BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, PLANNING, AND RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY

TOWARDS EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVES

OCTOBER 16th-17th, 2025

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2nd International Conference on Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory

Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

This conference returned for the second time within the Albanian and Mediterranean academic context, aiming to build a tradition of collaboration centered on scientific research and academia. Following the success of the first edition held on October 13th-14th, 2023, where proceedings were published in the Book of Proceedings, Albanica journal, and various international academic platforms, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania relaunched this important event. The 2025 edition focused on housing, urban planning, and resilient territorial development, offering a platform for researchers, policymakers, and experts from the region and beyond.

Albania and the Western Balkans have faced major transformations in urbanization, spatial planning, and environmental management. Demographic changes, economic pressures, and environmental challenges created a need for new strategies in architecture, planning, and governance. This conference brought together diverse voices to explore these themes and promote resilient and sustainable development.

Key topics included architecture and the city, with emphasis on urban form, housing typologies, and the role of cultural heritage in modern urban design; urban mobility, addressing traffic challenges, public transport, and the use of technologies like GIS and AI in planning; and new housing models, focusing on affordability, energy efficiency, and innovative materials.

Discussions also covered demography and economy, exploring territorial governance, smart cities, social enterprises, and digital technologies such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse in urban management. Finally, the urban and natural environment was addressed through topics like pollution, adaptive planning, and nature-based solutions for climate resilience.

Through this conference, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania aimed to foster a broad interdisciplinary debate on these pressing issues, combining academic and practical perspectives to offer concrete recommendations for future urban and territorial development policies and projects.

Organizers' Announcement

The International Scientific Conference on Housing, Urban Planning, and Resilient Territorial Development: Toward Euro-Mediterranean Approaches was held on October 16th-17th, 2025, in Tirana, Albania. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences of Albania and supported by national and international partners, including the University of Ferrara and Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development, the event brought together researchers, academics, policymakers, and professionals to address key challenges in urban development, with a focus on resilience and sustainability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The first day of the conference took place at the Academy of Sciences, while the second day was hosted at POLIS University.

The conference explored five main themes:

I. Architecture and the City, which investigated the typological and morphological dimensions of urban form, the evolution of collective and individual housing types, the relationship between architectural design and urban identity, and the role of historical and cultural heritage in shaping contemporary cities;
II. Urban Mobility and Resilient Cities, which addressed traffic congestion, infrastructure challenges, and public transportation, while also promoting the redesign of public spaces – such as streets, squares, and pedestrian zones – to improve accessibility and mobility; it also explored the integration of digital technologies like GIS, AI, and simulation tools to enhance planning, automation, and infrastructure management;
III. New Housing Models, which examined innovative approaches to affordable and social housing in response to demographic shifts and technological change, along with energy efficiency strategies, passive energy systems, and the application of new sustainable materials and construction technologies;
IV. Demography and Economy, which focused on macro-regional and national dynamics impacting territorial development, including urban governance, disaster risk reduction, and the rise of smart and inclusive cities; it also explored how emerging technologies – such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse – along with social enterprises and circular economy practices, could foster more equitable and adaptive urban systems; and
V. Urban and Natural Environment, which analyzed environmental degradation in urban settings, including air, water, and soil pollution, and promoted nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based planning, and adaptive strategies to enhance environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The conference was conducted in English and Albanian (with self-translated texts where applicable) and was free of charge, with all registration fees fully covered by POLIS University in support of open academic exchange. Key deadlines included abstract submission by June 15th, acceptance notification by June 30th, first draft of papers by September 15th, and final submissions by October 31st.

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Circular economy in the construction sector.

Cultural Dimensions and Entrepreneurial Innovation in Co-Working Spaces

Socio-Spatial Insights from Tirana

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Abstract

This paper investigates the socio-cultural factors influencing innovative entrepreneurial behavior within co-working spaces in Tirana, Albania – an emerging urban setting marked by a nascent but rapidly developing startup ecosystem. Grounded in Hofstede's 6-D Model of National Culture, the study explores how cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance shape entrepreneurial dynamics and innovation processes in shared work environments. Co-working spaces have increasingly become integral to urban transformation, acting as nodes of knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovation. Despite substantial investments in education and early-stage tech ventures, Albania has yet to produce startups with international visibility and sustainable growth. This research analyzes survey data collected from four co-working spaces in Tirana (using purposive sampling) to assess how national cultural values manifest in these spatial environments and impact the scalability of entrepreneurial initiatives. Findings reveal specific cultural barriers embedded in the daily practices and social interactions of co-working communities, which may constrain or delay innovation. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for enhancing the socio-spatial design and cultural adaptability of co-working ecosystems in developing urban contexts. By situating co-working spaces within broader urban and territorial frameworks, this study contributes to the discourse on how socio-cultural innovation can drive inclusive and resilient urban development in low-to-medium income countries.

Keywords

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, co-working spaces, entrepreneurial innovation, Albanian startup ecosystem, urban transformation, national culture and entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Albania has seen a notable surge in its tech startup scene. This growth stems from a collaborative effort between the government[1], and even foreign experts. Despite the infusion of capital and educational resources into these tech ventures, Albania has yet to produce significant startups that achieved international acclaim, especially in revenue growth relative to industry benchmarks. Albania has no critical mass of scalable startups (EU for Innovation, 2024). However, some studies analyze the impact of government support, including grants, subsidies, incubators, and financial assistance programs, or the maturity of the innovative ecosystem, one intriguing aspect that has yet to be explored: *entrepreneurial culture.*

To understand the impact of culture on the tech startup scene in Albania, it is essential to narrow down the research focus. This study will specifically examine whether culture influences the success of startups by looking at one of the critical components of the startup ecosystem: co-working spaces and the organizations that support them. There is a clear link between the more advanced stages of a startup's life cycle, like validation, growth, and scaling, and the role of co-working spaces (EU for Innovation, 2024). DESTIL and Coolab are prime examples of this connection. There is present research on the impact that accelerator and incubation programs have in tech startups in Albania. Startups that achieve success typically navigate through stages such as product-market fit, growth, and scaling, with most successful startups being identified in the development and scaling stages (Ries, 2011). This research will be focused on the observation of the influence of culture in the success of tech startups within the model of co-working spaces.

This thesis aims to observe the application of the 6-D Model of National Culture in the context of co-working spaces in Albania, and to examine how these applied cultural dimensions might influence innovative entrepreneurial behaviors.

This research will answer the following research questions:

1. How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions apply in the setting of co-working spaces in Albania?
2. How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions, as applied in these co-working spaces, influence innovative entrepreneurial behaviors?

2. Literature review

2.1. Co-working spaces and innovative entrepreneurial behavior

Co-working spaces (CWSs) are a modern version display of the sharing economy, characterized by their collaborative environments that foster innovation and creativity, often described by the phrase *"working alone together*". CWS acts as a critical urban practice, especially for freelance workers in cultural and creative industries, contributing to a collective approach to self-help and self-organization to address the challenges of informality and uncertainty in their labor markets (Merkel, 2018, pp. 526-547). These CWS differ from traditional offices because of their cultural

[1] Albania's 2016 Innovation and Startup Law offers tax breaks and grants (Kume & Dobi, 2017).

dimension, contributing to professional collaboration among independent workers through spatial design that encourages interaction (Bencosme, 2022).

Previous research work states that co-working spaces nurture innovative entrepreneurial behavior, by building an environment where collaboration encourages members to share knowledge, network and do creative work. This collaborative culture exposes entrepreneurs to new ideas and potential partnership opportunities, increasing in this way the presence of innovation. Some studies note that entrepreneurs that share the same space with one another have more opportunities for collaboration and innovation, which contributes to the overall growth and success of their entrepreneurial ventures (Bouncken et al., 2018; Weijs-Perrée et al., 2019).

Co-working spaces located in Albania are at the early stages of their lifecycle development. Their primary role is tied to building trust and providing community support within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is at the same time nascent. Usually, in more mature lifecycle stages, co-working spaces tend to downgrade to rental facilities, when the ecosystem is competitive. But, in Albania, the industry is still maturing, and the co-working spaces and start-ups are more engaged in a "first partnering relationship" where trust needs to be built both ways for innovation to grow.

2.2. Hofstede's model and innovative entrepreneurial behavior

The innovation process does not happen outside of the cultural context. Hofstede's six-dimensional model (2001) provides context on how national values shape innovative entrepreneurial behavior. Mueller and Thomas (2001) support the idea that individualism and low uncertainty avoidance are in favor of entrepreneurship. However, they also found that more than these traits alone are needed to fully explain entrepreneurial motivation across different cultures (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). To summarize, each of the six dimensions can be linked, in broad strokes, to innovative entrepreneurial behavior.

- Power Distance (PDI): High PDI organizations are dependent on hierarchy, which from a management perspective limits innovation. Low PDI organizations have more fluid roles and collaboration is present, encouraging new ideas. Albania has a high-Power Distance score (90)
- Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV): Individualism in the workplace puts tasks over relationships, creating "economic persons" that prioritize their own needs. Collectivism puts relationship over tasks, bringing equality in the workspace. The latter fosters incremental innovation, the former radical one. Albania is a collectivistic society (27)
- Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): Low uncertainty avoidance cultures can be faster at innovating and risk-taking. High uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to rely on formal roles and informal rules when doing business. Albania has a culture of avoiding uncertainty (70)
- Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS): Masculine cultures are result oriented and rewarded based on performance. Feminine cultures are rewarded based on equality, according to need. Albania has a masculine culture (80), meaning people take pride in their accomplishments.
- Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO): Long-term orientation focuses on future rewards, contributing to a steady but slow innovation, while short-term orientation

focuses on the present, wielding to fast results. Albania has a long-term oriented culture (56).

- Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR): This dimension influences organizational culture and management practices in the workplace. Indulgent societies encourage personal satisfaction that leads to higher innovation. Restrained societies encourage discipline, control and a conservative approach to work. Albanian culture leans toward Restraint (15).

Table 1 summarizes how each of Hofstede's dimensions is generally thought to shape innovative entrepreneurial behavior. The overall message, however, is that while culture matters, it does not act alone. Other forces, such as economic development, education systems, and institutional support, play equally significant roles (Mueller & Thomas, 2001).

Dimension	Low / High	Innovative Entrepreneurial Behavior
PDI	High	Low probability
IDV	High	Moderate probability (need to be combined with other factors like education system, economic development, and business type)
IVR	High	High probability (need to be combined with other factors like education system, economic development, and business type)
UAI	High	Low probability
LTO	High / Low	High probability (sustainable innovation) / High probability (quick results)
MAS	High	High probability of entrepreneurship, low probability of innovation

Table 1. *Cultural dimensions and entrepreneurial innovation.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study examines how Hofstede's cultural dimensions apply to Albanian co-working spaces and how these cultural dimensions influence innovative entrepreneurial behaviors. It uses a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary research through literature review and primary data collection using conditioned sampling questionnaires. This research has used two models to help answer the research questions and observe how culture influences innovative entrepreneurial behavior.

The first model is Hofstede's six cultural dimensions. This model was chosen because it is validated in cross-cultural studies (Hofstede, 2001) and it has been relevant in previous entrepreneurship research (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). The second model used in this research is the Co-working space. These spaces have become an important part of Albania's start-up environment.

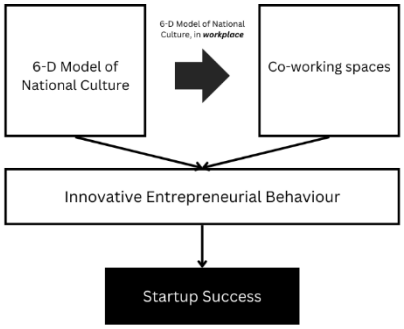

Figure 1. *Research design.*

3.2. Data sources & collection

3.2.1. Desktop research

Secondary data are derived from academic journals and institutional reports. They help in providing context on the Albanian start-up environment and the role of co-working spaces.

Primary data is collected through a questionnaire based on Hofstede's guidelines in Culture's Consequences. Specific cultural dimensions (2 to 6) items were selected for each cultural dimension, adjusted to reflect the experiences of actors such as: freelancers, entrepreneurs, and mobile workers. The questionnaire measures decision-making (PDI), individual versus collective goals (IDV), cooperation and recognition (MAS), tolerance for stress and rules (UAI), time orientation (LTO), and attitudes toward leisure and happiness (IVR).

Question no.	Dimension	Question Type
1 to 6	IDV	Scale from 1 (very important) to 5 (less important)
7 to 12	MAS	Scale from 1 (very important) to 5 (less important)
12 & 17	UAI	Scale from 1 (I never feel this way) to 5 (I always feel this way), and single choice question
14 & 18	IVR	Likert scale question and multiple choice question
15 to 16	PDI	Frequency scale question and single choice question
18 to 19	LTO	Multiple choice questions

Table 2. *Questions grouped by cultural dimensions.*

3.2.2. Data collection & sampling

Given the constraints of time, accessibility during the summer months, and the lack of comprehensive data on the total number of co-working spaces in Albania and their current renting

capacities, a convenience sampling method was employed for this study (Etikan et al., 2016). The questionnaire is designed based on the guidelines mentioned at the end of each chapter and is dedicated to a cultural dimension in Hoftede's second edition of "Culture's Consequences" book and it is built using an online collection tool called Google Forms. From July 8 to August 16, it was distributed t to four well-known co-working spaces in Tirana: DESTIL Co-working, Coolab, Social Hub, and Innospace (EU for Innovation, 2024). 22 freelancers, entrepreneurs, and digital nomads participated in this questionnaire.

3.2.3. Data analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using Hofstede's method for calculating cultural dimension scores. These results were then compared with Albania's national cultural profile and interpreted in relation to innovative entrepreneurial behavior.

3.2.4. Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary, and all respondents gave informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose and use of data. No personal information was collected beyond optional email addresses from participants who wished to receive results. The data received was managed following GDPR standards. Secondary sources were cited appropriately, ensuring respect for intellectual property.

4. Result analysis

Between July and August, we collected 22 responses. The result analysis will give an overview of the demographics, and then it will interpret question results across each cultural dimension. The findings for the six dimensions validated for the co-working space model are then compared with the corresponding national-level scores.

4.1. Demographics

The distribution of responses was relatively even across the four co-working spaces: three spaces contributed five responses each, and one contributed six. This balance indicates that no single space disproportionately shaped the findings.

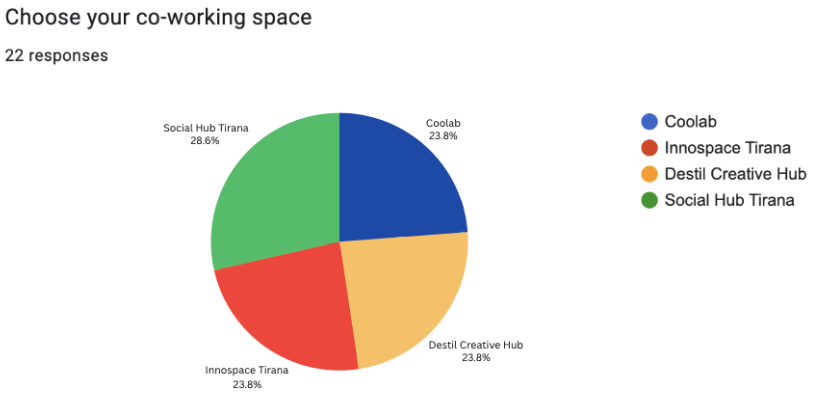

Figure 2. *Responses broken down by CWS.*

The age profile of respondents was heavily skewed toward younger users. 77% were between 18–34 years old, while 18% were between 35-54. No respondents were above 55.

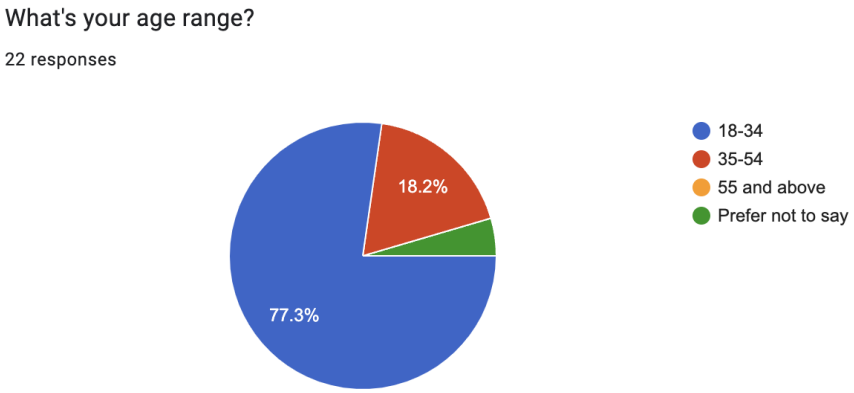

Figure 3. *Age.*

The gender distribution of the respondents is perfectly balanced; with 50% male and 50% female respondents. This shows that both male and female perspectives are equally represented in the data.

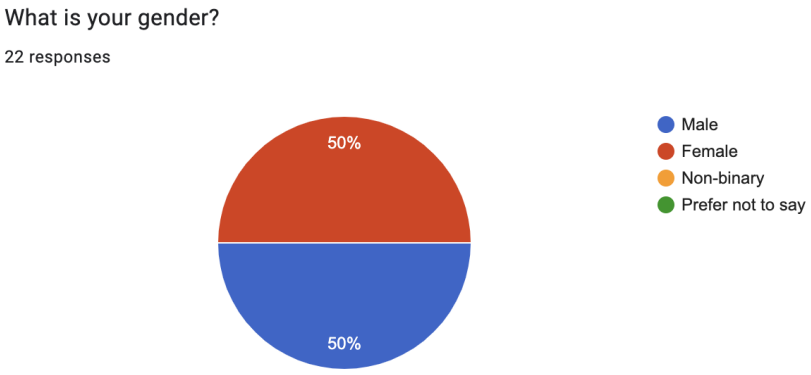

Figure 4. *Gender.*

Most of the respondents have been using the co-working space for a significant period. 86.4% of the respondents have been using the co-working space for more than three months.

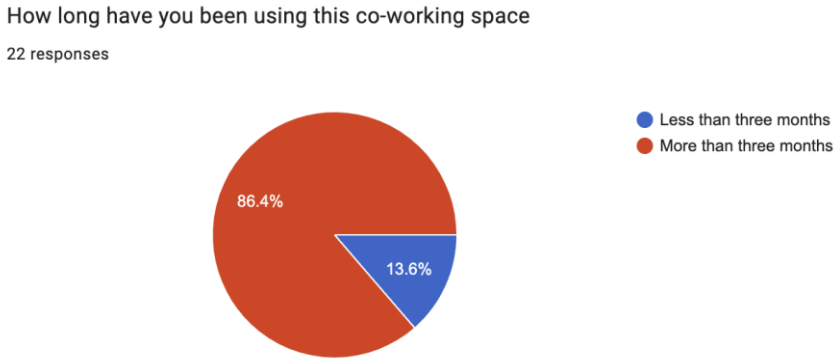

Figure 5. *Longevity of usage of CWS.*

4.2. National culture analysis

(PDI): CWS score: 70, National score: 90. This result rationalizes that CWS environments experience a less hierarchical structure compared to broad society norms. Members of these CWS feel comfortable in challenging authority, making the environment a microcosm of the social venue, where young entrepreneurs are leading a shift to flat decision-making structures.

(UAI): CWS score: 93, National score: 70. This significant difference suggests that members may prefer a working environment where rules, policies, and expectations are clearly defined so that they can avoid ambiguity and risk. Innovation needs to be supported by this baseline.

(IDV): CWS score: 53, National score: 27. The higher IDV score in co-working spaces indicates that individuals in these environments are more likely to value and seek autonomy, personal initiative, and self-expression. This suggests that co-working spaces support and encourage entrepreneurial activities, where individuals are free to pursue their own projects, ideas, and business ventures independently.

(MAS) and (IVR): Co-working spaces scored 41 on MAS and 36 on IVR, compared to national scores of 80 (MAS) and 15 (IVR). The environment of a co-working space is characterized by discipline, and a mentality of work over leisure, but it is more relaxed compared to other working environments on a national basis. Members tend to prioritize work-life balance, cooperation and negotiation.

(LTO): CWS score: 50, National score: 53. These are nearly identical. Co-working spaces foster an environment where users are encouraged to think beyond immediate gains and consider the long-term impact of their work and decisions.

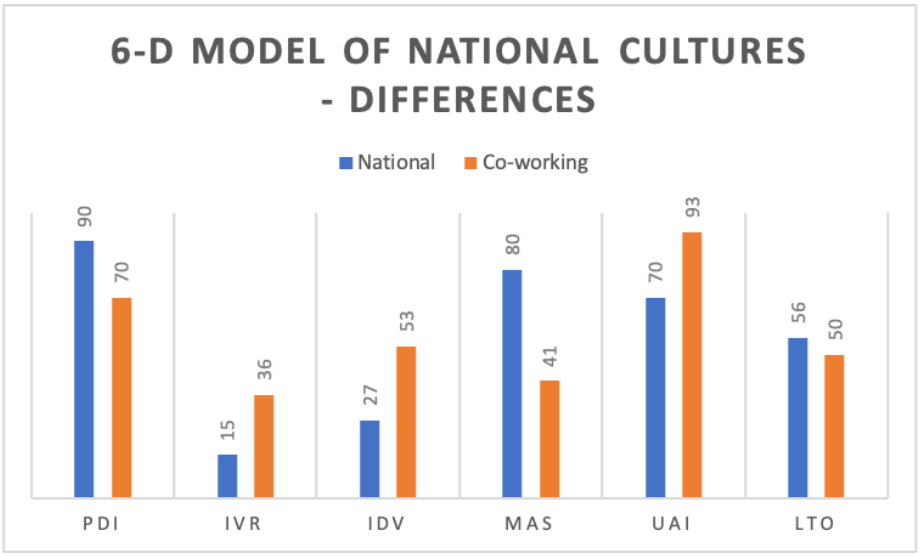

Figure 6. *National vs. CWS scores.*

5. Discussion on findings and conclusion

5.1. Answering the research questions

This study examined how the Hofstede's cultural dimensions within Albanian co-working spaces influence the innovative entrepreneurial behavior, comparing those with the national dimensions. The results suggest that co-working spaces in Albania both disrupt and reinforce national cultural norms, and this duality in effect shows us that these CWS do create conditions that support start-ups, but they mirror national barriers that hold back innovation.

The results show an interesting dynamic interplay between power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Co-working spaces contribute to lowering the PDI, reducing hierarchy and allowing the members to interact freely and exchange knowledge. The young members of these organizations tend to break the ties with old patterns of authority, benefiting from collaboration and peer learning. This cultural shift increases innovation.

However, it is counterbalanced by a higher level of UAI compared to the national scores. CSW members prefer security, predictability, and well-structured environments to build their initiatives. This usually discourages the risk-taking behavior that is needed for disruptive innovation. Members often will choose safer, incremental projects or initiatives compared to the high-risk ones that are necessary for scalable growth, potentially limiting their innovative behaviors. The combination of low PDI and high UAI creates a paradox: entrepreneurs might have great ideas and take them to the planning phase but are constrained in acting boldly on them. This dynamic interplay gives a decent explanation on why Albania has not yet developed a strong base of scalable growing start-ups, despite the ecosystem support.

Other cultural dimensions considered are supportive of this conclusion.

- Although the CWSs have shifted the national score on IDV index to a more individualistic approach, it is still within the balanced threshold.

- Although the CWS have shifted the national score on IVR index, the culture remains that of a restraint.
- Although the CWS have shifted the MAS index it has been towards a feminine culture; lacking the aggressive drive for short-term innovation.

5.2. Limitations

These findings have successfully answered the research questions, however there are some limitations that should be acknowledged.

The sample size for this research is relatively small, because it is based on a sample size of 22 respondents scattered across four co-working spaces, located in Tirana. Also, this research has used a convenience sampling, due to the practical limitations on the time the research was conducted, limiting the diversity of perspectives among other co-working spaces in Tirana.

5.3. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and limitations of this study, several specific recommendations can be proposed to strengthen the ability of the co-working spaces included in this research paper to promote innovative entrepreneurial behavior. Furthermore, suggestions for future research are provided to address the limitations encountered in this study.

Addressing high UAI: To counterbalance the high level of uncertainty avoidance within the co-working spaces, this paper suggests implementing “Safe Zones” for innovation. Members should be encouraged to experiment boldly with their innovative ideas, and they might do so within a controlled environment. The “Safe Zones” can impose clear guidelines and expectations, reducing the high level of uncertainty avoidance through short-term low risk innovation grands; incremental innovative workshops to build muscle memory around risk-taking behaviors.

Addressing moderate to low MAS: To counterbalance the low MAS index, this research suggests partnerships with universities through recognition programs. This recognition program can help shift the focus towards individual achievements. For instance, awards could be given for "Most Innovative Idea of the Month" or "Best Collaborative Project," which would incentivize both individual and collective innovation while aligning with the low MAS preference for modesty and quality of life.

Future research should use a broader sample of co-working spaces and examine their interaction with universities, research institutions, and the private sector to give a fuller picture of the factors shaping entrepreneurial innovation in Albania.

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