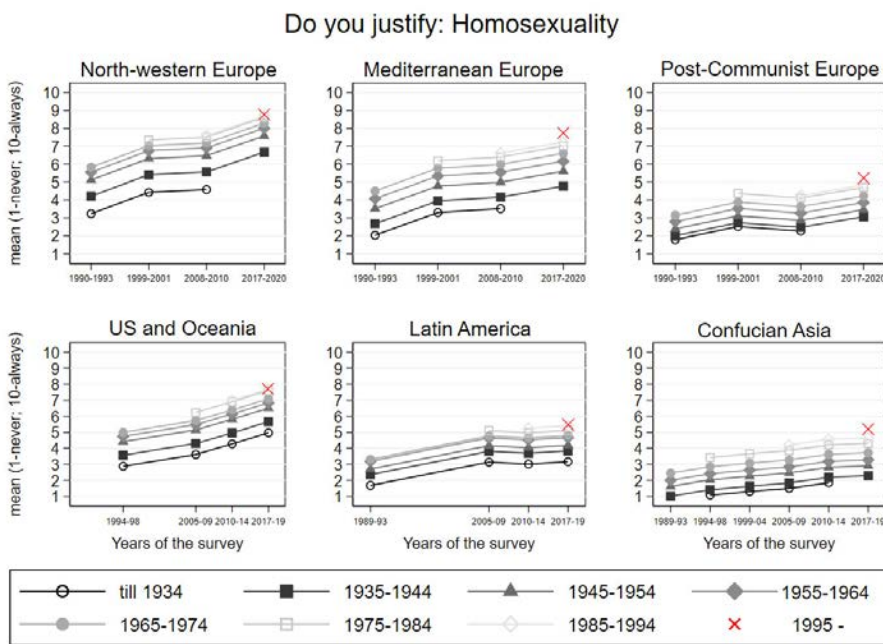


Fig. 3 - Average level of justifiability of homosexuality (1-10 scale; 1: never, 10: always) by survey year, cohort and country group (EVS/MVS data)

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our analyses on the evolution of different sets of values over time, contexts and cohorts lead to the following conclusions. All in all, we cannot refer to a common pattern of value configuration and value change as there is high degree of heterogeneity across countries both in the distribution of values in recent years and temporal value trends. Moreover, we have shown that cohort effects play a relevant role in explaining value

change, with younger cohorts holding the most progressive and liberal attitudes. Furthermore, the role of the institutional context is often crucial in explaining both heterogeneity across contexts and the variation of values over time in a single context. Finally, our analyses do not provide support for Norris and Inglehart's cultural backlash hypothesis, as no divergence was detected in attitudes across cohorts over time.

As we have tried to prove in this article, research infrastructures on value change



All in all, we cannot refer to a common pattern of value configuration and value change as there is high degree of heterogeneity across countries both in the distribution of values in recent years and temporal value trends.

– such as EVS and WVS – provide us with the big picture. They offer the opportunity to analyse what sociologists call aggregate change, that is, how values change for aggregates of individuals such as countries, birth cohorts, etc. These data do not enable us to grasp individual change, namely the value change that may happen in individuals during their life course. This is the kind of change we are interested in when we want to study the impact of individual experiences like studying abroad. Nevertheless, aggregate change can still teach us some lessons about individual change.

Following the modernization theory proposed by Inglehart and Welzel (2005), existential security is supposed to foster value change. Increasing levels of existential security lead to a shift from materialistic to post-materialistic values, which are closely connected to a more positive attitude towards cultural diversity and self-expressive values. This effect might be reinforced by contextual security: for example, we have seen that a higher presence of immigrants only leads to more positive attitudes towards immigrants in safe economic and social contexts. In an intercultural student exchange experience, the contexts are provided by the families, schools and communities: it is essential that they provide a safe environment where the intercultural exchange may take place.

We have seen that institutions are crucial in explaining both the variation across contexts and change in values over time. Institutions can contribute to value change: for example, policies supporting dual-earner families are associated with positive attitudes towards female labour force participation. In intercultural exchanges, the principal institutional role is played by schools and teachers, not only from the host schools but also from the sending schools. It is evident that their policies towards this kind of experience may affect the success and/or failure of the intercultural exchange.

Finally, we hope that readers may appreciate the relevance of research infrastructures such as EVS and WVS for studying value change. They provide the background to understand the scenario where the intercultural exchange takes place. Moreover, they may provide materials to reflect on intercultural exchange per se. From this point of view, it is worth mentioning the European Values in Education (EVALUE – www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu) project that developed secondary school teaching materials based on EVS data. The goal of these materials is to clarify and communicate values: students are given a clearer idea of how to self-position within a diversity of opinions and learn the possible explanations not just for their own but also for others' viewpoints.

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