Loneliness, Individualism, and Urbanization in Europe

Christopher Swader, Tatiana Karabchuk
Laboratory for Comparative Social Research
National Research University – Higher School of Economics

loneliness ≠ social isolation

What do we know?

◆ Psychology. Link between loneliness and depression (also in our data)

◆ Sociology. More lonely: Teens and the elderly, immigrants, materialists. Religion, internet-> ambivalent.

◆ Loneliness in Russia: urbanism and individualism. The city determinants of loneliness are different (values matter, but ambivalently)

◆ These urban and individualist effects need to be more broadly tested

Research Question

◆ **Do urbanization** (modernization) **and individualism** (culture) **matter, in addition to objective social isolation, in predicting loneliness?**

Scientific Contributions

◆ Highlighting the **role of individualism** in relation to subjective loneliness outcomes.

◆ Illustrating the links between such individualism and levels of **urbanization**.

◆ Providing insight on the **differentiation in loneliness outcomes in Europe**. Further studies can look at of reasons for this.

◆ Motivating further in-depth studies of loneliness as a distinctly sociological phenomenon. Loneliness is arguably even more innately 'sociological' than is happiness.

Hypotheses

◆ **Urbanization will predict greater loneliness, but these effects will be usurped by individualism** (alone and as an interaction with social isolation).

Individualism is a mechanism for the urbanism effect.

But in which direction?

'Social Nature' Hypothesis:

Individualism → self-centric behavior amid social needs→ enhanced loneliness

and

Blase Hypothesis:

Individualism → less valuation of social relations → less loneliness

Social Nature?

Urban Values

Individualism vs. Collectivism
Instrumental-rational vs.
Intrinsic, intuitive values
careerist vs.family oriented
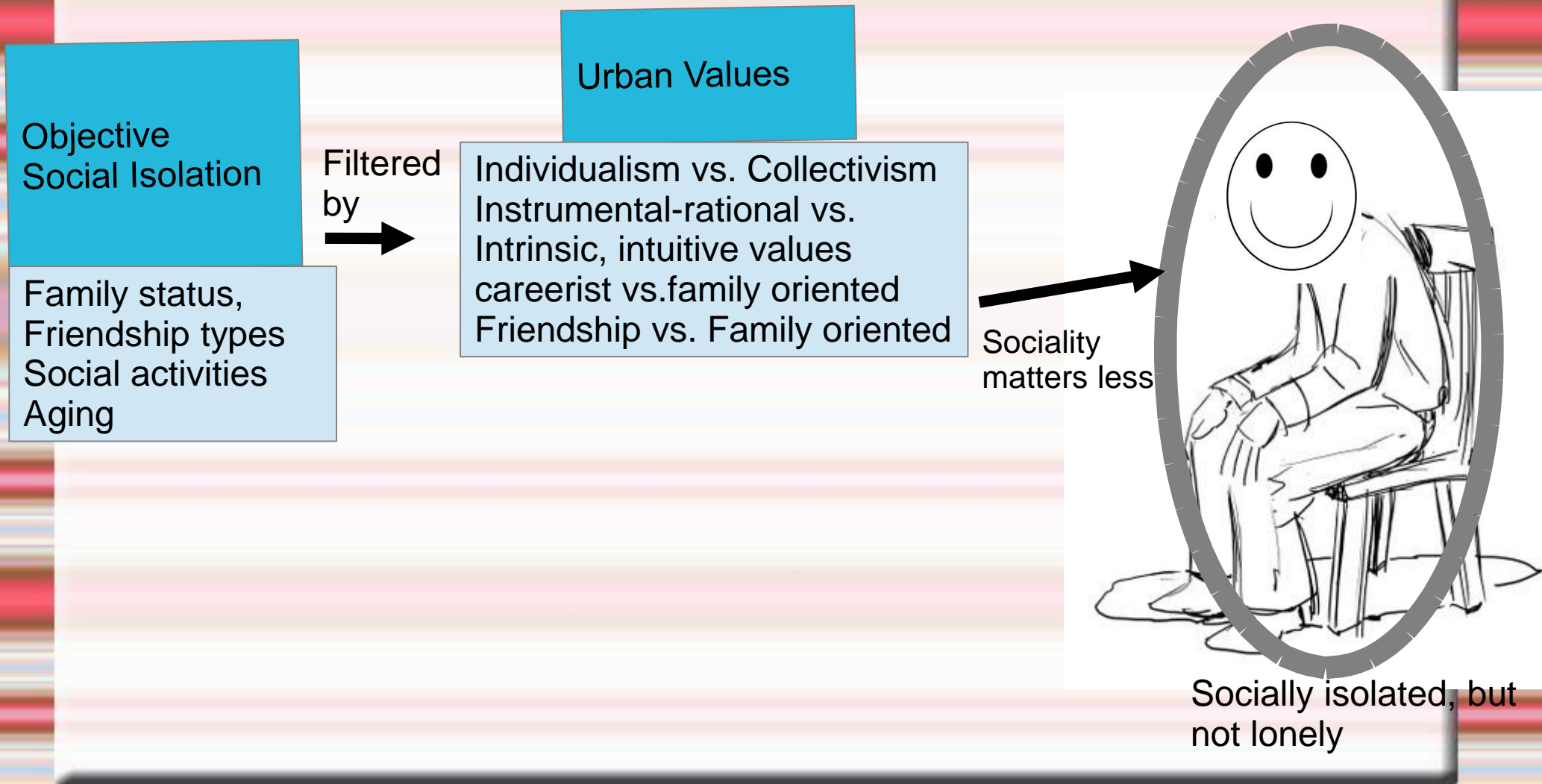
Less social
behavior

Objective
Social Isolation

Family status,
Friendship types
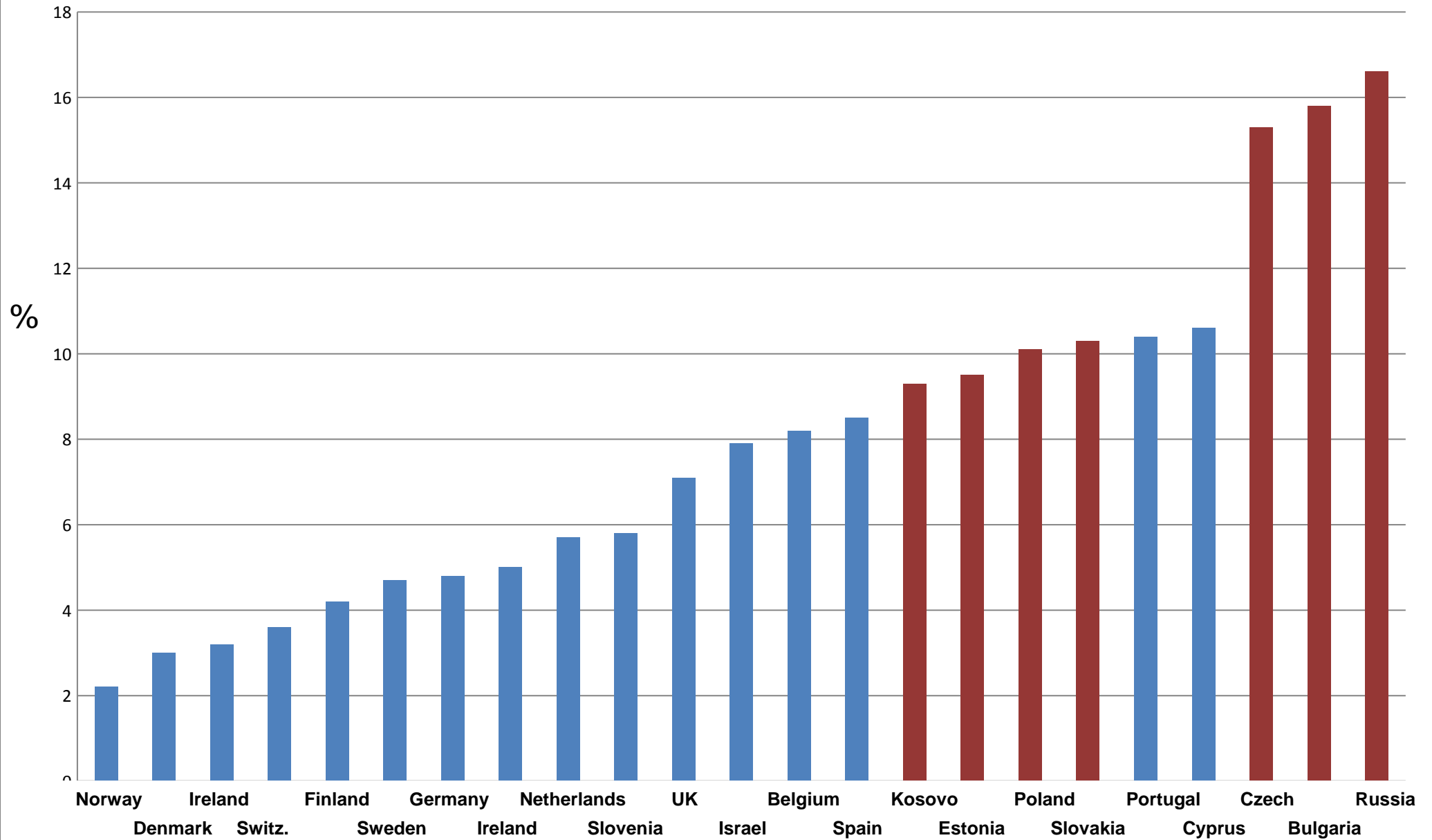Social activities

Aging

Lonely :(

Blase' Attitude?

Objective Social Isolation

Family status,
Friendship types
Social activities
Aging

Filtered by →

Urban Values

Individualism vs. Collectivism
Instrumental-rational vs.
Intrinsic, intuitive values
careerist vs.family oriented
Friendship vs. Family oriented

Sociality matters less →

Socially isolated, but not lonely

Methods

◆ ESS 2006, 2010, <u>2012</u>. Modules that include loneliness question.
◆ Max country sample ~ 23
◆ Multi-level logistic regression model

% of very lonely people
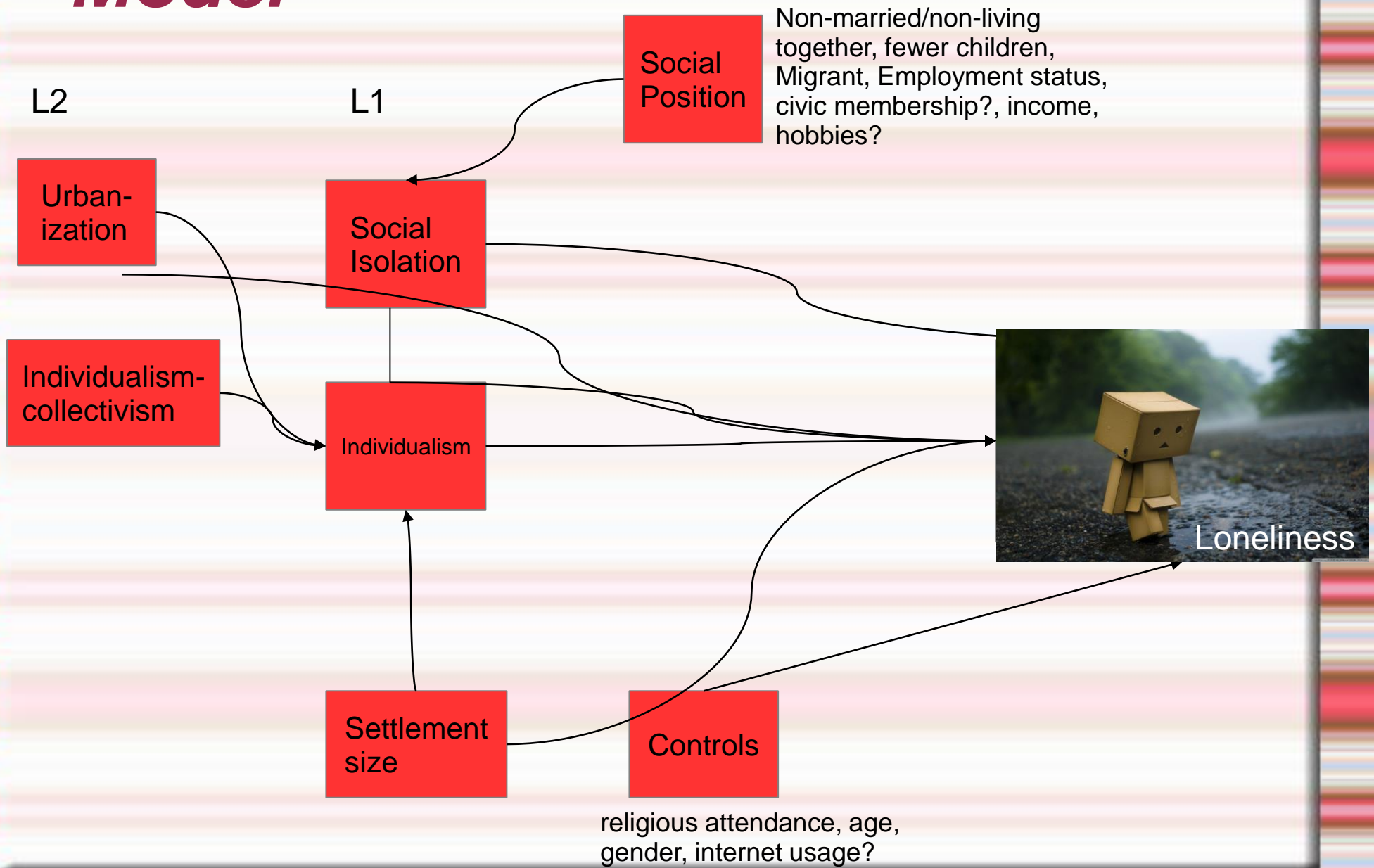
Red: post-socialist

"felt lonely in the past week" (*all or almost all the time* or *most of the time)*

Key Operationalizations

◆ Loneliness: 2 versions

◆ Social isolation: 2: with how many people intimate discussions vs. amount of social meetings

◆ Individualism: Important to make own decisions and be free, L2 mean

◆ Urbanization: L2 % living in city, L1 settlement size of respondent

Model

L2   L1

Social Position

Non-married/non-living together, fewer children, Migrant, Employment status, civic membership?, income, hobbies?

Urban-ization

Social Isolation

Individualism-collectivism

Individualism

Settlement size

Controls

Loneliness

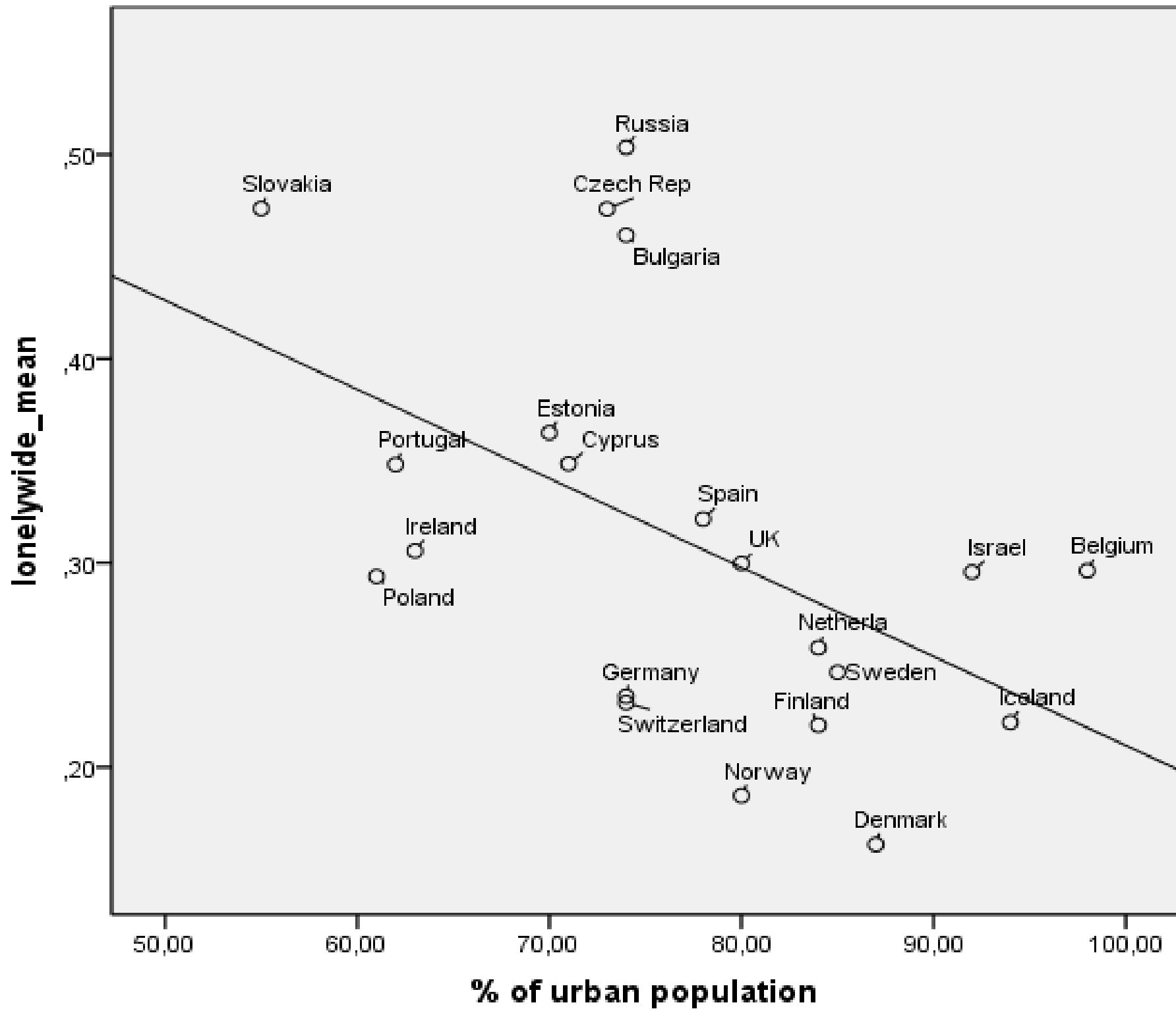religious attendance, age, gender, internet usage?
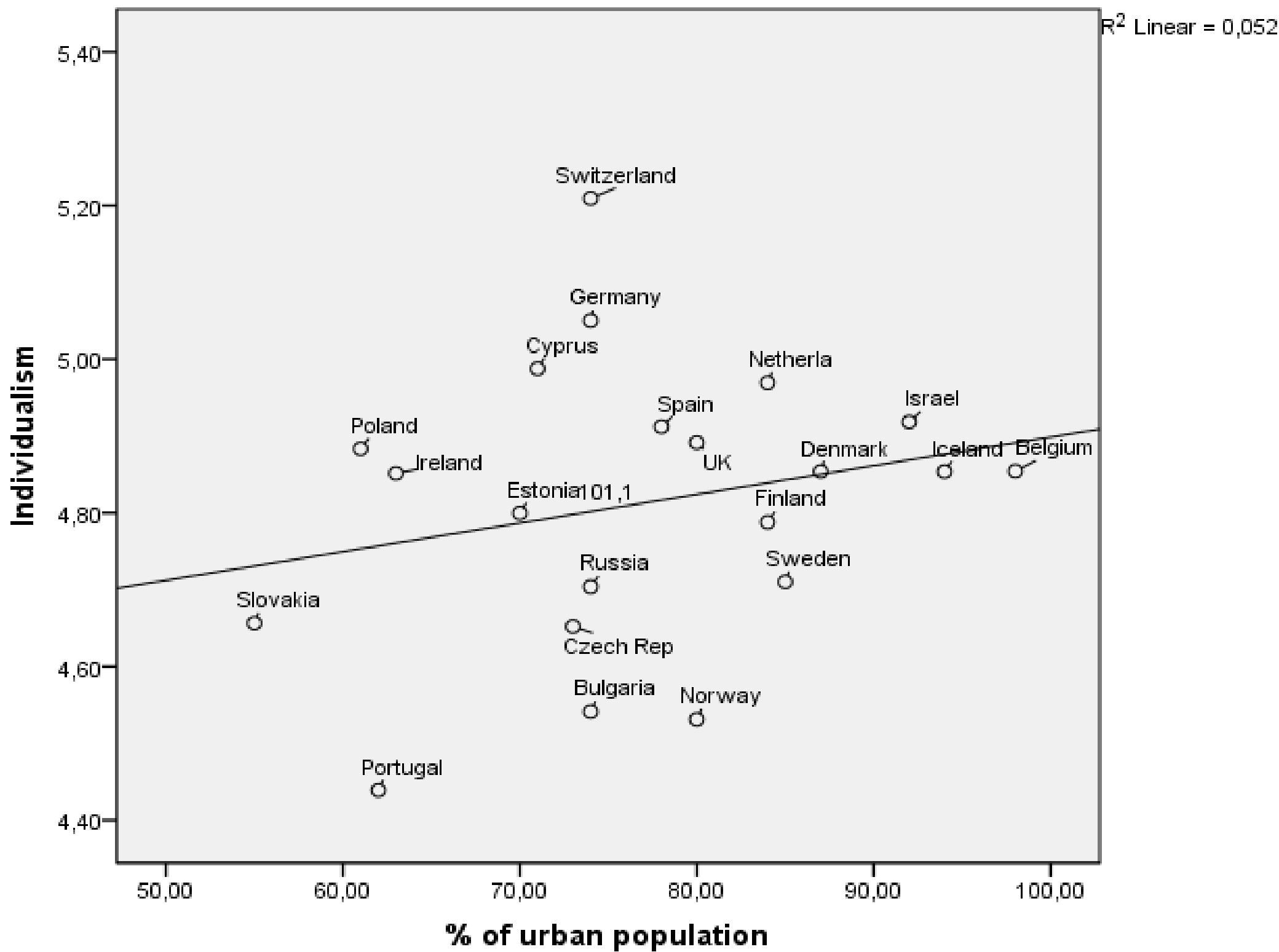
L1 Correlations

+ (more lonely): females, older, religious attendance, <u>collectivists</u>, big city, fewer intimate discussants, fewer social meetings, widowed, divorced, poorer, child out of home (vs. no children or children at home), not self employed, unemployed, permanently disabled/sick, retired, minority ethnic groups (but not noncitizens, born out of country)
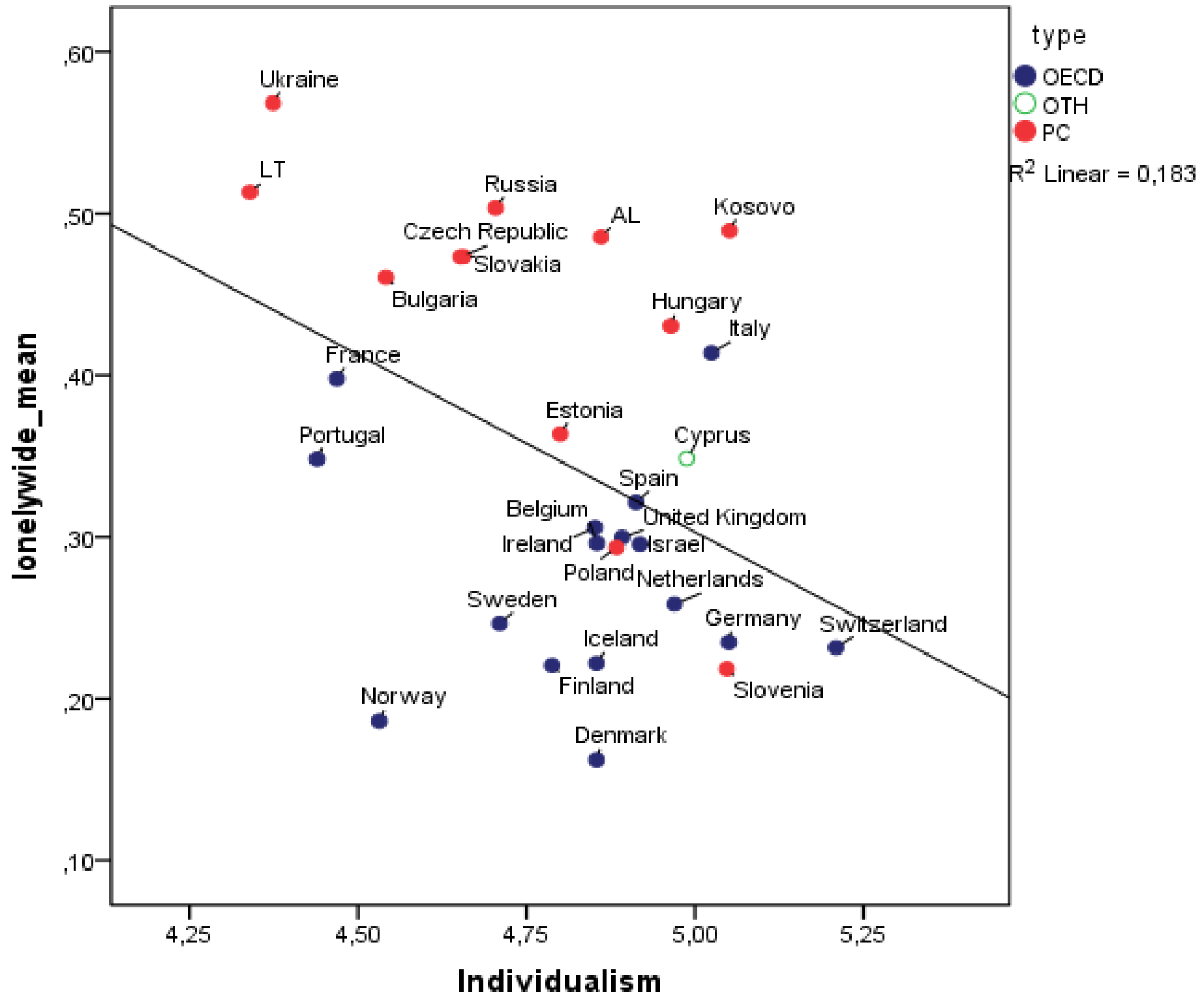
Wider (sociological) loneliness variable has stronger correlations to our predictors

L2 Relationships

Multi-level Logistic Regression results for predicting (wider) loneliness outcome

	Model 1 (IGLS) All L1 without individualism			Model 2 (IGLS) With individualism L1 and L2, plus interactions			Model 3 (IGLS), add country types			
	log odds	S.E.	Odds	log odds	S.E.	Odds	log odds	S.E.	Odds	
constant	0,322	0,678		4,423	2,034		2,734	1,792		constant
Urbanization rate (L2, centered at 75%)	-0,017	0,007	,98	-0,014	0,007	,99	-0,004	0,006		Urbanization rate (L2, centered at 75%)
Social integration (discuss personal mattters) (0 to 6)	-0,159	0,013	,85	-0,138	0,045	,87	-0,137	0,045	,87	Social integration (discuss personal mattters) (0 to 6)
Social integration (meeting people) (0 to 6)	-0,119	0,011	,89	-0,164	0,039	,85	-0,162	0,039	,85	Social integration (meeting people) (0 to 6)
marital_widow (ref: living with partner)	1,611	0,059	5,01	1,637	0,059	5,14	1,635	0,059	5,13	marital_widow (ref: living with partner)
marital_divorced	1,089	0,056	2,97	1,129	0,056	3,09	1,128	0,056	3,09	marital_divorced
never married	0,835	0,06	2,30	0,863	0,061	2,37	0,862	0,06	2,37	never married
no_child (ref: child at home)	0,041	0,662		0,029	0,663		0,026	0,663		no_child (ref: child at home)
child_but_gone	-0,061	0,662		-0,08	0,662		-0,087	0,662		child_but_gone
Ethnic minority	0,393	0,067	1,48	0,404	0,067	1,50	0,4	0,067	1,49	Ethnic minority
uemployed, actively looking for job	0,083	0,074		0,082	0,075		0,086	0,075		uemployed, actively looking for job
uemployed, not actively looking for job	0,274	0,108	1,32	0,264	0,109	1,30	0,267	0,109	1,31	uemployed, not actively looking for job
income	-0,11	0,007	,90	-0,108	0,007	,90	-0,108	0,007	,90	income
big city	0,175	0,04	1,19	0,184	0,04	1,20	0,183	0,04	1,20	big city
religiousattend	0,027	0,012	1,03	0,022	0,012		0,022	0,012		religiousattend
Age (Centered at 48)	0,019	0,005	1,02	0,021	0,005	1,02	0,021	0,005	1,02	Age (Centered at 48)
age_square	0	0		0	0		0	0		age_square
female	0,077	0,034	1,08	0,073	0,034	1,08	0,073	0,034	1,08	female
L1 Individualism (0 to 5)				-0,168	0,043	,85	-0,168	0,043	,85	L1 Individualism (0 to 5)
L2 Individualism (0 to 5)				-0,717	0,397		-0,401	0,341		L2 Individualism (0 to 5)
L1 Individualism X discuss_personal_matters				-0,004	0,011		-0,004	0,011		L1 Individualism X discuss_personal_matters
L1 Individualism X meeting_people				0,012	0,01		0,012	0,01		L1 Individualism X meeting_people
PC (vs. OECD)							0,517	0,152	1,68	PC (vs. OECD)
Random Part										Random Part
Level: cntry										Level: cntry
cons/cons	0,117	0,038	1,12	0,093	0,031	1,10	0,057	0,02		cons/cons
DIC (run using MCMC):	21937			21871			21873			DIC (run using MCMC):
Units: individuals	19673			19673			19673			Units: individuals
Units: cntry	21			21			21			Units: cntry

Initial Findings

- Individualism diminishes loneliness, but the effect is additive. It does not cancel out objective social isolation.
- There are remaining «big city» effects at the individual level, but not at the country level.
- Individualism explains effect of religious attendance.
- A large unexplained post-communist effect remains. (demoralization, nihilism, ideological collapse? Social trust?)

Next Steps

- Add I1 and I2 individualism interaction effect
- Willl use 2-3 indicators for individualism
- Looking for additional L1 relevant ESS variables (internet usage? Hobbies?)
- Connected to longer-term ethnographic study, NYC-Moscow, Tokyo?

Comments, suggestions, Questions?