Federal Institute for
Population Research

Is it all about the costs?

Cultural distance and adjustment of recent immigrants

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Definitions

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Culture (C) & cultural distance (CD)

C: Something that people within groups share (both in the sense of transmission and similarity), and which guides their thinking and behavior.

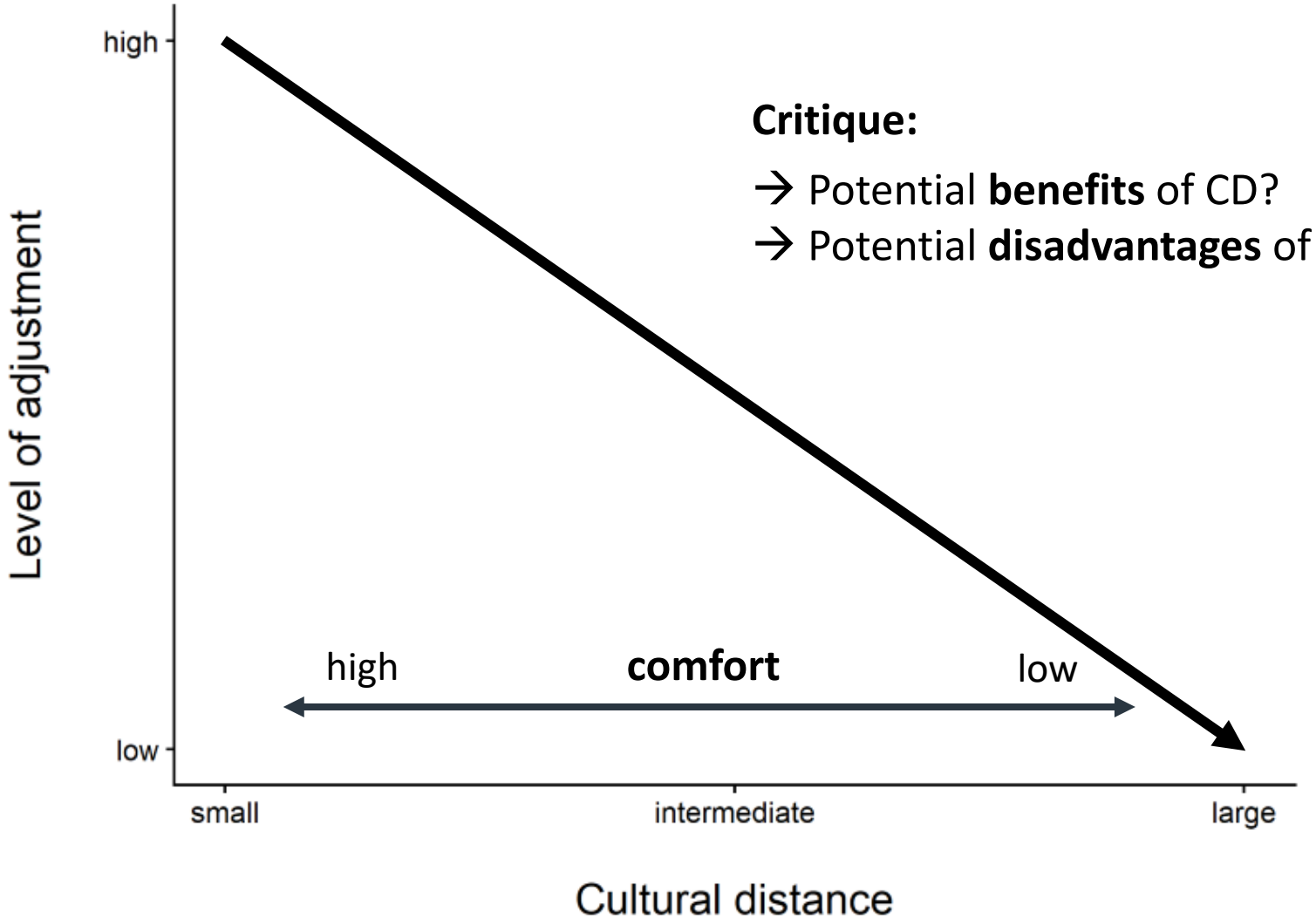
CD: The extent to which inhabitants from different nations differ culturally from each other

Adjustment

A directional change of individuals or groups towards „becoming“ more like their environment (Berry 1997: 20)

(Beugelsdijk & Welzel 2018; Hofstede 1980; Ingleheart 1997; Miles 2015)

Existing research established the cost hypothesis



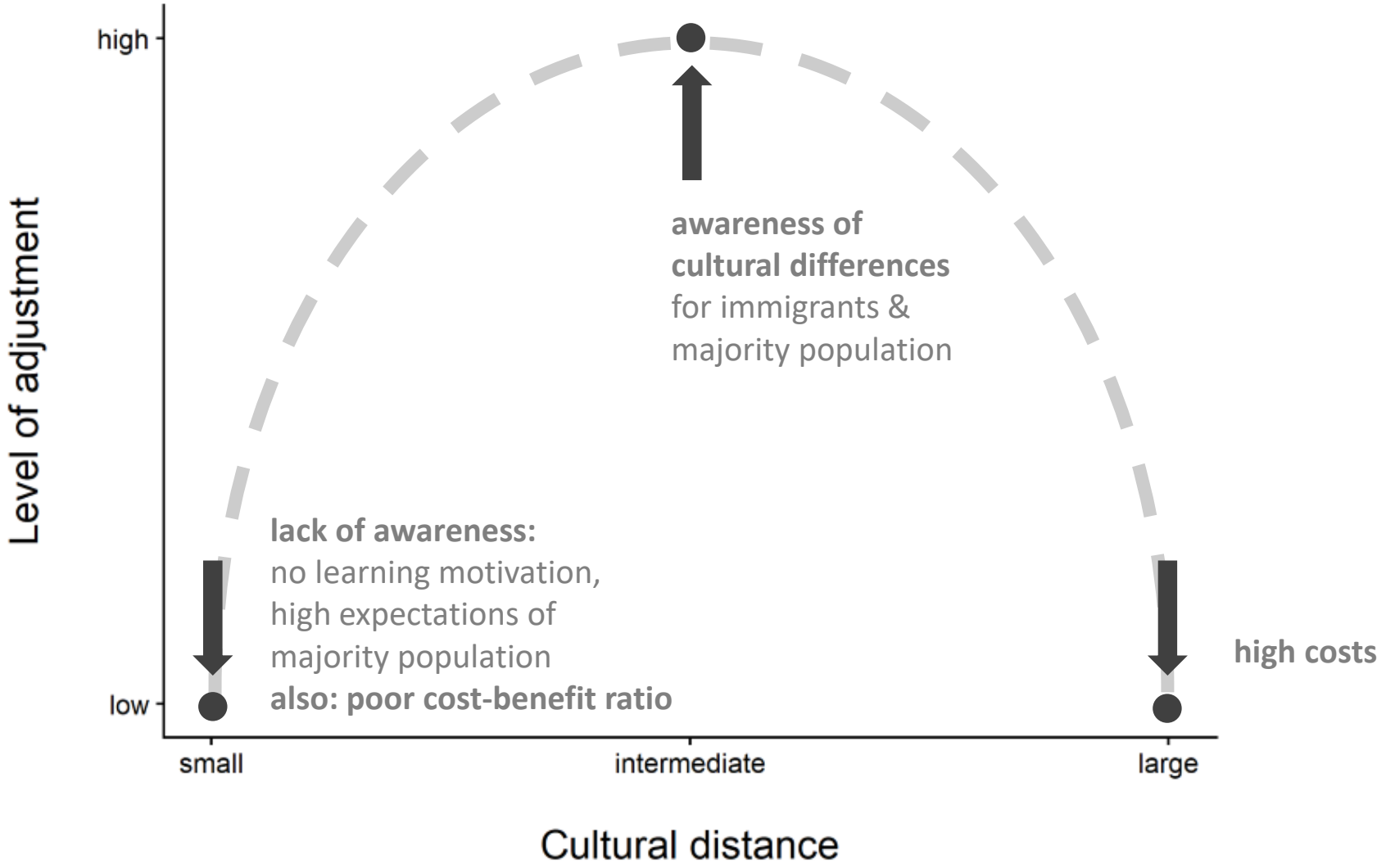
Critique:

→ Potential **benefits** of CD?

→ Potential **disadvantages** of cultural closeness?

(e.g. Esser 2006; Ward et al. 2001)

Moving on: The cost-benefit hypothesis



(Brewster 1993; Selmer 2007; Tadmor & Tetlock 2006)

Moving on: The cost-benefit hypothesis

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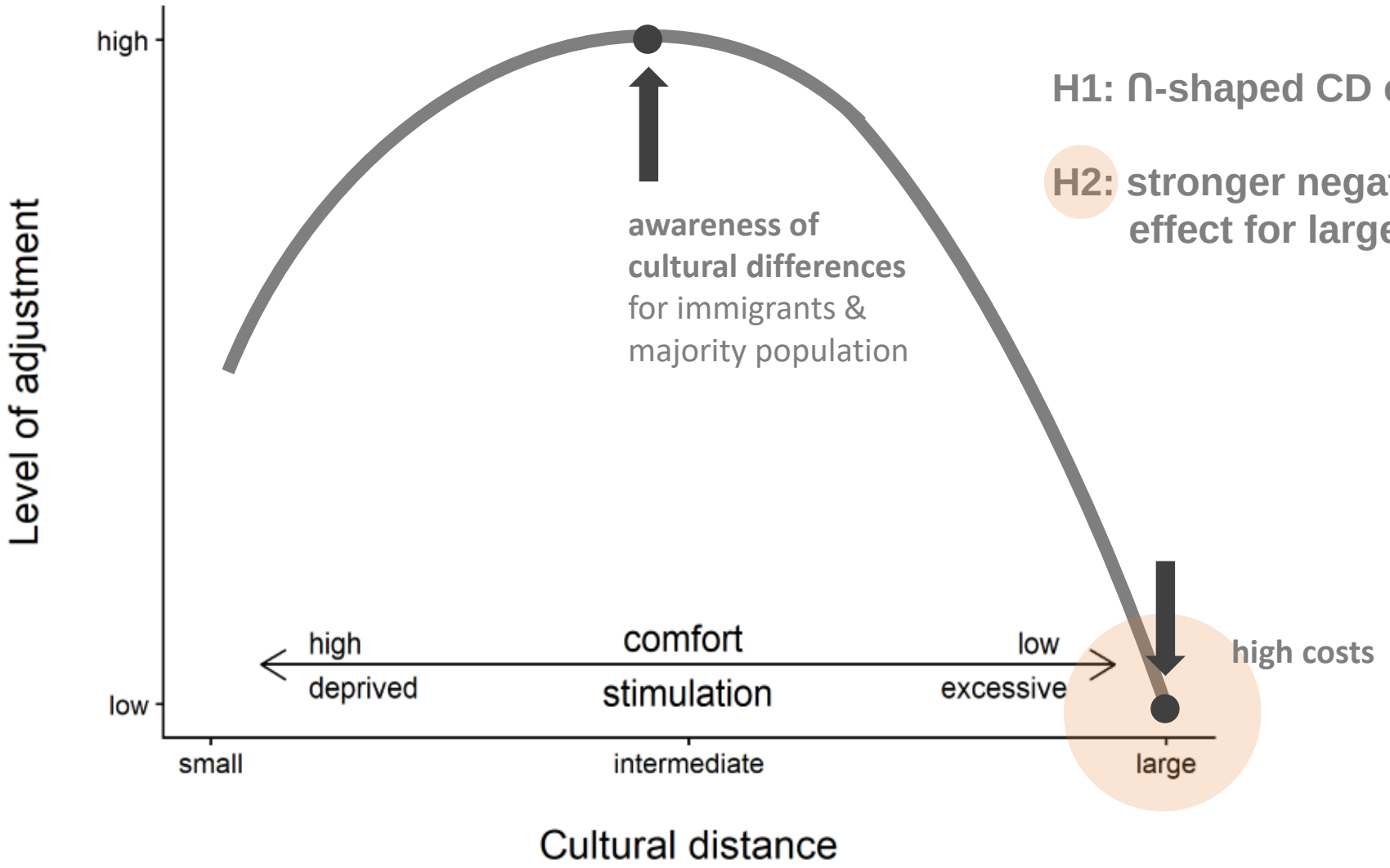

H1: ∩-shaped CD effect

H2: stronger negative CD effect for large CDs

Data, variables & methods

GERPS
German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study

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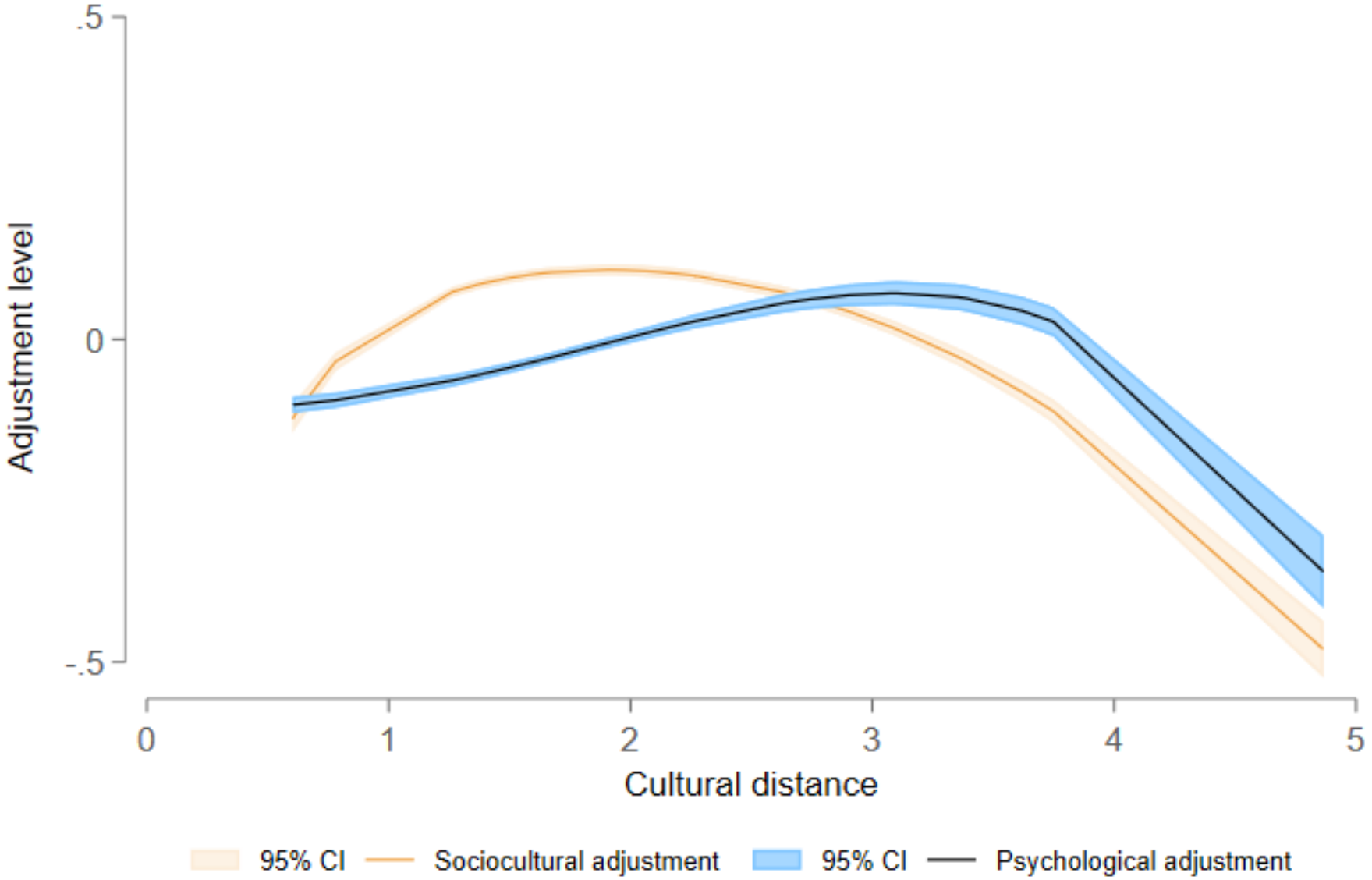
- **Data:** Recently emigrated Germans (*N* = 3,528; in 38 destination countries)
  - Representative for internationally mobile German population

- **Variables:** Sociocultural & psychological adjustment (outcomes, standardized)
  Cultural distance (stand. Euclidean distance, expl. variable)
  + Country- and individual-level controls

- **Methods:** Multilevel mixed-effects linear regression

(Ette et al. 2020; Hox et al. 2017)

Findings: Support for H1 & H2



Main findings

1) There is an **„optimal“ middle range of CD** for recent migrants‘ adjustment: Cultural dissimilarity can be stimulating for adjustment

2) **Optimal CD range varies** with the adjustment dimension

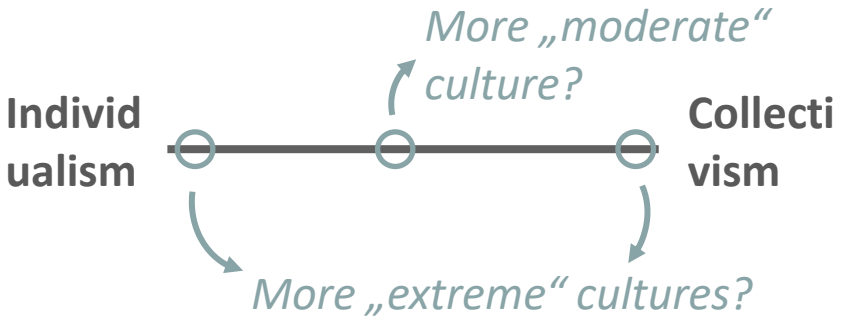
3) **Awareness** for migrant groups that move to culturally similar destinations

4) **Costlier adjustment** for culturally distant than culturally close migrants

Some thoughts

- Robustness of findings across migrant groups?

- Changing the level of interpretation:
  Does a country‘s position in the cultural space matter?



- Cultural distance and cultural change in immigrants:
  How does the influence of CD change with increasing duration of stay?