EQUALSOC: A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE ON SOCIAL RESEARCH IN EUROPE

EQUALSOC, a network of research centres, including a large number of well-known scholars, from many parts of Europe funded by the EU, has started its activities in September 2005. By fostering cross-national research and training collaboration on the theme of social cohesion and its determinants, and by an active dissemination agenda towards other scientists and actors in national and European policy, the institutes within EQUALSOC aim to improve the level of social research and to strengthen the ties both among themselves and to other research departments in Europe.

The central focus will be on social cohesion and its dependence on social differentiation, assessing the relationships between the growing importance of knowledge in the economy and the different chances that individuals and groups experience with respect to the quality of life in Europe. The central emphasis will be on cross-national and cross-temporal research on issues such as inequality, mobility, the changing patterns of work and family formation and the increasing role of multiculturalism. The analysis of how change in such respects influence the conditions for women and men, social classes and ethnic groups will be particularly important.

In this newsletter you can read more about the partner institutes, the themes we cover, and the way we aim to link social research with social and public policy in Europe. We are convinced that EQUALSOC will lead to many important research findings, theory developments, and policy-relevant knowledge!

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EQUALSOC will study social cohesion in the context of the labour market, income differentiation, education and training, family and social networks, social-cultural inequalities, social trust, and associability. It will stimulate high quality comparative European research on social cohesion and its determinants; encourage the development of additional research centres; provide an infrastructure for training the rising generation of young researchers in the skills of comparative research; and facilitate access to the most recent results of research for the wider research community and for policy makers.

The central focus is on social cohesion and its dependence on social differentiation, assessing the relationships between the growing importance of knowledge in the economy, the different chances that individuals and groups experience with respect to the quality of life, and social cohesion. It will explore how far differential life chances reinforce differences between social categories - e.g. gender, class and ethnicity - and the role of inter-generational inheritance processes in sustaining such differences over time.

It will assess the implications of social inequalities and social differentiation for social cohesion at the micro, meso and macro levels, including the effects of institutional differences and the scope for policy intervention. The network will mobilise leading researchers across Europe in economics, political science, social policy and sociology. The structure of the network consists of six thematic research groups. However, in addition to group activities, many initiatives will be organized bridging two or more groups.
Research Groups

Employment and the Labour Market (coordinator: Duncan Gallie, Nuffield College, Oxford; duncan.gallie@nuffield.oxford.ac.uk)

The work of the network will focus on two broad, but closely interrelated themes: (1) The 'Knowledge-Based Economy' and Skill Development and (2) Changing Work Patterns, Social Polarisation and Risks of Marginalisation. Topics that will be covered are the changing role of skills on the labour market; skills mismatch across Europe, and the convergence or polarisation in labour market conditions, such as flexible work, job control, and unemployment.

Income Distribution, Consumption, and Income Mobility (coordinator: Brian Nolan, Economic and Social Research Institute Dublin; Brian.Nolan@esri.ie)

Inequality in income and living standards is directly affected by economic change and is in turn a key influence on social cohesion. Research under this theme will focus on the implications of patterns of economic change for the distribution of income, consumption and living standards, and how this works through dynamically for individuals and families over time.

The first aim will be to strengthen links between research on inequality and the "macro"-economics of growth and employment. More specifically, the relationships between aggregate economic growth and the incomes of households will be examined, as well as factors which may be critical in mediating the impact of globalisation.

Intergenerational transmission of income (and its cross-national dissimilarities) will be another research focus. Links will be made with research on intergenerational transmission by sociologists in terms of education and social class.

Education, Social Mobility and Social Cohesion (coordinator: Walter Müller, Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung (MZES); wmueller@sowi.uni-mannheim.de)

This research group will investigate if, to what extent and how educational opportunities and choices are unevenly distributed among different social classes, generations, sexes and ethnic groups in contemporary European societies. Another set of important questions concerns the gain that individuals and society have from education. To what extent do different types and levels of education affect individuals' life chances, in particular provide secure and profitable employment, protect against unemployment, poverty and other social risks, and enable advantageous occupational and mobility chances?

Family and Social Networks (coordinator: Chiara Saraceno, University of Torino; chiara.saraceno@unito.it)

Research of this research group will focus a) on the implications of the changing family-work balance as expressed by women’s labour force participation for work organisation, for family formation and organisation, for welfare state arrangements; b) on the varieties and changes of social networks in crucial phases of the individuals’ and household’s life cycle, with a specific attention for their impact over time on the individuals’ and households’ life chances.

Social and Cultural Differentiation (coordinator: Yannick Lemel, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS); lemel@ensae.fr)

Research will focus on the consequences of economic growth and the knowledge-based society on the issues of social cohesion related to the expansion of social groups less integrated than others inside the core of European societies and on the closures that could develop consequently. More specifically, this group will examine (1) the role of ethnicity in issues of social stratification, (2) urban inequalities and social exclusion, (3) cultural and life style differentiation.

Trust, Associations and Legitimacy (coordinator: Jelle Visser, Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS); Jelle.Visser@uva.nl)

Mutual trust, associational life and the legitimacy of the societal and political order all contribute to determine the level and nature of social cohesion. By combining micro, meso and macro perspectives, this research group will study employment union membership and associability, the potential conflict between welfare state retrenchment and social capital and social trust, and social cohesion in the light of political attitudes.

For further information on the research programme, the partner institutes, information for students and policy makers and upcoming events, please have a look at our website www.equalsoc.org. Eventually the website will also function as an important source of information for policy makers, as well as other interested researchers.
The Economic and Social Research Institute is Ireland's leading centre for applied research in the social sciences. The ESRI is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1960, with the mission of bringing the latest thinking in economics and the social sciences to the actual and potential problems of Irish society. Organisational goals of the ESRI are academic excellence, objectivity, relevance to policy, and widespread dissemination of results. The ESRI is funded by commissioned research projects, a grant-in-aid from the Irish government, membership subscriptions, sponsorship from the corporate sector and sales of publications. Key researchers include: Christopher Whelan, Brian Nolan, Philip O’Connell, Richard Layte, Helen Russell, Emer Smyth, and Tony Fahey.

The Mannheim Centre for European Social Research is an interdisciplinary research institute of the University of Mannheim. It is Germany's largest university based social science research centre and is among Europe's leading centres for the comparative study of the development and integration of the European societies and the European political systems. It is affiliated to the faculty of social sciences (University of Mannheim), which ranks at the top (place 1) in the field of sociology and political science in Germany according to several national and international rankings. Key researchers include Josef Brüderl, Jan van Deth, Hartmund Esser, Markus Gangl, Franz Kraus, Walter Müller, and Heinz-Herbert Noll.

Since its establishment in 1972 the Centre's principal objective has been to study the adequacy of social policies. Its research is mainly based on large-scale socio-economic surveys of households in Belgium and Flanders. The Centre seeks to link developments in the distribution of welfare and poverty to broader socio-demographic and economic trends, and to explain the actual and possible role government policies can play in this regard. For this purpose a micro-simulation model (MISIM) was developed at the Centre. Key researchers include Bea Cantillon, Lieve de Lathouwer, Joris Ghysels, Ive Marx, Karel van den Bosch, and Gerline Verbist.

The CNRS (National Scientific Research Centre/ Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) is a state-funded scientific organization under the authority of the French Ministry of Education and Research. Key researchers include Alain Chenu, Michel Forsé, Marie Duru-Bellat, Olivier Galland, and Yannick Lemel, Tomas Piketty, Serge Paugam, Roxane Silberman, and Louis-André Vallet.

Nuffield College, Oxford

Nuffield is the specialist social science college of the University of Oxford, founded in 1937. It has particular strengths in Economics, Politics and Sociology. The College has a strong tradition of quantitative social science, making extensive use of large-scale data sets (both cross-sectional and longitudinal). Key researchers include Sir Tony Atkinson, Richard Breen, Geoffrey Evans, Duan Gallie, John H. Goldthorpe and Anthony Heath.

The Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) conducts research on questions related to living conditions, welfare, social inequality, social policy and labour market policy. SOFI has six Professorships in economics, sociology and social policy, 15 post-doctoral researchers, around 30 doctoral students, and a support staff of five persons. Research at SOFI is organised within three research divisions: labour economics, level of living and social policy. Key researchers include Anders Björklund, Robert Erikson, Jan O. Jonsson, Walter Korpi, Michael Tåhlin and Sten-Åke Stenberg.

Unimib has been established in 1998, simultaneously to the birth of the second state university of Milan, that is to say the University of Milano Bicocca. Currently 44 official scholars belong to it, of which 17 are full Professors, 12 associate Professors, and 15 researchers. The common commitment of scholars working at UNIMIB is to carry out theoretically informed empirical studies, using advanced quantitative and qualitative social research techniques. Key researchers include Antonio Schizzerotto, Paolo Barbieri, Maurizio Pisati, and Emilio Reyneri.

The University of Pampeu Fabre, Barcelona

The UPF is a public Catalan university, founded in 1990. The UPF’s economics department is ranked among the top in Europe and the Political and Social Science department is ranked among the best in Southern Europe. Within the politi-
cal and social sciences department, main research fields include public policies and regulation, comparative social policy and welfare states, research on social inequalities and poverty, demography and the family, labour markets and employment. Key researchers include Gösta Esping-Andersen, María José González, Javier Polavieja, Sebastian Sarasa and Ernesto Villanueva.

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**

Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tartu was founded in 1992. The faculty includes the following departments: Journalism and Social Communication, Political Sciences, Public Administration, Psychology, Semiotics, Sociology and Social Policy. Key researchers include Raul Eamets, Dagmar Kutsar, Anu Laas, Kaia Philips, Kadi Roosma, and Avo Trumm.

**UNIVERSITY OF TORINO**

The Department of Social Sciences, one of the largest in Italy, includes sociologists belonging to four faculties in the University of Turin: Political Sciences, Education, Literature and Philosophy, Economics. The Department organizes a Ph. D. program on comparative social research. Key researchers include Chiara Saraceno, Nicola Negri, Carmen Belloni, Manuela Olagnero, Nicoletta Bosco, Manuela Naldini, and Filippo Barbera.

**UNIVERSITY OF TRENTO**

The Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento has carried out cutting-edge research often relying upon innovative techniques of field research such as panel studies, content analysis and, more recently, network analysis. The Department has successfully attracted both national and international funds in 23 highly competitive application processes. Key researchers include Ivano Bison, Antonio Cobalti, Mario Diani, and Giuseppe Sciortino.

**WZB, BERLIN**

The Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (Social Science Research Center, Berlin) is structured into four research areas which are composed of a total of eight research units and seven working groups, with around 140 social scientists. The participation of the WZB in the EQUALSOC-Network is implemented on behalf of the research unit “Inequality and Social Integration”. Key researchers include Jens Alber, Jan Delhey, and Ulrich Kohler.

### Upcoming Events / Activities

**2005**

- 2 & 3 December 2005 Workshop of EDUC Research Group

**2006**

- 23 January 2006: Workshop of TRALEG Research Group, Amsterdam
- 26-27 January 2006: Workshop of EMPLOY Research Group, Turin
- 27 January 2006: Combined EMPLOY/FAMNET workshop, Turin
- 28 January 2006: Workshop of FAMNET Research Group
- 30 January 2006: Workshop of INCDIS Research Group, Barcelona
- 3-4 February 2006: Workshop of SOCCULT Research Group, Paris
- 27 February 2006: Meeting of Scientific Committee, Paris
- 21 September 2006: Meeting of Governing Council, Barcelona
- 21 September 2006: Meeting of the Scientific Committee, Barcelona
- 22 and 23 September 2006: Network Conference, Barcelona

**Building Research Skills of the New Generation!**

An important group of activities of EQUALSOC is the development of a new generation of social researchers. Summer schools are organized for graduate students connected to the network, smaller-scale methodology workshops, and individual exchanges of students are made possible.

**Generating Policy-relevant Knowledge**

The knowledge produced by social research is too often kept within academic circles, thereby limiting its use for social policy. An important challenge is to develop a structure in which the exchange of policy-relevant knowledge with policy makers is optimized. This is done in several ways. First, policy workshops will be organized to inform politicians, civil servants and other interested parties in the policy domain. Second, we will actively seek access to policy makers through this newsletter and by other means. Third, policy makers will, in the near future, be able to go to the EQUALSOC website to enter the Policy Portal where relevant material will be accessible.