

# **PH.D. THESIS**

**Csukonyi Csilla**

**RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL  
ORIENTATION (INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM)  
AND THE „CULTURAL TRADE-OFF”- HYPOTHESIS:  
One for All or All for One; versus One for One?**



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# 1. Introduction

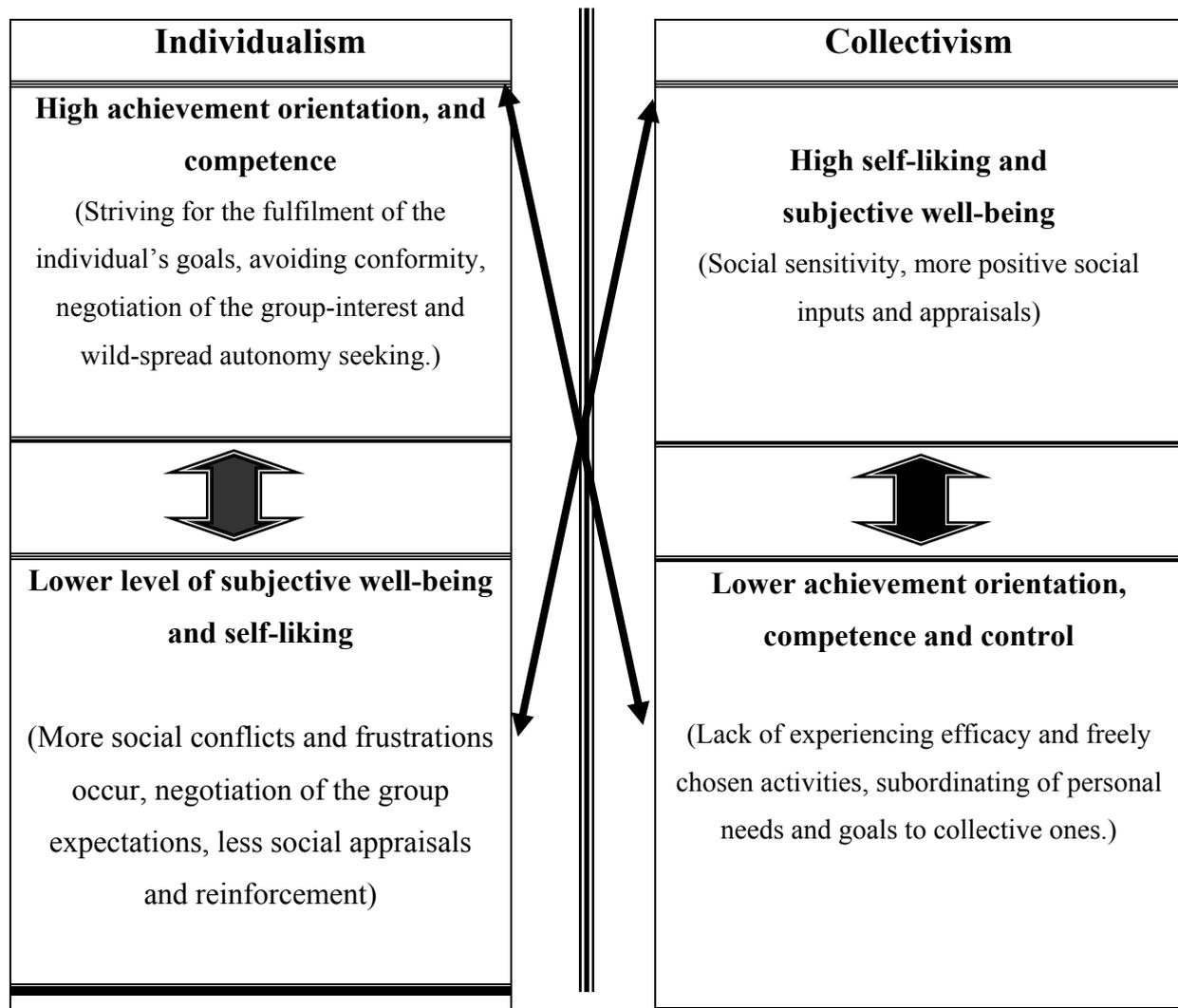
The social orientation plays a highly important role in our lives. It has an enormous effect on how we relate to others and on the ability of cooperation. The latter is usually the object of the most common aptitude tests. The key question evoked according to the subtitle of the recent thesis is the starting point: which is profitable to operate independently and autonomously or cooperate. The answer is evidence for many people, whether choosing the first or the second way of behaviour. Therefore the individualists find the first way evident, thus collectivists choose the second way with absolute certainty. However even these evident behaviours give the interest of this psychological topic: to reveal motives behind the conceptions (if there are any) of extreme collectivists giving priority to cooperation, and the motives of extreme individualists' conceptions to follow independence and autonomy at any cost.

In the recent thesis we try to give an alternative interpretation for the above mentioned questions applying the so called "cultural trade-off" hypothesis (Tafarodi and Swan, 1996; Tafarodi and Walters, 1999; Tafarodi, Lang and Smith, 1999). According to the "cultural trade-off" hypothesis the collectivists are higher in self-liking, subjective well-being, but having a lower level of self-competence than individualists (see Table 1.). Although the individualists show more competence in achievement situations but they are lower at self-liking and subjective well-being. This asymmetric "mirror" or "puzzle" hypothesis could give an explanation of the compensatory balance of the advantages and disadvantages of individualism and collectivism. We assumed that the "cultural trade-off" hypothesis would promote on the explanatory researches on individualism and collectivism.

Individualism-collectivism constructs have been discussed in many contexts in social sciences. There was research on these constructs in the areas of values (Hofstede, 1980), social systems, religion, economic development, ideology, cultural patterns and the self. First of all, to clear the emerged discrepancies connected to the concepts of individualism and collectivism (Fiske, 2002; Voronov and Singer, 2002; Realo, 2003) we overview the most common and well-known definitions of the concepts. Specifically, Triandis (1995) argued that the four defining attributes of individualism and collectivism are (a) the definition of the self, which can emphasize personal or collective aspects, or can be independent or interdependent; (b) personal goals that have priority over in group goals or vice versa; (c) the emphasis on exchange rather than communal relationships or the emphasis on rationality rather than relatedness; and (d) the importance of

attitudes and norms as determinants of social behaviour. For individualists attitudes are more important than norms, but collectivists give more weight for norms than for attitudes.

Table 1. The model of „cultural trade-off” hypothesis connected to individualism and collectivism (Tafarodi és Swan, 1996)



One behavioural characteristic that distinguishes the collectivists from the individualists is the value the former place on harmonious relations (Hofstede, 1980; Hui, 1988; Hui and Yee, 1994). More often than not, collectivists strive to preserve interpersonal harmony. These factors impact on their satisfaction of interpersonal relationships in several ways. First, collectivists certainly would put up with their group-mates', family-members' and friends' unpleasant behaviours, at least temporarily, if the goals of group desires so. Their inner feelings would subsequently be adjusted to be in line with their overt non-complaining behaviour. As a result, they would experience greater overall well-being in relationships than do individualists. Second, collectivists are accustomed to collaborating and compromising in group activities and sharing in group

outcomes (Hui, Triandis and Yee, 1991). Less important is choosing to attain one's own goals and being independent (Hui, 1989), which can easily result in conflicts, a source of inner harmony. Third, when collectivists' friendly and non-confrontational gestures are reciprocated by the others, pleasant feelings will probably result. These positive feelings further strengthen themselves by facilitating more amicable exchanges. Thus, whether these three factors occur separately or together, they would result in higher well-being among collectivists than among individualists.

The terms of individualism and collectivism are also used at cross-cultural level. Several studies proved that western countries tend to be more individualistic, while eastern ones are more collectivist in nature (Tafarodi & Swann, 1996). Highly collectivist cultures are defined as those that emphasize social interdependence, connectedness, and mutual deference or compromise as dominant values. Highly individualist cultures are defined oppositely, as those that emphasize independence, autonomy in choice and action, and social assertiveness (Triandis, 1995). However, there are many different forms of individualism and collectivism in different parts of the world.

Then we overview and show the survey steps of establishing and developing the social orientation "tetrahedron" model through and on the basis of the results of a pilot study (Csukonyi, 1995) and three surveys (Csukonyi, Sallay and Münnich, 1999; Csukonyi and Münnich, 2002; Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2003; Csukonyi and Münnich, 2004; Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2005). Furthermore we were striving for revealing the effects of individualism and collectivism on - applying the proceeds of the "cultural trade-off" hypothesis - subjective well-being, self-liking, achievement orientation and drug-using behaviour.

## **2. Methods**

The pilot study (Csukonyi, 1995) made efforts to reveal the formation and pattern of individualism and collectivism among students with individual and group sport career. We assumed higher level of individualism among students with individual sport career, and started the validation of INDCOL Scale (Singelis, 1995) on a Hungarian sample. 90 athletes students (52 men and 38 women) took part in the study, with individual sport career (swimmers, triathlons), and group sporting (volleyball, basketball, handball). The participation in the study was voluntarily.

In the first survey the subjects were 300 students of the University of Debrecen in 1999. The mean age was 20. The sample was representative for faculty and year of study. The INDCOL Scale (Singelis, 1995) was used to determine the concepts of individualism-collectivism. This scale contains 29 items, which are assessed on a dichotomy scale with 1 (true of me) to 0 (untrue of me). The scale measures individualism and collectivism as two separate tendencies. The concept of individualism was based on those 14 items that emphasise pleasure, enjoying life, being broadminded, choosing own goals, competition, and being unique. The 15 collectivist items emphasise the importance of family security, good relationships, honouring parents and elders, respect for tradition. Higher scores indicate more agreement with individualistic or collectivist orientations. Individualism and collectivism scales proved to be reliable, as alpha coefficients showed (0.81 and 0.82, respectively). The “Twenty-Statements” or “Who am I?” Test (Kuhn és McPartland, 1954) was employed to assess the evaluation of the self-system. The responses were content analysed by whether each responses category (such as preferences, capabilities and social attitude) was linked to the groups of individualism-collectivism or gender (Sallay, 1998). Revealing the pattern of subjective well-being the SWB-test (Grob, 1995) was applied. The values system was examined by 38 item scale on the basis of the values system of Schwartz (1994) and concepts of individualism and collectivism.

In the second survey the concept of individualism and collectivism was examined with 20 items in 4 dimensions based on the so called “tetrahedron” model (collectivism, unique individualism, competitive individualism and hedonist individualism). The research was conducted in 2001 at the University of Debrecen on 7 faculties (Arts of Science, Humanities, Medical, Economy, Law, Agriculture and Technology) with the participation of 622 students (248 female és 374 male). The participation in the study was voluntarily and anonymous.

The reliability and validity of the four social orientation dimensions (collectivism, unique individualism, competitive individualism and hedonist individualism) was examined with a latent structural model (statistical programme Lisrel 8.3), testing the weight of factors of the dimensions of the newly developed scale.

The third survey-series were connected to a drug-prevention research conducted in 2002 at the University of Debrecen (Münnich, 2003). In these two questionnaire-surveys (Csukonyi, Máth és Münnich, 2003; Csukonyi, Máth és Münnich, 2005) we revealed university and secondary school students drug-using habits and their reason to try out drugs. The university students’ sample (980 persons) was representative for gender, faculty and year of study. The secondary-school sample was examined in 2005 (721 persons), 408 girls and 304 boys took part in the

study (Csukonyi, Máth és Münnich, 2005). The secondary school sample was representative for age and gender. The participation in the study was voluntarily in 14 secondary schools in Budapest, Debrecen, Eger, Hajdúhadház and Hajdúszoboszló. As the participation was anonymous the results were examined in age cohorts or according to other categories (for example drug-users and non-users). The concept of social orientation (individualism and collectivism) was studied in four dimensions (due to the “tetrahedron” model). The collectivism, unique individualism, competitive individualism and hedonist individualism covered with 4-4 items per each; therefore the scale developed in the second survey was applied. At the question about drug-using behaviour four possibilities could have been chosen: “someone never tried any drugs, and he/she is never willing to do so”, somebody never tried any drugs, and he/she might will try it”, “somebody never tried any drugs, but he/she is willing to do so”, and “somebody has tried drugs” both in the case of university and secondary school students’ samples.

### **3. Results**

Summarizing the results of the pilot-study (Csukonyi, 1995) and the three researches (Csukonyi, Sallay and Münnich, 1999; Csukonyi and Münnich, 2002; Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2003, Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2005) it can be stated that many important and original conclusions and relations had drawn according to Hungarian students’ individualistic and collectivistic orientation.

1. In the pilot-study (Csukonyi, 1995) and the first research (Csukonyi, Sallay and Münnich, 1999) we applied the two dimensional model of individualism and collectivism (Singelis, 1995) 1996) to predict social orientation tendencies, as independent, different, but not opposite factors. This issue concerns the dimensionality of the social orientation constructs. Are collectivism and individualism bipolar opposites (one-dimensional) or distinct constructs (two dimensions). Therefore we supported the multidimensional conception of collectivism and individualism, so a person can show high level at individualism, but at the same time high level at collectivism, or can refuse both of them as well. The subjects differing in their social orientation altered in their content of self-description, subjective well-being and value-system. The collectivists (mostly students of Faculty of Sciences) emphasised the importance of social relationships and the role of harmony in social contexts. Their most important values were connected to close, intimate relations to others, safety and solidarity. The individualists (most of them were students from the Faculty of Law) preferred those values which emphasised the importance of uniqueness and difference from others. The “Complex” socially oriented (mostly economist students) could

accept both connectedness and uniqueness at the same time. These students with “complex” orientation were more satisfied, showed higher level of subjective well-being and concentrated less for the psychical and mental problems. The findings could be related to a disposition which results a better way of adaptation in every day life that may be connected to their more complex self- and value-system.

2. In the second research (Csukonyi and Münnich, 2002) we examined the students’ social orientation related to the acceptance of group interest and their terms with others. The key questions were about the construction, structure and role of individualism and collectivism in the students’ value-system. Methodologically we strived to establish such an instrument measuring the concepts of individualism and collectivism which reliable, relatively short and easy to apply, and (under certain limitation) avoid the cultural and familiarity effects. The vertical and horizontal components of individualism and collectivism (Singelis, 1995) were measured in a different way. We found that established “tetrahedron” model (including collectivism and the three individualistic components: unique, competitive and hedonist) proved to be a reliable method defining the concepts of individualism and collectivism from a new approach.

3. The results of the second research (Csukonyi and Münnich, 2002) indicates significant gender, faculty and year of study differences among students connected to their social orientation and their values relating to independence, and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships. As we proved in the first study (Csukonyi, Sallay and Münnich, 1999) subjects can accept both individualism and collectivism on high level, as they showed a “complex” social orientation. However, in the second study we examined the concept of individualism in three dimension on the basis of the “tetrahedron“model, we assumed students can be characterised with 4 social orientation factors: collectivism, unique individualist, competitive individualism and hedonist individualism. It can be observed that in case of many faculties (for example Technology, Law and Medical faculties) students have high level of collectivism and one or two types of individualism.

4. The results of the third study-series (Csukonyi, Máth és Münnich, 2003; Csukonyi, Máth és Münnich, 2005) can be summarised as we found significant difference between drug-user or “hesitating” university students and non-users according to their social orientation. The non-user students dispose a special social orientation; they show high level of individualism and collectivism at the same time. This result agrees with our previous findings (Csukonyi, Sallay és Münnich, 1999) according to “complex” social orientation group of students that they showed

higher level of subjective well-being and satisfaction both mentally and psychically. It also refers to Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği (2006) assumptions, that to healthy functioning a person needs autonomy and independency (as individualistic attitude), and interdependence (collectivistic attitude) as well. Moreover, we recognised those social orientation factors which describe university students who are in a kind of highly risk category connected to drug-using behaviour. These students (they would like to try drugs in the future) can be characterised as hedonist individualists.

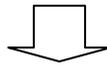
5. In case of secondary-school students the collectivism plays a protective role in drug-using behaviour as well. The competitive individualism showed the same feature according to the possibility of trying drugs among secondary school students. But the high level of unique and hedonist individualism predisposes for using drugs, as risk factors. It must be observed that in case of university students, high level of unique individualism and collectivism together played a protective role in drug-using behaviour. Resolving this discrepancy it is recommended to highlight social orientation factors in case of secondary-school drug-user students. Collectivism was emphasised by those students who stated that they will never try drugs, and the drug users significantly more refuse being a member of a group. In case of competitive individualism there was no significant difference between students with different drug-using behaviour. Students with high level of hedonist individualism are willing to try drugs in the future. Students with unique individualistic social orientation are due to accept drug-using behaviour at parties, though it has a strong direct effect as well in the secondary-school sample.

6. The social orientation results connected to the „cultural trade-off” hypothesis can be overviewed at Table 2.. In the first study (Csukonyi, Sallay and Münnich, 1999) we found that those subjects who are able to accept both collectivistic and individualistic values on high level, are more satisfied. Showed higher level of subjective well-being, and mentioned less psychical and mental problems in their everyday life. Therefore not only the collectivistic attitude, but completed with individualistic attitude can result higher level of subjective well-being which might root in the better adjustment to the several and various social contexts.

Table 2. Result in social orientation connected to the „cultural trade-off” hypothesis

**Study 1. (1999):**

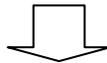
*The “Complex” social orientation resulted the highest level of subjective well-being and self-esteem among university students, they significantly less emphasise psychical and mental problems in everyday life.*



**The ability of accepting both individualistic and collectivistic values at the same time (“complex” attitude) seemed to be an advantage in healthy functioning**

**Study 2. (2002):**

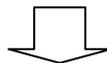
*Students with individualistic orientation (unique, competitive or hedonist) showed high self-competence and achievement orientation, but collectivistic students do not avoid achievement situations, though prefer collective forms of achievement (for example student associations) to independent forms*



**The collective forms of achievement situations is recommended to study according to social orientation (individualism and collectivism), not only the independent or competitive forms of it. The “Complex” social orientation also proved to be advantageous in this case, because these students can benefit at the individual and collective achievement situations at the same time**

**Study 3. (2003, 2005):**

*Collective social orientation together with an individualistic dimension (competitive or unique) play a protective role in drug-using behaviour in case of secondary-school and university students*



**The “Complex” social orientation also occurs as an adventurous feature in avoiding unhealthy behaviour such as trying drugs**

In the second study (Csukonyi and Münnich, 2002) connected to the „cultural trade-off” (Tafarodi és Swan, 1996) hypothesis we found that the individualist students are more prepared to publish their scientific findings, more willing to take part at scientific competitions, and it seems that individualistic social orientation plays a role in obtaining a scholarship. Due to the “cultural trade-off” hypothesis, collectivists have lower level of achievement orientation, but examining university students they do not refuse achievement situations but they prefer the collective forms of achievement situations such as joining to and working at student associations. In the third study-series (Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2003; Csukonyi, Máth and Münnich, 2005) the collectivistic social orientation showed protective feature connected to trying drugs on the secondary-school and university students’ samples. This finding agrees the assumption indicated by the “cultural trade-off” hypothesis that collectivists receive more positive reinforcements from their social environment, therefore they show high level of subjective well-being.

7. Finally we can conclude that the researches started in 1995 result many new findings in the concepts of individualism and collectivism. The so called “Complex” social orientation proved to have many advantages in accordance with Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği (2006) assumptions, that people need autonomy and interdependence at the same time as individualistic and collectivistic attitudes for the healthy functioning. Moreover we introduced, applied and tested a new “tetrahedron” model measuring individualism and collectivism.

Certainly many new questions emerged: one of them was the connection of collective achievement and individualistic social orientation. So due to the findings of Gundlach, Zivnuska and Stoner (2006) it is worth to study the dilemma between higher achievement orientation and group-behaviour in case of individualists. It may connect to the studies of Ng and Van Dyne (2001), they found that individualists and collectivist differ in behaviour under group-pressure and minority influence. Individualists proved to be significantly less sensitive to the stress evoked by group-pressure and less worried about to lose their roles or even their memberships in the certain group. These questions need further studies in experimental social psychology.

## 4. Publications list

### Articles:

1. Csukonyi Cs. és Münnich Á. (2004). A kábítószer-fogyasztás lélektani háttere a középiskolások körében, *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 3, 18-36.
2. Csukonyi Cs., Münnich Á. és Oravecz Z. (2003). A demokratikus értékek megjelenése a középiskolások csoportgondolkodásában. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 11, 17-32.
3. Csukonyi Cs. és Münnich Á. (2003). A demokratikus nevelés értékei és az európai dimenzió: elméleti és módszertani ismertető. *Alkalmazott Pszichológia*, 1, 21-41.
4. Csukonyi Cs., Sallay H. és Münnich Á. (1999): Individualizmus és kollektívizmus: csoportkülönbségek egyetemisták körében. *Alkalmazott Pszichológia*, 4, 19-31.

### Chapters:

5. Csukonyi Cs., Máth J. és Münnich Á. (2005). A középiskolások és a kábítószer: A kábítószer-fogyasztás hátterének feltárása a középiskolások körében. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A mentális egészséget és egészségmegtartást befolyásoló tényezők*. (83-148.) Didakt Kiadó, Debrecen
6. Csukonyi Cs. (2003). A szociális orientáció - individualizmus és kollektívizmus és a kábítószer-használat összefüggései. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A kábítószer kipróbálásának okairól az egyetemi hallgatók körében végzett vizsgálatok alapján*. (139–155). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
7. Csukonyi Cs., Máth J. és Münnich Á. (2003). A kábítószer-fogyasztásra hajlamosító ill. azt akadályozó tényezők egy modellje. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A kábítószer kipróbálásának okairól az egyetemi hallgatók körében végzett vizsgálatok alapján*. (221–237). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
8. Csukonyi Cs. (2002). Az értékek világa. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A jövő vezetőinek jelene: Az egyetemi diákság karrierépítési komponenseinek lélektani háttere*. (31–45). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
9. Csukonyi Cs. (2002). A társas orientáció elmélete – Mi vagyunk másokért, vagy mások vannak értünk? In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A jövő vezetőinek jelene: Az egyetemi diákság karrierépítési komponenseinek lélektani háttere*. (45–57). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest

10. Csukonyi Cs. (2002). Az egyetemisták “valós” értékei. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A jövő vezetőinek jelene: Az egyetemi diákság karrierépítési komponenseinek lélektani háttere.* (103–133). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
11. Csukonyi Cs. és Münnich Á. (2002). A teljesítménymotiváció elmélete és gyakorlata. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A jövő vezetőinek jelene: Az egyetemi diákság karrierépítési komponenseinek lélektani háttere.* (83–103). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
12. Csukonyi Cs. és Münnich Á. (2002). Társas viszonyok az egyetemen In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A jövő vezetőinek jelene: Az egyetemi diákság karrierépítési komponenseinek lélektani háttere.* (133–153). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest
13. Hunyady Gy., Csukonyi Cs., Münnich Á. és Máth J. (2002). Személyes értéktudat, mint a társadalmi csoportok percepciójának nézőpontja: Egy módszertanilag újszerű megközelítés. In: Münnich Á. (szerk.) *A demokratikus nevelés, polgári értékek és Európa tudat: az iskolai nevelés helyzete és lehetőségei.* (74-85). OM Kutatási beszámoló, Debrecen
14. Csukonyi, Cs. and Münnich, Á. (2001). Motivational Roots of Giftedness and Individualism-collectivism. In: Balogh, L. and Tóth, L. (Eds.) *Development at schools: Research and Practice.* (171-180). Debrecen: Univ. of Debrecen
15. Münnich, Á. and Csukonyi, Cs. (2001). The concept of the European dimension at Hungarian adolescents. In: A. Ross (Ed.) *Learning for a Democratic Europe.* (128-135). London: Cice.