

The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities

Urbino, 17-19 September 2009

Social capital and European regions: a possible paradigm shift?

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Paper distributed at the 7th ESPAnet conference 2009

Stream nr. 7B - The Role of Welfare Attitudes in Welfare State Change

Social Capital and European Regions: A Possible Paradigm Shift?

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1. Introduction

Comparative Social Capital studies have traditionally focused analysis on the individual and national level. The only exception is that offered by Beugelsdijk and Van Schaik (2005), with their regional measurement in 54 European regions. However, in addition to the methodological issues in their study¹, there is a total absence explanation as to why the level of analysis is shifted from nations to regions. Before undertaking a measurement at the regional level, it is crucial to understand the relevance of a comparative regional analysis of Social Capital. In exploring four prominent arguments on the subject, this paper attempts to shed light upon this notion.

Firstly, from a theoretical point of view, the development of the literature on ‘new regionalism’ provides a suggestive perspective: rescaling the level of geographical analysis to respond to the emergence of a new ‘spatial economy.’ This new spatial economy is progressively emerging in conjunction with technological transfer and the growing interdependence of markets. These phenomena are increasing the attention for sub-national entities. This new theoretical perspective is directly applicable to a European context. In fact, the European continent is experiencing an evolution of its governance systems. Regions are important actors in this process. The positive correlation between the integration process and the empowerment of regions is highly contested in the literature². Regardless of the association between European integration and empowerment of regions, it is undoubtedly true that the new emphasis on regional policy proposed by the

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I am indebted to the comments and advice offered by Jonah Rimer, Peter Pritchard, Martin Seeleib-Kaiser and the research group ‘the Politics of Social Policy’ in the department of Social Policy and Social Work at University of Oxford.

commission in the last 20 years is fostering political and academic debates about the role of regions. Secondly, from an institutional perspective, the progressive devolution of power from central governments to regions is a well-documented reality. The power of regions have been increasing almost everywhere since the 1950's. The formulation of the Regional Authority Index provides clear proof of this devolution (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks; 2008). This index is an important conceptual instrument for detecting the institutional changes that are taking place in our continent.

Thirdly, the importance of fostering the development of regional analysis is rooted in history. Countries such as Belgium, Italy, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Germany have been fragmented for centuries; the creation of the modern nation-states is embedded in the presence of regions and sub-national entities that carry an important heritage and play a strong role in identity. Finally, the theoretical, politico-institutional and historical arguments are complemented by an empirical test. The aim of the empirical test is to verify the claim that feeling more connected to regions as a geographical group has a stronger correlation with the nine indicators used to measure Social Capital than other geographic/administrative entities.

In what follows, new evidence is complemented with previous research to overcome the 'national bias.' The theoretical, historical and institutional reasons to pursue regional analysis are presented in the first section; the empirical model is discussed in the second section.

2. The historical and institutional relevance of European regions

2.1. Historical matters: an introduction

European history offers many rational arguments to foster research in the regional direction. Belgium, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Germany contain differentiated realities, with populations characterized by regional/local administrations much older than the national governments.

In Belgium the coexistence of three different communities with two primary languages, in one state, is a 'historical product' created by external powers on several occasions in an attempt to dominate a wealthy and prosperous area. After the end of the Holy Roman Empire, between the 11th and 12th century, the provinces of Belgium

were almost identical to the present. This included: the County of Flanders, with actual provinces of East and West Flanders, the French Nord, and the region of Lille; the Marquisate of Namur; The Duchy of Brabant, which included the actual provinces of Flemish and Walloon Brabant, Antwerp, Brussels and the Dutch region Nord Brabant; the County of Hainaut; Luxembourg; and, the Bishopric of Liège, which included the actual provinces of Liège and Limburg. If we call to mind the Middle Ages, cities such as Bruges, Antwerp, Brussels, and Liege enjoyed autonomy and economic development. The pre-existence of these realities, and the cultural division between the Flemish and Walloon, influenced and weakened the unification process of the country.

The United Kingdom contains four historically autonomous regions, or perhaps stated more accurately four distinguished nations. The relationship between the central power and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has been problematic in many respects and is currently a contested issue. Scotland fought many times for independence, and under English control still enjoyed unique relationships with the European continent, particularly a large trade with France. The Welsh have retained their language and culture despite a very heavy English domination after the 13th century. In modern day, Northern Ireland remains a society divided between Catholic and Protestant with a strong legacy of civil conflict.

Italy proves to be a country of stark fragmentation. A history of regional states and powerful cities reduced the ability of the Italians to act together, as Machiavelli (1513) had already emphasized in the 16th Century. The fascinating history of a country, which is not able to consider its past, as definitely past, offered an interesting case for historians, sociologists and political scientists (Banfield, 1958; Putnam, 1993). The tremendous socio-economic differences between the North and the South have been the subject of many analyses and remain a domain largely contested in the literature (the so-called 'Questione Meridionale,' Southern Issue). In this context, analysing behaviour of Italians in terms of participation and generalized trust is pointless, if not adapted to regional or local levels (Cartocci, 2007).

In Spain after unification, at the end of the 15th century autonomous regions retained their identity within the national framework. Before unification, Spain was divided into kingdoms and principalities. During the 'reconquista' the two most powerful kingdoms, Castilla and Aragona, conceived the idea of unity through family ties. The unification process did not destroy the ancient cultural and linguistic

differences existent in the country. For example, Catalans and Basques recalled their identity to political units older than the state, which was created in 1492.

Finally, Germany has a rich history of principalities and city-states present since the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire. The struggle between the empire and the powerful princes shaped the cultural and political life of the country. The progressive emergence of a new religious community provoked wars and disputes for centuries and remains a contested issue in the country. The historical description is fundamental to understand the construction of sub-national entities and their importance in our analysis, but the historical outlook has to be complemented with an accurate understanding of the politico-institutional developments of regions. The relation between states and regions has changed drastically in the last decades. From this point of view, the most relevant event has been the creation and development of the European Union.

2.2. European Policy and empowerment of regions

A new literature on the 'opportunity' of rescaling the level of analysis has emerged in the last few years in opposition to the national paradigm. This 'new regionalism' highlighted the necessity to develop a spatial political economy illustrating how the desegregation of the nation-state is conferring new importance on the sub-national level of analysis (Brenner, 2005; 2009). In this context, the academic debate concentrated on the analysis of institutional changes activated by progressive European integration.

According to Keating (2008), there are three main factors that generate this attention. The first is the launch of the regional structural funds, the second is the progressive enlargement of European competencies in the same domains administered by the regions, and the third is the renewal of the old debate on the discrepancy between state definition and national identities.

Firstly, the launch of the European structural fund in 1988 has been interpreted as the will of the Commission to undermine the power of the state and open a direct dialogue with regions. In reality, the scope of this policy was not to bypass the nation state, but to re-equilibrate the economic divergence between European regions after the integration of countries such as Spain and Portugal – countries characterized by extremely poor and underdeveloped regions. In fact, in the European Parliament

resolution on Regional Policy (1988), the first two points emphasize that regional disparities, were again increasing (to reach a level close to 1970) after narrowing down in the first phase of community integration. The absence of a concrete regional policy to counterbalance the opening of the market on a larger scale, as well as Spanish and Portuguese accession, was leading to a serious widening of disparities. As a consequence, more than 20% of the community population was living in impoverished regions.

Before this declaration, the question whether regions were converging or diverging (in terms of income per capita and economic development) was already attracting the attention of economists and decision makers (Magrini, 2004). In his seminal work “Regional Inequality and the Process of National Development,” Williamson (1965) first used a comparative approach to explain the so-called ‘North-South problem’ – the persistence of cleavages among regions in many countries after their processes of modernization. According to Williamson, the first stages of development are characterized by an increasing North-South dualism; in fact, the majority of economic activity tends to be concentrated in a few nodes of growth. The economies of scale and the expansion of economic activities generate an increase of regional inequalities. Then after a certain level of development, the wealthier regions enter a mature stage of development; the congestion costs, due to an excessive concentration of people, generate a spatial diffusion of the technology. Thus the process of convergence takes place (Williamson, 1965: 44). The question whether this process of convergence was similar for all poor countries and regions was left unanswered by Williamson’s study. In a famous article more than 25 years later, Barro and Sala-i-Martin (1992) suggested the validity of the general neoclassical hypothesis of progressive convergence. After this contribution, a lengthy academic debate took place; however, the idea of convergence remains in question (Boldrin et al., 2001; Ezcurra and Rapun, 2006; Fingleton, 1999; Magrini, 1999; Petrakos, Rodríguez-Pose and Rovolis, 2005).

This academic debate has also influenced the decision-making process and the development of new innovative policies. In Europe, the disparities inside certain countries (e.g., Italy and Spain) used to be very stable over the time but there were also cases of fast convergence (e.g., Ireland). European policy makers decided to launch the regional structural funds with the precise aim of enhancing the

development of poorer regions. The achievements of this frame of policies are contested, but the increasing attention to regional reality is not in doubt.

Secondly, the enlargement of European competences has largely overlapped with the increasing competence of regions. According to Keating (2008), this overlap did not represent an increasing representation of regions inside European institutions. Nevertheless, the accelerated devolution of power from the state to the region in allocating and negotiating structural funds must be acknowledged. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the power of regions in the 15 countries analysed has increased dramatically .

[table1]

Thirdly, the development of European integration re-opened the old debate on the relationship between nations and states. The emergence of a new central power has been seen with hope from the stateless nations. The idea of a 'Europe of Regions' was very appealing for the vindication of regional parties during the 1980's, and produced strong support for the European Union integration process. The integration process was seen as a way to reduce the power of the state and allow more freedom to autonomous regions. In reality, European Union institutions never concretely challenged the role of the member states, generating a strong disappointment among the regional parties. These parties changed their attitudes and in the 1990's, adopted anti-European positions (Hepburn, 2008). Particularly interesting is the case of the Basque county. In her attempt to assess the impact of European integration on regional power, Bourne (2003) used the Basque case to demonstrate how European legislation reduced the autonomy of the region.

In this regard, there is no consensus in the literature on the effect of European Union Integration and the empowerment of regions. After Bache and Jones (2000) and Bourne (2003), the academic contributions can be grouped into four categories. In the first group we find the supporters of the idea that the EU integration process 'disempowered regions;' the second group is constituted by the supporters of the idea that the integration process effectively 'empowered regions;' in the third group there are the scholars who support the idea of the neutral effect of the integration process; finally, in the fourth group are the scholars who support the idea that the impact can be different according to the pre-existing situations and legislative activity of the regions.

Legal scholars have argued that the process of European Integration is reducing the autonomy of regions because the state monopolizes the formal representation in the European context (Bullain, 1998; Borzel, 2002). Through a different analytical lens, Anderson (1990) drew the same conclusion. He analysed the evolution of the European Regional Development Fund in Germany and Great Britain, discussing with scepticism the possibility that a strengthening of regions could undermine the power of the nation-state as fundamental gatekeeper for the development of European policies in the future: “[...] The community will not play the role of universal liberator ascribed to it in the Europe of Regions scenario. The image of strengthened regions breaking out the orbit of weakened states is too simplistic (Anderson, 1990:445).” According to Anderson, the implementation of the European Regional Development fund in Germany and Great Britain demonstrates that the perspective of a progressive empowerment of regions in the European integration process fails to take into account the solidity of the different ‘constitutional arrangements’ existent in the states. To overcome this problem, it was recommended that the EU (at the time EC) foster a regional policy flexible and ‘sensitive’ to different local situations, tweaking policies to each region. A development as such was judged unachievable by Anderson (1990).

A second group included the academics convinced that the European Union integration process was empowering regions. This position has been developed primarily in the ‘comparative regionalism’ and ‘multi-level governance’ literature (Bourne, 2003). Three arguments have been put forward in support. The first states that the new attention given to regions from the Commission after 1988, is offering regions new powerful allies with whom to claim autonomy (from a financial and administrative point of view). The second argument states that the Commission is legitimating regional actors through the development of intensive partnerships in implementing regional policies (Kohler-Koch, 1996). According to Kohler-Koch, the importance of the state is not directly challenged by the Commission and the regions, rather the increasing importance of European policies is contributing to the creation of new partnerships between public and private actors. The development of this ‘joint-venture’ is enabling the executive power, particularly at sub-national level, to penetrate society more deeply (Kohler-Koch, 1996:375). These networks are becoming increasingly independent from the central power of the state; their existence and development is the tangible proof of a slow progressive transformation of the

system of governance. The third argument, which is a direct consequence of the second, states that regions are progressively becoming the administrators of EU policies in order to support 'partnerships' and networks financed by Brussels.

A third group of theories supports the idea that the European Union has a neutral effect. This theory is supported by the inter-governmental approach to the study of international relations. In this approach, states are viewed as strong gatekeepers that hold the decision-making power in the European context (Moravcsik, 1993). The European integration process can only be analysed in the context of international relations, as a free agreement between different states. Therefore, regions can only be directly empowered by the state through 'devolution' of power.' In this sense, the European policy cannot play a direct and pre-eminent role in this process.

The last group includes theories that highlight the importance of exploring the role of European Integration in the empowerment of regions from a bottom-up approach (Smyrl, 1997). According to Smyrl, regions vary systematically, and the variation of the impact of European Policy can only be explained by examining structural differences at the sub-national level (Smyrl, 1997:288). The result of his study on European Community Regional Policy impact on Italy and France proposes a mix of results. Some regions, those that had already tried to increase their power and the efficiency of their policy, enjoyed the benefits of European policy and increased their autonomy. On the other hand, other more static regions did not enjoy these effects. The final result is that European Community Regional Policy increased the divergence among European regions.

2.3. Regional autonomy is increasing everywhere

While there is no agreement about the EU's effect on the new landscape of regional governance, there is a broad consensus on the contemporary relevance of regions in Europe (Bourne, 2003: 597). Hooghe, Schakel and Marks (2008a, b) published a review and an empirical measurement of regional powers in a double issue of *Regional and Federal studies*. They show that the power of regions has increased in all the countries subject to our analysis, with the exception of Sweden (table 1).

After their analysis, the 15 countries have been classified according to the high, medium and low decision-making power attributed to the regions. To define the

entity of regional autonomy in the decision-making process and constitutional arrangements they used – the RAI indicator (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2008a, b). The RAI, Regional Authority Index, is the sum of two indicators and it is synthetically presented for the selected country (table1).

The two indicators created to measure regional power are ‘The Self Rule’ and ‘The Shared Rule.’ ‘The Self Rule’ is defined as ‘the authority exercised by a regional government or its representatives over those who live in the region.’ In order to measure this, the ‘Institutional Depth,’ the ‘Policy Scope,’ the ‘Fiscal autonomy’ and the ‘Representation’ are considered (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2008b: 258). ‘The Shared Rule’ is defined as ‘the authority exercised by a regional government or its representatives in the country as a whole.’ In order to measure this dimension, the ‘Law Making Power,’ the ‘Executive control,’ the ‘Fiscal control,’ and ‘the Constitutional Reform Power’ are considered (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2008b: 259).

In the first group there are federal and regional states that confer important powers to their regions: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain.

[table 2]

In Austria in 1955, after the end of allied occupation, nine länder have been created. They have extensive legislative power in many areas: housing policy, poverty, land reform, labour law and public schools. The share of power between the federal state and the länder, as confirmed by the RAI index (table 1), is stable over the time.

Belgium undertook a radical reform in 1993. Under the Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehane, the country turned into a fully-fledged federal state with three autonomous regions and communities. The first article of the Belgian constitution was changed to read as follows: “Belgium is a Federal State which consists of Communities and Regions.” This was considered the best response to the perpetual tension between the Walloons and Flemish. In the regions, the elected assemblies decide territorial interests. They have a large constitutional and fiscal autonomy; they can also sign international treaties on issues within their competence.

In Germany since 1949 there are eleven länder, mirroring Austria. Germany represents the scholarly model of federation. Extensive exclusive competencies are attributed to the länder: cultural policies, education, universities, media and television, police. The länder are also responsible for the implementation of the majority of federal laws. After reunification with East Germany, another five länder have been

added to the original eleven. Germany, like Austria, has a very stable RAI index over the last 50 years (table 1).

Italy is a regional state undergoing great change, as shown by the increase of the RAI index (table 1). In Italy the debate between centralists and federalists has been central to the construction of political institutions after reunification. During the 19th century, Cavour and the centralistic wave prevailed over the federalist movement led by Cattaneo. After World War II, the new Italian Constitution recognized the existence of 20 regions, but they only became politically elected institutions in the early 1970's. There are five autonomous regions: Sicilia, Sardegna, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trentino Alto Adige and 15 other regions. The power of the 'normal' regions progressively increased; in 1997, they obtained residual administrative powers. Then, with the substantial reform of the constitution of 2001, they obtained extensive concurrent competencies with the central government: EU relations, education, health, food, sport, civil protection, town planning, ports and airports, cultural and environmental resources, transport and energy. The 'devolution' of competencies from the central state to the regions is still under discussion. There are many proposals to realize a 'fiscal federalism' using the Belgian reform of 1993 as a model.

In Spain, since the promulgation of the constitution in 1978, a long debate began about the extension of regional autonomies. It resulted in an extension of competencies of communities and regions, under the powerful influence of regions like Cataluña. Communities and regions enjoyed a degree of autonomy never allowed during Franco's dictatorship. Thanks ideological arguments, local authorities have been able to expand their powers beyond the competencies officially recognized in the constitution. In less than 30 years, Spain changed from being one of the most centralized states in the world, to the scholarly example of a regional state. The Comunidades Autonomas have extensive exclusive powers: city and regional planning, health, housing, public works, regional railways and roads, ports and airports, agriculture, fishing, environmental protection, culture, tourism, social welfare, economic development within national objectives and regional political institutions.

In the second group there are three countries that have very different characteristics: United Kingdom, France and The Netherlands (table 2). The United Kingdom has a particular organization dictated by historical events rather than a

precise political plan. There are three regions with distinctive powers: Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is difficult to define the relationship between these three regional entities with the central government; the United Kingdom is neither a wholly regional state nor a federation. Scotland and Wales have an autonomous executive accountable to a directly elected legislature. Scotland has a larger autonomy to write primary law and a different education and legal system. Since 2007, Wales has been moving in a similar direction. Concerning Northern Ireland, the powers of the local parliament are similar Scotland. However, a long history stemming from the establishment of Home Rule in 1922, created a different type of relationship with the central government. This challenging and interesting historical debate is a contested issue, even after the agreement of 1998. The other regions have limited competencies: attracting investments, infrastructures, improving skills, coordinating economic development and regeneration public policies. This low level of power explains the low RAI index attributed to the United Kingdom. However, in the presence of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we cannot consider the United Kingdom a country with low powers attributed to regions.

In France, 22 planning regions known as the 'circonscription d'action régionale' were created in 1955 in order to follow a top-down economic strategy. They were a pure administrative category. Only in 1972, did they become regions with a small and limited budget. In 1983, came the Defferre reforms and directly elected assemblies. In 2003, a new reform established the 'revolutionary' principle of the sub-national devolution. The competencies of the regions since this are: vocational training, secondary schools and public transport, regional and town planning and environment and cultural policies. There is a clear pattern to reinforce the competencies and the decision-making power of the regions (as confirmed by the RAI index increase, table 1), even if France remains a centralized state.

In the Netherlands, there is an open debate about the possibility of creating four administrative regions. At the moment the second tier of power is constituted by 12 provinces that share the following responsibilities with the central government: transport, infrastructures investment policy, regional planning, urban development, housing, culture and leisure, environmental planning.

In the third group we included Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden (table2). In these countries, regions have been instituted to deal with European Union requirements, or like in the Scandinavian countries, to improve the collection of

statistics. In Denmark, regions do not exist and 16 counties constitute the second tier of power. They have administrative powers over welfare provisions, hospitals, secondary education, nature protection, economic development, spatial planning and regional support. The Faroe Islands and Greenland have particular agreements with the central government. In Finland, 19 regions were constituted in 1993. They have residual competencies in regional planning, economic development and education. Aland Island has an autonomous statute with a directly elected assembly. In Greece and Ireland, regions have been created to deal with European Union funds, respectively in 1986 and 1987. In Portugal, five regions have been created after the dictatorship in 1979, with residual power to deal with EU funds and to direct regional development according to central government strategies. In Sweden like in Denmark, there are 21 counties with similar powers, but five regions have been created recently for statistical purposes. Also in the third group of countries, with the exception of Sweden (table1), regional power has increased dramatically over the past years. This demonstrates for these countries, a regional analysis has current value.

If public opinion is considered, the feeling of belonging to regions becomes directly correlated with the amount of autonomy given to regions (table1). The rank of the 15 countries analysed, classified by the percentage of people that affirmed belonging to regions as a geographical group (rather than local community/town, the country as a whole, Europe and the world), is consistent with RAI index (table1).

In Austria and Germany, where the power of regions and the RAI have remained constant over the years, people tend to identify much more with regions than in the rest of Europe. In Belgium and Spain, where regional autonomy grew consistently in recent years, the percentage of people who identified themselves with regions is also quite high (table 1). Denmark constitutes a peculiar exception in this model. The Danish exception can be explained by the importance of counties. Individuals likely perceive the research question as inherent to the counties, as this is the second tier of power in the country. If the top ten regional scores are examined (table1), two Danish counties occupy the third and fourth position, with values of ~40%. The medium-high score of Portugal can be explained by the high values of Southern regions (Algarve and Alentejo), where a strong identification with the regions exists. The medium score of the United Kingdom is explained by the particular status of the country; Scotland and Wales score consistently higher than the rest of the country³.

The other exceptions are constituted by Italy and The Netherlands. In Italy the low score of regional belonging can be explained by the tendency of Italians to identify with their town or local community. Regional identities are stronger in some regions (e.g., Sardinia) with a particular history and geographical position. In the Netherlands, the absence of an official regional tier of power can explain the very low identification of the population with this administrative institution.

Hooghe, Schakel and Marks (2008) confirm that regional powers after World War II increased everywhere with the exception of Sweden with their RAI (table 1). Their study constitutes empirical evidence of the growing importance of regions in the European context. The discussion of historical and institutional importance of regions, complemented by public opinion, provides the first clear support for the shift from national analysis to regional analysis. In what follows, an empirical model to test the association between regional identity and Social Capital is presented.

3. Regional identification, networks and trust: an empirical model

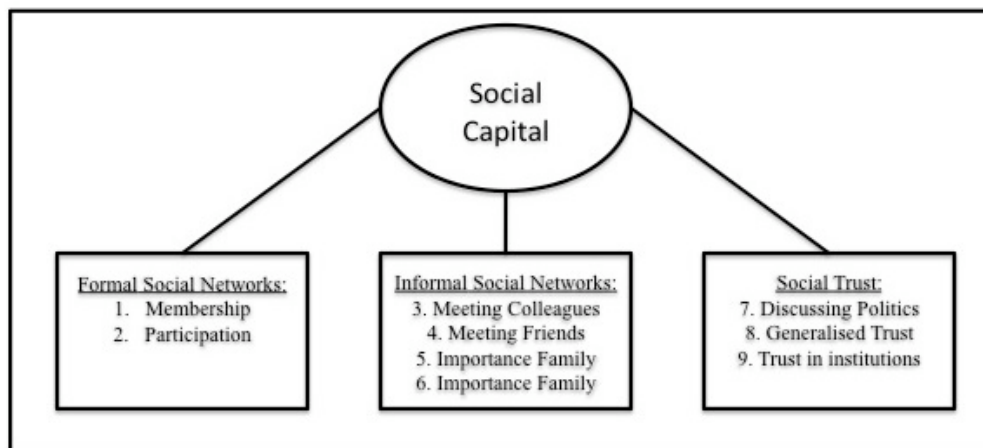
The study moves from the assumption that to measure Social Capital a model taking into account the intrinsic multidimensionality of the concept is needed. Social Capital has been defined⁴ and measured in many ways in the literature (Putnam 1993, 2000; Paxton, 1999; Costa and Kahn, 2003; Hall, 1999; Rothstein, 2001; Knack and Keefer, 1997). Putnam's original definition will be employed, which restricts Social Capital to a manageable number of dimensions. Expanding on Putnam, Van Oorschot and Art (2005) measured Social Capital starting from the same definition, but used observational data contained in the same dataset used for this study (EVS, 1999-2000). They defined Social Capital as a combination of 'Social Networks,' 'Social Trust' and 'Social Norms.'

The category 'Social Networks' included: passive and active participation in 14 types⁵ of voluntary organizations⁶; time spent with friends; the relation with family and friends; and, two indicators measuring political engagement⁷. 'Social Trust' had two sets of indicators: trust in individuals and trust in institutions⁸. 'Social Norms' referred to particular attitudinal or behavioural characteristics⁹ (Van Oorschot and Arts, 2005: 12). Differing from Putnam and Van Oorschot and Art, the 'Social Norms' component is excluded from the definition adopted in the study. The reason for excluding 'Social Norms' is that this indicator appears to be an output of Social

Capital rather than a proxy to measure it. The reduction of opportunistic behaviours described in the question is a direct consequence of a high degree of participation and trust in society, but it is not something that can be considered Social Capital. For this reason, and to avoid incurring Putnam’s problem of confusing input and output, this dimension is not an object of the study.

Three other significant deviations from Van Oorschot’s and Art’s (2005) study have also been introduced, First, we considered two dimensions of ‘Social Networks,’ dividing Formal and Informal ‘Social Networks,’ in order to conceptually separate and discuss ‘Bridging’ and ‘Bonding’ Social Capital. Second, we added the variable ‘time spent with colleagues’ in the dimension ‘Informal Social Networks.’ Third, we considered ‘Interest in Politics’ as a dimension of ‘Social Trust’ rather than one of ‘Social Networks.’ Individuals are interested in politics if they think they can improve or change their society. They believe they have agency to impact society as a whole; as a result they are more involved in collective actions. In synthesis, the measurement of Social Capital includes: ‘Formal Social Network,’ ‘Informal Social Networks’ and ‘Social Trust’ (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Social Capital Model



‘Formal Social Networks’ are defined as the involvement of people in formal associations. This dimension captures the ‘official’ engagement in social activities. The simple membership is distinguished from the active participation in associations. This distinction played an important role in the literature. Putnam (2000) described the decline of Social Capital in America through the reduction of participation in associations. According to Putnam, the corresponding increase of membership in new types of associations (e.g., environmental groups) was not able to generate the same links and connectivity among individuals. This distinction has been contested, and

many empirical models have illustrated unconvincing elements in Putnam's argument (Paxton, 1999). Membership and participation are positively correlated with the willingness to discuss politics and general trust in other individuals (table 3 and 4). Therefore, it appears that both types of formal networks have a positive impact on 'Social Trust.' This component has been defined as 'Bridging' Social Capital (Putnam, 2000).

The 'Informal Social Network' dimension is defined as the involvement in social life and the importance people attribute to informal networks. Four items are considered: the frequency of meetings with friends and colleagues outside work (to explore the involvement in social life) and the importance attributed to friends and family. This dimension has been defined by Putnam (but never measured) as 'Bonding' Social Capital.

Finally, the 'Social Trust' dimension is defined as the capacity of individuals to discuss current affairs and trust other people and institutions. This dimension captures the attitude of people in the public sphere: their willingness to discuss political issues of general interest, the propensity to trust others without knowing them, and finally the relationship with different types of institutions. In what follows, the methodology used to construct the nine Social Capital indicators (the dependent variables) and the predictor/control variables is described.

Membership and participation indexes were constructed from the answers to the following question: 'Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organisations and activity and say which, if any, do you belong to/you are currently doing unpaid work for?'¹⁰. The variable was constructed summing all the points obtained for membership. The variable is dichotomized; the value one is attributed to people that are members of, or participate in, at least one organisation, and the value zero is attributed to people who are not members of, or do not participate in any association.

The meeting colleagues index is derived from the question 'I'm going to ask how often you do certain things. Spend time with colleagues from work or profession outside the work place, every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, not at all.' The value one is attributed for the answer 'meeting colleagues every week,' the value zero is attributed for all other answers. The meeting friends index has been recoded according to the same logic of meeting colleagues. Importance in life of

friends index is derived from the question ‘how important are friends and acquaintances in your life friends? Very important, quite important, not important, not at all important.’ The value one is attributed for the answer ‘friends are very important,’ and the value zero is attributed for all the other answers. Importance of family index has been calculated according to the same logic as importance of friends.

Discussing politics index has been recoded; the original question was: ‘When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never?’ The value one has been attributed for the answer ‘frequently,’ the value zero for all others. Generalized trust index has been recoded; the original question was: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ The value one has been attributed for the answer ‘Most people can be trusted’ and zero for the answer ‘Can’t be too careful.’ Average institutional trust index has been recoded, looking at confidence in six institutions: the education system, the press, the parliament, the social security system, the health care system and the justice system. The value one has been attributed if the interviewee was confident in more than three institutions. The value zero has been attributed to all other cases.

To empirically test the importance of regions in measuring Social Capital, we used the ‘geographical belonging’ of individuals to predict the dependent variables described above. The geographical belonging is measured through the question: ‘Which of these geographical groups would you say you belong to first of all?’ We measured geographical belonging in regions against geographical belonging in all the country and locality or town. We completed the model with nine control variables to predict Social Capital. These nine predictors have been widely used in the literature and include: income, education, gender, age, religious affiliation, trust, membership, participation and social actions (lawful political actions and participation in boycotts and demonstrations).

Income is measured by ranking people on a 10-points scale. Zero indicates the lowest segment and ten the highest. Education is measured through an eight-point scale. The lowest indicates ‘inadequate and incomplete elementary education,’ and highest indicates ‘higher education upper level certificate.’ The relationship between Social Capital and education attainments, and the fascinating link between the

generation of Human and Social capital (Coleman, 1988), has been widely developed in recent years (for a complete review see: Dika and Singh, 2002).

Age is calculated from the year of birth and gender is measured by the question ‘sex of respondents.’ Religious affiliation is measured by the question ‘which religious group do you belong to?’ In the study, only Roman Catholic, Protestants and Orthodox are considered. The relationship between religious categories has always been central in Sociological analysis. Max Weber’s protestant ethic and more recent works (e.g., Smidt, 2003) have suggested the importance of religion and religious affiliation in the creation of social capital.

To measure the political actions, the follow were considered: signing a petition, joining in boycotts and attending lawful demonstrations. These three variables have been measured by the question ‘I’m going to read out some different actions that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances do it.’

3.2. Results

The model has been built to explore the following question: is feeling closer to regions as a geographical group rather than other geographic/administrative entities directly correlated with Social Capital? In this manner, the empirical analysis will complement the historic-institutional considerations in the first part of the article.

[table 3 and table 4]

Before discussing the regional hypothesis, correlations between the control variables used in our model and Social Capital will be highlighted.

Income tends to be positively correlated with Social Capital; however, for education the relationship is more complex. Higher levels of education are positively correlated with ‘Formal Social Networks,’ but negatively correlated with ‘Informal Social Networks.’ This empirical test confirms a recurrent theme in Social Capital literature: people who are highly educated tend to have a more formal participation in society, while less educated people tend to invest their time and attention in the construction of informal ties, privileging friends and family (‘Bonding Social Capital’). In terms of ‘Social trust,’ the results are less clear. People who are more educated tend to be more interested in politics and have more interpersonal trust. On

the other hand, people who are less educated tend to trust institutions. This can be explained by the greater scepticism of highly educated people with respect to the institutions of their country. Finally, having a lower level tertiary degree is more correlated with all dependent variables than having an upper level tertiary degree. Meaning, after a certain level of education people tend to have less Social Capital.

Concerning gender, men have more 'Bridging Social Capital' and tend to meet more friends and colleagues, while women correlate with a high importance attributed to family. Men tend to discuss politics more than women, but there is not significant evidence for other 'Social Trust variables.' Age is positively correlated with 'Formal Social networks' and 'Social trust' but negatively correlated with 'Informal Social Networks.'

Concerning religious affiliation, it is important to take note that Roman Catholic, Protestants and Orthodox affiliations interact differently with the variables analysed. Being Roman Catholic is negatively correlated with 'Formal Social Network' variables and positively with the importance of family. There also exists a negative correlation with 'Social Trust.' Being Protestant is positively correlated with 'Formal Social Networks' and with importance of friends. A positive correlation with generalized trust exists. Being Orthodox is negatively correlated with all 'Social networks' variables. Mixed evidence for 'Social Trust' exists: there is a negative correlation with generalized trust but a positive correlation with discussing politics. These results seem to confirm the classical 'Weberian' hypothesis of a protestant ethic.

Lawful demonstration, signing petitions and participating in demonstrations are positively correlated with 'Formal and Informal Social Networks.' Mixed evidence exists for boycotts. Lawful political actions are also positively correlated with discussing politics and generalized trust, but they are negatively correlated with trust in institutions. This demonstrates that people who are politically active tend to trust other people rather than institutions.

After discussing the control variables, the central question of our model can be analysed to examine if our original hypothesis is confirmed. The model presented shows that people who feel part of regions as a geographical group tend to have a higher membership and participation¹¹. Our model does not allow discussion of the relationship between geographical belonging and 'Informal Social Networks.' In

terms of 'Social Trust,' individuals who feel part of a region as geographical group appear to have more generalised trust than those who feel belonging to local communities or nations. In sum, those who identify in regions tend to participate in 'Formal Social Networks' (they thus have more 'bridging Social Capital) and tend to have a higher generalized trust. The differences are not large, but are significant and allow for conclusions.

The higher levels of membership, participation and generalized trust of people who feel they belong to regions can be explained with the intermediate character of regions. Meaning, regions constitute a 'secondary' geographical identity between the nation and the local community. In this regard, we can call to mind Durkheim and his focus on the importance of secondary groups (Durkheim, 1893). An efficient intermediate tier of decision-making is necessary in modern societies in order to avoid the 'alienation' of individuals. Regions are the institution that better respond to the needs of renewing civic spirit (Putnam; 2000). This 'renewal' cannot be left to the action of local communities, but rather has to be supported by institutions. Nations are too large to provide a meaningful sense of identification, and local authorities are too small to allow the individual to pursue macro-political objectives. Regions appear as the institutions that best mediate this local-global tension and provide the potential to renew engagement in society. People who identify themselves with regions are readier to have an active role in society because they understand regions are the most suitable avenue to pursue their objectives. The process of devolution from central states to regions, and the progressive empowerment of the European Union, seems to point clearly in this direction.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to give a concrete answer to the question proposed at the beginning of the paper. A comparative regional analysis of Social Capital endowment at the European level is relevant. This has been demonstrated using four theoretical and empirical arguments. It is meaningful at historical level because in many countries, regions have a richer history than nations and nations are a puzzle of a complicated historical development. The examples of Belgium, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Germany have been provided to clarify this argument. It is meaningful from a theoretical point of view as demonstrated by the emergence of a

new spatial geography and the academic debate interested supported by new European regional policies. It is meaningful from an institutional point of view, as showed by the RAI index, the power of regions increased everywhere. Also the centralistic countries have started to develop regional system of governance, to access to European funds and also to answer to the challenge proposed by the internationalisation of trade and more in general by the globalisation. It is meaningful from an empirical point of view, in fact as demonstrated in the second part of the paper, people that feel part of regions as geographical group tend to have a higher membership, participation and generalised trust than the one who feel part more of their local community or nation.

Within this framework, this article aims to invigorate interest in comparative regional measurements of Social Capital. National measurements have been important in developing the discussion of Social Capital, however expansion beyond this level is necessary. The relationship between Social Capital and other variables must be analysed in more detail in the future¹². Before constructing a new regional measurement, it is important to look at the limits of the previous analyses proposed by Beugeldijk and Van Schaik¹³ (2005). In fact, the construction of a new regional indicator will require the use of a more accurate methodology. Only in this way it will be possible to complement the previous comparative national analysis, with a new reliable regional measurement.

Table 1 Percentage of people who declare that they to feel part of regions as geographical groups, by nations and by selected regions; RAI index

Descending order	Nations	Belonging to regions EVS (1999-2000)	Last RAI (2006)	Oldest RAI (1950-1980's)	Difference First-last index	Top Ten regions	
						Regions	Belonging to regions EVS (1999-2000)
	Austria	31,0%	18.0	17.0	5.6%	GR Kriti (rest)	50,0%
	Germany West	29,3%	29.3	28.3	3.4%	DE Rheinland-Pfalz	43,4%
	Germany East	26,8%				DK Bornholms amt	40,0%
	Denmark	22,2%	10.2	4.1	59.8%	DK Ringkøbing amt	39,3%
	Belgium	20,5%	29.0	14.0	51.7%	DE Saarland	37,5%
	Spain	16,5%	22.1	10	54.8%	AT Vienna	37,0%
	Ireland	15,7%	6.0	0	100.0%	IT Sardegna	36,8%
	Portugal	14,7%	3.7	2.5	32.4%	DE Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	35,5%
	United Kingdom	13,6%	9.6	9.4	2.1%	DE Brandenburg	35,0%
	France	12,6%	16.0	6.0	62.5%	AT Oberoesterreich	34,6%
	Finland	12,2%	7.1	1.1	84.5%	Ten lower values	
	Italy	10,6%	22.7	8.4	63.0%	SE StorGöteborg	6,0%
	Greece	10,3%	10.0	1.0	90.0%	ES Murcia	5,9%
	Luxembourg	10,3%	0	0	0	NL Flevoland	5,9%
	Sweden	9,2%	10.0	13.5	-35.0%	GR Dodekanisos	5,9%
	The Netherlands	7,3%	14.5	13.5	6.9%	GB London	4,7%
						FI Lappi	4,5%
						NL Noord-Holland	4,4%
						FI Uusimaa	4,0%
						NL Gelderland	3,4%
						IT Campania	2,7%

Source: Author's elaboration from EVS 1999-2000

Table 2 Institutional frameworks of European regions

Country	N	Name	Power of regions	Year constitution	Competencies
Austria	9	Länder	High	1955 (after allied occupation)	Extensive legislative powers: housing, Health Policy, Poverty, Land reform, labour law, public schools
Belgium	3	Regions	High	1993 (constitutional reform)	Institutions typical of modern federations: directly elected assemblies, a senate representing territorial interests, fiscal federalism, constitutional autonomy, international treaties on issue of their competence.
DK	16	Counties	Low	1950 (modified in 1970)	Administrative powers in welfare provisions, hospitals, secondary education, nature protection, economic development, spatial planning and regional support
Finland	19	Regions	Low	1993	Regional planning, economic development and education
France	22	Regions	Medium	1955	Few powers (mostly concentrated in departments) before 2003. After 2003 regional competences increased substantially with the establishment of the principle of sub-national devolution. Competencies: vocational training, secondary schools and school transport, regional and town planning, the environment, culture
Germany	16	Länder	High	1949 (after allied occupation)	Extensive competencies: Culture, Education, universities, television, local government, police
Greece	13	Regions	Low	1986	Implement programs funded by EU
Ireland	8	Regions	Low	1987	Implement programs funded by EU
Italy	20	Regions	High	1970	Consolidation of regional power, reform 2001. Extension of concurrent competencies. Problem in the share of power. Evolution toward a federation?
Luxembourg	1		-	-	-
The Netherlands	12	Provinces	Medium	1851	Debate on the creation of regions. Shared authority with the central government for transport, infrastructure, investment policy, regional planning, urban development, housing, culture and leisure, environmental planning
Portugal	5	Regions	Low	1979	Responsible for regional development on behalf of the central government
Spain	17	Comunidades Autonomas	High	1978	Extensive powers: city and regional planning, health, housing, public works, regional railways and roads, ports and airports, agriculture, fishing, environmental protection, culture, tourism, social welfare, economic development within national objectives, regional political institutions
Sweden	8	Regions	Low	-	Main powers for the 21 counties. Eight regions have been created recently for statistical purposes.
United Kingdom	11	Regions	Medium	1964	Extensive powers: Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The other regions have limited competencies: attracting investments, infrastructure, improving skills, coordinating economic development and regeneration public policies

Table 3 Logistic regression models explaining Formal and Informal Social Networks
From Education, Age, Gender, Religion, Lawful Political Actions, Geographical Belonging, Generalized Trust

	Memb.	Part.	Meeting Coll.	Meeting Friends	Import. Family	Import. Friends	M (SD)
Income (Higher bracket omitted)							4.76 (2.553)
Lowest Segment	-0.654* (0.093)	-0.471* (0.94)	0.038 (0.118)	0.347* (0.086)	-1.117* (0.132)	-0.011 (0.085)	
Education (Higher education – upper-level tertiary certificate omitted)							4.51 (2.133)
Inadequately completed elementary education (lower segment)	-0.899* (0.085)	-1.019* (0.097)	0.006 (0.135)	0.655* (0.078)	0.208*** (0.112)	0.358* (0.077)	
Higher education – lower-level tertiary certificate (segment seven)	0.205* (0.076)	0.111* (0.034)	0.053 (0.088)	0.394* (0.069)	0.209** (0.104)	0.366* (0.067)	
Gender (Male/Female)							1.54 (0.498)
Gender (female omitted)	0.166* (0.032)	0.193* (0.034)	0.508* (0.044)	0.215* (0.031)	-0.509* (0.44)	-0.062** (0.030)	
Age	0.002* (0.001)	0.005* (0.001)	-0.38* (0.002)	-0.31* (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.010* (0.001)	44.966 (17.181)
Religion (Other religions omitted)							2.81 (2.732)
Roman Catholic	-0.747* (0.125)	-0.608* (0.126)	-0.187 (0.167)	0.051 (0.119)	0.288*** (0.159)	-0.152 (0.116)	
Church of England (protestant)	0.336* (0.009)	-0.355* (0.128)	-0.192 (0.171)	0.161 (0.122)	0.165 (0.163)	0.212*** (0.119)	
Orthodox	-1.221* (0.129)	-1.005* (0.131)	0.214 (0.172)	-0.079 (0.122)	-0.173 (0.162)	-0.409* (0.120)	
Lawful political actions							1.83 (0.815)
Petition (Would never do omitted)							

Petition (Have done)	0.621*	0.732*	0.107	0.409*	0.333*	0.257*	
	(0.048)	(0.054)	(0.070)	(0.046)	(0.067)	(0.046)	
Boycotts (Would never do omitted)							2.47 (0.661)
Boycotts (Have done)	0.155**	-0.141*	0.038	0.177*	-0.163***	0.109***	
	(0.067)	(0.064)	(0.083)	(0.062)	(0.092)	(0.60)	
Demonstration (Would never do omitted)							2.15 (0.769)
Demonstration (Have done)	0.417*	0.433*	0.126***	0.124**	0.015	-0.28	
	(0.051)	(0.053)	(0.069)	(0.048)	(0.070)	(0.048)	
Geographical Belonging (nation omitted)							2.05 (1.220)
Locality or town	-0.042*	-0.015*	-0.19	-0.81	0.071	0.012**	
	(0.072)	(0.075)	(0.91)	(0.69)	(0.095)	(0.006)	
Region	0.094***	0.016**	-0.69	-0.028	0.112	0.012***	
	(0.081)	(0.014)	(0.104)	(0.077)	(0.107)	(0.007)	
Trust (Most people can be trusted omitted)	-0.402*	-0.233*	-0.107**	-0.271*	-0.15	-0.337*	0.296 (0.456)
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.48)	(0.034)	(0.049)	(0.033)	
Constant	1.224*	-0.262	-0.91	1.019*	2.076*	0.354**	
	(0.170)	(0.170)	(0.221)	(0.160)	(0.227)	(0.157)	
-2 Log Likelihood	23619.940	21396.287	13862.417	25869.246	14630.678	26195.987	
Nagelkerke R Square	0.263	0.144	0.121	0.117	0.061	0.084	
Unweighted number of observations	20252	19762	16086	20075	20159	20155	

NOTE: Standard errors are in parenthesis

*p<.01; **p<.05; ***p<.001

Source: Author's elaboration from EVS 1999-2000

Table 4 Logistic Regression Models explaining Social Trust
From Education, Age, Gender, Religion, Lawful Political Actions, Geographical Belonging, Membership and Participation in Associations

	Politics	Trust	Institutions	M (SD)
Income (Higher bracket omitted)				4.76 (2.553)
Lowest Segment	-0,111 (0.107)	-0.516* (0.091)	-0.072 (0.087)	
Sixth segment	-0.180** (0.099)		-0.147*** (0.080)	
Education (Higher education – upper-level tertiary certificate omitted)				4.51 (2.133)
Inadequately completed elementary education (lower segment)	-1.496* (0.113)	-0.410* (0.087)	0.622* (0.081)	
Higher education – lower-level tertiary certificate (segment seven)	-0.440* (0.077)	0.180** (0.070)	0.226* (0.069)	
Gender (Male/Female)				1.54 (0.498)
Gender (female omitted)	0.408* (0.040)	0.022 (0.033)	-0.017 (0.031)	
Age	0.023* (0.001)	0.006* (0.01)	0.002** (0.01)	44.966 (17.181)
Religion (Other religions omitted)				2.81 (2.732)
Roman Catholic	0.321*** (0.173)	-0.261** (0.127)	-0.147 (0.123)	
Church of England (protestant)	0.189 (0.176)	0.510* (0.129)	0.388* (0.125)	
Orthodox	0.535* (0.177)	-0.469* (0.132)	-0.595* (0.127)	
Lawful political actions				

Petition (Would never do omitted)				1.83 (0.815)
Petition (Have done)	0.273* (0.064)	0.222* (0.052)	-0.098** (0.048)	
Boycotts (Would never do omitted)				2.47 (0.661)
Boycotts (Have done)	0.393* (0.071)	0.492* (0.063)	-0.042 (0.062)	
Demonstration (Would never do omitted)				2.15 (0.769)
Demonstration (Have done)	0.613* (0.061)	0.159* (0.052)	-0.123** (0.050)	
Geographical Belonging (nation omitted)				2.05 (1.220)
Locality or town	-0.073 (0.086)	0.087** (0.073)	0.020** (0.071)	
Region	0.049 (0.096)	0.099** (0.082)	0.002** (0.001)	
Independent variables				
Membership (Membership omitted)	-0.059 (0.051)	-0.328* (0.042)	-0.231* (0.040)	0.476 (0.499)
Participation (participation omitted)	-0.180* (0.050)	-0.079* (0.042)	0.027 (0.514)	0.258 (0.437)
Constant	-1.579* (0.019)	-0.803* (0.015)	-0.256* (0.015)	
-2 Log Likelihood	17174.371	22272.276	24211.331	
Nagelkerke R Square	0.106	0.147	0.063	
Unweighted number of observations	20225	19762	18316	

NOTE: Standard errors are in parenthesis

*p<.01; **p<.05; ***p<0.10

Source: Author's elaboration from EVS 1999-2000

¹ Beugelsdijk and Van Schaik (2005) approached Social Capital analysis from a regional perspective. The aim of their two papers (they are practically identical) was to test Putnam's hypothesis of the existence of a correlation between economic development and cultural factors. The authors conclude that extending Putnam's hypothesis to the rest of Europe is possible. The model tested Putnam's hypothesis in 54 regional cases. These articles offer an interesting methodological approach and a good basis to discuss the importance of a regional perspective in Social Capital analyses, but they present at the same time many drawbacks, which have to be discussed in order to improve the measurement at regional level. First of all, the choice of the dataset appears questionable. In fact the authors selected EVS (1990) wave instead of the EVS (1999-2000). It reduced the possible number of regions sampled. Secondly the small number of regions considered in the sample and thirdly some of the regions sampled presented a very small number of observations: Bremen 26, Hamburg 25, Saarland 35 and Sardegna 20. These three limitations made the ranking of regions questionable. For example the south of Italy and Sicily ranked higher than Lombardia and North-West, this is completely opposite to Putnam's results. There is a strong contradiction between this result and the fact that the authors confirm Putnam's result. In fact in Putnam's analysis Social Capital is much higher in northern regions.

² The debate is discussed in section 2.2.

³ Northern Ireland is excluded from the sample.

⁴ Adler and Kwon (2002) proposed a comprehensive review of the most important definitions.

⁵ The 14 types of voluntary organisations are: Welfare Service for Elderly, handicapped or deprived people; religious or church organisations; education, arts; music or cultural activities; trade unions; political parties or groups; local community-action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality; Third world development or human rights; conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights; professional associations; youth work; sports or recreation; women's groups; peace movement; health; other groups.

⁶ Trade Unions and religious organisations are not included because in Sweden and Denmark the membership to these types of organisations is necessary to be eligible for many social benefits.

⁷ *"One asks respondents to tell whether they discuss politics with friends, and another whether they follow politics in the media. We added up the answers to both questions to form the scale for political engagement, which runs from low to high"* (Van Oorschot and Arts, 2005: 11).

⁸ Paxton made the same distinction.

⁹ Social Norms are measured through the answers to the question: *'Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between...Claiming state benefits you are not entitled to...cheating on tax if you have the chance...lying in your own interest...'* This measure refers to particular attitudinal behavioural characteristics of people themselves (Van Oorschot and Art, 2005:12).

¹⁰ The associations included are: Welfare, Cultural, Political, Local Community action, Dvp/Human rights, Environment, Professional, Youth Work, Recreational, Women's Groups, Peace movements, Health and other interests.

¹¹ The difference with national identification is much more consistent for membership rather than for participation.

¹² A deeper discussion of new potential theoretical and empirical analysis is provided by the author in the article Social Capital and Equality: Tocqueville's legacy (Ferragina, 2009).

¹³ See note 1.

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