

INTRODUCTION

ISTVÁN GYÖRGY TÓTH

This book, the second in the series, seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the European societies of the enlarged European Union. Unlike TÁRKI's first European Social Report, however, this issue concentrates on "soft" rather than "hard" facts. Whereas the previous edition¹ focused on demographic, labour market, income distribution and housing characteristics, this book concentrates on the perceptions, opinions and attitudes of Europeans. From the wide range of potential issues we selected those fields that are most relevant to economic activity. People choose, decide and cooperate on the basis of their preferences, and are driven by cultural background, values, traditions and the like. This is the reason for the choice of such topics as attitudes to welfare, trust, risk, self-reliance, opinions on the role of knowledge, conscious consumption, attitudes to getting ahead in society, etc.

Ideally, the best source would have been a single, pan-European data set that covers all these issues. However, there is no such single source. Instead, we tried to collect data from different sources that might contain at least some of the relevant questions/variables. Fortunately, there is a wealth of various high-quality data sets that we can pick and choose from. Among these numerous international comparative social science data sets we had the privilege to analyse various waves of the European Social Survey (ESS), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the World Values Survey (WVS), the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) and the Eurobarometer (EB).²

These data sets are all the product of carefully designed international research exercises, and have already undergone a detailed harmonization process. Still, the various surveys are not totally consistent with one another, and so we had to invest a great deal of effort in making them so – at least at the level of analysis presented in the various chapters. Part of this harmonization was carried out by TÁRKI staff, but the authors, too (who represent a good selection of the TÁRKI social research network in Hungary), put a great deal of effort into common definitions and understanding of the individual variables.

Still, this is not a single-authored book: research questions, applied methods and interpretations of the findings reflect various personalities, methodological tastes, etc. However, it is hoped that the current selection and combination of issues, data sets and methods adds a clear value-added to the already existing research on the topics.

Though it is hard to summarize the collection in an "executive summary", here we attempt to provide a loose sketch of the main findings:

- There is a great deal of heterogeneity in the attitudes of various segments within Europe. Some value clusters reflect different phases of economic development (differentiating between better-off and less well-off countries), regions (East–West–South–Central–North) and political heritage ("old" and "new" member states).
- Some of these divisions loosely correlate (such as political divisions or divisions by affluence of nations), but sometimes they are cross-cutting (such as affluence and religious differences, which are particularly relevant in terms of values and attitudes).
- Differences in attitude correspond, in some cases, to an East–West division (or, to put it more accurately, between the "old" and the "new" member states of the European Union). This division may be due to the different economic levels of the two blocs of countries, but it may also be due to their divergent political heritage.
- In other instances, attitudes seem to be distinguished by a less crude geographical pattern. The chapters in this book seek to identify these differences along geographical lines (differentiating between North, West, South, East and Central Europe) or, alternatively, according to the type of welfare regime: Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, Mediterranean, post-socialist or Continental. Sometimes the divisions seem to correspond more to religious–territorial divisions, separating Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox denominations.

¹ TÁRKI European Social Report 2008, 130 pages, downloadable from www.tarki.hu/en/publications/SR/2008/index.html

² For a short description of the databases used, please see the annex to this book.

The first three chapters of the book are about inequality (in)tolerance and perceived/expected state responses to economic inequality. The major findings of these three chapters can be summarized as follows:

- There is a fairly loose correlation between the perceived and the actual level of inequality (Chapter 1). In some countries (e.g. Hungary) people's perceptions of inequality are apparently much higher than the level of income dispersion actually measured, while in other countries (e.g. the UK) there is more tolerance of inequality, despite the apparently higher level of measured differences in those countries.
- When comparing intolerance to income inequality across countries, we find a markedly lower level of acceptance of inequality in the post-socialist bloc than in other European countries.
- However, as some surveys show, when a "price tag" is placed on inequality, the level of intolerance may decrease. In other words, when statements about unacceptable inequality are juxtaposed alongside statements about the need for income differentials to stimulate economic development, people tend to back down and become more pragmatic in their acceptance of inequality.
- Turning to evaluation of the involvement of the state in various welfare and inequality-reducing activities, we present somewhat similar findings (Chapters 2 and 3). While we find that the expectations of state activity are higher in post-socialist countries, it is not entirely clear whether this is a result of historical heritage or if it can simply be derived from poor performance on the part of the actual governments.
- In any case, expectations of better/greater state involvement do not seem to correspond to the actual size of governments, except if we regard as large both the size of European governments and the "demand" for their activities (which would certainly be the case if Europeans were to be compared to US citizens).
- The fact that, in general, there is a high expectation of the state makes it difficult to observe social cleavages within countries. In general, the "usual suspects" apply: labour market status, income and wealth seem to have explanatory power, as do people's (subjective) evaluations of their material prospects.
- However, culture also matters: cross-country differences can reasonably be suspected as due to cultural/institutional differences, rather than purely to compositional differences along various socio-economic dimensions. One interesting finding in this respect concerns our evaluation of the acceptance of "undeserved" incomes. East–West divisions appear marked in this respect.

The next four chapters are about individual attitudes towards others (trust), work/leisure preferences, conscious consumption and attitude to risk (personal preferences regarding entrepreneurial/employee status). These four chapters are grouped together, since all of them are about important preferences being at the heart of economic activity. The major findings can be summarized as follows:

- Social capital (which is an indispensable element of cooperation between economic actors, having major consequences for the organization of production and services, as well as for governance and citizenship) has four major components: trust (in others and in institutions), network capital, participation activities and norms shaping cooperation, as is described in Chapter 4.
- The study reinforces previous findings of a higher level of all types of social capital in the Nordic countries, and a lower level in the South and in the post-socialist part of Europe. The Scandinavian countries are better equipped with all forms of social capital (various forms of trust are at a higher level; networking and participation are more widespread; norms drive altruistic behaviour; there is greater actual participation in various organizations). Southern Europe shows fewer of these virtues, and the post-socialist countries seem to be much less cohesive in this respect.
- When analysing the "balance" between the various types of trust, an excessive emphasis on family and friendship relationships (as opposed to institutional and political trust) can be viewed as a potential sign of "amoral familism",

which seems to be present in several countries (e.g. Poland, Romania and Italy), while a different type of unbalance (high generalized trust with low particularistic trust) seems to be present in the Netherlands.

- Analysing the distribution of generalized trust in socio-demographic categories, we found that, in almost every country, women trust their fellow human beings more than do men, and the level of generalized trust is very balanced across age groups, although there are countries where the elderly are significantly more trustful than the other cohorts (France and the UK), while Poland is characterized by a trustful youth. There is a positive correlation between the level of education and the level of generalized trust. Also the unemployed are less trustful than are employees and entrepreneurs (and in the Netherlands entrepreneurs are especially trustful).
- Preferences for work and leisure are important determinants of the time allocation of households in the various European countries (Chapter 5). The weight attached to work as a central value is higher in a fairly heterogeneous group of countries (Malta, Italy, Austria and Latvia), while greater importance is attached to leisure in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland and Sweden). This division does not seem to show a strong association with actual activity rates, leaving the way open to various explanations to do with behaviour and attitudes towards labour market participation.
- A high weight attached to work does not necessarily mean that people consider it bad. Were the role of work to figure less prominently in their lives, the citizens of the post-socialist part of the enlarged EU would like this the least. This provides a warning of the potential prevalence of certain special framing effects: in some social contexts, work may be viewed as a means of self-fulfilment, but in other contexts as a means of survival.
- The different attitudes towards the importance of work are partly explained by economic circumstances. When asked about their willingness to work more for higher salaries, people in the new post-transition member states tend to answer more in favour of the “yes” option than people in other parts of the European Union.
- This “money matters” tendency can also be observed in consumption preferences (Chapter 6). While price is reported to be important throughout Europe, there is a significantly higher proportion of price-concerned people in the Eastern European countries than elsewhere (in addition, aesthetic concerns play a greater role than quality for them). Quality seems to be the most important concern of people in the Mediterranean region.
- The potential reaction of people to problems of quality with consumer goods (most notably, boycotts in reaction to food scares) seems to depend linearly on education (the higher educated being more conscious) but non-linearly on age (people in their middle years show more concern in Scandinavian, Continental and Anglo-Saxon countries).
- Boycotting and other measures of consumption consciousness seem to be embedded in a more general climate of active citizenship. The analysis in this chapter highlights the fact that active and conscious consumption may be part of a broader attitude towards democratic opinion formation and behaviour.
- When analysing risk attitude in terms of a potential employment choice (between employee status and entrepreneurship), the geographical patterns of attitudes appear much less clear cut. The rate of potential entrepreneurs and the rate of actual entrepreneurs do not correspond closely to one another. If anything, the broad regional classification (North–South–East–West–Central) holds true to some extent. Entrepreneurial inclination and the proportion of potential entrepreneurs (as defined in the chapter) is lowest in the Scandinavian countries and highest in the Mediterranean group.
- In each of the countries studied, by far the greatest motivation for respondents to choose entrepreneurship as a potential future trajectory is a desire to become independent. The second most important motivating factor is to improve income prospects – something that is mentioned most frequently in the new member states (apart from Slovenia).

- The main motivation for choosing employee status is job security (highest in Cyprus, lowest in Lithuania and Hungary) and an acknowledged lack of entrepreneurial skills (lowest in Greece and the UK and highest in the new member states). The third item for *not* choosing independent employment is risk aversion, in the form of fear of failure of the enterprise (mostly in the heterogeneous group of countries of the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Austria, France, Malta and Hungary).

The final three chapters of the book are devoted (in one way or another) to views on getting ahead in society. First, there is an analysis of the value of knowledge and skills in getting ahead; this is followed by an assessment of the perception of various norms; and then, finally, the perception and evaluation of corruption is presented.

- Opinions as to the role of scientific knowledge in society differ widely across Europe, despite the fact that the level of scientific competence is fairly high everywhere (Chapter 8). Attitudes to scientific advance seem to be governed more by cultural/institutional differences than by level of knowledge or skills. Much the same holds true for inclination to learn a foreign language: while, as might be expected, people who live in countries that speak world languages seem to speak fewer second languages, more than one person in five in Portugal, Hungary and Bulgaria does not speak a second language and does not even wish to learn.
- While it is widely assumed that educational attainment (together with hard work) is an important element in getting ahead in society, the extent to which this assumption is shared by the respondents varies across European societies. Education is valued more in the West than in the East (despite the fact that, in certain cases, the returns to education are much higher in countries that belong to the latter group).
- Family background is considered to be a very important factor in getting ahead in some post-socialist countries, the Southern group of countries and Austria. It is important to note, however, that there is not always a high correlation between the socio-economic status of pupils' parents and the scientific knowledge/skills performance of the students. That is, opinions on getting ahead may be driven by other factors, such as the legitimacy of the Eastern and the Southern European social inequality systems.
- Opinions about claiming "undeserved" state support or about the under-declaration of taxable income may be treated as proxies for norm keeping and norm breaking (Chapter 9). The values of the "norm conformance index" vary greatly, with the highest values in Cyprus, Sweden, Malta and Luxembourg and the lowest in Austria, Portugal, Latvia and Hungary (though the ordering of the different elements that go to make up this index varies).
- Notions of the acceptability of "illegal" or "grey" practices are not always consistent. While, for example, in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy (and, to some extent, the Netherlands), there is general disapproval of tax evasion, people also tend to be more tolerant of unreported (for tax purposes) work.
- Self-interest-driven violation of the norms (i.e. following dishonest practices) is more tolerated in Greece, Belgium, Hungary and Italy (where people indulge in these practices), but is far less acceptable in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, the UK and Spain. To some extent, this appears to tie in with perceptions of job (in)security (among other things).
- Chapter 10 shows the perception of corruption to be markedly higher in the post-socialist countries (with the exception of Estonia) than in the "old" EU member states (with the exception of Greece). This "index of corruption perception", when combined with the Transparency International corruption index, shows Greece and Romania to be the countries with the highest level of corruption perception, while Finland has the lowest level.
- Active (asking for bribes) and passive (accepting bribes) corruption in public life are both strongly condemned in most countries (though with differences), and passive corruption is less rejected in some places. When the "self-reported" practice of active and passive corruption is analysed, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Greece and Estonia seem to show the highest penetration.

- When comparing perceived levels of corruption with the acceptance of it, Slovaks, Czechs and Estonians seem to show signs of partial “blindness” (their perceptions are lower than the practice), while Slovenes and Hungarians (among others) appear slightly “oversensitive” (the practice is rarer than perceptions would suggest).
- When comparing the tolerance and the penetration of corruption, the level of practice seems to be higher than the level of acceptance in the Czech Republic, Poland and Greece, while in France, Belgium and the UK the index of corruption tolerance would allow more corruption in practice than is actually measured.

This book makes no final judgements on any of these issues. Our aim is to present – in a unified structure – comparisons between the economic attitudes of Europeans living in countries with very different cultural heritages, geographies and institutions. We hope that the reader finds our results thought-provoking. We trust that this book promotes a better understanding of the heterogeneity of European cultures.

The examined countries

AT	Österreich
BE	Belgique/Belgie
BG	Bulgaria
CH	Switzerland
CR	Croatia
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Deutschland
DK	Danmark
EE	Estonia
ES	España
FI	Suomi
FR	France
GR	Ellada
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
NL	Nederland
NO	Norway
MT	Malta
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sverige
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovak Republic
TR	Turkey
UK	United Kingdom

List of the countries surveyed and the abbreviations used

Colouring of the names of the individual countries:

Green: EU member states before 2004 plus Malta and Cyprus

Red: post-socialist countries becoming EU member states in 2004 and 2007 respectively

Black: not an EU member state at present