

## DIFFERENCES IN GENERAL CAUSALITY ORIENTATIONS. RESULTS FROM THREE SOUTH- EASTERN COUNTRIES

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### *Abstract*

*Is it possible for people from different countries to register similar scores for their motivational orientations? Or maybe there is a common ground in motivation for people living in similar social and economic conditions, for example in South-Eastern Europe? The general causality theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) describes individual differences in self-determination and regulation, concerning external and internal locus of causality. Although debatable, the autonomous, the control and the impersonal orientations are considered personality traits, thus allowing interesting cross-cultural comparisons. Our aim was to cover a gap of research on this topic in South-Eastern Europe, by comparing the general causality orientations between three sub-samples selected from Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania, using a total sample of 225 participants, relatively evenly distributed between countries. The results revealed significant differences between countries, with the Bulgarian sample registering higher scores for autonomy, control, and impersonal. Unexpected strong correlations were found between the autonomous and the control orientations for the entire sample. The different age of the participants from the three samples, the sampling procedure and the recent economic developments may explain the results.*

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## **Introduction**

### *The self-determination theory and the general causality orientations (GCOs)*

The self-determination theory focuses on human motivation and personality, and highlights the importance of the basic psychological needs as an important resource for personality development and self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Several sub-theories contributed to the framework of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and each of them was developed to explain a distinct set of motivational aspects. (1) The cognitive evaluation theory aims to identify the factors that facilitate or thwart intrinsic motivation; (2) The organismic integration theory focuses on the development and internalization of intrinsic motivation from extrinsic motivation and contextual factors; (3) The general causality theory describes individual differences in self-determination and regulation concerning external and internal locus of causality, (4) The basic needs theory describes the psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, and their relations with psychological health and well-being. These are further specified in the Relationships motivation theory (which posits that individual differences in motivational orientations to pursue relationships depend on the basic psychological need for relatedness, that mobilizes people to pursue quality relationships, but only autonomy experienced and expressed by both partners in the relationship assures satisfying relationships), and the Goal contents theory (which focuses on the importance of goal contents related to intrinsic goals like community involvement, personal growth and satisfactory close relationships that improve well-being, whilst extrinsic goal like wealth, fame, and image hinder well-being) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Together, these theories contribute to the larger body of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The self-determination theory claims that there are differences on how humans perceive their environment, as allowing free-choices and supporting personal decisions and need-fulfillment, or controlling, establishing deadlines and need-thwarting (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The repeated experiences with the environment will develop stable individual traits, allowing for differences on self-

regulation between individuals (general causality orientations). On short, the causality orientations express an internal or external locus of causality (Stevens et al., 2015). The topic was anticipated by Vallerand (1997), who described a hierarchical model of motivation, with autonomy, competence, relatedness, as well as intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation on all levels - global, contextual and situational.

The autonomy orientation is specific for individuals who feel that they have the opportunity to choose their actions in the environment, that the decision to engage in a behavior is theirs to take (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005a). They are aware of their values, standards and goals, and seek activities that correspond to these. The activities are perceived as enjoyable, pleasant, interesting, or offering the chance for development and growth. The autonomy orientation is a characteristic of a mature personality, it is linked to self-actualization (Stevens et al., 2015) and it represents a general tendency towards intrinsic motivation and fully internalized extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Other variables positively associated to autonomy are the preference for jobs which require higher initiative, the organization of the activities according to personal interests (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the self-determined work motivation (Lam & Gurland, 2008), or the job search persistence in the case of the unemployed (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). Soenens et al. (2005) found that autonomy was an efficient predictor of an informational identity style, meaning that people with high levels of self-regulation tend to search for and use identity-relevant information, thus having fewer problems caused by identity crises.

Autonomy should not be confused with independence; specific for the autonomous orientation is not the lack of external pressures, but one's perception of these influences (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Also, the existence of many options does not necessarily lead to the feeling of autonomy, but to feeling overwhelmed and forced to make a decision. The number of choices is not important, there could be only one choice available and the person might still feel autonomous, as long as s/he endorses that option (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

The controlled orientation is specific for individuals who feel that they are forced by external factors to engage in a behavior, and that the decision is not theirs to take (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005a). Pay and status could be decisive factors in choosing a job or other activities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). So, these individuals tend to act in a manner that is expected from them, as they have internalized the expectancies on how they should behave (Soenens et al., 2005),

or as Zuckerman et al. (1988) found, they have a high level of self-monitoring. In other words, the controlled orientation represents a tendency toward external regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The activities are perceived as demanding, conflicted, or pressured by imperatives from the environment (Olesen et al., 2010). A high level of public consciousness is positively associated with the controlled orientation, so it should not be a surprise that Soenens et al. (2005) found that the controlled orientation was an efficient predictor of a normative identity style. The control orientation was also found to be a predictor of poor well-being (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

The impersonal orientation is specific to individuals who lack motivation and feel that the outcomes are regulated by chance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The activities are perceived as beyond control, incomprehensible, exceeding personal control or with little effects on the results (Stevens et al., 2015). Individuals with higher levels of this orientation tend to consider that they are unable to regulate their behavior so they will achieve the desired outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As a result, a sense of incompetence develops, making people with high levels of impersonal orientation prone to social anxiety, shame, or fear (Soenens et al., 2005). If a course of action was chosen at some point, such individuals tend to repeat the decision not because of the results, but because they lack the desire to do it differently. The impersonal orientation represents a tendency toward amotivation, and both result from the lack of basic need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Soenens et al. (2005) found that the impersonal orientation was an efficient predictor of the diffuse-avoidant identity style. People with high levels of impersonal orientation tend to avoid situations and decisions relevant for their identity.

Just like other complementary or opposed personality traits, we cannot talk about a pure autonomous, controlled or impersonal person. Rather, the psychological portrait includes a mix of these, in varying degrees, and eventually we can talk about a dominance of one of the causality orientations (Stevens et al., 2015), and the environment might play an important role in causing the quality of motivation (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2011).

According to Stevens et al. (2015), few studies searched for gender differences on general causality orientations, but the conclusions were that women registered higher scores than men in autonomy and men higher for the controlled orientation. The studies cited by Stevens and his colleagues were separately conducted on French-Canadian undergraduates, US high schoolers,

and Belgian undergraduates. Although not many data are available on this topic, it seems that women are more inclined to a self-determined profile, compared to men, and this seriously challenges the traditional gender perspective.

*Are the general causality orientations personality traits?*

The idea of traits is quite old, dating back to Aristotle and his descriptions of pride, modesty, and cowardice (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E.), but current approaches of personality traits (Matthews et al., 2003) acknowledge that the theory on personality traits is based on two assumptions: (1) the traits are stable in time, and (2) they directly influence the behavior, thus causing differences between individuals. For example, the five-factor models are based on these ideas.

There is a common ground between personality theories and the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and this common ground may start with the psychological needs for relatedness and autonomy. These psychological needs are regarded as results of the interaction between the innate needs and the opportunities that the environment offers for their satisfaction. The way people act or orient toward the environment, thus affecting the future need satisfaction, is considered stable in time and across domains, and it is referred in the self-determination theory as causality orientations (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The relations between the concepts promoted by these two sets of theories are complex. According to Olesen et al. (2010), autonomy and extraversion may share some conceptual roots, because they both require engaging in social interactions, thus leading to well-being. Also, autonomy and agreeableness share some characteristics such as expressing trust or confidence in social relations. The controlled orientation and the lower levels of agreeableness bring dishonesty in social interactions and hostility, and the impersonal orientation shares with neuroticism the characteristics of helplessness and avoidance.

A research conducted in 2010 by Olesen et al. aimed to establish a conceptual independence between the general causality orientations (GCOs) and the Big Five personality traits (considered to be dispositional traits, because they refer to a tendency to respond in a stable and predictable manner to different situations). Using a large sample of participants, Olesen et al. showed that the autonomous, the controlled and the impersonal motivational orientations were distinct personality traits. Some interesting implications are worth mentioning.

For example, as a distinct trait, autonomy might facilitate the positive expression of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness; control might negate agreeableness through conflicted and pressured behaviors; impersonal might contribute to neuroticism through negative affect and feelings of incompetence. So, the causality orientations could be considered motivational or developmental adaptations of dispositional traits, and as a result they are more likely to be shaped by psychosocial contingencies (Olesen, 2011).

One reason why the GCOs are considered individual differences variables is that same events cause different reactions in different people (Deci & Ryan, 1985). So, individuals make different interpretations of the context; some of them perceive the environment as a source of information for enhancing their self-determination and intrinsic motivation, no matter what the objective properties of the situation are. Other people search for controlling clues in the environment that will allow them to organize their behavior, and as long as they have a good understanding of the situation, they can become very competent. Finally, other people may be confused by the environment, their sense of self could be shaken, and they will experience the situation as amotivating.

According to Deci & Ryan (1985), the autonomous orientation for example is an individual difference variable, and the same idea was supported almost 30 years by scientists working in the framework of the self-determination theory. Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2011) referred to the GCOs as "traits" (p. 485), and Lam and Gurland (2008) mentioned that the general causality orientations were stable over time and across domains, and referred to individual differences in orienting to certain environmental inputs.

Drugař (2012) also focused on the GCOs as traits, using a sample of 45 unemployed participants in a longitudinal study, and trying to bring evidence for the time stability of the orientations. The 4-year investigation showed no important differences for the autonomous and the impersonal orientations, but a significant increase of the controlled orientation in the case of prolonged unemployment. The results did not succeed in adding a definitive answer to the issue of stability, but rather they supported the idea that the orientations might be influenced by contextual factors.

Trying to connect the GCOs and the identity styles, Soenens et al. (2005) mentioned that the causality orientations could be seen as surface traits, being more malleable and sensible to context, whereas the core traits (Big Five included) were less malleable (because of their large genetic source) and limited

to context-induced modifications. Of course, as people enter adulthood, the surface traits tend to become relatively stable, but still they are more likely to be modified by context, therapy, or important life events, compared to the core traits. Moreover, as surface traits, the general causality orientations might act as mediators between core traits and specific outcomes in the everyday life.

*Cross-cultural research on the general causality orientations*

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a gap in the scientific literature concerning the testing of the self-determination theory in cross-cultural settings (Deci et al., 2001). The interest grew later, Bulgarian and U.S.A. samples were compared on autonomy support (Deci et al., 2001), German and U.S.A. university students were compared on autonomy and competence (Levesque et al., 2004), and U.S.A. and Russian samples were compared on motivation and autonomy (Sheldon et al., 2017).

It is debatable whether human needs may be generalized across cultures (Deci et al., 2001). According to the self-determination theory, the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are innate, so they should be less sensitive to cross-cultural differences. Another perspective is that different cultures value differently the orientations towards control or autonomy; for example, Vansteenkiste et al. (2005b), in an effort to show that the self-determination theory is not limited to Western countries, started from the point of view that autonomy might not be valued in Eastern cultures (*e.g.*, China). The reason behind this line of thinking is that Eastern cultures are prone for collectivistic values and thus the individual performance, initiative or realization is less emphasized.

According to the self-determination theory, the experiences of autonomy are important for learning (Chirkov, 2009; Oates, 2019) and well-being, and this should be common even for non-Western countries (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Wichmann, 2011). Using a sample of 132 Chinese participants, Vansteenkiste et al. (2005b) showed that their results mimicked the ones obtained in Western countries: high levels of autonomy predicted positive outcomes, such as academic success or active-voluntary school behaviors, and high levels of control predicted negative outcomes, such as dropping out or avoidant school behaviors. In the same article, a second study of a sample of 79 participants revealed that the positive outcomes of autonomy were not limited to learning, but they were

extended to their general well-being, while control was associated with reduced well-being.

The idea that some cultures promote individualism or collectivism is not new; the real question is whether individuals can experience autonomy when they behave, according to these cultural influences or if they feel controlled when they are pressured to obey them (Ryan & Deci, 2006). The fact that autonomy is important, regardless of Eastern or Western cultures, is supported by a growing number of studies, even though the practical implications should be carefully analyzed when making real-life interventions.

The results of a cross-cultural research that compared U.S.A. and Bulgarian participants showed that these needs were universal (Deci et al., 2001). However, some of the results indicated higher autonomy support from immediate work context and lower pressure on the job for Bulgarians, compared to Americans. Although the general causality orientations were not measured in this study, we might wonder if the discussion could be extended in this direction starting from the previous-mentioned results. Could the Bulgarian context facilitate the autonomy orientation and lower levels of the controlled orientation, compared to the US?

Stevens et al. (2015) used a convenience sample of university students from seven countries in Europe and Eurasia to identify the strongest causality orientation, the gender differences, and the relations between the general causality orientations and psychological well-being. However, their small sample of participants (N=76) and the unbalanced sampling (53 Romanians, 14 Turkish, 4 Germans etc.) make it impossible to label this research as cross-cultural. The internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the General Causality Orientations Scales ranged from .66 to .76. In their research, the autonomy, controlled and impersonal causality orientations were uncorrelated, supporting the idea that the causality orientations may not be interrelated. The autonomy orientations registered the higher scores, and the impersonal the lowest, with statistically significant differences between them. Women scored significantly higher on autonomy. In a research conducted in 2005, Soenens et al. also found that the three general causality orientations were virtually uncorrelated and that women scored higher on autonomy.

However, these results are not that definitive as they seem. For example, Wu and Hwang (2000) found a positive correlation of .656 between autonomy



and control, of .437 between autonomy and impersonal, and .468 between control and impersonal, in a sample of 353 Chinese participants.

### Objective of the present study

We aimed to bring some evidence on the topic of cross-cultural differences of core concepts of the self-determination theory, and to cover a gap in the cross-cultural research for the South-Eastern Europe. Specifically, our main objective was to compare the general causality orientations between some samples selected from Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania. There is some common ground between the countries that were investigated in our research (*e.g.*, women working fulltime, the dominance of the agricultural work until the 1950's, the communist industrialization that came after, the unemployment around the 2000's or the migration of the labor force at the beginning of the 2000's - Kovacheva & Kabaivanov, 2008), and this offers good enough reasons for expecting similarities in the general causality orientations in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.

## Method

### *Participants*

Three groups of participants were selected from each country, using a convenience sampling procedure. Their demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the samples

Country of origin	N	Gender		Studies			Age	
		Male	Female	Primary	Secondary	Higher	m	SD
Bulgaria	73	28	45	1	33	39	29.94	9.05
Greece	76	40	36	1	17	58	31.80	6.62
Romania	76	36	40	0	25	51	40.98	10.33
Total	225	104	121	2	75	148	34.30	10.01

A total number of 225 participants were finally gathered, after removing those with incomplete datasheets. 12 random missing values were replaced with the series mean (an approach explained by Droesbeke & Lavallée, 1996). For the entire sample, the minimum age was 19, and the

maximum was 72. We tested for age differences between samples and we conducted a Kruskal Wallis Test, because of the nonsymmetrical distribution of the Greek sample (*Kolmogorov-Smirnov*  $Z=1.51$ ,  $p=.021$ ). The difference was statistically significant,  $X^2(2, N=225)=50.18$ ,  $p=.001$ , with the Romanian participants being the oldest ( $med=42.50$ ), followed by the Greeks ( $med=30$ ) and the Bulgarians ( $med=28$ ). The median was reported in all cases because we used a non-parametric test for comparison.

All of the participants were employed at the time of the data gathering (November-December 2019), the period of employment varying from less than a year to a maximum of 44 years. For the entire sample, the mean period of employment was 12.27 years ( $SD=9.63$ ). Because of the nonsymmetrical distribution of the Greek sample (*Kolmogorov-Smirnov*  $Z=1.91$ ,  $p=.001$ ), we conducted a Kruskal Wallis Test to check for differences between samples on the employment period, and the differences were statistically significant:  $X^2(2, N=225)=41.65$ ,  $p<.001$ , with the Romanian participants having the longest periods ( $med=18$ ), followed by the Bulgarians ( $med=7$ ) and the Greeks ( $med=5$ ). The median was reported in all cases because we used a non-parametric test for comparison. The differences were expected, as the Romanian sample was significantly older.

#### *Measure and procedure*

*The General Causality Scale* (Deci & Ryan, 1985) was used to assess the levels of the autonomous, the controlled and the impersonal orientations. The scale has 12 vignettes, and each vignette includes 3 items to assess each of the orientations (resulting a total of 36 items). The participants were required to indicate using a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which the responses were typical for them. The participants obtained a total score for each orientation, reflecting the intensity of that tendency.

The scale was translated for each country by a professional English - Bulgarian, English - Greek, and English - Romanian translator. The backtranslations were checked by the authors of the article, and the differences were discussed to clarify the differences between translations.

Deci and Ryan (1985) reported Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's of .744 for the autonomous, .694 for the control, and .741 for the impersonal orientation. For our research, the coefficients are reported in Table 2. All values are acceptable for an exploratory research.

Table 2. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's for the GCOs for the Bulgarian, the Greek and the Romanian samples

Country	Autonomy	Control	Impersonal
Bulgaria	.70	.60	.78
Greece	.82	.79	.70
Romania	.61	.65	.73

### Data Analysis

The results were statistically processed by means of PASW 18.0, applying descriptive statistics, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for check of normality of variable distributions, internal consistency computation for checking the homogeneity of the scales, Pearson correlation coefficients for establishing relatedness between the studied variables, Kruskal Wallis Test for group comparisons in case of violation of normality distribution, ANOVA and t-test for group comparisons, and effect size estimations.

### Results

Higher means were recorded for the autonomy orientation, followed by the control and the impersonal orientations, regardless of the country of origin (*see* Table 3). Unexpected strong correlations were found between the autonomous and the control orientations (for the Greek sample and for the entire sample) and between the autonomous and the impersonal orientations (again for the Greek sample).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations for the GCO's

Countries	General causality orientations	Mean (SD)	Autonomy	Control
Bulgaria	Autonomy	66.13 (9.36)		
	Control	48.24 (8.98)	.24*	
	Impersonal	37.41 (11.85)	.01	.28*
Greece	Autonomy	45.27 (12.21)		
	Control	38.43 (9.94)	.76**	
	Impersonal	32.21 (7.72)	.42**	.51**
Romania	Autonomy	54.89 (7.08)		
	Control	44.48 (8.66)	.16	
	Impersonal	32.82 (9.63)	.10	.42**
All three samples	Autonomy	55.29 (12.93)		
	Control	43.66 (10.02)	.57**	
	Impersonal	34.10 (10.07)	.26**	.42**

Note: \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

We conducted a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check for the normality of the distribution of the GCO's across the three samples and in all cases the distributions were normal, coefficients ranging from the highest of 1.25 (Greece, autonomy) to the lowest of 0.65 (Romania, impersonal), with  $p > .05$  in all cases.

The results of the comparisons using One-Way ANOVA for the statistic procedure showed significant differences between countries for all GCO's. In the case of the autonomous orientation,  $F(2,224)=84.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2=.43$  (large effect size). The results of the *Games-Howell* post-hoc tests showed that the Bulgarian sample registered significantly higher scores compared to the Romanian and the Greek sample, and the Romanian sample significantly higher than the Greek sample.

In the case of the control orientation,  $F(2,224)=21.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2=.16$  (large effect size). The results of the *Games-Howell* post-hoc tests showed that the Greek sample registered significantly lower scores compared to the Romanian and the Bulgarian sample, and the Romanian sample significantly lower than the Bulgarian sample.

In the case of the impersonal orientation,  $F(2,224)=6.14$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $\eta^2=.05$  (small effect size). The results of the *Games-Howell* post-hoc tests showed that the Bulgarian sample registered significantly higher scores than the Greek and the Romanian samples.

The final analysis targeted the gender differences across countries. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that all distributions were normal, the coefficients ranging from the highest of 1.152 (Romania, female, autonomy), to the lowest of .467 (Romania, male, autonomy), with  $p > .05$  in all cases.

The only significant gender difference was registered in the case of the Bulgarian sample, for the autonomy orientation:  $t(71)=2.41$ ,  $p=.019$ , *Cohen's d*=.56 (medium effect size), with women ( $m=68.15$ ,  $SD=8.33$ ) being more autonomous than men ( $m=62.89$ ,  $SD=10.15$ ).

For the entire sample the differences were not statistically significant, although there was a tendency for women to be more autonomous than men:  $t(223)=1.87$ ,  $p=.06$ .

### *Discussion*

Our research aimed to test for differences in general causality orientations between three samples from South-Eastern Europe, from countries

with similar historical, cultural, and economic evolution. The general causality orientations were considered personality traits, starting with the work of Deci & Ryan (1985), and this opened the possibility for intercultural comparisons.

Unlike other studies (Soenens et al., 2005; Stevens et al., 2015) that found that the GCO's were uncorrelated, our research revealed unexpected positive correlations between all variables, for the entire sample and separately in the case of Greece, for example. Our results were similar to the findings in China by Wu and Hwang (2000). Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and China are all collectivistic cultures with indexes 30, 35, 30 and 20 correspondingly on Hofstede's dimension collectivism/individualism ("Hofstede Insights", *n.d.*) that may explain similar results in these countries, while Belgium, where the study by Soenens et al. (2005) was conducted, was an individualist country with index 75 on Hofstede's dimension collectivism/individualism ("Hofstede Insights", *n.d.*), and the study by Stevens et al. (2015) was conducted among an eclectic sample of small number of participants from seven countries so their cultural background differed. It has been found that a positive connection exists between autonomy and collectivistic attitudes (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and our findings also revealed a leading autonomy orientation in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania that all value collectivism ("Hofstede Insights", *n.d.*). The connection between collectivism and autonomy is also supported by the finding that the Greeks who accept others or feel accepted by others are more often Autonomy seekers in their career motivation, compared to the Greeks who are less likely to accept others (Giannouli & Stoyanova, 2014).

Our research also identified some differences between the Bulgarian, the Greek and the Romanian samples concerning the GCO's. The studied Bulgarians were more oriented towards autonomy, control, and impersonal causality than the studied Greeks and Romanians, while Romanians were more oriented towards autonomy than Greeks. Having a similar background, how can these be explained? The first reason could be the age differences between participants. The Romanians had a significantly higher mean age and were engaged in the field of work for more years than the participants from Bulgaria and Greece. Perhaps their personality traits were shaped differently by the approximately 10 years more of working for earning a living. Seeking autonomy is less frequent career motivators with age advance and with more work experience (Ivantchev & Stoyanova, 2015) that may explain why Bulgarians were more oriented towards autonomy than Romanians. Besides, it

has been established that Bulgarians value Autonomy (Papazova et al., 2008) and that the career motivational type of Autonomy seekers is more frequent in Bulgaria compared to Greece (Giannouli & Stoyanova, 2014). Seeking autonomy is among the leading career motivators in Bulgarian students and this trend is stable during the years (Ivantchev & Stoyanova, 2015). These findings support our results of higher Bulgarian general causality orientation towards autonomy.

In the post-Communist societies, higher levels of authoritarianism are significantly related to lower levels of individualism (Kemmelmeyer et al., 2003), and authoritarianism may explain higher orientation towards control in Bulgaria and Romania than in Greece (the behavior is controlled rather than chosen, people seek out control and interpret events as controlling, rely on surveillance, deadlines and extrinsic rewards - Deci & Ryan, 1985). Bulgarian students score high on four aspects of authoritarian attitudes (dogmatism, ethnocentrism, intolerance of ambiguity and conservatism) (Schneider, Krumov, Andrejeva, & Kibarova, 1993). Bulgaria was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and Romania 4<sup>th</sup> among 13 Eastern European ex-communist countries on a complex index (comprising of six variables) of left-wing authoritarianism (de Regt, Mortelmans, & Smits, 2011), and this may be related to the higher scores on general causality orientation of control in Bulgaria than in Romania.

Concerning the higher impersonal causality orientation in Bulgaria than in Greece and Romania, this finding may be related to low life-satisfaction in Bulgaria (Abubakar et al., 2016; "Eurostat Press Office", 2015; Jang et al., 2017; Minkov, 2009; Veenhoven, 2005). It has been found that the increase of Bulgarian workers' self-esteem is accompanied with more expressed needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci et al., 2001).

Another reason for the differences between the Bulgarian, the Greek and the Romanian samples concerning the GCO's could be that although the countries have a similar background, the recent developments are quite different. For example, Greece has already entered the EURO zone (EURO are used for payments across the country), but Bulgaria and Romania have not, and their economic situation still needs improvements. It may be that the frequent economic variations, and the political instability did not lead to a certain general causality orientation, but rather that the individuals developed a mixed set of motivational orientations and they are using them contextually.

Finally, our research did not identify any gender differences concerning the GCO's, unlike Soenens et al. (2005) or Stevens et al. (2015), although women registered slightly higher scores than men on autonomy.

#### *Limitations*

The selection of the participants could be a limitation of our research. In such cross-cultural studies, some differences may exist between participants, other than the cultural-specific. The representativeness of the samples for their population was not verified, and the use of convenience sampling limits the generalization of the results. We tried to diminish these problems by measuring potential confounding variables (as recommended by Leung & van de Vijer, *e.g.*, age, gender, level of education or the field of work).

Another limitation may be connected to the cultural-specific response style, although the cultural, economic or social differences between the analyzed countries should be similar, as presented in the introductory section.

However, the interpretations of cultural differences are challenging, because the causal role of culture, as a multifaceted construct, is difficult to be demonstrated, and true experiments are impossible to organize (Leung & van de Vijer, 2008).

### **Conclusions**

This study was the first one to compare general causal orientations among three Balkan, Southern and Eastern European countries. The leading role of autonomy orientation established in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania is a prerequisite for satisfying relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2014) that corresponds to their collectivistic values directed to the importance of relationships.

The results offer a deeper understanding of the general causality orientations and expand the discussions on their role as personality traits. Although more studies are needed to offer a definitive answer for the time stability, our study succeeded in offering different motivational orientations portraits for the studied samples. Cross-cultural comparisons of general causality orientations reveal the preferred ways of perceiving and interpreting events that influence on coping strategies with difficult life situations, on maintaining and improving well-being, quality of life, and life-satisfaction. The sense of control over one's life and situation and autonomy seem related to the

freedom of choice, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Impersonal causality orientation or perceived incompetence and amotivation may be related to the need for knowledge, personal development, initiative, enthusiasm, and perceived self-efficacy. General causality orientations should be further studied in relation to some personality traits and behavioral indicators of performance.

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