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Educational stratification and welfare attitudes in six European countries

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Abstract

Social exclusion and welfare dependency are no longer a matter of risk, but have become predictable outcomes of vulnerable social positions. This implies that the legitimacy of the welfare state has to make a strong appeal to solidarity and inclusion, since the principle of insurance, based on a 'veil of ignorance', is becoming less adequate (Rosanvallon, 1995). Finding a social basis for inclusive social policy, however, remains problematic, especially among the lower educated strata whose social status has become threatened.

Drawing on data of the European Social Survey (2002) from six European countries, social attitudes with regard to equality, solidarity and redistribution are examined in connection to educational stratification. The paper shows that educational stratification not only influences the measure of agreement with egalitarian attitudes, but also influences the social and political meaning of these attitudes. The lower educated strata show higher levels of egalitarianism, but at the same time lower levels of social trust and universalistic social attitudes. But more importantly, with regard to egalitarianism an interaction effect is found between education and left-right attitudes. Among the higher educated strata, strong relations between egalitarianism and leftist (universalistic and inclusionist) social attitudes as well as leftist voting behaviour is found. Among the lower educated strata, these relations prove to be considerably weaker. This implies that the social and political meaning of egalitarianism differs between the educational strata. Egalitarianism of people with low educational attainments is relatively more particularistic and therefore it will fit in more easily with welfare chauvinism. Theoretically, this issue will be discussed with reference to the debate on meritocracy, the crisis of the welfare state and the 'new social question'.

I. General Introduction: meritocracy and the frustration of egalitarian ideals

Equality is one of the most central values of modern societies. Louis Dumont (1977) characterized modern man as a *Homo Aequalis*, the antithesis of the *Homo Hierarchicus* which he described in his earlier study on the caste system (Dumont 1966). The *Homo Hierarchicus* accepts and even appreciates inequalities, endorsing a holistic ideology that ascribes a fixed status to members within a hierarchical social community. Conversely, the *Homo Aequalis* adheres to an individualistic ideology centred on social mobility. Inequality can only be justified if it is related to legitimate (modern meritocratic) criteria. Nevertheless, Dumont does not always paint a rosy picture of modern society. The upheaval of the closed hierarchical social structure does cause new social tensions. The emergence of modern racism for instance can be seen as a drawback of the abolishment of slavery.

¹ I would like to thank Nils Duquet for linguistic proofreading and Dimokritos Kavadias for help with the multilevel analysis.

Modern societies are characterised by a fundamental tension between an egalitarian ideology and the persistence of social inequalities. T.H. Marshall reached a similar conclusion in his classical essay *Social Class and Citizenship* (1950). Modern societies have created new, egalitarian views on citizenship. Marshall distinguishes three elements in his concept of citizenship: civil, political and social. The emergence of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by the creation of a set of individual rights, such as liberty, freedom of speech and equality before the law. In the 19th century, civil rights were supplemented with political rights, facilitating the right to participate in the decision making process (through universal manhood suffrage and labour unions). During the 20th century, citizenship was expanded with social rights, guaranteeing to every citizen a social, economic and cultural minimum existence level. Marshall referred to the development of social policy and the expansion of (compulsory) education, but the emergence of the welfare state, that appeared after Marshall wrote his essay, can also be mentioned in this respect.

One of the most important aspects of Marshall's concept of citizenship is its assumption of equality. But modernization is linked with capitalism. This causes a tension, because capitalism creates social inequality. "*Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. (...) [S]ocieties in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed. The urge forward along the path thus plotted is an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed. Social class, on the other hand, is a system of inequality. (...) It is therefore reasonable to expect that the impact of citizenship on social class should take the form of a conflict between opposing principles.*" (Marshall 1950: 92)

Marshall did not expect that the conflict he was describing would cause social instability. Inequalities can be tolerated given that they remain between reasonable standards and provided that they are not an expression of hereditary privilege but of personal achievement (1950: 127). Marshall acknowledged the ambiguous role of the educational system in this respect. On the one hand, the democratization of education is in itself an important accomplishment in the field of social rights. But on the other hand, education, in its relation with occupational structure, creates and legitimizes social stratification and inequality. The status acquired by education is legitimized because it has been conferred by an institution designed to give the citizen his just rights (1950: 121). Consequently, social inferiority, as long as it is based on a lack of education, can no longer be regarded as unjust, but will be conceived as a personal failure.

This paper focuses on the social attitudes regarding (in)equality and redistribution of European citizens. In a meritocratic society, characterized by a conflict between egalitarian ideology and actual social inequality, the experience of social inequality and the corresponding social attitudes will differentiate along the lines of educational achievement. My analysis is less optimistic than the one made by Marshall in 1950. It rather fits in with Michael Young's (1958) scepticism regarding the meritocratic society and with Bourdieu's and Passeron's (1970) critical assessment of the contribution of education in reproducing social inequalities. People with low educational attainment not only find themselves in a social and economic precarious situation. Due to the prevailing collective representation of the open, meritocratic society, they also experience a lack of cultural resources in order to cope with or to oppose against their social inferiority. The quest for equality threatens to be frustrated and to be transmuted in discomfort. Later on in this paper I will try to show

empirically how egalitarian attitudes of people with low educational attainment are related with social distrust and with narrow exclusionist views, and how they are getting detached from economic leftist ideology.

II. Public support for institutionalized solidarity among the underprivileged

From an elementary rational-choice approach we could expect people in social vulnerable positions to support interventionist politics aimed at redistribution and equality. The conventional model of class politics departs from a traditional alignment of the working class with leftist political parties, whereas the conservative-liberal parties of the political right were associated with the middle class. The current debate on “the end of class politics” and “declining class voting” indicates that this relationship is not self-evident anymore (Svallfors 1995; Kriesi 1998; Esping-Andersen 1999; Clark & Lipset 2001; Houtman 2003). Various questions are currently being discussed, such as: Is class voting declining or just changing in nature?; Are concepts such as social class and political cleavages still suitable in post-industrial society?

This paper does not discuss the relationship between class and voting behaviour in general, but addresses a specific question. I will focus on the position of people with low educational attainment: can we find indications of a pattern of frustrated egalitarianism and if so, what are the political-ideological implications of this finding? To what extent are the underprivileged susceptible to anti-welfare state discourse, while at the same time holding on to (frustrated) egalitarian views? Before proceeding with the empirical analysis, drawing on comparative survey data, I will consult theoretical and empirical literature dealing with the problem of social support for welfare politics. The main argument I will try to develop is that, although the lower educated are the apparent victims of the crisis and retrenchment of the welfare state, this crisis at the same time threatens their support for welfare state politics. Successively, three crises of the welfare state will be discussed: the economic crisis, the ideological crisis and the “new social question”.

II.1 The economic crisis and the reinvention of the story of the parasitic class

The economic recession of the seventies restrains the steady increase of social expenditures of the post-war welfare states. During the eighties, the effects on social policy are becoming tangible for many welfare states. The Reagan and Thatcher policies are the well-known examples of the retrenchment of the welfare state (Pierson 1994).

In order to gain public support for retrenchment politics, economic arguments by themselves will be insufficient. After all, the cut down on social expenditures always runs a risk of provoking social discontent for the people involved. Therefore, political actors will try to appeal to popular (or populist) discourse, such as anti-tax attitudes, the criticizing of the inefficiency of the welfare state (as it maintains an ‘unproductive class’) and the demands for restrictive policies directed against the (ethnic) out-group. These narratives can be attractive, in particular for the underprivileged, as it can serve as a useful explanation for their own social subordinate positions.

Living in a subordinate position should not necessarily be painful from a psychological point of view. However, as Alain de Botton (2004) has noted, societies embracing meritocratic principles are losing their capacity to keep up “stories about our lives” that cushion the impact

of low status. These traditional stories, integrated in the cultural frameworks of Marxism and traditional Christianity, asserted that the poor are not responsible for their condition, that low status has no moral connotations and that the rich are greedy and parasitic, exploiting the skills and resources of the poor. With the rise of meritocracy, social mobility is conceived as a personal merit and social subordination as a personal failure. Accordingly, de Botton considers meritocracy to be the primary source of status anxiety and social malaise.

However, de Botton seems to underestimate the capacity of people to find new stories that alleviate the impact of low status. With the decline of socialism, the traditional Marxist notion of class struggle has been shattered, but new discourses of a parasitic class have been announced. Discourse about 'the crisis' of the welfare state, especially when formulated in a populist style, has given birth to a new story that can be used by low status groups in order to frame the causes of their social subordination. The suspected unproductive class is no longer the capitalist bourgeoisie, but groups at both the higher and the lower end of the status distribution: politicians, public servants and the 'undeserving' social benefit claimants. According to the populist criticism of the welfare state, these groups are exploiting the resources of the ordinary, hard-working people. The moral distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor becomes very attractive, because it allows people to identify themselves with the 'deserving' side of the bifurcation.

Previous survey analysis has demonstrated the susceptibility of the underprivileged for the populist criticism of the welfare state (Derks 2004). The elaboration of the idea of the inefficiency and inequity of the welfare state appeals to the frustrations of people in subordinate positions. It allows them to construct stories about their lives in which the responsibility for their deprivation can be externalized and the negative connotations of their lower status can be reversed. The populist criticism of the welfare state does not imply a rejection of the principle of redistribution and social policy, but it undermines the legitimacy of the current welfare state. The current welfare state is portrayed as an inefficient and even unjust means of redistribution. Consequently, the capacity to create popular support for a social policy based on universalistic and inclusionist criteria has been obstructed, paving the way for welfare chauvinism (Kitschelt 1995) and exclusionism.

II.2 The ideological crisis: neoliberalism and the coalition with the populist right

The economic crisis and the consequent criticism of the welfare state has been supplemented by an ideological criticism with an important moral appeal. It stresses the supposed 'moral hazards' of redistributive policy. The welfare state functions as a hammock instead of a safety net: it encourages laziness, irresponsible behaviour and dependency. Therefore, the welfare state is not only economically inefficient, it also incites to decadence and moral decline. According to this radical criticism, redistributive policies of the bureaucratic governments are contra-productive since they promote the things they are supposed to prevent: poverty and the related social and moral problems (Gilder 1981; Murray 1984).

In its purest form, this ideological criticism can be found in an Anglo-Saxon tradition of thought, situated on the common ground between economic liberalism and conservatism. The affinities between liberalism and conservatism can be grasped from two points of view. The first point of view (e.g. Middendorp 1978) situates the alliance between liberalism and conservatism as the outcome of shared interests in specific historical periods. Liberalism however is conceived as anti-conservative in origin, based on the values of Enlightenment. It rejects the traditionalist (organic and hierarchic-collectivistic) ideology of feudalism.

Therefore it can be regarded as the ideology of the rising economic elite opposing the hereditary privileges of the nobility by stressing the individualist notions of achievement. When the collapse of the feudal system became irrevocable, and with the rise of the working class, the economic and traditional elites became allies in their shared opposition of socialism.

However, the affinities between liberalism and conservatism can not be reduced as the mere coincidental outcome of shared interests between two different social groups. Following the second point of view, conservatism can not be equated with reactionary feudalism, not even in its original appearance. There has always been a substantial part of the conservative tradition of thought (e.g. Hume and Burke) that can be easily linked with economic liberalism. Moreover, conservative thought easily lends itself to uphold criticism against redistributive governmental policies. The social doctrine of conservatism holds that man is inclined to evil, but he is not condemned to it. This implies an emphasis on virtues, discipline and responsibility, fostered by institutions that have stood the ravages of time. Conservatism praises the benefits of institutions such as the Church and the family, but generally the usefulness of modern, liberal institutions such as private ownership and the market are also acknowledged. Not surprisingly, many contemporary conservatives show to be moderate advocates of the market but virulent opponents of the welfare state². The acknowledgment of the benefits of the market is based on two appreciations: the market proved to be an efficient means of production, but is also entails a disciplinary or even moral function: it rewards productivity and diligence whereas idleness will be punished. Joshua Livestro of the Dutch Edmund Burke Society formulated the essential points of conservatism as followed: “Genuine independency stands against dependency of an anonymous welfare state, the emphasis on responsibility against the rampant growth of the culture of rights, the reinforcement of key institutions against atomization” (Livestro 2001, *my translation*).

Conservative philosophers such as Friedman and Hayek grounded neoliberal arguments against the welfare state that were prominent from the 1980s onwards. It remains difficult to find popular support for intellectualistic strands of neoliberalism and for the classical doctrine of economic laissez faire. In order to gain popular support for retrenchment politics, neoliberalism has to be mixed up with popular strands of cultural conservatism and working class authoritarianism. Empirical research on stratification and social attitudes has repeatedly documented the susceptibility of lower status groups for conservative and authoritarian attitudes (Middendorp 1978; Lipset 1981 [1960]; Kohn 1989 [1969]; Evans, Heath et al. 1996; De Witte & Scheepers 1999; Houtman 2003).

In the research tradition on working class authoritarianism, inspired by S.M. Lipset (1981 [1960]), ideological attitudes of the lower status groups are generally classified as cultural authoritarian or conservative, but at the same time egalitarian and therefore economic progressive or leftist. The latter classification, that recalls the image of a leftist working class, needs rethinking in post-industrial societies (Derks 2004). Cultural conservatism and authoritarianism also affects attitudes on work and economy. Traditional work ethic asserts that earning money without having to work for it is morally reprehensible; as such it is related to the moral hazard criticism of the welfare state. The tendency to particularistic in-group identification and the negative attitudes towards the (ethnic) out-group, characteristic for working class authoritarians, are difficult to connect to the universalistic criteria of social inclusion on which modern welfare states are based. The welfare state guarantees social and economic rights to every citizen, within the borders of the nation-state, but regardless of

² The exception of conservatism in the European Continental Christian Democratic tradition should be noted, as Christian Democrats played a prominent role in the construction of the European welfare states.

ethnicity, in the context of anonymous rights in stead of interpersonal reciprocity. Welfare chauvinism, as propagated by the new populist right (Kitschelt 1995; Mudde 2000), intends a restriction of social security on the basis of ethnicity. This and similar propositions will find an audience among the underprivileged more easily than the abstract and universalistic premises of the welfare state.

According to Kitschelt (1995), post-industrial transition gives rise to a convergence of cultural authoritarian and economic neoliberal (or market capitalist) politics. The new radical right (NRR) serves as a master case of this transition, whereas the new left can be seen as their opposite pole. The conditions for the rise of the NRR become favourable if moderate parties converge towards the median voter. Kitschelt identified the electoral 'winning formula' of the NRR as the combination of free market appeals with authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. This formula makes it possible to attract a broad audience: cultural authoritarianism will attract the blue-collar and the lower white-collar electorate, whereas economic liberalism attracts an additional electorate of small independent businesspeople. Kitschelt explains the attraction of the NRR among the losers of economic modernisation (the unskilled working class) mainly from cultural and not from economic motives: "*[g]iven their economic predicament, they may not fully endorse procapitalist economic policies, but they are available to the NRR primarily because of the latter's authoritarian and racist appeals*" (Kitschelt 1995:9). Nevertheless, Kitschelt acknowledges the potential appeal of anti-welfare criticism among specific sections of the working class, especially among young workers who have never been able to build affinities with the (socialist) labour movement and unions. "*[i]t has been suggested that the rigidity of labor markets in Western European welfare states makes it so difficult for young unskilled workers to get an economic and a political foothold in these systems that they turn toward market liberalism in order to smash the institutions exacerbating their weak position in labor markets*" (Kitschelt 1995: 9). So it becomes reasonable to expect that the crisis of the welfare state and post-industrial transition serves as a breeding ground for the creation of an alliance between sections of the middle class endorsing neoliberal market capitalism with cultural conservative sections of the working class. Anti-welfarism rather than procapitalism is the common ground between these two different sections, falling back upon the ideological tradition of conservative liberalism. This may seem illogical, given the economic predicament of the unskilled working class. However, from a sociological perspective this should not come as a surprise. The development of the welfare state took place in a period of rising expectations. The main political parties at that time have all contributed to promote a gender specific script (featuring the male breadwinner and the female housewife) that linked work and identity, and that enabled the members of the working class to find a role in the civil society. This traditional bourgeois script has lost its impact and is being replaced by the new cultural script of globalization, post-industrialization and the knowledge society. These new scripts offer few possibilities for unskilled workers to find a meaningful role in society.

This interpretation is consistent with the results of a comparative qualitative research on the relation between socio-economic change and the attraction of right-wing populism (Hentges, Meyer et al. 2003). A specific profile of attitudes was found in each of the eight involved European countries: an injured sense of justice, appeals to the "decent and hard-working people", insecurity, fear of declassing, feelings of powerlessness and threats related to the turbulences of immigration. As the traditional parties do not succeed in delivering a meaningful project for the abandoned workers, the parties of the new populist right can be expected to attempt to fill this gap by making nostalgic appeals to traditional scripts. The social-democratic parties are placed in a dilemma: if they anticipate and elaborate the new

discourse on globalization, multiculturalism and the knowledge society, they will find connection with the new middle class of highly skilled employees, but they run the risk of abandoning the traditional workers (Elchardus 1994; 1996; Kitschelt 1999). This clearly shows that feelings of injustice and the pursuit of equality are not automatically linked with a support for an economically progressive social policy.

II.3 The New Social Question: new injuries to the dignity of the abandoned worker

The 'social question' at the end of the 19th century referred to problems of poverty, famine and harsh deprivation of the industrial proletariat, but it also referred to associated moral vices, such as alcoholism, indecency and anti-social behaviour. Moreover, the 'social question' framed a discourse, elaborated by the political elite, intended to deal with these problems. Poverty and social misery were not the only concerns. Social policy was also motivated by the concern on social instability and revolt, and the need for a disciplined and physically strong (well-fed) labour force (Lis 1986). Discourse on the 'social question' was aimed at the 'civilization' of the working class, by promoting values related to work and the family, such as thrift, diligence and responsibility.

The expansion of social policy culminated in the development of the welfare state and led to a dramatic diminishment of the problem of harsh deprivation. Poverty has become a matter of 'relative' deprivation and is now measured by indicators of income difference and inequality. During the first decades after the Second World War, the grimness of the 'social question'-discourse was put aside by an optimistic belief in social progress and the image of the bourgeois worker. This optimism was sheltered by the economic recession and by the ideological crisis of the welfare state. During the nineties, the discussion on the welfare state took a turn in a new direction with the debate on the 'new social question' (Rosanvallon 1995; Castel 1995; Cantillon, Elchardus et al. 2003). This debate discusses new forms of exclusion and inequality. It is based on the proposition that the original premises of the welfare state are no longer adequate for dealing with the new conditions of post-industrialization, globalization, migration, structural unemployment, the proportional increase of the ageing population and the growing participation of women in the labour force.

According to Rosanvallon (1995), the economic and ideological crisis is supplemented by a new crisis. Social cohesion in the post-war welfare states was to an important degree based on the idea of insurance. This idea is now under pressure since social vulnerability has become predictable. Dependency on welfare state provisions is no longer a matter of an accidental risk; it has become the predictable outcome of a systematic vulnerable position in which some specific categories of people find themselves. The logic of insurance rests on a veil of ignorance, but this veil has been lifted away. Therefore, the legitimacy of the welfare state and the instruments of social cohesion become dependent on the principle of solidarity rather than of insurance. Consequently, Rosanvallon advocates for a revision of the welfare state, focussing the right of full social integration (*droit à l'insertion*).

The issue of the public support for solidarity has become more urgent as a consequence of the 'new social question'. It should now be understood against the changing background of an increasing predictability of social deprivation. The question I want to address in this paper then becomes: how is this issue being experienced and evaluated in the public opinion? And more specifically, how are these experiences related to the social position of the people

involved: people with low educational attainment on the one side and the higher educated on the other side?

Following a simple, rational-instrumental approach, we could expect a low public support for solidarity (focussing *le droit à l'insertion*) among high educated people, because they have a predictable lower chance to benefit from this policy, and because of the growing awareness of the fact that they are less vulnerable. However, this view neglects the larger context of identity, culture and ideology and is contradicted by some recent empirical findings. The higher educated strata are not an ideologically homogeneous group; sharp internal divisions among the left-right cleavage exists within this group. For instance, van de Werfhorst and De Graaf (2004) have showed that the most consistent left attitudes are not to be found among the labour class, but among specific sections of the new, high educated middle class (see also Derks 2004), whereas a consistent rightist (or economically conservative) profile can be found among traditional middle class categories such as managers and technocrats. Van de Werfhorst and De Graaf attribute these differences to specific class interests: the new middle class is more often employed in the public sector and is educated in cultural oriented fields of study that offer few opportunities for employment in the private sector. Therefore they are supposed to adhere to government intervention policies.

The position of the lower educated is very ambivalent. Although they have a predictable high risk to be confronted with structural exclusion, it will be very difficult for them to openly support a policy aimed at solidarity by focussing on *le droit à l'insertion*. The context of the new social question intensifies the factors that menace the public support for solidarity (related to the crisis of the welfare state as identified before) even further. Through the discussion on the new social question, discourse on the economic inefficiency and inadequacy of the current welfare state will be put in the forefront again. This narrative can be useful for the losers of economic modernization in order to frame the causes of their social failure. But it remains very questionable to what extent the solution, as offered by Rosanvallon, will find an audience among the underprivileged. The new social question not only offers an analysis, but also a specific discourse that fits in with the script of the post-industrial knowledge society. This script condemns people with low educational attainment to a very unattractive role, it offers them few opportunities to find dignity and respect and to construct identity. The script of the knowledge society that is so closely linked to the current debate on the new social question, defines the unskilled worker as a useless, problematic category, unable to make his living without the support of a generous system of welfare provisions. Under such conditions, alternative scripts, linking identity and recognition to criteria such as ethnicity, will become more attractive. Therefore it is no surprise that previous research has documented that ethnocentrism and welfare chauvinism find a hearing among people with low educational attainment. Coffé, Billiet and Cambré (2002) even found that, at least in Belgium, the distance between the lower and the higher educated in their support for ethnocentrism has become greater.

Ethnocentrism is a menace for solidarity and a policy of inclusion since it runs counter to the universalistic premises of the welfare state and because it is empirically closely linked to welfare chauvinism and also to the radical conservative criticism of the welfare state. Drawing on quantitative survey analysis, Derks (2005) found strong mutual correlations between ethnocentrism, authoritarianism and the susceptibility for a radical conservative stance towards the welfare state. Qualitative research reaches similar conclusions (Lamont 2000; Hentges, Meyer et al. 2003). Michèle Lamont (2000) made a comparative analysis of working class culture in France and the United States. She studied the so-called 'patterns of

boundary work', these are the ways social groups defines themselves and others by making reference to available cultural repertoires. Unskilled workers create symbolic boundaries by associating themselves with a moral discourse on the 'disciplined self', while dissociating themselves from other social categories (middle class people as well as ethnic minorities) who are accused of neglecting these moral principles. Dignity, hard work and straightforwardness are the central values of this moral discourse. In order to regain self-respect, welfare recipients will be disapproved. As Lamont (2000: 132) cites one of her respondents: "*If you are a half decent person at all, you have to hate yourself for having to accept [welfare] in the first place ... Anybody who takes advantage isn't worth their salt*". White Americans are inclined to associate poverty and dependency to welfare provisions with the Black population. On the other hand, Lamont traced aspects of a discourse on class struggle in French working class culture, although without solidarity with North African immigrants, who are accused of a lack of civic virtues. Lamont's analysis offers a broad understanding of the mechanisms that create susceptibility for moral conservative anti-welfare state attitudes. The negative prejudices against welfare recipients and the symbolic boundaries on the basis of ethnicity and conservative morality can be explained, at least partly, as resulting from a quest for dignity and respect of the underprivileged.

III. Data and measurements

This article addresses the issue of (frustrated) egalitarianism in meritocratic, post-industrial societies. The focus is on the social and political attitudes of people with low educational achievement. The main thesis that will be examined is that people with low educational achievement stick to egalitarian attitudes (pro-redistribution), but egalitarianism tends to be related, in this specific category, with distrust and social discontent. More specifically I will examine the extent to which the egalitarian attitudes of the people with low educational achievement tends to take a narrow, exclusionist form and gets detached from an economically progressive (universalistic and inclusionist) ideology. Furthermore, the detachment of leftist party vote and ideological self-identification, and the susceptibility for the politics of the new populist right will be examined.

The analysis is based on data of the first round (2002) of the European Social Survey (ESS, edition 5.1).³ The original database comprised 22 European countries and more than 42000 respondents. The analysis below is based on a selection of 6 countries: Austria (N=2257; Denmark (1506); France (1503); Norway (2036), Switzerland (2040) and Flanders⁴ (1234). These 6 countries have been selected because in each of these countries a considerable proportion of the respondents voted for a party that can be clearly attributed to the denominator of the new radical (Kitschelt 1995) or populist (Betz 1994) right.

The data contains information on the socio-demographic background as well as on social, cultural, and political attitudes and values. In this first round, the topic of the rotating module was centred on immigration and citizenship.

³ The data, the complete original questionnaire and an extensive technical report with information about methodology and the field work are made available at the internet (<http://ess.nsd.uib.no>).

⁴ Only the respondents of the Flemish region are included in our selection for Belgium. The only new right wing populist party with a large electorate is the Flemish party Vlaams Blok (currently Vlaams Belang). Because of the federal political structure, this party is not available for the Walloon voters, not even in national elections. At the time the survey was held (2002), the Walloon region was not confronted with a NRWP party with a considerable electorate (Swyngedouw 1998).

Five scales measuring social attitudes were constructed. They are measured as sum scales, with 0 as the (theoretical) minimum and 100 as the (theoretical) maximum. The scale construction was preceded by explorative principle component analyses (PCA). These analyses revealed that, in each of the six countries and for each of the five attitudes, one PCA with an eigenvalue larger than 1 could be discerned.

Accordingly, the following variables were used for the analysis.

- **Education level.** The original variable with 7 categories was recoded into three categories: low education (lower than tertile category for each respective country), medium education and high education (tertiary education).
- **Egalitarianism.** This scale measures a support for redistributive policies by means of a strong government and labour unions. It is based on two Likert-items⁵: (a) *The government should take measures to reduce differences in income level* and (b) *Employees need strong trade unions to protect their working conditions and wages*. The Pearson correlations between these two items differs from 0,23 to 0,31 in the six countries.
- **Social (dis)trust.** Two types of social (dis)trust are measured, the first on the level of personal daily live, the second on the political-institutional level.
 - **Interpersonal trust.** This scale measures the extent in which people trust other people. It is measured by 3 items of a semantic differential scale (each with 11 response categories): *Generally speaking, in dealing with people: (a) You can't be too careful* versus *Most people can be trusted*; (b) *Most people would try to take advantage of me* versus *Most people would try to be fair*; (c) *People mostly look out for themselves* versus *People mostly try to be helpful*.
 - **Institutional trust** (trust in political and legal institutions). Four items from a semantic differential scale are included (with 11 response categories ranging from *No trust at all* to *Complete trust*): (a) *[country's] parliament*; (b) *the legal system*; (c) *the police* and (d) *politicians*.
- **Universalistic inclusionism** versus **Particularistic exclusionism.** Two types are distinguished: first on the level of general cultural attitudes and second on the level of (mainly economic) attitudes concerning immigration policy.
 - **Cultural universalism** versus cultural particularism. This scale indicates (in)tolerant attitudes towards ethnic and sexual minority groups. It is measured by 2 tolerant and 2 conservative statements (Likert-items): (a) *Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish*; (b) *It is better for a country if there are a variety of different religions*; (c) *It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions*; (d) *If a country wants to reduce tensions it should stop immigration*.
 - **Welfare universalism** versus welfare chauvinism. Measured by five items⁶ demanding a restriction or an extension of immigration and asylum policy, mainly from economic motives; (a) *Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think people who come here take out more than they put in or put in more than they can take out?*; (b) *[country] has more than its fair share of people applying for refugee status*; (c) *the government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status*;

⁵ Response categories from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly”. The scale was reversed in order that a high score indicates an approval of the egalitarian statements.

⁶ Item (a): semantic differential with 11 categories; items (b) and (c): Likert-items with 5 response categories ranging from “Agree strongly” to “disagree strongly”. A high score on the scale indicates a universalistic-inclusionist attitude.

(d) *People of a different race or ethnic group: Allow many to come and live here / allow some/ allow a few / allow none;* (e) *People from the poorer countries outside Europe: Allow many (etc.).*

- **Left-right self-identification.** Semantic differential scale with 11 categories. The respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale ranging from 00 (left) to 10 (right).
- **Party vote.** The respondents were asked for which party they voted during the last national elections. Evidently, the original variables are different for each country. Because we are primarily interested in the identification with leftist and new right wing populist political parties, we constructed a variable with 3 categories that could be applied for each of the 6 countries:
 - Leftist party vote: SPÖ and Grüne (Austria); Social-democrats, Swiss Labour Party and Green Party (Switzerland); LCR, LO, PC, PS, Les Verts (France); SD and SF (Denmark); RV, SV and A (Norway); Agalev and SP (Flanders).
 - New right wing populist party vote (NRWP): FPÖ (Austria); SVP (Switzerland); FN (France); DF and FrP (Denmark); FrP (Norway) and VB (Flanders).
 - Other party vote.

IV Results

IV 1. Social attitudes: introductory descriptive analysis

In this first section, we look at the distribution of social attitudes according to country and educational level (table 1). As expected, the attitudes of the lower educated strata are characterized by a relatively high level of egalitarianism, distrust (institutional as well as interpersonal) and particularistic exclusionism (cultural particularism and welfare chauvinism). Roughly speaking, this trend can be observed in each of the six countries (see figure 1), although variations in the magnitude and linearity of the relations can be depicted.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The social attitudes also vary significantly between the countries. This applies particularly for social attitudes related to trust. The high scores for Denmark and Norway are consistent with the literature on the Nordic high-trust societies (Delhey & Newton 2004). Noticeable differences between the countries can also be found for egalitarianism, with a remarkable low score for Denmark and a high score for France. The low score for Denmark may seem contra-intuitive. Nevertheless, it is consistent with previous empirical research (Grendstad 2003). As regards to attitudes concerning universalistic inclusionism, the country differences are rather weak.

Secondly, in order to get acquainted with the data, the correlations between the social attitudes are examined (table 2). Obviously, the two indicators of social trust (institutional and interpersonal) are strongly correlated ($r = 0,43$). The same holds for the two indicators of universalism ($r = 0,60$). Moderate and positive correlations can be found between indicators of trust and universalism. These correlations can be sociologically grasped because trust and universalism both correlate with educational level. The correlations of egalitarianism are somewhat more complex. Although the lower educated strata combine egalitarian attitudes with relatively low scores for trust and universalism, egalitarianism is *positively* correlated with (welfare and to a lesser extend also cultural) universalism. This finding suggests an

ideological association between egalitarianism and universalism that can be understood from the left-right ideological cleavage. This is consistent with the finding that egalitarianism and universalism are both correlated with the leftist pole of the left-right spectrum.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

IV 2. A closer examination of the egalitarian attitudes of the lower educated strata

In this section we will try to find empirical evidence for the main thesis of this paper. According to our thesis, the social and political meaning of egalitarianism differs significantly between the different educational strata. The social attitudes of the higher educated strata are expected to be strongly linked to the ideological left-right divide, whereas the egalitarian attitudes of the lower educational strata are expected to be relatively more detached from left-wing attitudes and politics. Technically, an interaction-effect between education and social attitudes on egalitarianism is assumed.

In order to avoid multicollinearity, separate models have been constructed, each time including only one or two social attitudes as independent variables. Using the mixed model procedure (SPSS 12.0), two-level models with country at the second level were constructed. For each model, egalitarianism is the dependant variable. Educational level and social attitudes are included as independent variables, as well as the interaction-variable. This allows for the verification of our main assumption that the social and political meaning of egalitarianism differs between the educational strata.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Model 1 includes social attitudes on the political-institutional sphere, more specifically trust in institutions and welfare universalism. As could be expected from the explorative analysis in the previous section, a low educational attainment level has a positive effect on egalitarianism. However, the egalitarianism score for the people with average educational attainment is also remarkable high. Welfare universalism has a positive effect on egalitarianism. In line with our assumption, the effect of welfare universalism on egalitarianism is remarkable smaller among the lower (and medium) educated strata compared to the higher educated strata (the reference category). This becomes clear when we take into account the interaction variables between welfare universalism and education level. The effects of institutional trust and the interaction variable with education level on egalitarianism are low or even statistically insignificant.

In model 2, social attitudes in the sphere of daily life are included, more specifically interpersonal trust and cultural universalism. A similar pattern can be discerned. Cultural universalism has a considerable effect on egalitarianism, but this effect is remarkably lower among the lower and medium educational strata as compared with the higher educated strata. Interpersonal trust has a moderate (but statistically significant) positive effect on egalitarianism. Here we can depict a similar interaction effect: the relation between trust and egalitarianism is weaker among the low and medium educational strata.

Model 3 shows the effect of self-identification with the left-right ideological spectrum. Obviously, people identifying themselves with the left are generally more egalitarian. However, the same interaction effect can be traced: the relation is considerably weaker among

the lower and medium educational strata. Remarkable and more difficult to grasp, however, is the observation that the effect of education level is neutralized or even reversed. In this model, controlling for left-right self-identification, the lower educated are less egalitarian than the higher educated strata, although this effect is small and barely significant.

Model 4 shows that a considerable association between a leftist party vote and egalitarianism remains. Nevertheless, the interaction variable reveals that this relationship is considerably weaker among the lower educated strata. Regarding the votes for the New Right Wing Populist (NRWP) parties, no significant effect can be traced. This means that egalitarian attitudes do not act as a brake for a NRWP party vote. To put it differently, NRWP parties seeking electoral support among the working class should not worry about the egalitarian attitudes of this group. The theoretical assumption that only the egalitarianism of the lower educated strata is indifferent to the NRWP whereas the egalitarianism of the higher educated strata is not, does, however, not fit our data. Here we should note that only small proportions of the higher educated strata vote for a NRWP party.

IV 3. Conclusion

In general, the empirical results support our theoretical assumptions. The attitudes of the low educated strata are characterized by relatively high levels of egalitarianism, distrust and particularism. Moreover, egalitarian attitudes of the lower educated strata tend to get detached from the left-right ideological dimension. Among these strata, the ideological affinities between egalitarianism, universalism and inclusionism are weakened. This specific combination of attitudes can be described as particularistic egalitarianism or economic populism (Derks 2004).

It should, however, be noted that the attitudes of the high educated strata are the most 'atypical'. After all, the attitudinal profile of the average educated strata appears to be more similar to the profile of the lower educated than to the profile of the higher educated strata. In contrast to the general public opinion, the attitudes of people with high educational attainments are strongly and consistently related to the left-right ideological antithesis. Although egalitarian attitudes will find less support among this strata, they are more strongly linked with welfare universalism, cultural openness, ideological identification with the left and electoral support for left parties.

V Discussion

Meritocratic egalitarianism and decommodification: an uneasy relationship

Modern societies endorsing egalitarianism are characterized by a contradiction. At the cultural level, they distribute egalitarian values, based on the concept of equal chances and opposing the principle of hereditary privileges. Modern egalitarianism is intertwined with meritocracy, attributing equal rewards to equal personal achievements. At the social and political level, European continental welfare states conduct a social policy that involves a certain level of decommodification. Decommodification, however, is difficult to reconcile with the culture of meritocracy. The culture of meritocracy links identity and respect with personal achievement and ability, whereas a policy of decommodification aims at a redistribution of goods relatively independent of personal abilities. This poses a serious problem for the legitimatization of redistributive, inclusionist social policy.

According to Rosanvallon (1995), contemporary societies are facing new and structural forms of inequality that require a revision of the welfare state. The logic of insurance is no longer adequate and needs to be replaced by the notion of solidarity. His plea for '*le droit à l'inclusion*' can indeed be seen as a quest for a further elaboration of decommodification. It becomes clear, however, that it will be a difficult task to find public support for this idea in our current, meritocratic societies. Paradoxically, finding public support will be especially difficult among the social categories that suffer most from the conditions of the new social question. A social policy as suggested by Rosanvallon could serve their economic interests, but at the same time it could hurt their self-respect. For them, the stories of the populist right can be more attractive than the stories of the left. Whereas the former stories appeal to social discontent by accusing external actors (the elite as well as the 'undeserving' poor), the latter allocate them into an unattractive role: the role of welfare recipients.

Meritocratic egalitarianism makes it difficult to justify a redistribution of wealth that is not based on personal merit. Therefore, in order to deal with the new social question, an efficient policy of economic redistribution will be insufficient. It should also imply a process of cultural elaboration. Social and political actors should put into perspective or even refute the culture of meritocracy by elaborating new stories or by revitalizing old ones, which enable people to find self-respect. In order to be successful in creating solidarity, these stories should not give way to exclusionism and scapegoating.

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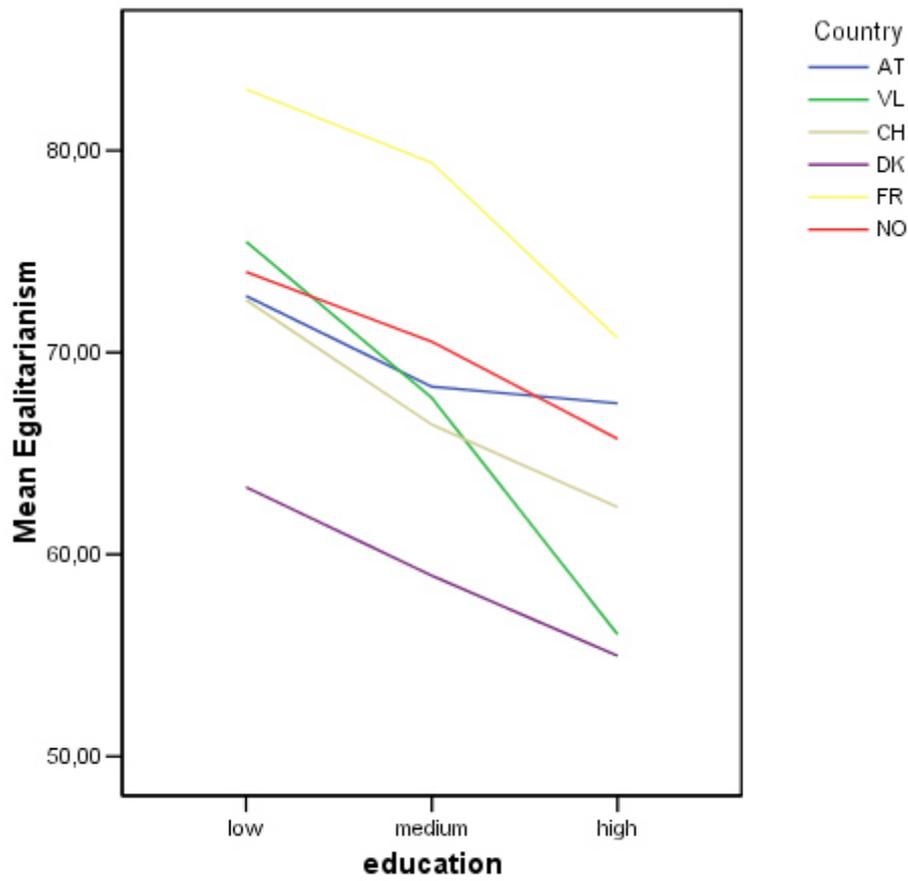
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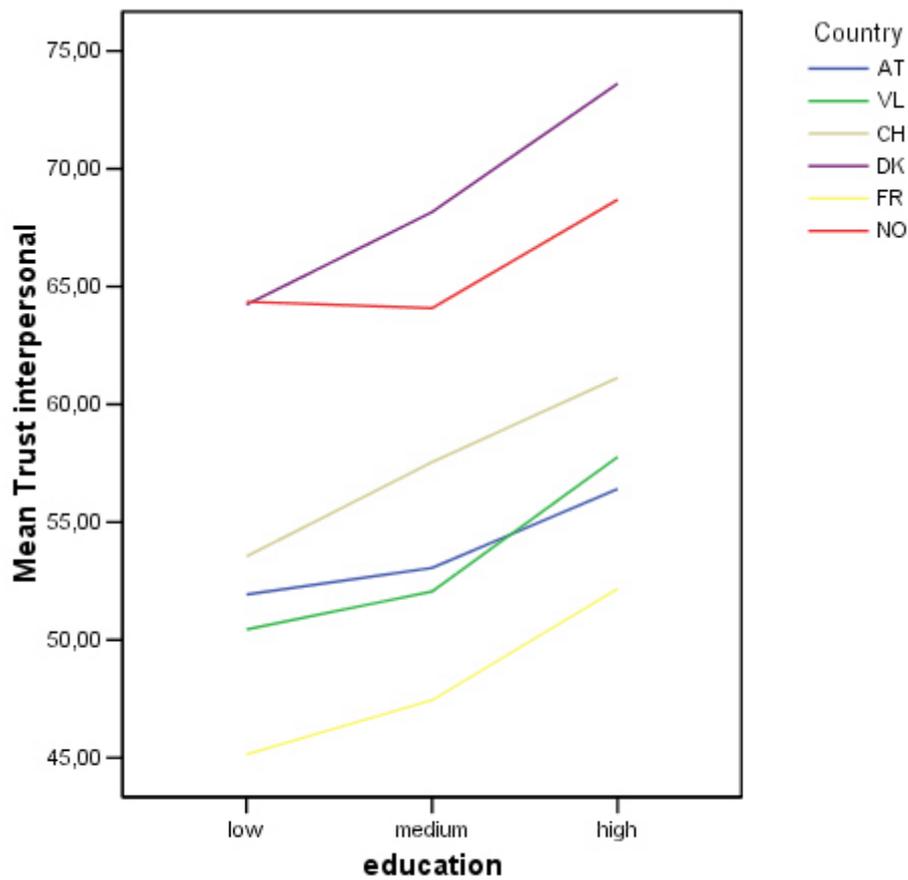
Table 1: social attitudes by education level and country (MCA-models)

			N	Predicted mean		Deviation		eta	beta	
				unadjusted	adjusted	unadjusted	adjusted			
Egalitarianism	Education	low	1606	73,20	72,98	4,66	4,44	0,13	0,14	***
		medium	5002	68,42	68,78	-0,12	0,24			
		high	1665	64,41	63,55	-4,13	-4,99			
	Country	AT	1405	69,06	68,39	0,52	-0,15	0,25	0,25	***
		VL	1001	66,70	66,64	-1,84	-1,90			
		CH	1585	66,60	66,39	-1,94	-2,15			
		DK	1077	59,13	59,01	-9,41	-9,53			
		FR	1293	78,02	78,13	9,48	9,59			
		NO	1912	69,61	70,31	1,07	1,77			
Trust interpersonal	Education	low	1606	54,06	54,81	-3,85	-3,10	0,15	0,13	***
		medium	5002	57,61	57,59	-0,30	-0,32			
		high	1665	62,52	61,85	4,62	3,94			
	Country	AT	1405	53,27	53,77	-4,64	-4,14	0,39	0,38	***
		VL	1001	52,20	52,29	-5,71	-5,61			
		CH	1585	57,30	57,48	-0,61	-0,43			
		DK	1077	68,25	68,34	10,35	10,44			
		FR	1293	48,33	48,21	-9,57	-9,69			
		NO	1912	65,45	64,92	7,54	7,01			
Trust institutional	Education	low	1606	52,09	52,37	-4,25	-3,97	0,15	0,15	***
		medium	5002	56,21	56,11	-0,13	-0,23			
		high	1665	60,83	60,86	4,49	4,51			
	Country	AT	1405	53,60	54,20	-2,75	-2,14	0,35	0,34	***
		VL	1001	49,94	49,99	-6,41	-6,35			
		CH	1585	59,39	59,58	3,05	3,24			
		DK	1077	67,31	67,42	10,96	11,08			
		FR	1293	47,03	46,92	-9,31	-9,42			
		NO	1912	59,31	58,68	2,97	2,34			
Welfare universalism	Education	low	1606	40,41	40,27	-5,32	-5,47	0,27	0,26	***
		medium	5002	44,43	44,57	-1,30	-1,16			
		high	1665	54,78	54,49	9,05	8,75			
	Country	AT	1405	43,37	44,37	-2,36	-1,37	0,13	0,11	***
		VL	1001	40,82	41,19	-4,91	-4,54			
		CH	1585	47,10	47,51	1,36	1,78			
		DK	1077	46,22	46,40	0,48	0,66			
		FR	1293	47,83	47,45	2,10	1,72			
		NO	1912	47,22	46,10	1,48	0,37			
Cultural universalism	Education	low	1606	48,79	48,26	-6,96	-7,49	0,28	0,29	***
		medium	5002	54,94	54,97	-0,81	-0,78			
		high	1665	64,90	65,30	9,15	9,55			
	Country	AT	1405	54,33	55,54	-1,42	-0,21	0,17	0,19	***
		VL	1001	53,14	53,37	-2,61	-2,38			
		CH	1585	59,81	60,23	4,06	4,48			
		DK	1077	55,58	55,80	1606,00	0,05			
		FR	1293	59,69	59,40	3,94	3,65			
		NO	1912	52,22	50,93	-3,53	-4,81			

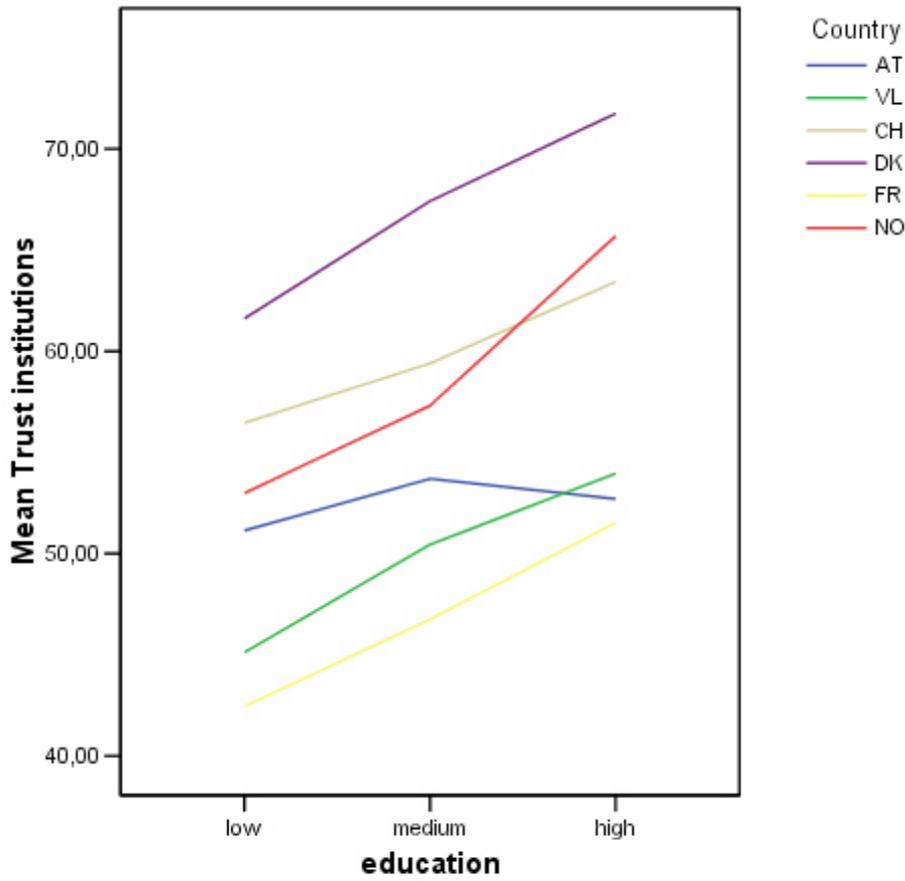
Figure 1: social attitudes by education level for each county



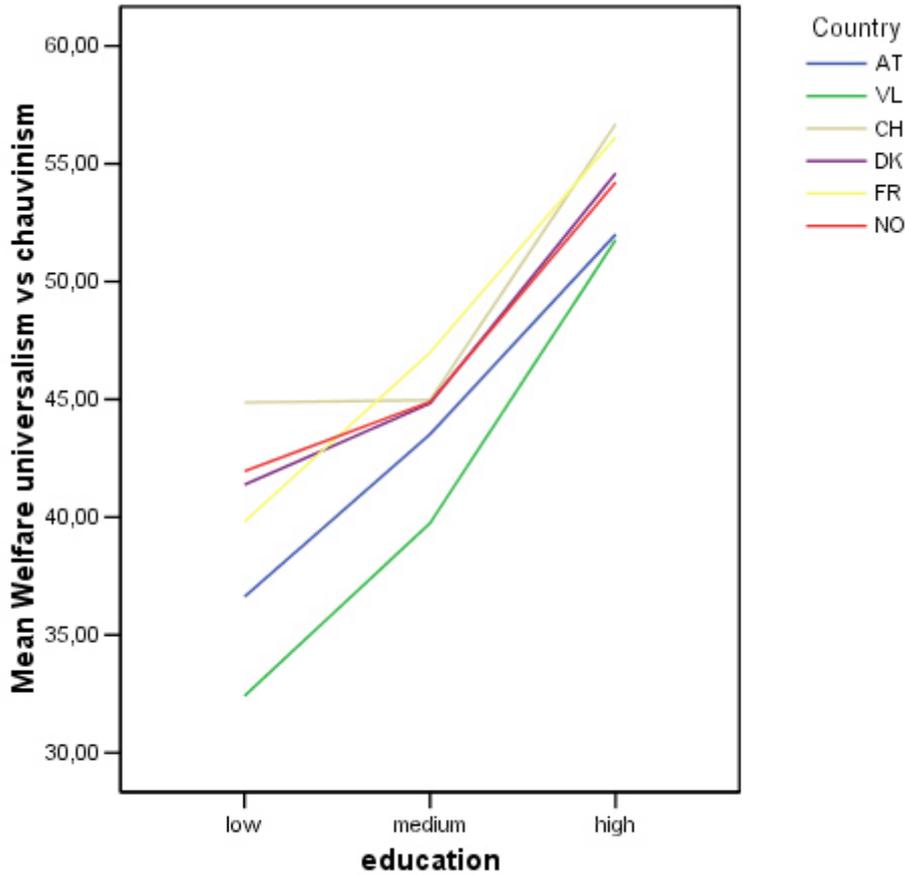
Cases weighted by Design weight



Cases weighted by Design weight



Cases weighted by Design weight



Cases weighted by Design weight

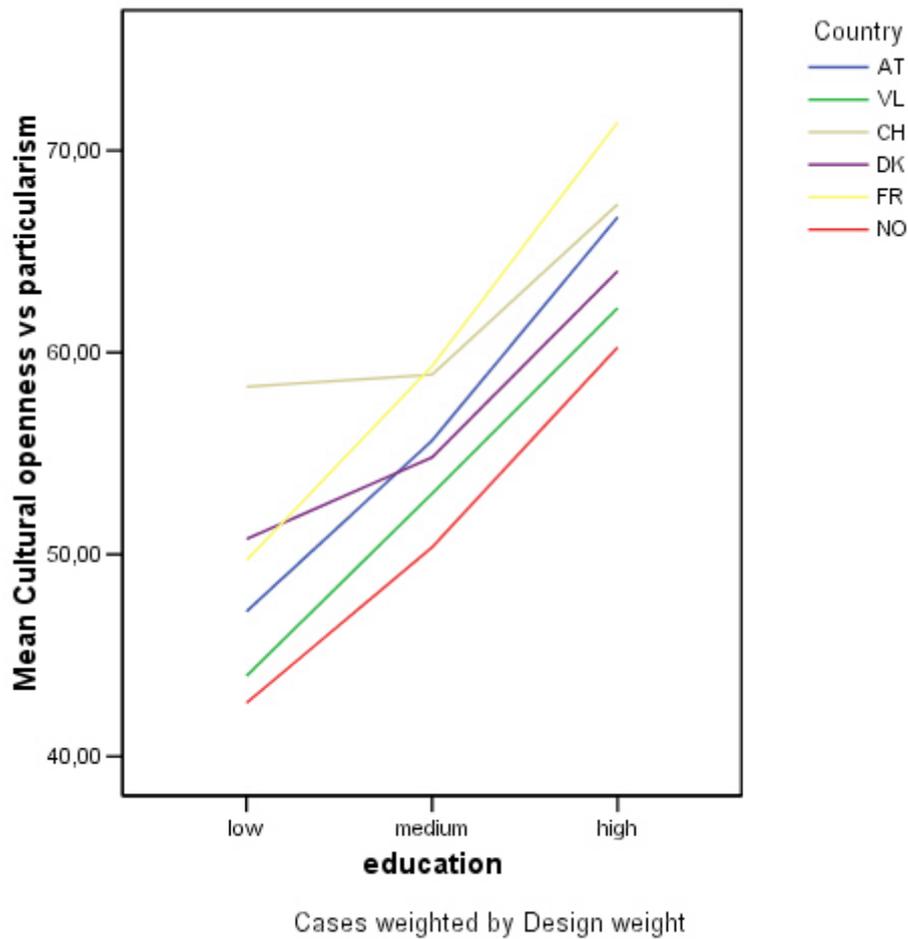


Table 2: social attitudes (0-100 sumscales); zero order correlations (pearson)

	trust people	trust institutions	welfare univ.	cultural univ.	L/R selfid.	Egalitarianism
trust people	1					
trust institutions	0,43 ***	1,00				
welfare universalism	0,23 ***	0,19 ***	1,00			
cultural universalism	0,13 ***	0,11 ***	0,60 ***	1,00		
L/R self-identification	0,02 *	0,11 ***	-0,28 ***	-0,28 ***	1,00	
egalitarianism	-0,06 ***	-0,13 ***	0,11 ***	0,07 ***	-0,29 ***	1,00

correlation significance: *** 0,001 level; ** 0,01 level; * 0,05 level
 Pairwise deletion, N 8426 < 10465

Table 3: Mixed models (multilevel), Egalitarianism by social attitudes, with education interaction effects

Model 1: Welfare universalism and trust institutions (N = 8169)

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	42,79	3,223	19,77	13,27	0,000
education=low	29,37	2,799	8889,37	10,49	0,000
education=medium (<i>high=ref.</i>)	25,44	2,508	8890,21	10,15	0,000
welfare universalism	0,38	0,027	8889,29	14,35	0,000
trust institutions	-0,01	0,030	8893,82	-0,25	0,800
trust institutions([education=low])	-0,07	0,039	8890,14	-1,78	0,075
trust institutions([education=medium])	-0,10	0,033	8890,23	-3,12	0,002
welfare universalism ([education=low])	-0,27	0,038	8889,23	-7,04	0,000
welfare universalism ([education=medium])	-0,24	0,031	8889,21	-7,76	0,000
<i>-2 Restricted Log Likelihood</i> 78649,74					
<i>Intraclass correlation (country)⁷</i> 0,072					

Model 2: Cultural universalism and interpersonal trust (N = 8922)

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	34,85	3,522	21,77	9,89	0,000
education=low	34,84	34,848	9745,22	11,32	0,000
education=medium (<i>high=ref.</i>)	29,43	2,789	9745,43	10,55	0,000
cultural universalism	0,31	0,028	9747,87	11,24	0,000
trust interpersonal	0,13	0,031	9749,94	4,20	0,000
trust interpersonal([education=low])	-0,15	0,038	9746,57	-4,06	0,000
trust interpersonal([education=medium])	-0,13	0,033	9746,68	-3,89	0,000
cultural universalism ([education=low])	-0,22	0,036	9746,25	-6,01	0,000
cultural universalism ([education=medium])	-0,24	0,031	9745,65	-7,61	0,000
<i>-2 Restricted Log Likelihood</i> 86327,00					
<i>Intraclass correlation (country)</i> 0,080					

Model 3: Left-Right self-identification (N = 8861)

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	86,12	2,531	7,69	34,02	0,000
education=low	-3,47	1,615	86,12	-2,15	0,032
education=medium (<i>high=ref.</i>)	-4,35	1,324	9665,82	-3,29	0,001
-					
Left/Right selfidentification	-4,77	0,217	9665,99	22,02	0,000
Left/Right selfidentif ([education=low])	2,85	0,302	9665,28	9,41	0,000
Left/Right selfidentif ([education=medium])	2,10	0,250	9665,18	8,40	0,000
<i>-2 Restricted Log Likelihood</i> 84857,46					
<i>Intraclass correlation (country)</i> 0,076					

Model 4: Party vote (left and new-right-wing-populist) (N = 9537)

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.
Intercept	58,37	58,369	58,37	22,55	0,000
education=low	13,46	0,757	10435,78	17,77	0,000
education=medium (<i>high=ref.</i>)	8,06	0,640	10436,28	12,59	0,000
vote=left party	15,27	0,954	10434,24	16,02	0,000
vote=nrwp party (<i>other=ref.</i>)	-4,16	2,653	10434,27	-1,57	0,117
[vote=left]*[education=low]	-7,78	1,403	10434,51	-5,54	0,000
[vote=nrwp]*[education=low]	1,83	3,117	10434,22	0,59	0,558
[vote=left]*[education=medium]	-6,78	1,118	10434,37	-6,07	0,000
[vote=nrwp]*[education=medium]	1,26	2,813	10434,14	0,45	0,654
<i>-2 Restricted Log Likelihood</i> 91976,33					
<i>Intraclass correlation (country)</i> 0,090					

⁷ intraclass correlation is calculated as a function of covariance parameters: country variance / (country variance + residual)

